



Killer NOTES

CJ BARLOWE

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THE ROAD TO ROCKTOBERFEST 2023

CJ BARLOWE

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WARRIOR BLACK



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KILLER NOTES

by

CJ BARLOWE

THE NOTE

Hello My Beautiful Raven,

I never thought I'd be writing to you, but this matter between us needs tending.

You were made for me—no one can have you and I will be defending.

I thought I made it clear with all the gifts and love songs I've been sending,

But it seems I need to be straight with you that my love isn't pending.

You cheated on me with that bastard so I can't leave him standing.

Now you're going to pay for your deceit and betrayal by your flesh rending.

A warning isn't enough, so you'll have to prove if you're amending.

In the end, do you deserve my love and adoration, or should I find someone else commending?

Your Love

PROLOGUE

DANNY

It doesn't matter how big or small the venue, the buzzing excitement before a concert stimulates every molecule in my body, making me edgy.

Pre-show nerves always threaten to get the best of me. But once I'm out there, microphone in hand and my band behind me, I remember that I am Warrior Black's lead singer and belt out the songs I'm meant to sing.

Almost five years ago, after my friends and I got rid of Siles, my ex-lover and our former band manager, we became more serious about our music. Since we entered the Midwest Clash of Bands Contest a year and a half ago, our lives have changed drastically. It's been surreal.

We honestly didn't expect anything much out of the contest. We're five people from the Chicagoland suburbs who have been playing together since high school, and the opportunity to play our music on a big stage for a large crowd was too good to pass up. The euphoric thrill we felt when we came in second place was indescribable. The small cash prize didn't hurt either.

Best of all, though, is that the contest is where we met Ron Darling, who became Warrior Black's manager. He made things happen for us. He found better gigs, like this one tonight at The Independence.

We'll be recording our first album in the coming month, and he pulled out all his tricks and got us on a tour this fall, opening for Def Flowers and Whip Lash, two of our favorite bands.

And let's not forget Rocktoberfest in Black Rock, Nevada in a few weeks, where we've been invited to play. What's even more kick ass? We'll be there with a dozen other bands, including two more of our favorite bands— Maiden Voyage and Social Sinners. We can't wait to be a part of the festival.

I blow out a heavy breath, trying to control the rapid beating of my heart. The last thing I want to do is pass out. But one glimpse through the side stage curtain, and I have to step back and ground myself.

With my lip tint in hand, I swipe it across my lips and take in several slow, deep breaths. The scent of mint and chocolate calms me.

Tonight, the open floor of the venue is crammed full with fans impatiently waiting for us to step onto the stage and jam our songs. No doubt, Ron's in the audience now, passing out flyers for Rocktoberfest.

"Are you ready?" Connor Wild, my best friend and our drummer, asks while he twirls his sticks between his fingers.

"Fuck, yeah," Callum Fitz, our bassist, crows as he slides his fingers down the neck of his Stratocaster.

"Damn straight," Raef D'Angelo hoots. The lead guitarist strums the strings of his Gibson ES 35 and then winks at me.

"I'm fucking ready." Bobby Hicks, Warrior Black's keyboardist, puts his fingerless black leather gloves on and gives me a double thumbs up.

"I guess we are," I say with a smile, then turn to the announcer and give him a nod.

After a quick intro, we rush onto the stage and the crowd goes wild. They're chanting "Warrior Black" and most of the women in the front row are trying to get our attention by screaming out our names.

“Raven. I love you!”

“I want you, Connor Wild!”

“I want your baby, Raef!”

Despite their exuberant efforts to get our attention, we jump right into our music.

We start with “Hit it,” our first single, and a fan favorite. Then on to “Dangerous,” where Bobby sings back up to my lead.

There’s so much charged energy in the air, from us, and from the fans. We are sweat slicked, running on pure adrenalin for the rest of our set.

The night couldn’t have gone any better. Or so I thought.

After our final encore, I step off the stage feeling high and wide awake. Needing to piss, I head to the bathroom, telling my friends who are celebrating with drinks that I’ll be back.

Not two steps into the bathroom, something hard smashes into the back of my skull. I stumble forward, pain showers across my skull, my vision goes wonky and I free-fall. Right as my cheek hits the cold tile, a face blurs in front of me. There are words spoken but I can’t understand them because the ringing in my ears is deafening. I try to get up, but a hard kick to my stomach drops me like a rock and blackness takes me under.

CHAPTER ONE

DANNY

“Is it the same handwriting?” I ask with defeat, seeing the now-familiar beige card stock in Ron Darling’s hands—the same type of paper that was duct taped to my back when they found me two weeks ago in the bathroom at The Independence. The same paper that has been used to send notes practically every day since.

Ron’s been Warrior Black’s manager for a while now, so I know how Ron can get overly dramatic, but his drama seems real this time.

“This one is the worst,” Ron says as he smooths down his jacket. Even though, we are in his condo, he’s still dressed in his usual black Armani suit and tailored dress shirt. He glances at his assistant with impatience. “Ms. Walters?”

Jennifer meekly peers over her red-rimmed glasses and smiles at her boss. Ron frowns, and her eyes go wide in quick understanding.

She nods and explains. “Laney’s attack was terrible—worse than yours, Mr. Wells, and the LC Record higher-ups are worried. So they called in a favor and they’re bringing in a full-time security team,” she says in a rush.

“Ventura Security?” I ask, the heavy tension easing out of me. I pull out my gloss, lightly coat my lips and stash the tube to my back pocket. *Hmm. Raspberry. My favorite.*

Ron and Jennifer shake their heads in unison, causing the worry about the situation and the knot in the back of my throat to double in size.

“No. But they recommended another security team, who is just as good. Dean Harper and his agency come highly recommended,” Ron says decisively.

“When are they coming?” Connor jumps in. His face is pinched with concern. He’s flipping a single drumstick in the air with his left hand and drumming his right hand against his thigh. A nervous habit he’s had since we were kids.

“Two men will arrive sometime today. One will cover Danny; the other is for the band,” Ron explains.

“Only two? I thought you said a team,” Connor gripes, nearly missing the drumstick.

“Two for now, unless a more serious situation arises. They will stick with you until that son of a bitch is found and behind bars.” Ron’s cheeks redden with frustration.

“Even through Rocktoberfest?” I ask, already knowing, and dreading the answer.

“Even after. However long it takes.” He turns to Jennifer and orders, “Call Harper and find out when his men are arriving at the studio.”

“On it,” the petite woman says, as she rushes out of the living room in her three-inch black heels.

I never thought I’d gain a stalker, especially now, when our band is fairly new to the scene and we only have three singles out. But as much as I hate seeing those notes, I have to face the facts and prepare myself for a twenty-four hour guard watching over me.

That might sound petulant, but I value my privacy and my time alone. Particularly after what I went through with my ex.

I learned a valuable lesson from that fucker, too. Siles Barrett never left me alone in the five years we were together. *Never*. He was physically and mentally abusive in so many

ways. I got good at hiding the black and blues on my body. Or Connor and the guys would have killed him.

I thought I loved him so much that I did what I could. All because I didn't want to be alone. But now I see the truth behind all his cutting remarks and the times he hit me.

I learned, in those years with Siles, that bruises heal pretty quickly, but the verbal damage takes a hell of a lot longer to mend. And I'm still on the healing path.

I shiver at those dark memories.

Yet, if I have to make a choice, I'd rather face my stalker with a twenty-four seven bodyguard than to deal with my ex.

Connor grabs my shoulders and squeezes, pulling me out of my thoughts. "Are you going to be okay?"

"I don't have any options, do I?" I grouse, as I take a breath to ease the tension from my body.

Ron leans in, his dark eyes on me. "I won't take any chances with your life, Danny. Especially after what happened to Laney two days ago." He looks at the rest of my band. "Or any of yours," he says vehemently.

"We know that, Ron," Connor says. "And we appreciate it."

The Wildman. Always the protector. Even when I don't want it.

"All this, because of those damn notes," Callum grinds out. He sits back against the chair, his jawline tense and neck corded.

"Maybe the attack on Laney was random and not connected to the notes being sent to Danny," Bobby suggests, while he peels off the bright blue polish off his fingernails and flicks away the pieces. The neon color is a cool contrast to his smooth ebony skin, but not all over Ron's dark gray carpeting.

"Seriously, Hicks? Do you want to chance Danny's life? Yours? And what did I tell you about leaving dried polish all over my floor?" Ron clips out. He points down at the messy pile of blue and demands, "Pick that shit up."

There's no doubt in any of our minds that Laney's attack and the note left on her chest was done by the same person who's sending me notes.

Poor Laney. She must hate me.

I should have fired her when I had a chance four months ago after Ron first hired her as my personal assistant, but my guilt ate at me because she needed a job. Too late now.

I feel like it's all my fault that she was attacked as she was coming out of a bar alone. She didn't see who beat her, and the cops have no evidence other than Laney's word, her bloody split lip, a black eye, and the note.

"What did the note on Laney say?" I ask, cutting off Ron's tirade while Bobby picks up the polish bits before the argument escalates.

"Are you sure you want to know?" Ron looks around, presumably looking for his assistant. He shakes his head, mumbles something under his breath and takes out his phone.

"Yes," I say with reluctance, as my bandmates crowd around me.

"You asked for it." Ron taps the screen and passes me his cell.

The scrolly script is the same style as on the notes sent to me.

Not so Beautiful Raven,

*I heard your song on the radio the other
day and I couldn't help touching myself.*

*I stroked and stroked until I came from
the words you sung to me personally.*

You made me feel so special and adored.

But I then saw you with HER. Touching HER.

Laughing with HER. She doesn't deserve

your love or focus. And I know she has to go.

*With every betrayal cutting deep into my soul,
you deserve to be punished. I'll show you.*

*I told you. You are mine, and that's
not a lie. But you will learn soon enough
because next time, whoever touches you will
die. And you won't see me coming.*

Be prepared for your punishment.

Danny. You. Are. Mine. Forever.

Your Love

All the air leaves my lungs in one harsh breath, as crushing guilt slices through me like a machete. I wrap both arms around my middle, trying to alleviate the pressure building in my chest, and I swallow down the bile rising into my throat.

“Who is this sick fuck?” Bobby hisses, stepping back as though the words are poison.

Because they are. Each letter pricks my brain like the sharp thorns of a thistle plant.

“It’s so strange that they used Raven in the beginning but ended it with Danny,” Callum chimes in, a deep groove cutting into his forehead.

“What’s even stranger, this note is different than the one Danny received yesterday and all the others,” Connor adds with concern.

“How so?” Ron asks as he takes back his phone and studies the screen.

“The notes to Danny are more song-like. But the note on Laney is a straight up warning. There’s no rhythm or flow,” Connor says with frown. “This letter was written in anger.”

“It doesn’t matter if they used my real name or stage name. Laney got hurt. This stalker needs to be caught before they go after someone I care about,” I grate out, a knot of rage twisting my emotions.

The murmurs of agreements from my friends should ease my anxiety, but it doesn't.

“Well, help is coming. And since we can't do anything in the meantime, let's talk schedule for the next nine months,” Ron says as his assistant rushes back in. Her face is flushed and her tight ponytail is messed up. I want to ask if she's okay, but Ron's glare at Jennifer has me clamming up. And I thought she was going to stick.

Through clenched teeth, Ron throws in, “We'll talk about where you were later, but right now I want you to tell the guys the schedule.”

Jennifer quickly smooths back her fly aways before she begins explaining the timeline. “For the rest of this month, you'll be at the studio on Barns, working on the songs for the album. After Rocktoberfest, you'll head back to the studio to record. You will then have two weeks off before you set out on the tour with Def Flowers, and possibly one more group, but that's still in the works. Then you'll have one month off before y'all are back in the studio to work on the second album.”

“Remember, you have a lot riding on the first album.” Ron's encouraging words are more like a warning. From the knowing looks across all my friends' faces, we're on the same page and have to take our manager very seriously.

Ron takes the seat next to Raef, who's been quiet the entire time.

“We're not letting any stalker ruin this for us. Right?” Connor eyes me.

“Right,” I confirm, but with some trepidation. Scrubbing both hands through my hair in slight frustration, I can't help wondering who'll be next. I stand, not able to sit any longer. “Maybe I should—”

“Don't you fucking dare,” Connor glares at me. “This isn't your fault.”

“Danny, don't turn this on yourself. The one at fault is the attacker,” Raef finally comments. “You didn't tell that psycho to put the hurt on Laney.”

“Yeah. Blame it on that fucking whack job,” Bobby says derisively.

“I am.” Then I hesitate, trying to come up with the right words to explain how I jumbled up my feelings are about all this. “What if the bodyguards—you know—doesn’t understand.”

“Then we will tell them,” Raef says simply. His easy smile that pushes back my anxiety.

“I want one with muscles.” Connor cuts in and poses with his arms flexed.

Everyone except Ron and me busts out in laughter.

“You’re not funny, Wildman.” Ron throws his rubber stress ball at Connor’s head and misses.

“Yes, I am.” Connor shrugs and then turns back to me, his eyes filled with mischief. “If you ever need a moment to rub one out, you can always shut the bedroom door, while we distract your bodyguard.” My best friend heaves his ass onto my lap and starts gyrating his hips.

“Fuck off, asshole.” I push him off. “You should be worried about *your* daily jerk off sessions,” I fire back, the easy banter loosening the tightness in my chest.

Callum, Raef, and Bobby look at each other and then start chanting out the true words of the late, great Billy Squire, “Stroke me, stroke me.” The intensity around us lightens even more.

Connor thinks he’s at his best behind the drums after a good release. That’s how the song, “Jerk It” came about, which we’ve added to our lineup for the upcoming album.

“That’s enough,” Ron rolls his eyes. “Let’s be serious for a moment and not talk about someone yanking at his meat.”

“Calm down, Ron. Wildman, here, is the only one who strokes off on the daily,” Callum chortles.

“We do find this very serious. But you know us, laughter eases the worries,” Raef adds as he elbows Ron.

“You do know, as of right now, Warrior Black is in lock down mode,” Ron says flatly.

All humor leaves the room.

“What if I say yes to the lock down but no to the bodyguard?” Bobby quickly jumps in to ask, but Ron’s response is just as swift.

“What do you think?” One sharp brow hiked high on our manager’s face says everything.

I slump further in my chair, pressed my lips closed, and taste raspberry on the tip of my tongue. The idea of not having the time alone that I need to decompress is depressing. Not to mention it will hinder my ability to write songs. This is all too much. But I have no choice in the matter and need to roll with whatever these next several months bring.

“Now that you know what I know, you have an hour before we head to the studio,” Ron says. He gets up and puts a hand on my shoulder. “Go chill in your room for bit. It’s going to be a long day.”

Ron releases me and crooks his finger at his assistant to follow him.

As I head to the bedroom I’ve been using, Connor wraps an arm around me and lays his chin on my shoulder. “Maybe the bodyguard will understand and give you the privacy you need. Don’t worry, Danny,” he whispers.

“Maybe, but I doubt it.” I shrug him off. “I need to meditate.”

“You do you, boo. I’m hungry,” Connor says.

“Is that what you’re calling it now?” I say over my shoulder.

My best friend flips me the bird and strolls to the kitchen.

Since staying with Ron in his spacious condo near Nob Hill, I’ve slowly come to terms with our music career and the chaos that comes along in this business. Writing songs is easy for me, and I’m ready to record our first album. Dealing with people, that’s a whole other matter I’m still figuring out.

I flop into the Barclay chair and a half next to the window. The picturesque view of San Francisco and the bay is one I will truly miss once we're finished recording.

Sucking in a calming breath, I attempt to clear my head of the notes, Laney's attack, and the bodyguard that'll stick to me like glue.

Clear your head. Focus.

I blow out a breath and think about Rocktoberfest, the most iconic of music festivals. We might not be playing Saturday—the main night, but Friday still kicks ass. Especially playing on the same stages as Embrace the Fear, Social Sinners, and Maiden Voyage—three major heavy metal bands in the rock world.

It's all too dreamlike.

Then I imagine seeing Warrior Black's logo on the festival graphics, alongside logos from some of the biggest rock bands ever.

Life as a rock singer just got a whole lot more attainable. But those notes...

It's like dropping a thousand pound sand bag on my head, and all the tension is back in my body. I'm strung tight and no amount of meditating will ease this burden.

A knock at the door pulls my attention. "Come in."

"Can we talk?" Connor pops his head in, a weak smile on his face.

"Sure," I say, before turning my attention back out the window.

"I'm sorry if you're upset about the extra security. But I'm sure if you explain, the bodyguard will understand," Connor says, taking a seat on the edge of the bed. "If it makes you feel better, I won't jack off until after Rocktoberfest is over."

"Jesus, Con." I drop my head, attempting to not take his bait. But laughter bubbles out of me in uncontrolled fits. "This situation isn't funny."

“Then why are you laughing?” He looks so serious. How does he do that?

“Because of your ugly mug.”

“I know, but at least I got you to laugh.” Connor winks. “Seriously though, this is a solid plan. Between the cops looking into Laney’s attack, and the private security person covering your ass, no asshole will reach you. And I bet, once the festival is over and the album goes live, our days will go back to our normal crazy life. I even bet your stalker will get bored and find some other idiot to stalk.”

“Dick.” I lunge to punch him, but he bolts out of my reach.

“I love you, so stop being a diva over this.” He then takes off out of the room, but not before he hollers out, “We’re leaving in fifteen.”

As much as Connor might be right, I still can’t wrap around the fact that someone is out there stalking me. Worse yet, they proved they would go to any lengths to hurt people, just to get my attention.

Is all this worth being out in the public, for the world to see me and my friends? I don’t know.

CHAPTER TWO

TOBIAS

I pull in behind my partner, John Brand, and park next to his black SUV, which is identical to mine. We both get out and walk around to the bumper of his vehicle.

“Whose damn idea was it to wear these fucking suits?” John scowls down at the black suit Dean Harper, the owner of Harper Security demands us to wear them.

These stupid suits are a joke, and John asks this same question at every job. Dean wants us to look professional, but he isn't out in the field working in them. They're restrictive and un-fucking-comfortable, and hot as hell.

I stretch my arm and the material doesn't give. What the hell am I supposed to do if I have to run. It's going to be a bitch, trying to reach for the gun in my shoulder holster.

“Who do you think?” I say, frowning down at my suit.

“Oh yeah. Remind me why we still work for that asshole? Jesus. My ball sweat has sweat.” John adjusts his boys and then his skinny black tie.

I chuckle. “Well, I won't have to worry about it after this job's over. This is my last,” I announce, while tracking a blacked out Lincoln Navigator rolling into the parking lot. John makes a noise, but I cut him off. “I'll explain later. They're here.”

The men pour out of the vehicle. I instantly clock the singer and my dick perks right up. But I quickly tamp down my fast rising lust by thinking of my ex in bed with another guy. That does it. My cock deflates like a popped balloon.

I memorized his features the moment I received the file, but the photo didn't do him justice. Danny Raven Wells is even more stunning in person. I'm glad I have on my shades because it gives me an advantage to watch him closely.

However, I can't ignore the tight-as-fuck blue denim jeans that show off the singer's pert ass. Or the shirt that doesn't hide any of his slim lower torso.

His long, straight brown hair is halfway down his back, and it glimmers in the sunlight, like there's soft gold interwoven in the strands.

Jesus, my fingers itch to touch it.

The way his hair frames a perfect oval face... Christ, I have a need to taste his glistening, full and taunting lips. But his piercing blue eyes. Even from this distance, I can see the depths of the aquamarine color, and the slight disdain cast my way.

I don't know what or who pissed in his Cheerios, but I'm getting the feeling this guy is a diva with a capital D. Even if he's beautiful to look at, I know he's going to be trouble for me.

I shift my gaze to the other men in the band, and then to the slender, tall man who we know is the Warrior Black's manager.

"Fuck," John mumbles under his breath.

"What?" I ask without looking over at my partner.

"I think Dean sent me on this job to kill me."

Not sure what John is talking about, but I do have to agree with him that this job is going to be somewhat tough when my dick wants what it can't have.

I'm this isn't my first rodeo. I've been in this business for too many years to let my lust run my brain. I know not to cross

that line. Or let my cock do the thinking for me.

As we approach, the singer's eyes pin me with another frosty glare as he pulls a tube of something out of his pocket, twists it open, and slathers a glossy substance across his lips.

The singer says something under his breath to the drummer, who I remember as Connor Wild, or Wildman to the fans. The singer then hauls ass into the building as though there's fire licking at his feet. And the rest of the band members follow right behind him.

I wonder if he's trying to get away from us? Or just *me*?

Well too fucking bad, princess.

I'm not here to coddle the singer or give in to his spoiled ego. I know those types. Know them well. And they are all the same. I'm here to protect him from a stalker who is sending letters threatening bodily harm.

Too bad if Mr. Wells—or should I call him Danny, or his stage name, Raven—Fuck. I don't know what to call him now. I'll have to ask the manager.

How did Dean talk me into doing this job? I should be lazing on my ass back at Pops' place, fishing. Instead I'm here, babysitting a guy who doesn't seem to want my protection.

I just need to keep the singer safe and alive, while Harper and the crew back at headquarters unravel who's behind the threatening notes. I can't do much about the singer's disposition.

“Thank you both for meeting us here. Did you hear from Mr. Harper? He promised me some news on the latest note,” Ron Darling says with an edge to his tone. He glances down at his phone without waiting for a response from either us. “I thought I'd hear something by now.”

I'm about to tell the impatient manager that it takes more than a day to track down a stalker, or get any evidence off the paper he sent only this morning, but my partner beats me to it.

“They’re still working on getting leads,” John says coolly, in spite of the way his jaw is set. His sentiments about the manager apparently mirror mine.

“Sounds good. Follow me inside, gentlemen, and I’ll introduce you to the band. Then, we’ll let them do their thing,” the manager says in a rush.

John lines up behind me as we step inside the building, following Warrior Black’s manager through the reception area. I take off my sunglasses and tuck them into my jacket pocket.

Ron leads us toward an open seating lounge, where the band has congregated. The big room looks misplaced. It should be in some fancy hotel rather than in a small recording studio.

The square room, with its textured wallpaper in blues, grays and white, has an easy relaxing vibe. There’s a single dark blue couch that sits angled on one wall with three flanking dark gray chairs and a large black oval coffee table in the middle of the seating arrangement.

Slicing a look across the bar—yes, I did say bar, I note that every bottle that’s lined up is premium liquor. Then I glance at each band member and try to assess if any of them are heavy partiers. From looking over the files previously, I suspect three.

“Drinks anyone?” *Bingo*. Bobby Hicks, who plays the keyboard, asks the room as he reaches into the four-foot fridge. He grabs a bottle of lager, pops the top, and takes a long pull of beer. “No?” He then downs it like a pro in five seconds flat.

I glance over at John, who will be keeping an eye on the four band members, and his lips thin into a barely perceptible frown before that familiar mask of indifference slips back onto his face.

We both thought this job was going to be an easy one. And yet, I should know better.

“We have four songs to work on today, so no alcohol. And that includes you, numb nuts.” The singer grabs a second,

unopened bottle out of his keyboardist's hand and pushes him to a set of doors at the other end of the room.

To my surprise, the singer's watchful gaze slices to me for all of three beats before he turns his back, ready to leave.

I don't know what that is about, but I can care less.

"Wait, guys. I want you all to meet your security team. This is Tobias Grant and John Brand. They are your bodyguards until this shit is over," Ron explains with narrowed eyes on the band members.

"Grant and Brand? Sounds like a kids cereal." Connor chirps out a laugh.

"Shut up, Wildman. Tobias, this is Danny—or Raven, if you prefer. He's the front man for Warrior Black. John, this whack job is Connor Wild, he plays drums. To his right is Raef D., who's the lead guitarist. Next to him is Callum Fitz who plays bass, and Bobby Hicks over there is on keyboard."

"Hey, mate." Callum reaches out a hand to John and then to me.

"Your accent..." John quickly shakes his hand.

"I'm an Aussie transplant from five grade, and it stuck," Callum chuckles.

"Gotcha," John says.

"Mr. Wells," I say, catching Danny's attention.

He takes his time to make direct eye contact. His pinched scowl proves he doesn't like that title. Or me.

"Call me Raven, or Danny—anything else but Mr. Wells. Mr. Wells is my father," Danny responds tightly before averting his eyes.

I decide I'll comply, even though Raven doesn't suit the guy, and Danny fits him better.

"Have to ask, but where does the name Raven come in?" I ask, curious how he got the name when he's far from the dark the bird represents.

“Danny used to dye his hair blue black in high school and one of our friends nicknamed him Raven. And it stuck,” Connor explains with a smirk to the singer.

“Ah, okay. Then Mr. Raven—”

“Just Raven,” he snaps without looking at me.

I’m not going to let this princess bother me. “Okay, just Raven.”

“Now that we have that out of the way.” Ron points to the singer. “Danny, wherever you go, he goes. Understand?”

The singer rolls his eyes and stalks off through a door, mumbling, “Whatever.”

The manager grunts out a huff. “I’m sorry, it’s been trying for him.”

“I bet,” I say, a little too quickly, and in a slightly condescending tone.

“What does that mean?” The drummer loses all his jovialness and bullets me with a nasty look.

Are he and the lead singer... No. I don't remember seeing that in the report.

I eye the drummer, who flushes with indigence. Connor’s file details that he’s the jokester of the group. But apparently, he’s too sensitive where the singer’s feelings are concerned.

“I want to know what you mean by that, asshole.” Connor steps into my space, his eyes ablaze with anger.

Brushing off his jab, I remain cool. “No meaning. Just understanding the severity of what’s happened to him, the attack on his assistant and what those letters are doing to your friend—to all of you.”

What I said must appease him because he steps back from me, and the anger disappears from his face.

“Connor, head inside and warm up—and don’t go running off, if you know what I mean.” Ron gives him a pointed glare, and jabs a finger toward the doors. “All of you, head inside with Connor.”

Connor pitches a frown my way before striding out of the room, the rest of the band following.

“I’m sorry. You’ll have your hands full with that one,” Ron admits with a grimace.

“I can handle him,” John says evenly. I can tell by the tone of his voice that he’s up for the challenge.

“We’ll wait out here until they’re done. It’ll give us time to devise a run through for the updated schedule you gave us from now to the end of Rocktoberfest,” I convey, pulling my phone from my pants pocket.

“Yes—yes. If you need anything, I’ll be in there.” Ron heads to the doors, but stops. “By the way, if you want to dress down... you know, no suits, I’m fine with that. But only when we don’t have an appearance.” He then disappears behind the doors.

John clicks his tongue. Then a quiet whoosh of breath conveys one thing. Annoyance.

“I’m down with that,” I say, glancing at my partner.

“Let’s see the lay of the land and tomorrow we’ll decide what kind of plain clothes will work better for us,” John says, as his attention focuses on the iPad in his hand, already running over the logistics of the music festival.

John takes off his jacket and places it on the seat next to him and sits. “I have a feeling it’s going to be a long day. Might as well get comfortable.”

“Agreed.” I do the same, while looking at the festival schedule Ron sent. “The only thing that has changed is the interview with Rock Magazine, from three on Friday afternoon to noon.”

“I’m glad their place in the lineup to go on stage stayed at seven. Forty-five minutes on stage, equipment change, then the next band heads out. Pretty simple,” John says as he runs a finger down his screen.

“Simple,” I echo. “Nothing’s ever that simple. But we’ll see. Then all we need to know is the entry and exit points on

stage,” I add, tapping out the notes for the change in time and exit strategy.

“Well?” John utters a few minutes later.

My head shoots up at his odd question. “Well, what?”

“Aren’t you glad you gave up a month-long getaway to the lake house for this?” John asks with a smirk.

“Harper said this case was important.”

“So you dropped everything for that bastard. Again.” John frowns.

“That bastard is our boss,” I counter. “And I’m not ready to go there yet.”

“I’m sorry about your grandfather. I know you two were close.”

“We were,” I admit, feeling the hollowness in my chest at losing the man who taught me everything. Pops showed me how to fish. How to handle a knife and gun, in case I got lost in the woods alone. It never mattered to him who I liked in my bed. My parents on the other hand... I shake the thought of *them* out of my head.

“Harper might be our boss, but you know he called you in just to be a dick,” John explains. “If it was—”

“But it isn’t you. It’s me,” I slap back with too much venom, but I won’t apologize for it. John understands that discussing my ex is a trigger and I’d rather not talk about *him*. Or so I thought.

“I’m looking out for you, man. Ever since you broke it off with his douche of a brother, Harper finds ways to fuck with you.”

“He’s fucking with me because I’m the one who broke off the *engagement*. Not Carl,” I clarify, knowing the truth to that. Working with Carl’s brother wasn’t bad while he and I were engaged.

“But you found Carl balls deep in some guy in *your* bed. You had justification to break off the engagement.

“And I immediately moved out, so he’s no longer my problem,” I throw in.

John grunts his approval, but doesn’t say a word.

Those several months after I left Carl were tough. Not two months later, I got news that he’d moved that same guy into our home. The home where we were supposed to spend our lives together. Not liking the idea that the home I planned to live in with my future husband was being occupied by another, I did a shitty thing. I got a lawyer, wanting half the equity out of the house.

Petty? Maybe. Justified? Abso-fucking-lutely.

Carl had to sell the place to be able to give me back the down payment I’d made and half of the profit. He had no reason to balk at the sale since he got the other half of the equity.

Now a year has passed and I’m still working for his brother. Stupid? Maybe. But the money is worth the hassle, and soon enough, I’ll be out from under Harper’s thumb.

“Tell me why you’re leaving,” John says.

“It’s time to move on. I want nothing tying me to him, Carl, or the agency anymore,” I confess to my friend, which eases the heavy weight I’ve been carrying. I shrug, because really, that’s a good excuse for leaving a job that pays a mint. “I’m one of the best trackers in the western hemisphere. I won’t have a problem finding another job.”

“I can understand that. I’m just surprised you tolerated his bullshit for this long,” John says sincerely.

“Trust me, once I’m done here, I’m handing in my resignation.” I smile.

“You let me know where you’re heading. I may join you,” John says with chuckle.

I narrow my eyes on the ex-Marine, surprised at hearing that coming out of John. “I thought you liked working for the *bastard*,” I say with a smile, then abruptly stand when I see

Danny in the doorway, his eyes wide and his plump lips slightly parted.

“Is everything all right, Raven?” I ask, as I take a step toward the singer.

His eyes stray to John before returning to me. “Umm... Nothing. Sorry.” He then turns and runs back inside the studio without another word.

“What the hell was that about?” John slices me a frown.

“Who knows.” I sit back down, but my attention never leaves the door the singer fled through. He looked like a scared bunny caught in headlights, because the singer froze on the spot just like the furry animal.

“I can never understand musicians,” John mumbles, then adds, “Most of them are fucking strange.”

“You got me,” I say before returning my eyes to the phone in my hand. But every once in a while, I cast a look to make sure Danny isn’t standing there, staring at me.

I don’t care how pretty or how sweet and appealing he may sound. I don’t even care if he makes my cock stand at attention. I would never act on my attraction. For one, he’s a client. And two, Danny Raven Wells would lay waste to my heart the instant another came along to replace me.

It was done once before, and I never want to go through that pain again.

CHAPTER THREE

DANNY

I race to the bathroom, my lungs losing air with every step. With the twist of the lock, I lean against the bathroom door and finally suck oxygen into my lungs. The black spots floating about begins to fade, while I try to ease my galloping heart and order myself to calm the fuck down.

But that smile. His white teeth. That damn fuckable mouth. And those, dick-sucking, kissable—biteable lips. I know I'll be dreaming about them tonight and every night while he's *babysitting* me.

I quickly pull out the gloss, swipe some on my lips, and close my eyes.

Why am I reacting this way? Tobias is only a guy.

A guy who's going to be up my ass for as long as I have that stalker. A guy I'm insanely attracted to.

Tobias fucking Grant will be the bane of my sexual desire. Not only is he my type—all brawny in all the right places, and those piercing amber-green eyes that spark with fire. Throw in domineering and I'll be nothing more than a hormonal teenager around him if I don't get myself in check.

After splashing cold water on my face, I look into the mirror. "At least I said sorry for being an ass... I think," I groan.

I wipe my face and hands and head back into studio to finish the lyrics for “One Last Kiss.” But every time I try to concentrate on the music, my guy’s smile pops into my head... *Shit*. Tobias Grant isn’t my guy. He’s my bodyguard. Now, I have to keep that delusion out of my head, too.

“Danny?” Connor snaps his fingers in my face. “Where the fuck are you, man?”

“What?” I blink at my friend.

“Come on. We have one more song to work through,” Callum says as he stretches.

“How about we break for a late lunch and then tackle “One Last Kiss” when we get back,” Ron suggests through the speakers in the control room. “Besides, I have a meeting to get to in an hour.”

“One more run through and we’re out of here.” Raef slides his fingers up the neck of his Stratocaster, the sweet sound reverberating up my spine, revving up my energy, making me forget about the bodyguard and his alluring smile.

“Count it down, Connor,” Bobby calls out as he taps his foot.

“One. Two. One, two, three—” Connor sets the beat. My head’s moving in rhythm and so is my body. I’m ready to sing this song.

I close my eyes as Bobby, Raef, and Callum join Connor in the beginning hook. As the last note is hit, I belt out the first verse of the lyrics I rewrote not twenty minutes ago.

You set me ablaze, your lips are fire.

The taste of your love drowns me in desire.

Kiss me forever, you rock my world.

Then you fade away, my life unfurls.

You Leave me spinning out of control.

I beg you to stay,

but you deny me your love,

and isn't the way.

you left me spiraling, grasping for bliss.

Give it to me, I'm desperate, for one last kiss.

Between the words and the music flowing through the live room, I'm so caught up in the song that I don't see who's standing in the control room watching me until the last lyric is out of my mouth and the ballad ends.

Tobias. His eyes are intense and magnetic, capturing me in a snare of want and I can't look away. I wouldn't dare. Taking my eyes off the man feels like a life or death situation. No matter how much I try to fight it, he lures me in hook, line, and sinker.

"That was fucking awesome." Connor plops his heavy arm over my shoulders, pulling me in for a hard hug, and yanking my concentration away from the bodyguard. "We did it. That song is going to rock the charts."

"No doubt," Raef cheers beside us. "All we need to do is finish the lyrics with the rest of the songs and then rock it at Rocktoberfest."

"Fuck yes. We will. I can't wait to watch this song rise in the charts," Connor croons.

"First, we need to finish the list and record it when we get back. And then let's wait to see if the song hits the charts before we celebrate," Callum grouses, but the small smile on my reluctant bandmate says he agrees.

"Callum's right," I say, pulling out of Connor's arms. I glance back into the control room, but Tobias is nowhere in sight. "How about food?"

"Where are we eating?" Bobby asks, rubbing his hands together. "I'm starving."

"You're always starving. How about Choy's," Callum suggests. "I'm in the mood for some dim sum."

"What? No shrimp on the barbie?" Connor cackles.

“Whacker! Stop it already with the Aussie jokes.” Callum wraps his arm around Connor’s neck and wrestles him to the ground.

“Children,” Ron shouts, pinching the tip of his nose. “Jesus Christ.”

I ignore Connor and Callum and head out of the sound room, with Bobby and Raef behind me.

We enter the lounge area where our new bodyguards wait. I try not to look in Tobias’s direction, but I find it hard not to gawk at the gorgeous man.

Ron steps in my line of sight, blocking my view of Tobias Grant. “I’ll see you back at the condo later. Danny, good job on the vocals. I want the same intensity when we record, after we get back from the festival. The execs won’t know what hit them with this album,” he chortles with glee. He waves us off and leaves.

“Does he mean that?” Callum asks with wide eyes.

“Ron doesn’t lie,” Raef counters with a nudge to our bandmate.

There’s a moment where silence fills the room. My friends look at Tobias and John, not sure what to do next. I, on the other hand, keep my attention anywhere other than the man coming up on my right.

“Where are we going?” Tobias asks. God, his gruff voice is sending tingles to my dick.

“To Choy’s for lunch. Then back here,” Connor explains with a hint of annoyance and steps between me and my bodyguard.

I narrow my eyes at my friend, who’s smiling at me.

“Tobias, Danny and Connor ride with you, and the rest of you guys are with me,” John instructs as he moves around the couch.

“Okay.” I nod at John.

“I think it’s best that Connor—” Tobias begins to say.

“I’m riding with Danny,” Connor cuts in. “Now lead the way, big man.”

Tobias shoots a brief glare at John before leading us out of the building. Apparently, my bodyguard isn’t happy about being here. And least of all, guarding me. A sudden twinge of unhappiness skitters through me, but I don’t know why.

He opens the back door to the SUV and Connor climbs in, but I open the front passenger side.

“What are you doing?” the bodyguard grates out, his hand clamping over mine on the door handle. A zing of electricity bolts up my arm and a bloom of warmth fills my chest. I quickly pull my hand free and step back.

“Getting in the car,” I barely manage to say, without jerking back another step, or two.

“I prefer you sitting in the back.” There’s a hint of ice in Tobias’s tone that draws the fear out of me.

“Hey man, Danny gets car sick easily if he rides in the back,” Connor explains, sticking his head out of the window.

“It ain’t no lie,” Raef shouts from the other vehicle. “He’ll get sick real bad.”

Tobias’s jaw tightens. *If he gnashes his teeth anymore...*

“It’s okay.” I slide in next to my friend and close the back door. “I don’t want to sit next to someone who’s intolerant,” I whisper to Connor.

“Are you sure?” Connor asks with concern, his eyes roving over my face.

“If I get sick, I know where to throw up,” I reply with a smirk, before glancing at the man who’s grimacing at me in the rearview mirror.

Connor belts out a laugh. “Alrighty then.”

Luckily, the restaurant’s not far from the studio. Before my stomach begins to revolt, Tobias pulls into the parking lot behind the building. Connor tells him to park in one of the VIP

spaces. Since we come here often, those spots are designated to us.

I get out at the same time as Raef, who's humming a tune I haven't heard before.

"What are you humming?" I ask him.

"Nothing yet," Raef says quietly, like he's keeping a secret. "But I'll let you know once I'm done." It's so like my friend to keep a song to himself until he deems it ready.

"Damn, you're brave," Bobby tells Tobias, then his eyes shift to me. "Your skin's a little green, man."

"Fuck off." I push the keyboardist out of way and walk around the building to the restaurant's entrance. As I open the glass door, a loud bang reverberates around us.

"What the fuck," someone shouts.

I don't know who's shouting, but my ears are ringing as though fireworks went off right in my face. Then the next thing I know, I'm flat on my back, the wind knocked out of my lungs, and a hulking body is covering me.

"Jesus fucking Christ." That's Connor frantically yelling. "Danny!"

"Get in the fucking building," John yells his demand.

"Don't move," Tobias growls in my ear.

I don't move a millimeter—I don't even take a breath. My entire body is frozen from the terror of being nearly shot.

"Count of three. Then I'm going to get up, pull you with me at the same time, and get you safely out of the gunner's range." Tobias's voice is hard and commanding.

I give him a barely perceptible nod. I hold my breath as he does just that. But he now has me against the wall on the side of the building, his back to my front.

A full thirty seconds go by before Tobias turns around and his face is inches from mine. "Are you okay? Hurt anywhere? Bleeding?"

I slowly meet his amber-green eyes, trying to find my voice. “I-I think I’m okay—ouch.” Pain radiates from the back of my skull when I shift slightly to the left. “My head.”

“Hold still,” Tobias commands as he cautiously looks around. “John!” he shouts.

“Right here,” the other bodyguard responds.

“Assess,” Tobias counters.

I hear crunching sounds. Glass, maybe.

“Not crystal,” John says.

“What does that mean?” I ask, feeling my hands turn ice cold.

Tobias looks back to me with such intensity that my body shivers with alarm. He doesn’t answer my question. “I want you to follow my lead. We’re going to run into the building. I’ll be covering the entire time. And Raven?”

“Yeah,” I say shakily, feeling even colder.

“Don’t stop.”

“Okay,” I utter, but panic has me in its grip and my teeth start chattering.

“Breathe,” he commands, at which I inhale. The back of my head thrums with a dull pain and my vision’s swimming.

“Clear,” John calls out.

“On three, we run inside.” Tobias carefully looks around the corner, then he says three and he hastily shuffles me inside the restaurant.

“Danny.” I hear my name being called out by my friends. But my eyes are focused on the shattered glass in the entry way. Then I notice the gun in Tobias’s hand and a chill runs down my spine like I’m splashed with ice water. I don’t like guns. This one is way too close and real, and I stumble away from him.

“Got the cops on the line.” John says, with a cell phone to his ear.

“Who is shooting at us?” Connor questions. He strides up to me and hugs me. “Are you okay, Danny? I thought you were...”

His words trail off, but he doesn't need to finish the sentence for me to know what he's thinking.

“I'm not hurt,” I admit. It's a small lie, but I don't want my best friend to worry.

“You said your head hurts,” Tobias says with narrowed eyes. A small level of relief washes over me when he approaches us without the gun in his hand.

“Not hurt, but freaked the fuck out. I almost got shot.” My voice cracks at the last word.

“Come, sit.” Connor drags me to a table away from the big front windows, to where the rest of my band has congregated.

“Be right back.” Tobias walks toward his partner.

“Maybe your stalker doesn't like the idea of bodyguards,” Connor whispers and takes a seat in one of the chairs.

“Maybe. But it's a good thing they were here. What if...” Bobby's voice falters as his bloodshot eyes dart to me. “Jesus Christ. Tobias's a fucking superman. He was on you so fast. I didn't know what was happening until John shoved us inside.”

“Well this shithead saw the whole thing.” Raef thumbs to Callum.

Callum's leaning forward, hands hanging between his knees, and quiet.

“I know it's their job to protect us, but Jesus, Tobias would have taken a bullet for you if there was another shot,” Connor says with surprise.

“Oh my God. That thought never occurred to me,” I utter, as tears begin to pool. The idea of Tobias taking a bullet for me sends a wave of nausea through my body. But I swallow and lock down my emotions. For my sake and for my friends, losing my composure isn't an option.

Too late.

The sting in my eyes spreads and the pounding headache at the back of my skull drowns out the noise in the restaurant. I clamp my mouth shut before I burst into tears or throw up. Or both.

Looking out through the unmarred picture window, I spot Tobias picking something up before he and John scan the area. Several minutes later, two squads of San Fran's finest pull up and four uniformed officers get out.

Quiet descends around us, as scared patrons glance between us and the cops outside.

One officer separates himself from the discussion and carefully walks in and looks down at the glass. He studies the metal frame of the door and the adjacent wall and points to an area. John steps up, says something to the officer, and nods.

John's phone must have rung because he answers it.

"What did you do, Connor?" Wanda, the owner and our usual waitress, asks. Worry pinches at her aging face. "Now my husband has to clean up the glass." I know she's trying to ease the tension in the restaurant, but the stiff humor doesn't cut through the fear on the petrified faces around her.

"Now, Wanda, why would you think I did something?" Connor folds his arms across his chest.

"Because you are a *troublemaker*." She stalks off, seeing to the rest of the patrons. Several minutes later she comes back with a tray of drinks. "You look like you need a drink."

"You can say that again," Bobby says with an expelled breath, reaching for his usual beer.

"Thank you, Wanda," I add before grabbing my water and taking a large sip.

She pats my shoulder. "You're a good kid, Danny."

I smile at the woman as I stick my fingers in the back pocket of my jeans and find the gloss missing. An extra shot of panic fills me as my eyes scramble through the glass laden floor for the tube. *Nothing*.

Right then, Tobias and John are walking back into the restaurant, which doesn't ease my anxiety.

I look up at my bodyguard's stoic face, then glance down at his outstretched hand and see the lip gloss. I swallow down the relief, take the tube, and swipe some gloss across my lips. "Thank you."

He nods to me, sniffs, and steps back.

"What are the cops doing about this?" Connor adds, finishing up his vodka cranberry.

"They are searching the area, but whoever shot at us is probably long gone now," John replies and then glances at Tobias.

"Fuck." Connor's fisted hands slam onto table. "Could this be coincidence, or *were* they aiming at Danny?"

"Danny was opening up the door, so he had to be the target," Callum admits, then he throws back his tequila shot.

"Get your food to go. We're heading back to the condo," Tobias says, his face a mask of stony composure.

"But we have one more song to work on," Raef adds, getting to his feet.

"I called Ron, and he said you can work from the condo," Tobias says firmly.

We glance at each other before Connor says, "Then to the condo."

I slump back in my seat. The adrenaline rush and fear are slowly seeping out of me. I'm not hungry anymore, and I'm suddenly tired.

"Listen to me," Tobias says with authority. "Once you get your food, we're going to walk out of here in this order. I go first, with Raven and Connor behind me. Then Bobby, Raef, and Callum, with John behind them. No messing around. Get in and buckle up. Got it?"

We all agree with yeahs and nods.

With the bags of food in Raef and Callum's hands, we head out just like Tobias instructed us to do. With each step toward the vehicles, I wonder if everything I'm doing is worth the price of living in fear.

The last thing I want is to disappoint my bandmates—my friends. But with being shot at, a stalker sending me threatening notes, and Laney's attack, maybe I should re-evaluate what's most important in my life.

I never thought that being in a rock band would be dangerous. Worse yet, not knowing if and when this shit in my life will be over... or if it ever will be.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOBIAS

It has been a full week since the incident happened at the restaurant. The cops found no evidence at the scene, not even a shell casing in and around the area.

John went back that night and found a bullet in the wall, but who knows if it was *the* bullet. He also scoped out the roofs of the buildings across the street and found nothing.

Could it be a coincidence that the door just happened to be faulty and shattered at the very moment the singer opened it? Maybe. But my gut's telling me no.

I was hoping a night away would erase the image of what could have been a fatal shot to Danny's head. It happened so fast, I didn't think. The second that bullet shattered the glass, I was on the singer like a flea on a dog's ass and covered him with my body.

John hauled ass and corralled the other band members inside the building and then covered me while I got Raven inside.

The entire time, my mind raced at the idea there could be another shot. But luckily, there wasn't. One attempt on his life is enough to make this shit all too real for the singer and the rest of the band. The entire week, they were on a knife's edge as they worked on their songs.

And the strange way Raven penetrating gaze was off putting, I had to leave.

First, to check in with my neighbor, who has my dog, Saint. Then, I needed to grab more clothes from my two bedroom house in Milford Gardens.

Now I'm driving back to the condo while thinking of fucking raspberry. Danny smells like my favorite fruit—*Jesus*.

As I approach the Nob Hill area, John calls. I tap the screen on my dash. "Hey."

"ETA?" John says in a rush.

"Ten minutes. Why?"

"The men are restless. They want out of the condo," he grates out.

"I'm not taking any chances. Tell them no," I reply, shaking my head in annoyance. "Until we get the reinforcements to cover these guys, they aren't going anywhere."

"Alright. I'll tell them."

"Okay. I'll be there soon," I say and then disconnect the call. John isn't the type to be rattled easily, but from the sound of his voice he's on his last nerve.

I pull into the underground garage, tap in the code for the door, and then drive in. It doesn't take long before I'm up to the top floor and spot John by the door.

"I'll be right back," John announces to the group in the living room, and closes the door.

I huff out a laugh. "Want to leave?"

"Seriously," John frowns, glancing at the closed door with grimness. "That drummer... I swear, if he says one more thing, I'm going to bend his smart ass over my knee and show him who's really in charge."

I arch a brow. "Really? I've only been gone overnight. What happened?"

"Danny and the drummer were arguing about something—then one pinches the other and the drummer—"

“You can say his name, John. Connor,” I coax.

He growls in displeasure. “Connor—happy?”

“Yes. Now tell me what happened.”

“Danny storms off, probably a lovers spat—I don’t know or care, but now the drummer keeps hounding me about the singer’s safety.”

All of my new-found good humor is gone. I narrow my gaze on my partner. “Are you sure about that?”

“Can’t you tell? They are constantly touching each other.”

“No,” I say, but John’s right. Every instinct in me wants to go into that condo and order the drummer to stop fondling Raven. Instead, I push that idea out of my head because the singer isn’t mine, and I need to focus on what we are here to do.

“What we need is a new game plan. Did you hear back from Harper? Is he going send reinforcements for this Ocktoberfest?”

“It’s called *Rocktoberfest*,” John corrects.

“Whatever it’s called, I know it’s going to be a logistical nightmare,” I say, positive the weekend is going to be a clusterfuck if we don’t get the right amount of security for the band.

“No, not yet. But I have a feeling with this latest incident and another note sent this morning, he will,” John admits with a glance at the closed door again.

“Let’s hope that Hale or the cops find this bastard before that,” I admit.

“I doubt it,” John says and then pulls out his cell. “I’m calling Harper now.”

“While you’re talking with him, I’m going to check on the guys.” I leave John to our boss, and head inside the condo.

Bobby, Raef, Callum, and Connor are at the dining room table scarfing up what looks like sub sandwiches, but the

singer's absent. "Where's..." I don't finish. All four men point to the corridor.

Down the hall, there are five doors, three are open and two aren't. I knock on the first closed door and wait. Nothing. I knock again, turn the handle, and open the door to see the hall bathroom is empty.

As I'm about to knock on the door adjacent to the bathroom, my hand hovers, not sure if I should bother the singer. There's no doubt he's still shaken up by what happened last week, most people would be. Though, something in me needs to know he's okay.

Leaning into the door, I listen for a sound. Nothing. Finally, I call out *Raven* and give the door a couple of soft raps. Still nothing. So I slowly turn the handle and push the door open, finding the room empty.

My inner alarm bells aren't ringing, but with the room empty I need to check it out. The second I step foot inside, I see the ensuite bathroom's door partially open and have a perfect back view of Danny's naked body in the shower.

My feet are frozen to the spot; my brain blows a fuse. The lust in me jolts awake, along with my dick that wants the sole attention of this singer. I can't look away—wouldn't dare to, just in case I miss more of this stunning person.

Danny's head is tilted back, the water streaming against his face, and his long brown hair is like wet silk flowing down his back. He reminds me of a water nymph. Or a siren. Either one, he's too damn alluring.

There's several tattoos on Danny's back, but what stands out the most is the raven in flight. Even though the tattoo is no bigger than a dollar bill, the composition of the bird and its wings are so detailed that I swear it's real. It's flawless, especially the one eye, which is the color of the bluest sky... just like Danny's.

Danny is gorgeous in ways I normally am not attracted to. I usually like my men thick with some muscles. But the Warrior Black singer is a delicate flower, with a powerhouse

of a voice and a body that's made for sinful things. I see that now.

My near-reckless desire to taste, to devour Danny's lithe form is like a desperate slut. My mouth waters, yearning to lick every inch of his wet skin. And when I think he's had enough, then I'd fuck his tight bubble ass until we both blow a nut.

I automatically take a tentative step toward the bathroom, then abruptly stop. I can't rip my clothes off and climb into that shower. I can't taste or lick any part of Danny's flesh or fuck him until we both cum. It's unprofessional.

What the fuck? Is he stroking himself?

My entire body locks up in fascination as I watch Danny jack his dick. Too bad I can't see his cock. Everything in me is demanding that I strip, get in that shower, and show him what I'm capable of with his body.

Jesus Christ. Get out.

Gathering what brain cells I have left, I quickly back out of the room and close the door as quietly as I can. Pressing my back to it, I take a moment to slow my pounding heart and settle the granite pole in my pants. As the flush along my skin slowly recede, I exhale another long breath and then head back toward the living room like nothing happened.

But it did. And I will never be able to get that picture of Danny out of my head.

CHAPTER FIVE

DANNY

A hot shower is exactly what I needed to unravel my nerves. The band and I worked all day on the next few songs, but my stomach is tied up in knots—because what’s taking up most of my mindset is *where is Tobias?* Why did he leave? John said he left for personal reasons, but I figure Tobias took off because of me. Between the glares and subtle sneer, the man simply doesn’t like me.

Jesus. I lean against the sink and stare at myself in the mirror. The dark circles under my eyes are getting darker. And no wonder, when my dreams are filled with nightmares of me being hurt. My head. My body—and one time, Connor and the rest of my friends were also potential victims. My brain keeps going over all the shit happening in my life—in my friends’ lives.

You have to shake it off. You’re alive and here.

Telling myself to shake it off is getting harder to swallow. Not when I’m still getting unsettling notes. Let’s not forget Laney’s attack, and its similarities. And being shot at has never been on my bucket list, especially now with Warrior Black on a career rise.

All these pressures are finally getting to me, but I don’t know what to do or how to handle the clusterfuck that is now my life. Then throw a sexy as fuck bodyguard into the fray and I’m at my wits’ end.

One second, I'm afraid for my life and the next I'm horny as fuck over a guy that scares the shit out of me. My dick may want to know Tobias, but I choose to ignore what my dick wants.

I step in and stand in the center of the shower, letting the barrage of hot water and the steam surround me. As I relax, my mind goes back to when Tobias had sheltered me with his body.

From head to toe, I felt every inch of his hard frame. I try to imagine what he looks like under all that clothing. All tight muscle, heat, and strength.

My right hand slides down my chest, imagining how his big hands would feel stroking my rigid cock.

Is it just hero worship I'm feeling for the man that saved my life? Or is it simple attraction? At first sight, I thought him stupidly gorgeous. But with his amber-green eyes and that fucking crooked smile, my body reacts every time he's near me. I'm like some sex-deprived deviant thinking of different ways to have this man in my bed.

Maybe it was good that Tobias left, because another day with him close by would drive me to drink.

A wisp of cool air touches my back. I swiftly turn and my whole body freezes under the assault of hot spray as I watch Tobias backing out of my bedroom.

"Fuck." Plastering myself against the tile wall, I'm out of sight from that vantage point. Why didn't I close the bathroom door? I cover my face with my hands in utter mortification.

Did he see me stroking my dick? He had to.

But for how long? Did he like watching me?

My heart's pounding for a whole different reason than fear. My mind forms an erotic image of Tobias touching himself while watching me jack off while thinking of him. A flash of heat shoots straight down to my balls. I firmly grip my cock and redouble my efforts for release. From base to tip, I stroke until that familiar buzz at the base of my spine crackles like a

live wire, and I cum. Hard. With Tobias's name silently on my tongue.

When my heart and breathing calm, I wash off the remnants of my spunk and get out of the shower. I wrap my body in the warm bathrobe hanging on the hook, and step into the bedroom. I contemplate if I should approach Tobias on why he was in the room to begin with, but I change my mind. I don't want him to know that I saw him leave.

I dress and head out to where my friends are arguing about who's sleeping where on the tour bus.

I lean over Connor's shoulder and peer down at his phone. Ron texted an image of the tour bus to our group chat.

"That's what we're riding in to Rocktoberfest?" I ask, but the guys ignore me; they are too embroiled in the disagreement.

"That's bullshit," Connor grates out, pushing up from where he's sitting. "I think we should draw straws on who gets to sleep in the room or the bunks."

"Does it matter?" I ask, taking the seat Connor vacated. And yes, I'm totally avoiding eye contact with Tobias, who's standing by the door.

"There is only one bedroom on the bus. The main suite with a bathroom, and four bunks with a bathroom between them," Callum explains.

"I said we should give the main room to you since you need space, but Connor is being a selfish dick bag," Bobby huffs out.

"Fuck off, asshole," Connor shoots back. "I didn't say Danny couldn't have it. I said we should be fair about it and draw straws."

"But isn't that the same, since we would rather give it Danny, but you want to draw straws?" Raef throws his two cents in with an evil grin.

"You can suck my dick." Connor flips him off.

"Only if you pay me," Raef counters with an air kiss.

As my band argues over sleeping arrangements, the overwhelming urge to look at my bodyguard has me side-eyeing Tobias. With Ron's condo being an open concept, it's easy to watch Tobias from my vantage point, and I catch him watching me. His face suddenly flushes with pink and he darts his eyes to his partner.

Shit... There's no doubt now that he saw me jacking off.

I want to hide away from my embarrassment, but if I don't handle what's going on between my friends, this tiff could turn into something much bigger. So I tamp down the humiliation and turn back to my bandmates and raise a hand. All of my friends stop talking and shift their attention to me. Yep. Just like children.

"Is everyone done arguing?" I ask, keeping my hand up. They all nod and I drop my hand. "Good. Now I don't care where I sleep. If you want to draw straws or pick a number out of a fucking hat, I don't care. But I'm done listening to this whiny bullshit. Grow the fuck up and let's make a collective decision like adults. Like friends."

"Danny's right," Raef says and snags a piece of paper out of the notebook he uses for writing lyrics. "Let's pick numbers. One through five. That's fair. Agreed?"

We all agree. Then Raef rips the paper into the five pieces and writes a number on each one. He folds them and drops them in a plastic bowl John brings over.

"Connor, you go first, since you're the one who started all this," I say.

Connor retrieves a number, and a frown appears on his face. He flashes us the number five. "Fuck it," he says, crumples the paper and tosses it over his head.

"Danny, you go next," Callum says.

I reach for a piece and open it. I shake my head and turn the paper around with a grin. "One."

"I knew it," Connor laughs, grabs my paper, rips it up, and tosses the pieces onto the table. "Danny, you take the back room and us stupid fucks will take the bunks."

“Isn’t that what I’ve been saying?” Bobby says, slapping Connor on the back.

I look over at Tobias again, but he’s nowhere in sight. In his place is John, who is looking at me strangely. Not sure why. And really, I don’t care. I have bigger things to deal with than my bodyguard disappearing.

“Hey.” Connor touches my shoulder.

I meet my friend’s eyes. “What?”

“You good?”

“Yeah,” I lie, as I shift uncomfortably in my seat. I get up and grab a plateful of food. “Just hungry.”

When I sit back down, Connor’s attention is on John, who’s returning my drummer’s stare with equal intensity. Talk about combustible. But I don’t mention it to my friend. Connor will only deny the chemistry between them.

I wait a few minutes, hoping to catch sight of Tobias. But I don’t see him the entire time it takes me to eat. So I head back to my room, pick up the guitar that’s laying on the bed, and work on my music.

CHAPTER SIX

TOBIAS

The following morning, I get up to find that John is already up, showered, and dress in jeans, a dark blue dress shirt, and black gym shoes. I follow suit, and then dressed in a similar fashion, but my running shoes are white.

“Coffee?” he asks, raising the glass carafe and a mug.

“Yes, please,” I reply and drop onto the stool at the island.

“Did you get your shit handled while you were back at home?” John takes a sip of his coffee and closes his eyes. “Hmm. There’s nothing like the first sip.”

“Yeah. Saint’s in good hands with my buddy Nolan and he’ll keep an eye out on my place since we don’t know how long this job will take,” I explain, not looking at my partner.

A silent moment passes before John says, “I don’t get it.”

“What don’t you get?” I shouldn’t ask, but sometimes I’m a dumbass.

“Why didn’t you do all that before we started this job? You knew this wasn’t going to be a few days.” John’s eyes never waver from my face. “But that’s not what I’m asking about.”

Should I confess the real reason why I had to leave? Fuck no. I’d never hear the end of that shit. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.” I remain stoic and drink my coffee.

John shakes his head. “That’s one bad excuse. Why not just say that the singer has gotten under your skin and you just needed a breather?” My partner is too damn perceptive.

I chuckle, shaking my head. “You’re right. But now I’m good. And I won’t let *him* get any further inside my head.” I purposely did not say Danny’s name, which might resurrect those images of him in the shower.

Noise from the corridor has us turning our heads. Danny walks out, yawning, rubbing at his eyes. The t-shirt he’s wearing rides up an inch, exposing a strip of creamy flesh. In that moment, all of my good intentions flee and my dick rises to attention.

Fucking A.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Danny stumbles to a stop, eyes wide with surprise, and on me. “I thought I was the only one awake.”

“Coffee?” John offers with a smirk.

“Yes. Thank you,” Danny says in a rumbly whisper that’s all too sexy. He glances at me and quickly averts his gaze to watch John pouring coffee while he says, “Where did you run off to yesterday?”

Since John didn’t go anywhere yesterday, I know Danny’s talking to me. But I’m a little surprised that he noticed my absence. “I had to do a perimeter check.” Short and sweet. It’s all he needs to know. I’m not lying.

“Oh... Okay.” He takes the filled mug, opens the fridge, and pours a good amount of creamer in the cup before taking a sip. “Good coffee,” he says in a soft moan.

Fuck. That groan is the last thing I want to hear out of the man.

“Danny,” I call out gruffly

“Yes?” he answers without looking at me. His eyes are closed, his mouth at the rim of the cup.

Damn it. Those lips...

And apparently, there're no words to say. My full attention is on Danny's mouth.

He pops one eye open and studies me idly before turning and walking away. Seeing his back hits me right in my gut... and lower.

"What time are we heading to the studio today?" John asks, which has me glaring at him. Is he nuts? We didn't get the okay from Harper that it's safe to venture out. Unless John did yesterday while I was out.

Danny slowly turns back around, the mug of coffee to his lips again but his blue eyes sparkle. "Really?"

"Yes. Tobias and I decided that you and the band need a change in scenery," John says. I'm not liking the way Danny's smiling at him.

"But there're rules," I add, glaring at John.

"Umm... Okay. I guess we can head over once everyone else gets up, which will probably be around noon," Danny says with a gleeful smile. "Thank you." He's acting like we gifted him an extra life. He then strides away, out of my sight.

"You are welcome," I mutter back, before rounding on John. "What the fuck?"

"You got it bad," John whispers, before a grin more evil than Lucifer's spreads across his face. "Just remember the rule. No fucking around with the clients. Look but don't touch."

I glare at John, knowing that rule. Instead of reminding him that same rule applies for his eye-fucking of the drummer, I keep my trap shut, and grab more coffee.

However, he's right. That's the number one tenet in Harper's guidelines for engaging with clients. Aside from keeping them safe. We don't sleep with them. Ever.

Sure enough, around eleven a.m. the rest of the band gets up in a groggy haze. After another round of coffee and some food Ron brought in, we're on our way to the studio. All uneventful.

Or so I thought until I run right into Danny as he's leaving the studio's bathroom and I'm going in.

"Sorry," he says, keeping his head bowed to his chin and his eyes averted from mine. Damn, his dark, thick, long lashes flutter against his pink cheeks.

Danny's silky hair is up in a messy bun at the back of his head. My fingers itch to touch the loose strands around his face.

His delicate appearance doesn't begin to convey the strength he has behind his voice. Danny is a powerhouse when he opens his mouth. I'm kind of looking forward to hearing him sing on stage.

"I'm sorry," I finally say, getting my head out of my ass.

He tries to sidestep me, but with my body twice the size of his, my hand automatically goes to his bicep before we collide into each other.

"Umm... Thanks." Danny tries to brush past me; embarrassment is written all over his face. Why?

Oh, shit. He knows what I saw yesterday.

"Wait. Danny." It's the first time I've used his real name, which has him motionless. I slide my hand to his wrist and wrap my fingers around it. I want to talk—no, ask him if he did see me in the bedroom, but nothing comes out of my mouth.

The pulse point on his wrist jumps under my thumb. When I brush the pad of my finger along his skin, he gulps audibly. Jesus, I can smell the gloss on his lips. Cherry, maybe.

"I have to go," Danny says as he turns away from me, but he doesn't pull out of my hold.

"What's wrong?" I ask, not loosening my grip.

There's electricity coursing between our hands, and a strong impulse to pull his lithe frame to mine. I crave to taste those irresistible cherry flavored lips, which is overpowering my sense of duty.

“Nothing’s wrong,” he says stiltedly, but the flush of pink blooms into crimson across his cheeks and down his neck. A pretty blush, I wouldn’t mind—*Stop!*

I drop my hand immediately and let him go, not saying anything else. Confusion crests in Danny’s eyes before he hurries off.

What the hell is wrong with me?

Think, damn it.

Abruptly feeling his absence, I shut that emotion down and head into the bathroom. When I get back, John levels me with hard glare.

“What?” I’m on instant alert, scanning the room, where all of the band members are crowding around Danny now.

“The singer got another letter.” John extends a gloved hand with an open envelope between his fingers.

He hands me a glove and I put it on. I take the note and carefully open it up, scanning the words on the paper.

Dear Danny,

I told you there will be repercussions for your actions.

Stop fucking around on me with that drummer.

That shot was a warning. Next time, I won’t miss.

Also, keep that muscled meathead of a bodyguard

at a distance. No one touches you but me. Or someone

else will get hurt... or die.

Your Love

I glance up at John, then to Danny, who’s visibly shaking in Connor’s arms. Returning my attention to my partner, I ask, “Who brought the note in?”

“No one knows. The receptionist found it on her desk and she only brought it to our attention a few minutes ago,” John explains as Ron joins us.

“Video footage?” It’s all I get out before Ron shakes his head.

“I called the security folks. They are working on getting the surveillance footage to me as soon as they can,” he says angrily. “What should we do now?”

“Is this session done?” I ask the manager.

“Yeah, except for any minor changes, but the band is done for now.”

“I need everyone to sit down. John and I will be right back.” With my partner beside me, we move out to the hallway for privacy.

“You have a plan,” he says grimly.

“Maybe. I think we need to separate Danny from the rest of the group, for everyone’s safety. But first let’s get the guys back to the condo where it’s more secure and then we’ll call Harper with that idea.”

“They aren’t going to like it. Especially Connor,” John says.

“I don’t give a fuck what the drummer says or wants. My only concern is for Danny. With Danny away from his friends, the stalker won’t go after the band. They will focus on finding the singer.”

“That just might work,” John says with a nod and we walk back into the lounge.

Ron doesn’t look happy. As astute and perceptive as the manager is, he knows we’re keeping him out of the loop, but that’s too fucking bad. He’ll soon know once I get the clear to take Danny away from here.

“We leave the exact way we came,” I say, eyeing Danny, who’s still visibly upset. He takes out the tube of gloss and coats his lips with it several times.

There’s no doubt, with today’s note, the stalker is watching Danny. If the threat is true, and Danny shows any affection to anyone else, someone is going to get hurt, or worse.

I'm not going to allow that. Or let anyone else be in the line of fire.

The drive back to the condo is quiet like a tomb. Not even the obnoxious drummer has anything to say.

As I pull up to the underground garage, the metal door is wide open with no vehicle in sight. It strikes me as odd, but I slowly drive down to the security touch keys—only to see that the screen has been smashed.

I want to back out, but there's a car stationed behind me, honking its horn for me to move.

“What's going on?” Connor asks.

“Someone smashed the keypad for the garage door,” I explain and carefully pull inside and move over to let the asshole behind me pass. It's tight, but with his tiny car, they have no issues getting around me.

Activating the blue tooth on the car, I call John, but he doesn't answer. I round the corner until the reserved parking spot and John's SUV comes into view. Then I see it. The bold red lettering, in spray paint on the wall.

“You're going to die BITCH.”

Now why is the word bitch in all caps?

I swing my vehicle next to John's, leaving the engine on. I call my partner once more. This time his voice echoes out of the speakers.

“Did you see it?” he thunders.

“Yes. Where are you?” I ask in a rush.

“We're inside the condo. Safe. I'm about to call Harper,” he adds with a note of anxiety in his tone.

“Give me five.” I hit end and turn to Danny and Connor. Their faces convey shock as their eyes rove over the red words. “Look at me,” I demand.

Both sets of eyes rivet to me. “I want you right behind me. Got it?”

They nod stiffly and unbuckle their seatbelts.

I get out first, pulling out my gun. I can't be lax—not with the note today and the words on the cement wall. I do a quick scan of the area, finding we're alone. I carefully open the back door, where Connor gets out first with Danny right on his ass. I then shuffle both men to the elevator.

I hit the up arrow and the door slides open straightaway. I shepherd them inside the elevator and hit the floor number. The second the door closes, I draw in a breath of relief. But this isn't over yet.

Riding up this elevator is like counting slow drips off a leaking faucet; the trip up seems never ending.

Once the door opens, I peek out and give the men an *all's clear* before we move swiftly to the condo door. As I'm about to slide the key in, the door swings open and John's standing there with fury flashing in his eyes.

"Where are the guys?" Danny asks, his eyes darting around the living room.

"In one of the bedrooms." John moves out of way for Danny and Connor. "Ron's there with them."

"We need—" I start to say.

"I already called the cops." John cuts me off. "I called Harper, too."

"Okay. I'll wait for them downstairs, but, John, this place is now comprised," I say with severity. "What did Harper say?"

"Harper agrees with your plan. We need to move them today." John rubs at his neck. "But I'm still working on where."

"I think the band is okay for now, but I have to move Danny today," I say, as my mind quickly decides where I can take him that no one will know but me.

"Agreed," John says.

Noise from the hallway has us both swiveling around to find Danny's pale face staring at me with unease. "Tobias?"

"I'll be back." I say to Danny, and then step out into the hall.

"Tobias," I hear Danny calling for me, but I close the door and head down the elevator, blocking out the fear lacing the singer's voice.

I don't want to be an asshole and ignore him, but Danny's safe for now. I'll leave it up to John to answer any questions he has.

I head to the building's main entrance to notify security as to what's going on. Once the guy finally clues in to what has happened, I leave the building and meet up with two officers getting out of their squad. The same ones who we met at the Chinese restaurant at the beginning of the week.

"We have another squad blocking the entrance to the garage," one officer says.

"But we need both you and your partner's statements, and possibly the band as well," the other cop adds. "Detective Magnus is en route."

Sure enough, not five minutes later the detective and his partner drive up. I call John and explain what the police need from us. He quickly comes, gives his account of what he saw and goes back up.

I then give them the rundown from the time we got hired on as Warrior Black's security. Magnus and his partner insist they want to talk to the band and, with Ron's permission, I lead them up to the condo.

Almost an hour goes by before the detectives finish their inquiry about the shooting and the spray paint. I then follow the detectives back down to the garage level where the investigating team retrieves whatever evidence they can find—though I highly doubt the stalker left anything behind.

"Here's my card. If something else happens, call immediately," Detective Magnus says.

“We will.” I head to the elevator and hit the button for the seventeenth floor. During the ride up, raw anger runs through me. When I step into the condo, all the band members are congregated in the living room, apparently waiting for me.

“Did the cops find anything?” Danny asks. Connor crams himself next to him, which pulls a barely audible growl from me. I don’t like seeing them so close together. Granted, I have no right to think so possessively of the singer, but I can’t help reacting that way.

Before I get a chance to answer, Raef jumps in, his voice an angry huff. “John says we’re going to be split up? Is that true?”

“Calm down.” John orders and then turns to me. “Harper called. He’s sending reinforcements. Pen and Jordan will arrive tomorrow night.”

“I’m not happy about the relocation idea,” Ron declares, his nostrils flare and a deep frown slices across his face.

“Well tough,” I toss out. “Safety is the number one goal here, and you all need to know that.”

“I explained that to them,” John says.

“Hello,” Danny shouts. “Why are you splitting us up?”

I turn to Danny, who’s standing there shaking and frowning up at me. If he wants the hard truth, I’ll give it to him. “Because you are the target. Those words on that garage wall prove it, along with that note today, confirming whoever it is, is aiming for you. Intentionally or not, anyone around you is at risk. Do you understand that?”

Defeat crests in Danny’s eyes, his shoulders slump and a tear slips down his cheek. “Yeah, I understand.”

“Well, I fucking don’t.” Connor pulls away from Danny to face off with me. “I think staying together is safer.”

“Usually,” I admit, “But not now.” I can understand the drummer is worried for his friend. I would be, too, since some crazy person is threatening his life. But why do I get the feeling there’s more between them than I’m seeing?

“That’s not good enough,” Connor rails.

“Calm the fuck down and listen, Wild,” John barks at the drummer.

My eyes trail to each member until I land on Connor again, who’s glowering at John like he’s the enemy.

“You saw those words. Bitch is in all caps. Does that mean something to anyone of you?”

“Yes—maybe. I’m...” Connor turns to Danny. “Remember that guy we used to call *bitch* in high school?”

“You’re the only one who called him a bitch to his face,” Danny says with a hint of dread. “Sam Jenson. Do you really think he’s stalking me?”

“Dude, I remember that guy. Every fucking day, he’d show up with his crappy guitar and ask to play with us. He crept me out, especially the way he gawked at Danny like a ham sandwich he wanted to bone.” Bobby shivers.

“That doesn’t make any sense, Hicks,” John says.

“I remember now. It was Connor’s idea to get a shirt made that said “bitch” on the front, all in caps.” Raef chuckles but abruptly stops. A sobering expression crosses his face. “But wait, didn’t that guy die in the car accident at the end of our senior year?”

Silence fills the space.

“You’re right, Raef,” Danny says solemnly.

“What about his family?” John asks.

“Not long after the accident, the family moved away and I never saw them again,” Danny explains, slumping into a chair. “That weekend was bad. We lost three in our senior class.”

“Same or different incidents?” I ask, getting the sense they might be connected.

“Same... You don’t think...” Danny’s words trail off when a knock comes from the door. We all slightly jump from the sudden noise.

I walk to the door and look through the peep hole. It's one of the building's security guys, so I open it. "Yes," I say, standing in the doorway.

"The cops got what they needed in the garage. The building manager is working on getting someone here to replace the garage entry pad," the man says as he tries to look over my shoulder, but I block him from seeing anyone in the condo.

"Sounds good," I reply with a subtle nod and close the door.

"Calm down, Mr. Darling." I turn to find John staring down at the band manager.

"Don't tell me to calm down. Harper needs to work harder on this matter. Warrior Black has interviews—"

"Cancel them. If you want your band to be safe—Danny to be safe—then cancel those interviews."

"'Drowning in Deep' is live. Warrior Black has to be out there and be seen," Ron frantically explains.

I grit my teeth, wanting to shout at the man for not listening. "The decision is made," I declare, narrowing my eyes at Ron.

"I can't believe this," Connor snarls and stalks off to the bar.

"Like in the Barrum's case?" John asks, ignoring the drummer's rant.

"Yes. If Danny's the target, and I eliminate the factor the stalker wants, the band will be off the stalker's radar. With Danny in hiding, he, too will be safe," I clarify, then turn to the singer. "Are you okay with that?"

"Warrior Black has commitments. Interviews, and a couple of appearances before Rocktoberfest. How will we pull those off if you separate Danny from the band?" Ron persists.

"I'll have that covered," I say with conviction. "I will bring him."

“Tobias has done this before,” John adds in reassurance, but from all the band members’ faces, they aren’t convinced.

Danny looks to his bandmates and then to me. “If it will keep them safe, I’ll do anything.”

“That’s bullshit,” Connor thunders.

“I will be the only one who knows where we are,” I say, more to John than anyone else in the room.

“I’m going to make some calls.” Ron stalks off as he puts his phone to his ear.

“Where’s Jennifer?” Callum asks.

“Ron fired her last week,” Danny whispers to his friend.

“What about us? If this place is compromised, where do we go?” Connor cuts in, then slugs back a shot.

“Just got word.” Ron pops back in. “Manny’s offering up his place in Vegas.”

“Once Pen and Jordan get here, we’ll make sure the next place is secure,” John says to me.

“Oh it is. Trust me.” Ron tosses over his shoulder and disappears again into one of the rooms.

John turns to me. “Then the game plan begins.”

“No, it does not. Fuck that. I hate the idea of Danny staying somewhere else,” Connor hisses out.

“Connor.” Danny grabs his arm and pulls him out of the room.

Frowning, I watch the two leave with a solidified assumption that those two *are* actually a couple, but keeping their relationship on the down low. Not liking where my mind is going, I shake off my possessive thoughts—again, and think about where would be the best place to hide Danny until this Rocktoberfest.

Then an idea hits me. *Pops’ place.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

DANNY

“What the hell is your problem?” I demand, pulling Connor to the bed.

“What the hell is yours?” Connor shoots back. “In all the years we’ve been friends, we’ve never been apart.”

“I’m thinking of you and the rest of the guys’ safety. Whoever this asshole is, is after *me*. *Me*, Connor. And if I can make sure you four don’t get caught in the crossfire, then I’ll do whatever I can to make that happen.”

“But I thought you didn’t like being around Tobias.” Connor folds his arms across his chest and glares at me

“I never said that,” I bluster, my arms doing the same.

“I can tell by the way you don’t look him in the eyes.” Connor stares me down, he’s pushing for a confession. “I know your tells, Wells.”

“You’re seeing things, Wildman. It’s not like I can’t trust the man with my life. He already proved it once. Besides, you have the guys,” I add with a reassuring smile, trying to hide my worry. “We’ll meet back up the day before we get on stage.”

“This entire situation sucks ass,” Connor confesses, reaching out and pulling me in for a hug.

“I agree,” I say, wrapping my arms around my best friend.

“I’m worried that this fucking asshole won’t give up.”

“Then Tobias will be there to protect me. And hopefully soon, the bastard will be caught,” I soothe.

A clearing of a throat has me turning my head to the open door. Standing in the threshold is Tobias, scowling.

What’s up his ass?

I pull out of Connor’s arms and face my bodyguard. “When do we leave?”

“I’ll be back in a couple of hours with provisions. I want you to pack light, only the essentials. We’re leaving as soon as I get back,” Tobias says with a hint of ice. He slices a look at me that I can’t decipher.

“Oh, okay.” I frown at Tobias. “That soon.”

“Would you rather face the stalker instead?” Tobias argues.

“No,” I rush out. A cold dread seeps through me at my bodyguard’s chilly demeanor.

“Then be ready when I get back,” Tobias snarls, then stalks out of the room.

“What a dick,” Connor says.

“Dick or not, he’s right,” I reluctantly agree. “The sooner I leave, the better.”

“Are you going to be alright?”

I face my friend. “I really don’t have a choice.”

Connor slowly nods and leaves me to pack my things. I appreciate this time of being alone with my thoughts since I have a feeling that I won’t have any more moments to myself until after Rocktoberfest.

True to Tobias’s word, he comes back a few hours later, carrying two large black bags, which he hands to John.

I say my goodbyes to my friends and follow him down an elevator we don’t usually use and out the back of the building. I’m confused as to why we aren’t driving away in his SUV

that's parked in the garage. Then I realize we're leaving without anyone getting wind of our departure.

I quickly follow Tobias through two other buildings and into a third. Once he shows his ID, we're led to the back of that building where a black BMW Alpina XB7 is parked near the exit.

"That's a bit much," I say under my breath.

"It's the only way to be sure we won't be followed," Tobias says.

Hmm. "I mean the car."

"I have no other," Tobias says and clicks the fob to unlock the doors.

As I climb into the passenger side, I halt in surprise. In the back seat is a boxer. It's my favorite dog breed, but I'm uncomfortable around animals I don't know, especially one that's growling at me.

"His name is Saint. And he's harmless," Tobias says as he closes the driver's door and starts the engine.

"Good to know." I glance once more at the dog, who's sitting there softly growling, with his dark eyes trained on me.

I wheel back around, face forward as my panic slips in. But I manage to grab the seat belt and clip it. Not only do I have to worry about a damn stalker, but now I have to keep an eye on my bodyguard's dog.

"That's enough, Saint," Tobias orders, and the dog promptly quiets down.

"So... where are we going?" I ask, giving one more glance in the back seat.

"Somewhere no one will look for you," Tobias says ominously.

I wait, hoping he'll give me more details but... nothing. "Vague much?"

Tobias turns his head, those intense amber-green eyes lasering onto me. Their intensity burns through me like a hot

branding iron. “It’s all you need to know for now.”

“It’s not like I’m going to tell anyone.” I roll my eyes, while trying to quell my racing heart. I don’t want Tobias to know I’m scared, even though I’m practically pissing myself.

Tobias shifts his attention to backing out of the parking spot and then heads out of San Francisco.

He remains mute, which makes me crazy. I hate being ignored, or not knowing where I’m going. So I begin rambling about my music, the inspiration for some of the songs and how I met my friends.

Tobias continues his silence, as though I’m not sitting next to him. If he doesn’t want to talk to me, fine. I’ll ignore him and not talk to him anymore, either.

He blends smoothly into the traffic on US 101, which I only know because I see the sign on the side of the road. And Tobias still isn’t talking to me.

I glance back at Saint. He, too, is just as quiet as he lays in the seat.

I’m inwardly fuming from the silence. I snag my earbuds from my pocket and shove them into my ears. Then I put them in noise canceling mode. I run through my playlist, and turn up the volume and lose myself in the music of Social Sinners and Maiden Voyage. These two powerhouse bands gave me and my friends the inspiration to put our music out into the world.

The music lulls me into sleep, where I dream of a stage, men around me and a shadow hovering over me.

Right as the shadow reaches me, Tobias shakes me awake.

“Danny, wake up. We’re here.”

I hear my name, but the fog of sleep pulls me back under, until a strong but warm hand on my chest jostles me.

“What?” I finally straighten in my seat and blurrily look around. It’s dark out, which surprises me. It doesn’t feel like I slept that long. “What time is it?”

“It’s ten thirty,” Tobias says as he retracts his hand from my chest, and I’m suddenly feeling cold without his touch.

I climb out of the car, and Saint lopes past me, sniffing about and marking his territory. I see nothing else but shadows. Then I tilt my head up and the black sky is filled with millions of tiny pinpricks of lights. I’m in awe.

Back home in Chicago, the guys and I used to go camping up north near the Wisconsin border. We loved sleeping outside and watching the night shine with an abundance of stars. But that doesn’t compare to what I’m seeing right now. There’s so much brilliance above, I feel a song materializing in my brain.

“Where are we?” I finally ask.

“My Pops’ place,” Tobias rumbles out as he starts unpacking the car. “Here’s the keys. Head inside.” He tosses them to me, and I catch them with one hand.

Just as I reach the stoop, I hear... splashing? I follow the sound to the back of the house to investigate.

With the crescent moon hanging high, the shadows of the night aren’t so ominous. The outline of tall trees is nestled back, adjacent to a round lake. The soft splash catches my attention again, then quiets. There’s an eerie peace that has me holding my breath.

“What are you doing?” Tobias’s voice has me jumping around and clutching at my chest.

“Don’t scare me like that.”

“I asked you to go in the house.” His voice is filled with annoyance as he steps next to me. “What are you doing?”

“This place... it’s so magical.”

“Wait until you see it in the day time. Come on, it’s late. I want you inside, so I can do a perimeter check of the area,” Tobias says.

“Fine.” I look over toward the bodyguard, but he’s already out of my sight.

I take one more look at the lake before making my way to the front of the house. I enter through the single door and find the inside to be rustic and simple. The living and kitchen area is one big open space, with a three-panel slider that brings you out to the deck I was standing on not a minute ago. One bathroom, which I'm not happy with but I can deal, and two bedrooms.

It may not have the comforts most people are used to, but I'm elated with the simplicity of the home. I may be here for a serious reason, but I think I'm going to enjoy my time in this place.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TOBIAS

I don't sleep. I can't. A prickly sensation that someone is watching us crawls around my brain and roots itself deep. But that's ludicrous. Right? No one knows where we are. I made sure of that yesterday.

We are off the grid. Meaning, nobody knows where we are. Not even my partner John knows the location of Pops' place. Granted, the place isn't truly off grid. We have electricity and the water comes from an underground spring. But with nature surrounding us, it feels like we're deep in the woods.

After Pops died, I hired a local that knew my grandfather to take care of the house. I trust Jimmy with this place and to keep silent with our whereabouts.

As I glance out of the glass slider, I can't let the uneasiness go. With Saint sleeping with Danny, I pace the inside of the house like a guard dog.

Still feeling on edge, I walk the perimeter of the house again and scan the lake for anything off. Hell, I even run to the end of the long gravel driveway that's obscured from the main road by overgrown brush and trees.

The entire night, my eyes darted to every little movement outside, while my ears were tuned to every sound in and out of the house. I finally glance at the clock and it's almost six a.m. when I collapse on the sofa, exhausted.

I still can't sleep, so I lean back against the cushions and stare out through the slider to watch the sun creep over the horizon of pine trees.

One second, I'm watching a heron take flight in the early dawn mist and then the next thing I know, I'm being shaken awake by Danny, while my dog idly stares at me with his head tilted.

Jutting up from the couch, I eye Danny through blurry eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Did you sleep out here all night?" Danny frowns down at me. "You won't do anyone any good if—"

"I know. I know," I groan, swiping at my tired eyes. "You don't have to tell me. And no, I didn't sleep out here all night." It's not a total lie, but Danny doesn't need to know that.

Saint whines, letting me know he wants out.

"Yeah, right," Danny scoffs, rolling his eyes. "I'm going to make some coffee. Want some?"

"Yeah. But first, I'm going to do a quick perimeter check with Saint." I get up, stretch, and stride toward the front door, with my dog next to me bouncing with exuberance.

I chance a glance over my shoulder and catch sight of Danny's ass in those black yoga pants, rounding the island.

Fuck.

But isn't that exactly what you want to do to him?

I immediately shut down that thought, leave the house, and focus on what I'm supposed to be doing. "Check the perimeter," I mumble to myself before going into a run.

Why now? Why this guy? It's been over a year since Carl, and I'm far from needing a fuck, when I have my hand and the trusty flashlight in my bag.

Hell, I can hardly stand to be around the singer... Okay, that might also be a lie. However, I know Danny doesn't like me for some reason, which I'm okay with since we're not here to socialize or fuck around.

I'm normally on my game. Nevertheless, with the singer here, a mixture of confusion and growing attraction is colliding with my unwavering duty to protect him. I won't cross that line. Especially when the client's life is at risk.

Ignoring him might be the only thing that will save me from a constant hard on. But every time I look at Danny, my pulse jumps, and every lustful thought batters against the ethics I hold onto. No matter how much I want to touch, taste, and fuck that man, I have to keep the singer at a safe distance. And if I repeat that a thousand times, my dick might catch on.

Grinding my teeth, I take a necessary acre tour around the house and the lake, to fully reacquaint myself with the land since I wasn't able to last night.

I haven't stepped foot onto this property in over four years. With the job, and Carl's "*I don't do nature*" bullshit, I regret not putting more effort into seeing my Pops or visiting this place before he died.

The most memorable moments of my life happened here, with my grandfather. I'm glad I never brought Carl to meet Pops. My ex would have ruined those memories for me.

"Sorry, Pops," I quietly apologize, staring up at the clouds.

Shifting my focus back to where I'm walking, I make sure to pin every spot where someone could hide. Once I'm sure it's safe, I call for Saint to follow.

Between sniffing and marking his territory, Saint keeps up. But when we approach a partially fallen tree on the east side of the property, Saint spots a squirrel. He yips and growls, all the while trying to jump up to get onto the low branch, where the animal sits. I have to chuckle at the sight of the damn thing looking at my dog like it's stupid.

"Saint, come," I order and walk back to the house.

As I approach the front stoop, my cell chimes with a text. I pull out the phone, and seeing that it's John, I open the message.

John: *Pen and Jordan just arrived.*

Me: *They are early.*

John: *Yes. It's a good thing. Got to go. Wild is a whining child.*

I bust out laughing, but then a thought hits me and I race into the house.

“Where’s your phone?” I demand harshly.

“Why?” Danny’s eyes go wide. He drops the toast he was lifting to his mouth, pulls the device from his side pocket and hands it to me.

I hand him back the phone. “Unlock it.”

He taps out the password and then passes it back to me. “What’s going on, Tobias?”

“Did you text or call anyone last night or this morning?” I scan his face before looking back down at the screen. I tap on the message icon and see that he did.

“I texted Connor when I got up. And I was going to call Laney after breakfast, to see how she’s doing,” he explains with a grimace. “Was I not supposed to? You didn’t say I couldn’t.”

“No, you can’t. But that’s my fault for not explaining that to you sooner. From now on, no calls or texts in or out.”

I don’t bother looking at Danny, all my focus is on his phone. Getting out of messages, I go into the settings and disable Danny’s location. Then I tap into the finder app and deactivate that. Now, no one will be able to find his whereabouts.

“The band is about to leave,” he says, glancing down at the cell in my hand. Disappointment shadows his frowning face.

“I know,” I throw back, promptly regretting my gruff tone. “John texted me.”

“Connor told me that the other two bodyguards arrived. He’s pissy as hell that he won’t be able to sleep.” Danny’s lips tip up into a small smile, and there’s a relaxed easiness in his eyes. “But I know that’s a lie.”

Danny's face lights up. It irks me how he talks about the drummer in such an intimate way. But, I do have to admit, he's even more beautiful when he smiles.

Something inside me loosens, seeing the happiness in his blue eyes.

"He can sleep when they get on the tour bus," I say, glancing at Danny, and his smile widens.

"Trust me, Connor can sleep anywhere." Danny chuckles. "One time, when he was about twelve, he fell asleep in his tree house. His parents looked all over for him for most of that day—they even called the police when it started to get dark. A bunch of us kids were screaming through the neighborhood calling out his name." Danny shakes his head.

"He was trouble even back then," I say with a smirk.

"Yes, he was." Danny pulls out his gloss and glides the tip along his lips. I inwardly groan, smelling bubble gum. Christ, now I'm envious toward an applicator.

I clear my throat and ask, "So what happened?"

"We all searched for him. Until I had to go home because it was getting dark. Then I happened to look through my window and spotted the tree house in his back yard, which was connected to my back yard. And I just knew he was in there."

Liking the sound of Danny's voice, I want him to keep talking to me. "What did you do?"

"I jumped the fence, climbed up the rope ladder and sure enough, he was out cold. Connor was wrapped up in his favorite blanket, his headphones on, and music blaring from them."

"That's why he didn't hear anyone calling out his name," I say.

"I woke him up and found out he wasn't feeling good. Anyway, he ended up having the flu, which he passed to me."

"That sucked," I say, then realize just how close our bodies are. I glance into his alluring blue gaze and fall a little harder

for the singer. The slight lift of Danny's chin, his mouth barely open, and those lips ready to be sampled. Devoured.

No.

I promptly shut that shit down, step back, and disengage myself from the easy-going banter. I clear my throat and say stiffly, "I turned off the tracking on your phone. Even though you aren't linked to anyone, it's best you turn it off. I don't want to take any chances." I take another step back, needing the space between us, and hold his cell phone out to him.

All the humor from moments before flees from his face. "I understand," Danny despondently says, and he takes the cell phone. He turns off the device and places it in one of the kitchen drawers. "I'm not hungry anymore." He picks up the mug of coffee and heads toward the back slider and stares at the scene without uttering another word.

I don't know what to say—if I should say anything at all, to ease the tension evident in his stiff posture. Surely, he knows I'm doing all this to keep him safe. Whatever connection is forming between us can't happen.

One way or another, I'm here to protect him at all costs. From the stalker, and from me.

CHAPTER NINE

TOBIAS

The following morning, I find Danny in the kitchen again. The moment I step into the space, his body stills, but he doesn't turn around or acknowledge me.

The tension-filled silence between us yesterday lasted the entire day and I didn't like it. Wanting that easy conversation back between us, I finally break the silence, "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to cook bacon and scramble eggs. Hungry?" He sets one pan on the stove and then grabs another.

"Sounds good... Danny, we need to talk," I say tentatively, sitting on the stool next to the small island.

"About?" He briefly meets my eyes before turning away.

"You need to understand something. I didn't set any ground rules for your safety when we got here the day before. So that's on me. But there are rules we both need to follow in order for me to protect you, and get you to that festival in one piece."

"I understand," he says evenly. "So what are the rules?"

Danny turns, eyes cast down to the package of bacon in his hand. I notice how his thick dark lashes frame his soulful eyes, and immediately my dick stands at attention. Thank God for the island, or he would see my tented cargos.

I inhale a silent breath for strength and concentrate on the rules. “I know this may sound ridiculous, but I have to take every precaution when it comes to you, Raven.”

“What happened to calling me Danny?” He bites his lower lip, and his questioning eyes finally meet mine.

Jesus. He’s going to be the death of me, if he keeps looking at me like that. The thick line I’m attempting to keep drawn between us just got thinner.

“Danny,” I acknowledge.

“Thank you. And I’ll do whatever you say, Tobias.” He says so innocently, but...

Now I’m imagining dirty things.

I shake off those thoughts and continue. “Once I make sure the perimeter is clear, that’s when you can go on the deck. If you want to go for a walk, then we’ll plan that time. But it won’t be a long one.”

“Understood.” He nods, ripping open the package and laying bacon slices in the frying pan.

There’s a quiet mood in the space as Danny starts humming a tune while flipping over the bacon.

“What are you humming? It’s... nice,” I say, snagging a cooked piece of bacon off the plate. Then I spot a small thin pouch on the counter and peer inside it. “Holy crap. How tubes of gloss do you have?”

Danny snatches the bag off the counter, zips it up and tucks it in the drawer where his phone is. “Does it matter? I... like variety.”

“Okay. Now, tell me about the song,” I say, to divert us from the gloss topic Danny’s evidently sensitive about.

“It’s something I’ve been working on for a while now. I just...” He pauses mid-flip and shakes his head. “The music is easy, but I can’t seem to get the lyrics to flow.”

“Sing it to me,” I blurt without thought, surprising myself in the process.

Danny turns wide eyes. “No.”

I glance at the bacon and then at Danny. “Why not?”

“Well, for one, it’s not the typical kind of song Warrior Black sings. And I’m not even done with it,” he admits with a sheepish grin.

“And the third?”

“I didn’t say there’s a third.”

“But there is, isn’t there?” I smirk.

He frowns slightly. “Yes. But I let Connor hear it first before anyone else.” He turns away, picking the cooked bacon from the pan.

Fucking Connor.

“Then it’ll be a privilege for me to hear it for the first time. Besides, I won’t be biased. And just to note, I don’t listen to heavy metal. I’m more a country music fan,” I say, reaching for another piece of bacon.

Danny glares at me as he whacks my hand with the greasy tongs. “Keep eating the bacon, and there won’t be anything left for me and Saint. And it’s an atrocity to not like heavy metal.”

I shrug. “It is what it is. I’ve always liked country music,” I say as I watch Danny pick up a piece of bacon.

“You can have one piece.” He tosses the bacon into the air, and Saint snatches it right up. Danny claps at my dog’s feat, then turns back to the stove.

Not wanting to lose the relaxed mood between us, I coax, “Come on, Danny. I want to hear your song.” I snag one more bacon slice without Danny catching me, and shove the piece into my mouth.

“No.” he says as he begins scrambling eggs.

“Just sing it,” I push.

“N and o.” Danny switches off the burner for the bacon, and puts down the tongs.

“Chicken.” I prod a little more, thinking he’ll sing.

There it is again. That spike of ire I saw back at the condo. He’s an enigma to me. On one hand, Danny can be fearful and look broken. But then, on the other, a spark of fire crests his blue eyes and he’s ready to tackle the world.

I like hearing him ramble on about his friends, and his passion for music. Danny’s too damn adorable for his own good. But when he’s mad, there’s no worry about the stalker shading in his eyes.

“I have a process, Tobias, and nothing you can say will change that.” He grabs plates from the cabinet and hands me one. As Danny dishes out the food, he hums the same tune, but a little louder this time.

I keep quiet, letting the crooning melody filter through my brain. The normalcy of it all. Here in Pops’ place—my place now, while this gorgeous singer is humming, as we eat the breakfast he made.

Normal. I inwardly snort. I don’t know what normal is anymore. But if I had to pick, this—right now, I’d take on the daily. Knowing I have a man by my side, making me food, and humming a song he’s composing. I would definitely want to call this normal.

“This is driving me nuts.” Danny drops his fork and the clatter yanks me out of my thoughts.

“What?”

“The song. I can’t get past one part of the song.”

“It sounds good to me.” I more than like it, but I don’t say that. “Where do you get your inspiration? Maybe pull from there.”

“Well, Mr. Grant, why didn’t I think of that?” Danny says with a sarcastic smirk.

“Smart ass.”

“That’s me.”

“Where *do* you get your inspiration from?” I repeat.

“Anywhere really. Sometimes, I see things and the words pop into my head. Other times, I can be standing in the shower...”

My breath hitches as the image of a wet Danny stroking off in the shower slides into my head.

Danny gasps. “You saw me, didn’t you?” He might have phrased it as a question, but there’s no doubt it’s an accusation.

I could lie, but why? “I did. But I quickly backed out of the room once I saw you.”

Talk about blushing. Danny’s face and neck are infused with a deep pink. His mouth drops open, but he immediately snaps it shut.

“I... I figured... Umm. I’m going to my room. I need to work on this song.” He stands and rushes out of the kitchen. Danny disappears quickly into the bedroom before I can respond.

Sitting there, alone now, I contemplate if I should go talk to him. But there would be only one outcome if I walk into that bedroom. And there wouldn’t be any talking or singing involved. Instead, I take my loaded plate and head out to the deck to eat.

Maybe the cold morning air will settle my raging cock and keep it from taking over my brain, and making me go after Danny.

CHAPTER TEN

DANNY

It's already feeling claustrophobic in the house. But what makes it worse, Tobias confirmed my suspicion that he had seen me in the shower, back at the condo.

Truly mortified about getting caught jacking off, I had no choice but to hide out in the bedroom for the rest of the day. There's no way I can face him now. Most guys would find it a turn-on that a gorgeous man like Tobias was watching, but not me.

And yet, I can't help imagining what would have happened if he had joined me in the shower. I tossed and turned all night, dreaming about the different ways that scenario could have played out. And every time I awakened, I touched myself until I came.

Now the digital clock reads five a.m. I'm tired, but I get up and quietly dress, then tiptoe out to the great room. I let out a relieved breath, grateful that I'm alone.

I make coffee, trying to keep the noise to a minimum. Then I cast a thorough glance around the house. I could be truly happy living here if I didn't have a life outside this bubble.

The house might be small—I'm guessing no bigger than seven hundred square feet, but it has everything I want in a home.

After filling my cup with coffee, I step out onto the wooden deck. Saint appears beside me for a pet, then he dashes off into the yard. While he sniffs around nearby, I take in the morning.

I shut my eyes and listen to the lapping of the lake water against its grassy shore. It's astonishing to hear nature all around me, teeming with life as though it has a soul of its own. The cool breeze sweeps across my skin, making me shiver, and I welcome the touch.

I inhale another deep breath, letting peace settle over me for the first time in a long while. A walk in the woods would be nice, but Tobias would have a shit hemorrhage if I went traipsing through the woods without him. It wouldn't be smart either.

Strange, isn't it? With all the crap going on in my life, I shouldn't feel calm or safe, but I do. Not sure if it's this place, or Tobias and his dog protecting me, but the wondrous view makes the world outside seem like fiction.

Then guilt perches heavy on my shoulders as I think of my bandmates. At least, I know they are safe while I'm hiding out with my bodyguard.

The same bodyguard that saw you jacking off in the shower.

Ugh. I have to get over my embarrassment. My avoidance tactics will only go so far.

A snapping sound catches my attention, then it stops. I pause to listen, hoping to catch it again, but I don't hear it. It doesn't sound like a bug. I'm not sure what it is.

Then I see a glint of something—maybe metal, across the lake in the woods. I lean against the wooden railing to catch sight of it.

“You're thinking way too hard,” Tobias says from behind me.

I jump and whirl around, spilling my coffee. “You scared the crap out of me.” The jerk's actually smirking.

His smile drops. “Didn’t I tell you not to come out here alone?”

“I’m not.” I point at his dog. “Saint’s with me.” The boxer trots over to me and sits by my feet. His short tail thumps against the wooden slat.

“Danny?” My name sounds gruff, like a rough tongue licking along my cock. I try to squelch any sexual arousal that’s unfurling in me, but it’s getting extremely difficult the more I’m around him.

“It’s a beautiful morning and I want to enjoy the outside. You can’t lock me up for the entirety of the time we’re here, Tobias.”

“I didn’t tell you to stay in the bedroom all day,” he says, folding his arms across his chest. I notice he’s holding a blue striped towel. “Besides, I’m thinking only of your—”

“My safety. Yeah, yeah,” I retort, my irritation rising to the challenge. “Who are you keeping me safe from, Tobias? There’s nothing out here. Unless,” I suck in a breath of shock, mocking fear, and point to a tall, skinny bird wading by the water’s edge. “Do you think that bird is going to peck me to death?”

“Didn’t I tell you that you’re a smart ass?”

“That’s better than being a dumb ass,” I counter with a snort.

I don’t know what’s come over me, but I like keeping Tobias from getting the last word. Though, I hate to admit that Tobias is right. I have to keep in mind the reason why I’m here in the first place. However, I’m still not going to let a stalker who’s obsessed with me turn me into a hermit.

Tobias rolls his eyes. “Fine. I’m going to take a quick shower. Can you behave yourself for a little while?” Tobias straightens, dropping his arms to his sides.

Can I join you? I so badly want to ask.

“Sure,” I utter instead, and turn back to the lake. “I’ll be fine. Saint’s with me.”

“Don’t stay out here too long,” Tobias says evenly. But I know it’s an order.

“Okay, I won’t.” My irritation starts to rise.

“I won’t be long,” he reaffirms.

“O-*kay*,” I say with resolve, looking over my shoulder and waving at him to go.

“Okay,” he repeats and leaves.

I roll my eyes and blow out an exasperated breath. I look down at Saint and rub his head. “He thinks I’m an idiot.”

I stay out there for a good five minutes more, taking sips of my now cooled off coffee, and hoping to see the flash of something again. But my stomach decides to growl like a hungry bear coming out of hibernation.

My precious time alone has been abruptly curtailed by my bodyguard and now my hunger. I head back inside to see what I can make for breakfast.

Tired of eating bacon and eggs, I grab the carton of milk and a box of cereal before sitting at the island. I look down at the cold meal and then glance over to the counter where there’s a loaf of bread. “Hmm. French toast sounds good.”

I bend down to look in one of the lower cabinets to look for the frying pan I used the day before. Just as I pop up with the well-used cast iron pan in hand, I find Tobias standing in the room, watching me.

“Jesus, Tobias.” I almost drop the heavy pan. “Can you stop doing that. Make some noise when you come into a room.”

“Sorry.” Slight pink infuses his cheeks. Or is that from the shower? Either way, the blush is cute on the hulking man.

His hair is slicked back, and he’s freshly dressed in jeans and a plain blue t-shirt. He’s too delectable, even dressed down. Strong broad shoulders defined with muscles that have my mouth watering. Those biceps of his... Hmm. I bet I wouldn’t be able to span both hands around either arm. I itch to run a hand down his chest and cup the front of his—.

Stop it.

I slowly turn, attempting to staunch the desire still flooding my veins, but realize that the clean, fresh scent that clings to him is getting stronger. He's close. Then an image of Tobias naked in the shower, stroking himself, takes over my brain. My cheeks heat up and my cock stands at full mast.

Turn around. But I can't. My feet are permanently cemented in place. However, my head swivels around and my eyes zero right in on his bulge.

"Want to take a picture?" Tobias steps closer, his eyes sharp, with the right corner of his lips tipping up, showing off a dimple. *A dimple, damn it.*

"What?" My eyes dart up to his face, attempting to sound casual. "Why do I need to take a picture?"

"You're staring at my dick like it's on the breakfast menu."

Gah. His arrogant tone is suddenly grating on me.

"Why? Is it that small?" *Take that.*

One blond eyebrow hikes up and a wry smile slowly creeps across his face. "Want a taste? And a closer look to see how small it is?"

"Um, no." *Yes, please.* "And please stop stalking around here like a damn ninja."

"That's my job."

"Don't you have to go check the perimeter or something?" I turn away, hiding my embarrassment and annoyance, and yeah, my dick, too.

I scoot to the stove and set the frying pan on top of the burner a little harder than I intended to.

"Why do you want me to leave, Danny? Afraid I might see something you're trying to hide?" His voice drops an octave, deep and throaty...

Now I'm thinking about getting on my knees and blowing —*Damn it, Danny. No messing with the bodyguard.*

I don't look back at him when I say, "I have nothing to hide."

"Are you sure about that?"

I huff out a laugh, "Yes." *Is he flirting with me?*

"Tell me about Siles Barrett." His accusatory statement lands a blow to my solar plexus.

Taking in a shaking breath, I slowly turn around, all the flirty banter gone. "He's the old band manager. Why?"

"I know he was. But why didn't I know he was also your lover?" Tobias asks, the accusation feeling like a sharp slap across my face.

"*Ex-lover,*" I spit out. "And why does that matter?" I counter with firm resolve.

His indignant scowl scores right through me. Now he thinks I'm hiding something damning, which draws up my hackles.

"In order to keep you safe, we need to know all the details of your life. Including any past and current lovers. That last fact was not in the file I received about you, which leads me to believe you *are* hiding something," he says, stepping into my space.

I swallow hard, but I'm not going to be intimidated by this guy. "I'm not hiding anything about Siles. But if I am, that's none of your fucking business."

The truth is, I am.

I'm hiding my shame. The last thing I want Tobias to find out is that I was beaten by my then-boyfriend and it took the entire band to get me out of that terrible relationship.

"Where your life is concerned, it is, Danny. I was hired to protect you. And in doing so, I need all the facts of your life. I don't care if you fucked every guy you've met. But I need to know every person you knew that you had issues with. I need

to know those details to make sure they aren't after you now." He leans in, until only a few inches separate us. "Got me?"

"All you are is my bodyguard, not my warden. You're here to protect me from a lunatic stalker. Not my past lovers, who have nothing to do with what's going on right now. I'm sure of it. I don't care what you think of me. And for your information, I'm no whore. I don't fuck around with anyone. Ever," I shout in his face.

Saint's whining, but I'm too riled up and focused on the angry man before me.

Tobias briskly closes the gap between us. Our chests touch, and our faces are so close that I can smell the mint from his toothpaste. I also can't decipher if it's my heart or his that's pumping erratically.

Tobias's nostrils flare and there's hellfire blazing in his eyes, making them more green than amber.

For the first time, I'm afraid of him. I want to step back, but I don't. My stubbornness won't let me.

"Let me tell you, princess. I don't give a fuck what you think of me, either. I'm only here to save *your* ass. So when I want to know something, you'll tell me everything. *Got me?*"

Barely a breath separates our lips, and for a brief moment, I want to close the gap and taste his angry sneer.

Tobias's eyes drop to my lips, and I see a flash of hunger. I'm momentarily taken aback, and right then I want to drop down, rip his pants open and show him what he's missing.

Instead, I restrain myself and step back, needing the distance to breathe and clear my head. With the tube of gloss in my hand, I put on a good layer of tutti-fruity on my lips.

"Do you get me, Danny?" he repeats.

I snap my attention to his harsh glare. "I got you." I salute him and stalk off toward the bedroom, forgetting all about my hunger for food. And for Tobias.

I slam the door and lock it. Of all the... I can't even think with all the fury swirling inside me. Forget about the sexual

frustration, I'm so far removed with those feelings now.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

DANNY

I hate Tobias Grant. He basically called me a whore and a princess in the same breath.

You're a jag-off, Tobias. I'm no fucking princess, or a whore! I scream in my head before picking up a throw pillow from the bed and chucking it against the wall.

Shit.

I have never been so infuriated in all my life, except for those rare moments where... No. Where Siles Barrett is concerned, I want to forget that part of my life ever existed.

My ass hits the floor as the torrent of emotions pools into a mass of hatred and shame at the back of my throat. My eyes fill with tears as humiliation begins to curdle in my gut.

Why would Tobias bring up Siles? That prick hasn't been in my life for years. Unless he thinks... I shake my head. Siles is too full of himself to be a stalker—my stalker. He wouldn't put in the time or the effort.

I pick up the gray pillow I threw, tuck it under my chin, and hug it to my chest.

Wishing I could call Connor or any one of my friends, I sigh, knowing I can't. I'm alone in this.

I tip my head back and wipe the tears away.

As painful as it may be to relive those moments, I grudgingly admit that Tobias has the right to know. He needs to know my past to eliminate any possible suspects, and that includes Siles. I just don't want Tobias to look at me differently when he finds out what Siles put me through for years, all for the sake of love. And when we did separate, it was in the most awful way.

Jesus. Even after all this time, I'm still so sensitive talking about him. But I know I have to tell Tobias.

After a good ten minutes pass, I finally get a grip on my emotions and ponder on how to explain about Siles Barrett.

Just...

Like lightning striking a tree, the realization of my feelings for my bodyguard hits me. More than just sexual attraction, I like the man for his values, his steadfastness, and his dedication to the job. And if I can admit it, his stubborn determination to drive me crazy.

If Tobias ever finds out that I'm attracted to him, exposing my feelings will be nothing but a disaster.

Leave it to me to fall for a guy that's unattainable.

Maybe the reason why I'm attracted to the man is because I've been single for a long while. After the abuse from Siles, I prefer it. I have the band, but that's different. My friends will always be my friends. But a lover? Someone I can share a life with? That someone special I've never earnestly had in my life—that someone who truly understands me.

Aside from the friendships, and the loneliness I admit to feeling, there's the intimacy I crave. I miss being touched, cuddled, spooned. I need that. I want that. But I won't be getting it from Tobias.

I take a deep cleansing breath, stand, and pull up my big boy panties. I might not ever be able to do wicked things with Tobias. However, I can apologize for my behavior and answer any questions he has about Siles. But this calls for something stronger—a gloss that will give me courage.

I grab my other lip bag and pull out the tube of raspberry gloss. After I layer on a thorough coat, I leave the bedroom feeling better.

The moment I enter the great room, I see my bodyguard through the glass slider. He's standing on the deck, exactly where I was appreciating the view. His attention is on the lake, with Saint at his feet.

Courage, Danny.

Tobias's posture is relaxed, his right hand rubbing the dog's head. I swallow down my pride and step outside, all the while trying not to appreciate the man's assets.

I must have been staring too intently at his ass, because I don't realize Tobias is looking at me, again. Not until he clears his throat.

Damn it. Our eyes meet for a moment, and like a coward, I look away. Running my fingers through my hair, I gather my nerve and meet his eyes. "I want to apologize for being an asshole. I know you need to know everything in order to do your job. It wasn't my intention to leave anything out. It's just..." I slowly drop my eyes back to the deck. "I promise from now on, I'll tell you what you need to know."

"You don't need to—" he abruptly stops, sniffs, and mumbles, "Raspberry."

Then my stomach emits a loud gurgling sound.

Why not just fart in front of the man, too?

"Danny." The restrained way he says my name has me swallowing hard.

"I'm sorry for fighting with you. Now I need to eat," I say, before rushing back inside the house. Fleeing could be construed as cowardice, but I don't care. I apologized, and the topic of Siles is now open for discussion. I hope I can keep the food down while talking about that fucker.

The word *eat* must be a trigger for Saint, because he barrels in after me, tail wagging, and tongue hanging out like he knows he's going to get a treat from me.

“Danny.” Tobias steps inside and slides the screen door closed.

“Ask any questions, and I’ll answer them,” I quickly say as I pull out deli meat, since it’s now closer to lunch time. “Want some? I’m making a sandwich and I—”

“Please stop. Come and talk to me,” he says, interrupting my ramblings. Tobias takes my hand and leads me to the couch. His touch is warm and gentle.

Okay, I can do this. Just rip off the band aid, Danny. Feel the pain and then move on.

I’m nervous about talking up the past, and it doesn’t help that Tobias’s warm, strong hand is still holding onto mine. Or that his thumb is gently stroking the back of my hand. Does he know he’s doing that?

The feather light touch sends a charge of electricity straight to my groin. It’s like he’s stroking my cock, and in my current position, there’s no way of hiding what’s growing in my pants.

If I don’t get a hold of myself, Tobias will notice what’s tenting between my legs.

And won’t that be an awkward explanation.

Instead of focusing on my stiffening dick, I keep my eyes on the man’s stubbled chin, pull my hand out of his, and tug down my shirt to hide the protrusion in my yoga pants.

Tobias stands, his crotch at eye level.

Not helping.

“I have to put this out here first and say I’m sorry for coming on so strong. You had no idea what’s in those case files and I should have asked you about it sooner. And I apologize for calling you a whore, I did not mean that. But princess...”

Without thought, I huff out a laugh. Now what do I do with that?

“I also have to be fully transparent with you, Danny, in order for us come to an understanding. I’m attracted to you,” he blurts out.

I think my brain just broke down, because I swear Tobias admitted that he’s attracted to me.

“Say again?” I blink, staring up at his face.

“You know what I said, Danny. I’m attracted to you, and I know you are attracted to me. In any other circumstance, I’d engage, but we aren’t and we can’t,” he insists as though I understand every word that’s coming out of his mouth.

I study his face long and hard, attempting to see any sign of a lie. If the implication of what he’s confessing is true, then... “You’re gay?” I squeak out.

“Is that all you got out of what I just said to you?” Tobias stares at me like I’m a strange three-headed alien.

“Well, yeah.” I stand, my eyes fixed on his face. “I didn’t... um, you were... I thought maybe but...”

“Gay, yes. I’m gay, Danny. I’ve been gay since birth,” Tobias says with exasperation.

“Me, too,” I chirp, and instantly regret it. *Me too? Brilliant, idiot.* “I mean, I didn’t know you were gay.”

“Can we move on from our sexuality, please?”

“Shit. Sure. I’m sorry. Go on.”

“Are you done?”

“Yes. Sorry.” I cover my mouth.

Tobias lets out an exasperated breath. “What I’m trying to say is that we can’t be together. It’s not professional. I have never and never will cross that line. Do you get me?”

God, I’m beginning to hate it when Tobias says those words.

“Alright. You’re gay, I’m gay, and even though we’re attracted to each other, we can’t do anything about it. Ever.

Did I get it all?" I ask with finality. But my heart hurts from speaking those words out loud.

"Yes," he says slowly.

"What else?" I ask with some composure.

His eyebrows furrow, like he's ready to take on a battle I have no plans of fighting.

Before he opens his mouth, I jump in. "You can ask me whatever while I'm making a sandwich. I'm kind of hungry and I haven't eaten since yesterday and—Want one?" I don't wait for his response and go the counter and begin making my food.

Tobias walks over to me, tension in his gait, but I ignore it and ask, "Ham?"

"Sure," he says, but I can see that he wants to talk.

I make his plate, toss a slice of ham to Saint, and then fix mine. Taking a seat on a stool, I bite into my sandwich, eyes on him, and wait for Tobias to talk.

"I tell you we're attracted to each other and you take it as a simple fact and then ask me if I want a sandwich." He's staring at me with such intent that I feel like a pinned bug under a magnifying glass.

I stop mid-point from biting into my food and look at my bodyguard. "What did you expect me to do, rant or rage over it? You said we can't. I know nothing will come out of our attraction. So why push. Or am I missing something?"

"No." The hard but assured tone of that single word cuts, but only for a nano second before I shove those feelings way down into the dark recesses of my heart.

What Tobias isn't getting, and I'm not about to tell him, is that his confession has me gut punched. No. He doesn't need to know how I feel.

"Okay?" I say calmly, then I bite and chew.

"Tell me about Siles." Tobias pulls out the other stool from under the island counter and sits.

I gulp down the food in my mouth. “Just one question before I explain.”

“What is it?”

“How did you find out about Siles and me?”

“John.”

“How did he find out?” That familiar knot at the base of my throat tightens.

“Drunk Connor.”

In for a pound, as they say. By the way, whoever made up that saying has no clue what I’m going through. And wait until I get my hands on my best friend; revenge will be sweet.

I suck some much needed air into my lungs and start at the beginning. “We went to school with Siles. From fourth grade on through high school. Even back then, Siles was a cocky son of a bitch. But back then, I thought the way he acted was attractive. Nonetheless, what I thought was his alpha male tendency was nothing but bullying and abuse.”

“How long were you two together?” he asks between bites.

“I started dating him in the beginning of our senior year, up to about five years ago.” My stomach is drawn tight like a new bow. After another soft rumble from my gut, I pick up my sandwich and take a small bite.

“How did he react to you breaking it off?” Tobias asks. He gets up and heads to the fridge for two bottles of water.

I accept the cold bottle, crack it open and chug some of the dryness away. “I didn’t.”

“He did?”

I shake my head. “Connor and the guys gave him no option,” I confess, as a wave of nausea runs through my stomach.

“Explain.”

I swallow hard. This is the first time I’ve talked about what happened that weekend with Siles. It’s much harder than I

want to admit, but I go on. “The last time I saw him was about five years ago. He accused me of cheating, then tied me up and beat the shit out of me for three days.”

“He what?” Tobias’s nostrils flare as he fists both of his hands on top of the counter.

I close my eyes, trying to distance myself from the memory of being bound and beaten bloody. “We were at a party that Friday night. It was one of Siles’s friends I’m familiar with. I didn’t want to go. I actually wanted to hang out with Connor and guys—jam with them, like we usually did. But Siles wanted me by his side, like some fucking trophy. So I gave in, like always.”

“You always gave in?” Tobias questions, but from the dark look in his eyes, he sees what I’ve been hiding. The raw physical pain. The humiliation. The disgrace Siles had put me through.

“Yeah. Anyway.” I swipe a lone tear and continue. “So I went and actually had a good time. Met some people, had great conversations. But when we got home, he punched me, knocking me out. I woke up tied to a kitchen chair. He said it was to teach me a lesson for being flirty with other guys.”

Tobias stays quiet for a long minute, but his jaw’s rigidly set and his knuckles are white. Then he asks in a hoarse tone, “What happened next?”

“I was supposed to meet up with the guys to rehearse the new songs we’d written the previous Monday. But when I didn’t show, Connor was at our door. I was still tied up and Siles used every excuse including me being sick to not let my friend inside the place. But you can guess what happened.”

“Connor being Connor, he saved the day,” Tobias says flatly.

I laugh, giving some relief to the pressure in my chest. Even though the entire situation was a clusterfuck, I have to find some humor in what was the worst weekend of my life.

“Yes. He did. Then Connor proceeded to kick the shit out of Siles before he called the guys, who stormed over and

helped me move out of the place.” I slump in my seat, before meeting Tobias’s eyes, afraid to see what’s in them.

“After that weekend, have you seen him since? Has he contacted you in anyway?”

“Twice in the five years. Once, the day after. I didn’t pick up. But he stupidly left a message.”

“What did he say?”

“Warned me to not call the cops or he’d show me what it really means to get a beating. He also said in the same breath that all of the stuff the guys took out of the apartment was his, and he had to move out because he can’t afford the place.”

“What did Connor say?”

“Connor called him back and told him if he ever came around me and the band again, they’d never find his body,” I explain, ignoring the food on my plate.

Tobias smiles huge. “How much stuff did they take?”

I smile. “All of it.”

“Really?” He chuckles, and the sound reverberates through me. I can’t help feeling oddly relaxed now, even though we’re talking about that asshole.

“Yes. That was my apartment. My things. Siles moved in with only two suitcases of clothes.”

“And the second time?”

“Asking if he was still our band manager,” I chuckle. “Can you believe that?”

“Did you call the cops?”

“No. I just wanted him out of my life.”

“Do you regret not calling?” Tobias asks, his voice sounding calmer.

“In the beginning I did, but not anymore.”

“One last question. How did he end up as your band manager, if he was that big of a dick?”

“Just like anything else Siles did, he wormed his way in.” I rub the back of my neck, not able to find a smile. All the money he scraped off our backs and we never saw a return. It all went into his pockets.

“Thank you. I know it had to be hard talking about that.”

I nod, not able to respond. I chug the rest of the water and remain quiet.

“Danny, I don’t want to be a dick and bring this up, but we need to set another ground rule.” His tone serious.

“Okay. What is it?” I feel a headache coming on, knowing I’m not going to like it.

“It’s for the best while we’re here, for the duration, that we keep our distance from each other. Aside from you going on the deck, or if you really want to stretch your legs, you’ll only see me in passing. Yeah?”

I nod rigidly, the sting in my eyes blooming again. “Good idea. Why tempt fate.”

“It’s for the best,” he repeats.

I look away, trying to hide the pain his admission is causing me. Feeling a bit spiteful.

Fuck you and the best.

“If we’re done, I think I’m going to lie down for a bit.” I pick up my plate and place it in the sink.

“Okay.” I don’t give him a chance to say anything else.

Each step away from him is another stab to my already battered heart. Knowing Tobias likes me is more of a detriment than a relief. I would rather be in the dark, then have to feel the lash of his unwavering sense of duty.

If he wants to keep his distance, then I’ll remember to do just that.

With Rocktoberfest coming up fast—one of our biggest career opportunities—I’m not going to waste my time thinking of Tobias anymore, or what could be between us.

I open the bedroom door and push it closed with my back.
I slump to the floor and stare at the three walls.

Hmm... Here I am... again. Alone.

CHAPTER TWELVE

TOBIAS

I storm out of the house as quietly as I can so as to not alert Danny that I've left. The singer doesn't need to see this side of me. I'm enraged at finding out what that bastard did to Danny.

As soon as I see this Siles Barrett, he will regret the day he ever touched the singer. I'll have no issues sending the ex-manager's ass to jail with a few pieces broken off his body. Namely, his hands.

What I don't get is why Danny's abuse or the reason why Siles's departure as the band manager wasn't in the files I received. I want to call the office, but not in the frame of mind I'm in.

I book it past a set of stumps near the water's edge, a spot my grandfather deemed to be the perfect fishing hole. Slicing through the sagging branches of a willow tree, then crossing over the deep ruts in the dirt from years of ATV riding, I finally slow my pace until I stop near a clearing where I can see to the other side of the lake. From this vantage point, the house is in full view and I wonder if Danny's alright.

A bark to my left signals that Saint has found me. There's slobber dripping from his jowls, and his tawny coat is covered in wetness. "Aren't you supposed to be back at the house, boy?" I rub the top of his wet head.

He barks and rears up, his front paws landing on my shoulders. I push him off, pick up a stick and throw it back in

the direction I came. Saint runs after it with gusto, and I laugh. It's been a while since I've taken a moment to just have fun. And from the way Saint's rushing back, the stick between his teeth and tail wagging, he needs this time too.

After several minutes of playing fetch, I have a solid grip on my emotions and reluctantly pull out my phone. There's only one person who can locate Siles Barrett. I dial Dean Harper's number. I would rather go straight to Hale, the tech geek at Harper Security, but there's zero chance Hale would keep my inquiry a secret.

"It's about fucking time you called me," Dean answers in a no-nonsense curt tone. "I thought I was gonna have to put out feelers to make sure you and the client are alive."

"I didn't need to call until now," I counter casually, not taking his bait.

"How's the singer?"

"Danny's safe," I admit and wince at my response.

"Danny, is it?" he questions then pauses for a second. Dean has a bad habit of plucking my thoughts right out of my head. "Grant?" My name comes out as a warning.

"There's nothing going on between me and the singer, Harper," I say truthfully. Almost.

"Okay. Then there's another reason why you called me."

"Actually, I need to talk to Hale. Siles Barrett, Warrior Black's ex-manager was in a relationship with Danny. I found out their break up was not so amicable."

"How so?"

"The fucker was beating on him. After Danny left Barrett with nothing, he promised retribution. But that was five years ago." I'm not about to explain that Connor was the one who actually did the breaking up between Danny and Siles. That's a moot point.

A low growl tears through the phone. "Were the police involved?"

“No.”

“Jesus Christ.” Silence. “So you think Barrett’s the stalker?” There’s a note of uncertainty in my boss’s voice. “And you think the reason is payback?”

“I don’t know, but I have a gut feeling we’re on the right track. We need to look into his activities. His whereabouts in the last month. Get something with his handwriting to compare with the letters.”

“Alright. I’ll have Hale check where he has been—But Tobias, putting aside the bullshit between you and my brother, I trust your gut on this. You’re never wrong.”

The tension in my chest loosens at Dean’s admission. “I think he is a person of interest, until he isn’t,” I declare.

“Hale—no, better yet, I will call you when he finds something.” With that, Dean hangs up.

I glance down at my cell, confirming the call is ended before shoving the phone into my pants pocket. “Bastard. He never says goodbye,” I mutter to myself, but knowing the reason why.

With my mind somewhat eased by knowing Hale will be looking into Barrett’s activities, I whistle for Saint to follow as I head back to the house. However, no matter how hard I push, I can’t seem to erase the memory of the hurt look on Danny’s face. The singer is already so far under my skin, he’s to the marrow of my bones.

It’s crazy to think it’s been only a few days since I met Danny, and heard him sing with such passion. Yet, I already have feelings for the singer. That admission stings. Reason being, even with our mutual attraction, there’s no chance for us. I’m far from ready to be involved with another guy, and maybe too jaded after the shit I went through with Carl.

Hook ups? They aren’t my thing, and I get the feeling they aren’t for Danny either, which proves my point. We can’t be together. If we try to make it casual between us, it’ll turn into more. I know it like I know the size of my cock. Sleeping with

Danny would be more. More than a fuck. More than the mind blowing orgasm I know I'd have with the lead singer.

Danny's the drug I wouldn't be able to resist. And if I get a taste of him, I'll be an addict for life.

Needless to say, I can't let that happen. Not when his life is at risk, or my career and his. I'll make sure to keep my distance from Danny at all cost. I just hope he fully understands this is for his own good.

With those thoughts, I walk into the house and find it eerily quiet. I go check Danny's room, expecting to hear music behind the closed door, but all there is, is silence.

I have the urge to knock, to see if he's okay. Instead, I back away, feeling my chest constrict with tension. I tell Saint to stay and head back out.

It's for the best, I repeat to myself as I stalk back into the woods, needing to let loose my pent up attraction and aggression. Giving myself enough distance from the house, I unzip my fly and yank out my dick. If I can't have Danny, my hand will have to do.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DANNY

What the hell am I doing? I drop my note pad onto the floor and fall back against the mattress, my eyes tracing the popcorn ceiling. I'm frustrated with myself and my lack of inspiration to write any lyrics in the last hour. I don't want to sit here and sulk anymore. I've done that enough in my lifetime. But what can I do?

I can't keep hiding inside this room whenever I have a conflict with Tobias.

So what if Tobias doesn't want me. I haven't needed a guy in a long time. I'm not about to start now and pine for someone who clearly says that he won't cross the line... whatever that is.

Tobias's confession hurt, but I've been through worse. I'll get over this hurdle like I've done all the others. All I need to do is remain focused on my music, and I'll be fine. Hopefully. But for now, I need to clear my head with fresh air.

Once I change out of my yoga pants and into a pair of my well-worn sweat pants, I grab my favorite running shoes and step out of the room to find the house... empty.

Okay, nearly empty. Saint is curled up on the sofa. The second he sees me, the dog jumps down and dashes over to me. I quickly look around for Tobias, but he's nowhere to be seen.

Why am I not surprised to find him missing. He didn't even bother telling me he was leaving. For a bodyguard who claims to care about my safety, his actions show otherwise.

“Well, boy, want to go for a walk with me?” I rub Saint's head. “Gross. Your head's wet.” And I wipe my hand on my pants.

By the front door, I look for a leash, but since I never see Tobias using one, I don't bother leashing Saint.

I step outside, suck in a lungful of cool air, and decide to see what's on the other side of the lake. Tobias did say that it's still his property, so I should be safe walking around there with the dog.

A good ten minutes into my casual stroll, I follow a bend in the path around some really tall redwood trees. My feet abruptly halt and my eyes widen in shock at what I'm seeing.

Tobias leaning against a tree, eyes closed, head tipped back, with a look of bliss on his face.

My eyes drop to his right hand—a hand which is pinching one of his pierced nipples through his shirt while the other is stroking his...

Oh, my, god.

I don't realize I'm moving toward Tobias. Not until I'm standing directly in front of him, my eyes glued to his groin in fascination.

My entire body becomes a live wire. Electrified and aroused. There's an instinctive desire to touch and taste the man. I want to reach out and run my fingers along his rigid shaft. Rub in the pearl of precum on the tip of his mushroom head. Feel the weight of his heavy balls in my palm while choking down his length.

Tobias is so focused on what he's feeling that he hasn't heard my approach. I drop to my knees, lean in, licking my lips with eagerness. I'm centimeters away from lapping up the pearly drop of cum from the tip. I swipe my tongue against the leaking head of Tobias's cock. The burst of flavor has me eagerly wanting more.

Then Tobias's eyes pop open and like a jolt, he jumps away and gawks in open shock at me.

"What the fuck? Danny?" Surprise and disbelief lace his words.

"Don't say no, Tobias." My eyes never leave his bobbing cock.

He shakes his head and steps back. "We can't. I—"

"We can," I interrupt, while still on my knees. The desire to have him down my throat, to taste him again on my tongue is a hunger I relish. "Please, Tobias. I need this."

I need you.

I don't know what he sees on my face, but he slowly nods and takes those tentative steps toward me.

I remain kneeling as I study Tobias's erect veiny cock, jutting up from a thatch of dark blond curls. I lick my lips at the enticing sight.

Tobias groans. "Keep doing that and I'll cum before your lips wrap around my dick."

I glance up at my gorgeous bodyguard with a wicked grin. "Would that still count, or..."

"Danny," he growls low, which sends another shot of lust to my groin.

Before I can wrap my mouth around his meaty girth, in the distance I hear Saint barking feverishly. Every hair at the back of my neck stands on end, knowing something is wrong. Then what sounds like a gunshot reverberates through the woods.

Tobias immediately draws back, rights his pants, and orders, "Run back to the house and stay inside until I get there."

I nod woodenly, not questioning his demand. I quickly get to my feet and take off back to the house. I fear for Saint being hurt; I wouldn't be able to handle it if Tobias's dog got shot because of me.

But can it be the stalker? I can't imagine how they would have found me here. Tobias explained he made every effort to keep this location a secret from everyone. And I believe him. The problem is that I did use my phone, even if it was only for a text message to Connor. Could that be what gave our location away?

I rush into the bedroom and close and lock the door. Frantically looking around, I decide it's not enough and push the tall dresser in front of it. Then I sit on the bed, my back to the wooden headboard, pillow clutched tight in my arms and wait. And wait.

What's bad about waiting, is that my mind keeps conjuring up terrible scenarios of Tobias hurt, or dead. What's worse? Knowing I can't do a damn thing about it. It doesn't help either that the time alone seems to move as slowly as dripping molasses on a winter's day.

"He's going to be okay," I repeat out loud, clutching the pillow tighter to my chest.

"Danny." Tobias's voices rings throughout the house.

"Tobias?" I move to the door, but leave the dresser where it's positioned.

"It's me," he says behind the door. "Come out."

"Is it safe?"

"It is. Just a false alarm," he says with a soft chuckle.

I push the dresser back into place, unlock the door and open it. Tobias isn't smiling, but he's not angry.

"What happened? What was that noise?" I ask, walking past him to find the dog. "Is Saint okay?"

"The damn dog was barking at a squirrel, and he decided he can climb a tree, too, and went after it. The low hanging branch Saint was on broke and caused that sound."

"Oh." I stare down at the animal. "How did he get in the tree in the first place?"

"Beats me. But that's Saint for you," Tobias says.

I drop to the floor and hug the dog. “You could have gotten hurt, boy.”

“Trust me, he’s been in more precarious situations than chasing a squirrel up a tree. That’s why I named him Saint. For all the times he could have hurt himself or worse and didn’t.”

“Well, Saint.” I look the dog in the eyes. “Stop doing that. You gave me a heart attack. And...” I meet Tobias’s eyes, clearly seeing the wall back up between us.

Tobias clears his throat. “Speaking of that...” He looks away. “We can’t.” He then walks away. Again.

I don’t say anything. Because what’s the point. Arguing the fact that he wants me just as much as I want him will only turn this feeling between us into an even more uncomfortable tension.

However, it doesn’t mean I accept his decision. I got a tiny taste of Tobias and there’s nothing stopping me from playing hard ball with the man. I’ll show him just how much he needs me. Just as much as I need him.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TOBIAS

Keep your distance.

Those vigilant words have been a litany in my head, until now.

Two days have passed since Danny found me in the woods, and he's giving me the silent treatment—no, he's avoiding me altogether.

Unfortunately, there has been no new information about the stalker or Siles, so all I have to focus on is Danny.

I can't take his silence anymore. He *will* talk to me today.

We have five days remaining before we have to leave for Black Rock, Nevada, and I'm not about to let Danny's silent avoidance get the better of me or wear down my patience and resolve.

The singer has been staying clear of me, except for when he comes out of the bathroom with only a towel wrapped around his waist, water glistening off his delectable slim body. Or when Danny walks out of the bedroom, half dressed, in only those tight yoga pants that show off every perfect inch of his legs, his pert ass and the bulge of his dick. And no matter where I am or what I'm doing, I keep smelling his scented lip gloss, which constantly reminds me of his dick-sucking lips.

If I didn't know any better, I'd swear he's trying to tease me.

Those are the moments when I haul ass to the woods and jack off like some sexual deviant, while thinking it's Danny's cock I'm stroking. Thank Christ, there's nothing but woods between here and the next neighbor or I'd surely have the cops at my door.

Needless to say, I get a boner when he walks out with his gorgeous long brown hair up in a messy bun on top of his head and his slender neck exposed. I want to bite the crook of his shoulder, and leave my mark so everyone can see that he's mine.

But he isn't, and I have to remember that.

Aside from all of that, what riles me the most is that when I ask him a question, all he does is grunt or nod, then Danny carts his ass back to the bedroom and works on his music.

It's infuriating and... challenging at the same time.

I swear everything he's doing is on purpose to punish me. My cock surely feels slapped every time those light blue eyes catch me staring back at him with hungry want. But all I can do is walk away and then go for a run. Or jack off.

Fuck. That's all I've been doing. But not anymore. I may not be able to have him physically, but at least Danny will talk to me. I miss his rambling. His laughter. His little rants about shit that has no consequence or interest to me. But I still listen.

And when he sings, the world around us fades away and there's only Danny in my line of sight.

The way Danny sings is a contradiction to his appearance. Where his face, might have at times an air of innocence, his voice is strong, assured, and powerful.

I hardly know Danny, but I'm going to miss him when this job is over.

To clear my head, I do another perimeter check, which feels senseless. So I enter through the front door, determined to get Danny to talk to me.

As I round the corner to the great room, aiming for the bedroom, out of the corner of my eye, I see Danny on the

deck... in a bright yellow speedo thong, doing yoga.

The globes of his ass—his entire body is a temptation I can't take anymore.

I storm out to face him before my wall of determination crumbles into dust. "We need to talk."

Danny grunts. He then proceeds to fold himself over onto the blue mat, his ass up in the air. Now I know he's doing this on purpose.

"That's it." I haul Danny up, throwing him over my shoulder, and then smack that pert ass hard. "You're going to listen, and you are going to respond with words. And if you don't, I'm going leave you in this position, and every time I ask a question, and you don't answer, I'm smacking your ass until you do. Got me?"

Danny grunts.

I smack his ass. "Got me?"

He huffs.

"You got it." I smack his ass again. This time much harder, where Danny can feel the sting. "Are you going to answer me?"

Grunt.

Smack.

This goes on four more times before I realize Danny's cock is rock hard against my shoulder.

Fuck. Things just got interesting.

As I place Danny on his feet, his face is flushed but he avoids looking at me.

Before he even takes a step back, I grab the back of his neck and haul him close. The heat from our bodies and the pure lust evident in his blown out pupils has my heart racing a thunderous beat.

"You like things rough, Danny," I say, running my nose against his. The puff of his raspberry scented breath quickens

at my statement. “Tell me I’m wrong.”

He remains silent.

I lean in, our lips a mere millimeter apart. “Tell me no, Danny.”

He opens his mouth, but nothing comes out. Because whatever he says will be a lie. I know it.

“I can’t say no to you, Tobias.” It’s all he gets out before I slam my mouth over his.

I had no doubt that kissing Danny was going to be good. But I’m blown away. He kisses with his whole being. His fervent glossed flavored lips, his talented tongue, and his exquisite body.

There’s no part of my mouth, that isn’t caressed by this singer’s tongue.

The hungry demand of his mouth is like he’s making love to me. And at this point I don’t give a fuck about morality or duty. I’m desperate for Danny, his body, his cock—everything he has to offer. I’ll do anything to keep this guy in my bed, even if it’s only the precious time we have here. I’ll cherish it.

I’m about to pick Danny up and carry him to bed when my fucking cell phone goes off.

Danny pulls away, lips all swollen, his pupils blown wider. “Don’t answer it,” he says in a husky overture.

A growl tears from my throat. “I have to. It’s my boss.”

The drugging sensation Danny has me under quickly evaporates and I pull out of his arms. I walk away from the still-dazed singer standing there in my living room.

What was I thinking kissing him?

Feeding the need, I guess? I lick at my lips, feeling and tasting Danny’s gloss on my mouth, and instantly regretting my action. Should I have stayed and taken what he was offering? No. But I won’t be able to remove the taste of him from my tongue.

Focus, damn it.

I storm out of the house and put the phone to my ear. “Bad timing, man.”

“Really? What’s happening that Hale and I can’t call you about Siles Barrett,” Dean patronizes, clucking his tongue before continuing. “I mean, if you have more pressing matters...”

“What do you have?” I rumble out in irritation. Two different chuckles emanate from the phone line, but I ignore the bastards and demand, “Again, what do you have?”

“Actually, a lot,” Hale says. “With Barrett’s financials, he’s on his second round of bankruptcy. He barely has a grand in the bank, and several credit cards with most of them at the max limit.”

“What about his whereabouts in the past month?” I ask while pacing the gravel drive.

“The guy manages two small-time bands, both from the east coast, and he has posted about them on his Instagram account in the last two months,” Hale adds.

“Are you sure? He could have easily set that up,” I question, not wanting to admit I’m wrong about my hunch.

“Yes, he could have, but there’s proof he was in New York all that time. However...”

“What?” I stop pacing and glance at the house, wondering what Danny’s doing.

“Looking through his phone records, I found several calls to and from the same number. So I traced it, but it’s one of those pay as you go phones. There’s no way to find out who that is. But I will keep on it,” Hale promises

“Okay. Got anything on the handwriting analysis?” I ask Dean.

“With most people doing transactions on their computers or their phones, it’s hard finding anything pen to paper,” he says. “We do have his signature, but the graphologist wants more samples. We’ll get there, Tobias. Keep cool.” Then Dean hangs up.

Frustration rams my gut. There's no way Siles isn't in on this. He's the only link to this, I'm sure. The only link to Danny and the band, but I just don't know to what degree.

Rounding the back end of the house, I come to dead halt. On the other side of the glass slider is Danny, standing naked, with a devious smile on his face. He then turns and walks off with his hand stroking his cock.

I stand there, my jaw dropping to my chest as he struts away. I debate for all of three second before my hunger overrides any sense of duty to protect Danny.

Before Danny reaches the bedroom, I'm inside and hauling him up into my arms.

"What are you doing?" I growl.

Stupid question.

"Tobias." Danny pinches one of my pierced nipples through my shirt, which draws a loud groan out of me.

I pause just outside my bedroom, stare down at the luscious man in my arms and wait. There's no way I'm going to take him to my bed without getting another verbal consent out of Danny.

He must realize what I'm waiting for, because he smiles and says, "Yes."

It's all I need before I kick open the bedroom door and stride inside. I drop Danny onto the bed, and begin stripping out of my clothes.

"Hurry," he says with a wicked grin.

Damn. He planned this the whole time, but I ignore the deviousness of Danny's mind. Because I want him so much that my dick throbs.

After shucking off my pants, Danny's eyes drop to the white jock I have on. "Don't take it off. I want to do it. With my teeth," he says and licks his lower lip.

"As you wish," I say, before climbing into bed, my cockhead peeking out from the waistband.

There's no hesitation as our mouths collide, all teeth and tongue, while my hands map every inch of his creamy flesh. The demand to be inside him is overwhelming my senses but I restrain myself, knowing there's nothing stopping me from having Danny under me. I want to make it good for him. Take it slow. Savor every second.

Danny releases our kiss, bends and slips his hands in my jock. His fingers wrap around my shaft, while he presses his face against my cotton covered length and sniffs loudly. "And I thought you smelled good in the woods. But now, I want to devour you whole."

I groan the instant he sucks hard at my head before using the tip of his tongue to play with my slit. But Danny isn't done torturing me. As he pulls down my jock—with his hands and not with his teeth—he swallows my length, engulfing my dick in wet heat.

Danny repeatedly sucks me down until I'm about to come down his throat and then he pulls back, saliva and my precum glistening on his plump lips. I glance down at my straining cock, where the head is blood-filled and aching.

"I need you to fuck me, Tobias," Danny moans.

"Not yet. It's my turn." I dive toward him, not letting Danny deny my hunger.

I wrap an arm around each of his legs and yank him until he's flat on his upper back, and his ass up to where I have full access to his pretty, pink, puckered hole. Leaving a gentle kiss on his inner thigh, I then swipe my tongue along the rim, tasting Danny for the first time. If all I get is this morsel from the singer, then I'll be a happy man.

"Tobias," Danny croons and grinds up onto my mouth, pushing himself with his forearms.

"Patience, honey." I swipe my tongue again before sucking on the pucker. "You taste so good." And then I drive my tongue deep, spearing him over and over until Danny is begging me to be inside him.

“Please, baby. I need you inside me right fucking now.” His demanding plea is cute, all flustered and needy. Danny then pulls out of my arms and gets on all fours. He proceeds to take two wet fingers and slide them into his slick hole.

I capture this moment to memory before grabbing the wallet from my pants pocket and pulling out the packets of lube and condom. Making quick work of the latex, I rip open the lube and slick two of my fingers.

“Let me.” I pull out Danny’s fingers and replace them with mine. “Damn, you’re so hot. Your greedy hole is sucking me in deep.”

“My greedy hole needs your cock,” Danny says as he grinds against my hand, where three fingers are now inside him.

Making sure I won’t hurt Danny, I use the rest of the lube on my cock, and then ever so slowly slide into him.

Danny isn’t patient, though, and rocks backward. But I put a stop to his movement by anchoring my hands to his hips. With a quick hard smack to his ass cheek, I leave a handprint on his skin. He groans loudly.

Leaning in, my cock now fully embedded in Danny’s tight heat. I whisper in his ear as my right hand caresses his dick in teasing strokes. “I’ve dreamed about being inside you since the moment I first saw you in the parking lot.”

Danny turns his head and meets my eyes. “Me too. Now fuck me, Tobias.”

A growl tears from my lips before I take his mouth with ravenous desire. I pull out and then thrust back into him, which has Danny keening. “Harder, baby.”

I thrust, pushing him forward until his shoulders are pressing against the mattress. My left hand on his lower back and drive into him to the hilt, over and over again.

Danny’s hand is between his legs, stroking his dripping cock. “Tobias,” is all he can get out before he shuts and moans out his orgasm.

I follow right behind, cumming while I shout out his name.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

DANNY

I lay in bed, half dazed, surrounded by the heat from Tobias as he lays half draped over me. The buzz from our frantic fucking hums along every muscle of my body. His voracious need to be inside of me was too much to deny him, or myself, that pleasure.

He's taken me two more times since we slid into bed yesterday, and my ass is happily sore in all the right ways. I sigh, wanting this moment to last. But the reality of my life creeps back in as I look over at my gorgeous bodyguard, who's sound asleep.

I'm not sure I have the energy to get up to relieve myself. But I slowly get out of bed and go the bathroom, hoping to not wake up Tobias.

When I peer around the door to the bed, relief settles over me, because he's still sleeping peacefully. Snagging my shirt off the floor, I tiptoe out of the room, close the door, and sit on the chair closest to the slider, where Saint lays on his back, one paw upward and softly snoring, just like his owner.

The view of the early morning sun casting down on the water is so tranquil. As the quiet of the space filters in, an idea hits me. I get up and quickly set up the coffee. By then Saint trundles over, whining to go out. I let him out and head to the drawer where I left my cell.

What would it hurt to take a few pictures and check for any messages. I'm not going to make any calls or text anyone. However, I probably have a million messages.

Sure enough, the moment I turn on the phone, I'm inundated with messages from Connor and the guys, and missed calls and four voice messages from Laney.

"What are you doing?" Tobias's voice is deep and husky from sleep.

I almost jump out of my skin when I spin around and watch Tobias walk toward me, wearing only his sweat pants. Still clutching the cell to my chest, I huff out, "Jesus, Tobias, why do you keep doing that to me?" I swallow hard and glare at him.

"Didn't I tell you not to go on your phone?" He steps behind me and wraps his beefy arms around my chest, then kisses the back of my neck. "Besides, wouldn't you rather come back to bed?" I can feel the strain of his erection on my bare ass.

I lick my lips, turn my head, and meet his waiting lips. "No." Kiss. "I want to take some pictures of the lake." I pull back and look into those amber-green depths. "It's so pretty this early in the morning. But the second I turned on the phone, it blew up with messages and missed calls. Look." I open the messages so Tobias can read Connor's texts.

Still with his arms around me, he glances down at the screen then back to me. "Keep looking at me like that, and I'm going to take you back into that room and fuck you again," Tobias warns as he takes the cell out of my hand and lets me go.

A shiver races down my spine as my dick perks up with eagerness at the idea, but my ass is having second thoughts.

"Connor says it didn't work out at Marcus's. They are now on the tour bus," I say, totally missing my friends. "Maybe it's safe to call or text the guys." I'm hoping to sway Tobias to at least that.

"No." He flat out says.

“Why not?” Now I sound like the whiny princess he called me at the beginning of the week, but I don’t care.

“Your safety, sweetheart,” he says firmly, folding his arms across his broad muscular chest. My eyes rivet on those brawny pecs and his thick forearms, totally forgetting for a second what we were talking about.

A rush of want floods my groin, and I arch a brow, seeing the same intensity of neediness on his face.

“How can I change your mind?” I step closer to Tobias, crowding into his personal space, lean up and kiss his lips.

A tiny smirk tips the corner of his mouth, before it disappears. “There’s no amount of sex that will change my mind, especially where your safety is concerned, Danny. But you can take pictures. Or we can go back to bed.” He waggles his brows.

“Pictures.” Snagging my cell out of his hand, I back away, and head to the slider. “No more sexy time for you.”

“Yeah? All because I won’t let you text or call your friend?”

I look over my shoulder with narrowed eyes. “Is that a rhetorical question?”

Tobias busts out laughing. Actual tears are seeping out the corners of his eyes.

“Why are you laughing?” I plant a hand on my hip.

“You know you’re cute when you’re mad.” In a flash, he’s across the room, lifts me up, and kisses me silly.

Je-sus, that devilish mouth of his. I wouldn’t mind if Tobias gets down on his knees and wraps those talented lips around my dick.

“I know what you’re thinking,” he pulls back before nestling his face in the crook of my neck.

“No, you don’t,” I utter in a moan as he nips along my skin.

“You want me down on my knees.”

I yank back from his sexy love bites, and stare at the man in utter surprise. “How did you know that?”

He chuckles. “It’s written all over your face, sweetheart.”

Hmm. “And?” I try to wiggle out of his hold, hoping he wants to suck me off.

“I guess getting off three times isn’t enough for you,” he says with satisfaction.

“Maybe I’m a greedy slut, and I can’t get enough of your mouth,” I confess with heat infused on my face.

“Or my dick.” He smirks.

I open my mouth to agree, but the slamming of a car door has us freezing on the spot. Tobias quickly releases me and puts his finger to my lips. I clamp my mouth closed and nod, knowing what he’s asking for.

Tobias points to the bedroom and I do as he quietly orders. I rush to his bedroom, grab the rest of my clothes, and open the closet to where the small hide out room is located on the back wall. As fast and silently as I can, I dress and then cram my body inside without any difficulty. I may be five nine, but I’m slim enough to fit inside and manage to slide the door closed.

I’m not sure how long I’m in the dark, cramped space, but I finally make out Tobias’s angry voice. With each passing second, his tone gets louder and angrier. Then another male voice chimes in, also livid—but nowhere near as angry as my gruff bodyguard.

Feeling unexpectedly claustrophobic, I slide the door open and climb out, taking a huge breath of air. Once my heartbeat slows to a steady rhythm, I head to where all the shouting is coming from.

As I peek around the corner to the living room, I find not only Tobias, but two men I have never seen before. A slender brunette, who reminds me of a runway model except with a resting bitch face, is standing quietly next to a beefy blond guy, whose snarl would probably rivals Genghis Khan’s.

The blond sees me and fumes, “What the fuck? Who’s this, Tobias? You said you were alone!”

“That is none of your fucking business, Carl. Give me the keys, the papers and get the hell off my property,” Tobias shouts, his hand out for said keys.

“It’s not my fault the lawyer sent me the keys and the paperwork on this house. How should I have known you were going to be here?” Carl confesses, but his blue eyes are honed in on me. “And I still want to know who this guy you’re fucking around with is!”

I’m about to tell Carl it’s none of his business, but Tobias reaches for my hand and hauls me right to his side, his arm wrapping around me tightly. “This is my boyfriend, Danny. Danny, this my ex, Carl, who shouldn’t be here.”

I swivel my head up and look at Tobias. “I am?”

He glances down at me with a soft smile. “You are.”

Warmth explodes in my chest. I might not know Tobias well, but what I’ve learned is that I like the way my bodyguard thinks. “Yes, I’m his boyfriend,” I say, turning to Carl.

Carl’s mouth drops open, his eyes narrow with disdain. “That’s not possible.”

Jesus, jealousy is pouring off the man. The way Carl’s gawking at Tobias’s bare chest, I’d say the asshole wants him back.

“Why not?” Tobias shoots him an ugly glare. “It’s been two years. What? You think I’d still be pining for you? Think again.”

“It wasn’t that long ago.” The haughtiness of this man sets my teeth on edge. But I keep a tight restraint on my opinion. And what a fucking douche. What about the guy next to him? The model now looks stricken. Why is Carl acting like he and Tobias are still together?

“Stop acting like you have any rights to me, Carl. You cheated on me. We broke up. The end,” Tobias grates out with so much disdain I’d swear there’re icicles hanging off of Carl’s

nose. “What were you thinking by coming here? That it’s okay to use my Pops’ place with your fuckboy? Well, it’s not.” Tobias’s words are like honed knives and they hit the mark when the boytoy’s face goes pale.

The room grows uncomfortably quiet as Tobias and Carl glare at each other. The animosity swirling in the space is choking me. I don’t want to be here, let alone be sneered at by Carl.

“I’m going to go back to the room,” I say, trying to pull out of Tobias’s hold.

“Yeah, why don’t you go.” Carl steps up. “You don’t need to be—”

Holy shit, the speed with which Tobias is able to get between me and his ex is fast.

“You don’t get to touch him, ever.” Tobias points a finger in Carl’s face. “Nor talk to him. Ever. Got me, Carl? You and your boy are the ones that don’t belong here. Drop my shit, and get the fuck out of my place and off my property. Or I’ll call the sheriff, who happens to be a friend of mine. Jacob will have no problem throwing your asses in jail.”

Tobias doesn’t need to say any more. With Carl’s jaw clenched and the boytoy yanking on his arm, the asshole drops an envelope and a key right where Tobias is standing and then grabs the two duffels and hauls ass out of the house.

Within two beats, Tobias strides out after them, with me right on his heels. We watch a Volvo XC90 spit up dirt as the couple takes off like the devil’s chasing them. I turn to Tobias, who’s still far from happy and ask, “Want to talk about it?”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TOBIAS

As I watch the dust settle from Carl's quick departure, my mind can't wrap around the fact that he would try to pull one over on me. That shit stain thought he could fuck in my Pops' place with his loser boyfriend. I don't think so.

"Tobias?" Danny's gentle prodding pulls me out of the red haze swirling in my brain.

I turn to the singer, who's standing so close that I pull him in for a hug. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that or put you in an awkward position."

"Said what?" His question comes out muffled against my chest.

I release him and step back, needing the space. "Calling you my boyfriend." I head back into the house, then retrieve the key and folder Carl dropped on the floor.

"How long were you with him?" Danny asks as he sits on the sofa, tucking his legs under him.

"Four—almost five years."

"And that guy with him is?"

I drop down next to him. "He was the guy I found Carl with in our bed."

"What fucking balls." Danny scowls. "They're lucky you didn't put both of them through a wall. I would have."

“Neither of them were worth going to jail for. Besides, it’s the past. I’m over it.”

Danny tilts his head slightly, studying me. “Are you sure?”

I let out a choked laugh. “Trust me. I’m done with that asshole—hell, I’m done with relationships. All I want is to get off, move on, and be left alone.”

The second those stupid words spit out of my mouth I realized I’ve fucked up big time and now I can’t take them back.

Danny’s body immediately stiffens, and he turns his gaze down to his lap. He slowly gets up from the sofa and whispers, “I need a shower.”

“Danny... Wait.”

Too late. He ignores me as he heads to the bathroom and firmly closes the door, the click of the lock as loud as a clanging gong. The shower goes on, adding another barrier to communication between us.

I want to tell Danny that I wasn’t talking about him... Or was I?

How do I explain to the singer that I learned a hard lesson from my ex? What I assumed was a good relationship wasn’t. Trust is important. So is honesty, which I thought Carl and I had. But I was wrong. Carl took my trust and my love, and kicked it to the fucking curb.

Danny isn’t like Carl. But lately, I can’t seem to rely on my judgment. It has steered me the wrong way too many times. And committing to someone, especially in this business, when I’m gone more than being at home, is not smart. I don’t know if my battered heart can take another rejection and betrayal. I won’t go through that again—not until I know for damn sure my feelings are returned.

Maybe, I should explain to Danny that, one day, I’ll be ready for a relationship again. Just not now. He should understand, because we hardly know each other. Being together for two weeks doesn’t make either of us friends—not when I’m on the job to protect him.

Besides, Danny is way too good for the likes of me.

The itch to run hits me, so I grab my running shoes, forgo the shirt, and follow the trail around the lake. A good hour passes before I head back to the house. My entire body's buzzing from the exertion energy and my head is finally clear.

The moment I step inside, I almost trip over Saint, who is laying by the door. He lifts his head to look at me and then lays it back on his paws. The silence in the space has me moving to the bedroom Danny is using. His luggage is gone, along with all his clothes and toiletries. I rush to the drawer where he'd put his cell phone and find it missing.

“Shit.”

I don't bother calling him, because Danny won't pick up. Instead, I take off down the dirt drive that leads to the main road. As I round the bend, a quarter of a block away, I spot the singer ahead of me, carrying a few bags and dragging his luggage behind him.

Danny glances over his shoulder, sees me and tries to run. If the situation wasn't so dire, I would have laughed at the way he attempted to carry his bags and luggage while running from me.

“Don't hurt yourself,” I call out, slowing down when I'm about ten feet away.

“Fuck you,” he shouts, flipping me the finger at the same time, and he ends up dropping one of his bags. “Go away.”

“Ah, come on, Danny. Stop. Talk to me.” I reach his side, and pick up the dropped bag. After slinging it over my shoulder, I pull him to a stop.

He yanks away from my hand. “Leave me alone, Tobias. Isn't this what you want? To be alone?”

“Listen to me,” I say, crowding into his space, making him drop the rest of his bags.

“There's nothing to say.” He steps back, trips over his luggage and almost falls flat on his ass. But I catch him before he's hurt.

“Will you listen for fuck’s sake? You’re so damn stubborn.” I hold him, until Danny’s steady on his feet.

His lips are drawn tight, no lip gloss, and a flare of hurt and anger bubbling in his beautiful blue eyes. Danny slaps my hands away, folds his arms across his chest and waits, not saying a word.

“You’re so frustrating,” I groan, ready to find a stump to sit on and put Danny over my thighs and spank his ass. But I know he’s not one for punishments like that. I think...

“Get on with what you want to say so I can get the hell out of here.” Danny gets on his tiptoes and snarls into my face.

I want to kiss him right there. But he won’t welcome the affection. So I ask instead, “Where do you think you’re going?”

“Laney’s picking me up,” he says, lifting his bags. He then turns toward the main road.

“How does Laney know where we are?” I ask, my stomach churning from that bit of news. “No one should know where we are. Especially your assistant.”

“I told her to locate me on the Find Me app.” Danny’s shoulders slump. “Tobias, I know you don’t like me as more than a friend. And I know this is only a job. But I think it’s for the best that I meet up with the band. They’re on the tour bus and I’ll be safe. Nobody will know where I am. So whoever was—”

“*Is, Danny. Is.* Someone is still after you,” I declare.

“Okay. Whoever is after me, won’t know I’m on the bus.”

“You don’t know that. For all you know the stalker could be anyone you know.”

My words must have hit home because Danny swivels his head my way, and his skin goes pale and his eyes wide with shock. “Are you saying that someone I personally know might be my stalker?” He then shakes his head. “That’s not possible.”

“Don’t be so naïve. There’s no rule stating a stalker has to be a stranger. It could be your eighty-year-old next door neighbor. You don’t know,” I explain. “Danny, come back to the house. We’ll call Laney and tell her not to come. We’ll wait out the next few days and then I’ll take you to the Rocktoberfest on Thursday, like planned.”

“Do you really think it’s someone I know?” he asks again, this time his voice’s a bit shaky.

“Seven times out of ten, the hunted knows their stalker. Now are you going to call Laney or do I have to?” I ask, no gentleness behind my words.

Danny’s eyes drop to the ground, and he bites his lower lip before he finally looks up at me. “Okay. And you do it.” He hands me his phone and begins dragging his suitcase back to the house.

As I watch him walk away, I hit redial on Danny’s phone, and Laney immediately picks up. “Danny, I’m on my way. Are you okay? Is that bastard causing more trouble?”

Her icy words put a chill down my spine. “No. This bastard is telling you not to come. We’re packing up and leaving here. Don’t call his phone, because it will be off and so will the GPS locator.”

“How dare you treat Danny—”

“Listen to me, Laney. I’m only going to say this once. Danny is fine. But you? You were attacked. Don’t you think that maybe the stalker might be watching you, waiting for one of the band members or you to go to Danny?”

A soft tapping rings through the other end.

“Laney?”

“I didn’t think of that,” she admits. “Are you sure?” Laney asks with hesitation.

“Yes.”

“Alright. At least tell me where you’re going and I won’t even call or message Danny,” she demands. Her tone leaves much to be desired.

“You don’t worry about that,” I say evenly.

“At least tell Danny that I’ll be waiting for him at the event. And that I won’t let him down.”

“I will,” I say, then end the call. That odd conversation has me feeling off about Danny’s assistant. I turn off his Find Me app, put the phone in airplane mode and turn it off. Then I pull out my phone and call Harper as I walk toward the house. He needs to know about Laney, but also about Carl.

“What now?” Dean chuffs.

Here it goes. “Did you know your brother came to my grandfather’s lake house today?”

Silence.

“He didn’t come here alone either, Dean,” I say flatly.

“I didn’t... Tobias, I’ll talk to Carl.” There’s regret behind his voice.

“Don’t bother. I think he got the message to stay away from here and from me. But just a head’s up. Once I’m done with this job. I’m putting in my notice.”

“What? You can’t.”

“I can. And you shouldn’t be too surprised with my decision,” I explain, glancing toward the house.

“I’m not. But, please, Tobias, rethink leaving,” Dean says earnestly. “Don’t let my asshole brother put a wedge between us.”

“I’ll think about it, Dean. But right now, there’s something else I’m calling about.”

“What is it?”

“What did you find out on Laney Turner?”

“The assistant?”

“Yeah.”

“Why? She isn’t a suspect... Or should she be?”

“I don’t know why but she’s giving me vibes. I can’t explain it. Just run a deeper check on her.”

“Alright. Hale will be on it. Also, giving you a head’s up. I’ll be sending Cal, Fig, and Dom your way. They’ll meet you and the rest of the team Thursday in Black Rock.”

“Fine.”

“Tobias, we’re not done with our conversation.”

“I have to go, Dean. Don’t want to leave the client alone too long.” I hang up, and my lips draw up into a smile at the thought of Dean swearing at his phone. He hates it when people hang up on him, but he does the same damn thing.

I shove both phones into the side pocket of my sweats and walk back knowing the I have to take Danny out of here.

The problem is where.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

DANNY

I drop my bags by the entrance and then flop down on the couch. I'm annoyed and frustrated more at myself than at Tobias.

However, I'm still angry at him for making me feel wanted and then casting me aside like I'm nothing. Tobias swept the proverbial rug out from under me, taking away my hope for a relationship.

Stupid, I know. But I can't help what my heart wants. And it wants Tobias. But he doesn't want me.

Then why did he fuck me? Why did he make me feel desired? Why did I let him in?

"Ugh!" The second the answer to the last question pops into my head, I hate myself for thinking it.

I'm falling for my bodyguard. And I can't do anything about it.

I suddenly feel ill for being in this situation—for not being strong enough to avoid the temptation of Tobias Grant.

He made it clear there's nothing between us. So I need to protect my heart. And as much as I'll miss his touch, I need to stay out of his bed.

As I anxiously wait for Tobias to walk through the door, I'm dreading the lecture I don't want to hear. But then, I did take off on him.

“Danny.” My eyes dart to the door as Tobias’s voice snaps me out of my thoughts.

My eyes focus on his handsome face. “What?” I shoot back.

“You can’t just leave like that,” Tobias demands as he closes the distance.

“Really?” I fold my arms across my chest and glare at him. “Why not?”

“Because someone is after you. Either to hurt you or kill you. Don’t you get that I’m worried for your safety? God damn it, I feel like I’m talking to a wall,” Tobias rants.

I’m taken aback by his emotional outburst. I haven’t seen Tobias lose control the entire time we’ve been here, until now.

A tiny layer of regret blooms in my chest for taking off the way I did. All because I didn’t want to face the truth and the honest rebuke from Tobias.

I’m a shit.

I take a deep breath and say, “I’m sorry.”

“You what?”

“I didn’t mean to risk my life or yours.” *Only my heart.*

“Where did you think you were going, anyway?”

“Anywhere but here,” I say, dropping my eyes to my lap. Saint jumps onto me, his bony ass digging into my thighs, but I don’t complain. I welcome the distraction from Tobias’s intense stare. “It doesn’t matter now.” I shake my head. Talking to Tobias about my misguided desire toward him would only make me appear a bigger idiot than I already feel.

“I told Laney not to come.”

“I figured.” I rub Saint’s head. “I promise not to take off again.”

“I know. But we can’t stay here anymore. This place is now compromised.”

“Where are we going?” My heart kicks up at the trouble my insecurity has caused.

“I’m still thinking on that,” he says, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Can we at least talk about the festival then, since it’s literally days away.”

Tobias hesitates a beat. “Leave that up to me and the rest of the team.”

“Team? What team?” I stand, but keep my distance from him. “Rocktoberfest is important to me—to the band. How are you going to keep me and the guys safe?”

The festival’s huge, and thousands of people are going to be there to listen to their favorite rock bands. I hope some of them come to watch Warrior Black. However, the last thing I want is for anyone to get hurt because of me.

“Harper’s sending a few more men to meet us at the festival,” Tobias explains.

“And you’re leading them?” This eases the tension that’s ratcheting in my shoulders ease together, and I sit back down.

Tobias’s scowl softens into a small smile. “Most likely John will lead,” he admits before sitting on the coffee table in front of me and taking my hands into his before I get a chance to tuck them under my legs.

The ache in my chest comes back and I hold my breath, afraid of what else he’s going to say.

“I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings earlier, but I hope you understand that I was pissed at Carl for coming here. He tends to bring out the worst in me.” His fingers ease their tight grip on my hands, and I think he’s letting go, but Tobias doesn’t.

“I see that.” My heart keeps racing but I can’t look at him, knowing the other shoe is dropping.

“Danny, look at me.”

“Please, just get it over with.”

Tobias cups my face, leans in, and softly kisses me with so much gentleness that I could cry.

“What I said before was a lie. I do like you, Danny Wells, a lot. And not just for the sex.” He places another kiss on my lips and continues. “You are sweet when you want to be. You think of others and when you get all pissed off at me, it turns me on.” My eyes go wide from his admission.

“Seriously,” I say with a dash of ire.

“I want to see where this leads us. I want you to get to know me—the real me—not the bodyguard. And I want to get to know who you are. Take a chance with me.” He leans in close, and I clearly see the gold flecks in his irises. “Danny,” he whispers my name like a vow.

My heart is screaming yes, but in my head, warning signals to be cautious are going off.

I have never been asked to take a chance on a guy—especially a guy I’ve known for not even two weeks—who also happens to be my bodyguard.

“I don’t—” I begin to say, but Tobias covers my mouth with his hand.

“Don’t say no. Just think about it. Okay?”

With his hand still on my lips, I nod yes. And I mean it. I do want to get to know him.

Tobias drops his hand and blows out a breath. “Now that’s settled, we need to leave this place. It’s compromised.”

“Because I told Laney?” I quickly ask, guilt building back up in my gut.

“Yes.”

“What if I asked her not to say anything,” I insist. “The last thing I want is to leave here. I love this place.”

Even with the disagreements between Tobias and me, and the abrupt arrival of his ex, this place puts me at peace. If we stayed, I’d have more time with Tobias and we could get to

know each other better. Except, there can't be any sex involved. I just need to figure out how to broach that topic.

Tobias wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me in. "We can come back anytime you want, sweetheart."

That endearment warms my heart. But I quickly shake off the sentiment and answer Tobias. "Don't worry about me. I'll be fine. Let me go, so I can unpack," I say in a too-chipper voice that sounds *so* fake.

Tobias crooks a finger under my chin. Our eyes meet before his drop to my lips. "Danny." It's all he gets out before his mouth slams against mine. All tongue and lips and so much passion, I'm overwhelmed.

Hell. There goes my vow to stay out of his bed.

Tobias picks me up and carries me to the bedroom. I don't remember stripping out of my clothes or seeing him take off his. All I know is the warm slide of his body against mine and the wet heat of his mouth voraciously devouring me.

My mind is scrambled like eggs in a blender. Tobias's kisses are drugging and his body is all I crave.

"I don't want foreplay," I demand against his lips. "Fuck me."

"Let me—"

"No. Damn it. I'm good. I want to feel the burn." I nip his lower lip, tasting the slight coppery taste against my tongue.

He growls into my mouth, "Fuck, turn over. I want your ass up in the air."

I don't hesitate. I pull out of his arms and get on all fours, like a bitch in heat. All because this man sets me ablaze.

I turn my head in time to see Tobias roll on a condom, spit into his palm, and stroke his thick covered length. He then bends slightly, spreads my cheeks apart and spits on my needy hole.

Fuck yes.

My mind is blown at how hot he looks as he kneels behind me. I push against him, demanding his dick in my ass. Tobias doesn't disappoint. With one more spit at my entrance, his wide head slowly breaches me. The burn's instant, but I welcome the ache.

"More," I pant. "Go deep."

"I'm not going to last," he groans, his fingers gripping hard at my hips as he pushes in deeper.

I know there will be bruises on my hips in the morning. But I'm not mad at that idea.

"Neither will I," I utter as I feel him skin to skin. "Tobias. You feel so good."

"Stroke yourself, baby," Tobias commands.

I reach my dick with my left hand and begin jacking myself slowly in time to Tobias's thrusts. Then he pulls me back against his sweat slicked chest, and wraps one arm around my middle, while his other hand cups my jaw. He turns my face up to his. Our mouths a mere millimeter apart.

"You're mine." He places a gentle kiss on my lips as his eyes remain open and fixed on mine. In those precious moments, we're joined by more than our bodies. We are connected, like our souls are entwined. There's only me and Tobias in this world.

"I'm yours," I confess in a whisper. My eyes don't waver from his face, confirming my declaration.

"I know." Then his cock slams into me over and over, hitting my gland with absolute precision. My body splinters, stars explode across my vision and every nerve ending lights up like I'm doused in gasoline.

"Tobias," I scream out his name as jets of cum pump out of my cock with each strong stroke.

"Fuck—fuck-fuck." Tobias thrusts deep once more, grinding into my ass and groans, and then he spills his release into the condom.

We both fall forward onto the bed. I love how his full weight is on top of me.

A whole minute passes before Tobias slowly pulls out and gets off the bed without a word. I turn on my back and watch his sexy ass walk out of the bedroom. He strides back with a warm washcloth, wipes the cum off my stomach and any remnants from the bed.

Tobias throws the cloth somewhere, climbs back into bed and pulls me into him. I don't fight him, even though I'm lying in the wet spot. I love being right where I am. In his strong arm, falling fast asleep, safe and sound.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TOBIAS

I stir awake, my eyes trying to adjust to the darkness of the room. Glancing at the nightstand, the digital clock reads ten p.m.

Damn. We fucked and slept most of the day away. There's a glorious ache in my legs and back and my dick is slightly sore. I'm not sure, but if I'm feeling this way, I can't imagine how Danny's ass is any better.

Lying here, with Danny by my side, I can understand why he doesn't want to leave. This place is quiet and he can be himself. I realize the idea of finding another place to hide out is moot. I will have to be diligent on perimeter checks and make sure Danny stays in my line of sight at all times. I'm sure he'll be happy to hear we're not leaving.

My stomach starts growling. I carefully slide out of bed without waking Danny. As I tug up my sweat pants, I take in my lover's sleeping form. Even in the dark, the restful calm on his face has me smiling.

I softly close the bedroom door and head to the kitchen for something to eat. I'm about to take out some lunchmeat for a sandwich, when I see headlights spearing the room. I retrieve my gun, and carefully make my way to the slider door.

All my senses are on high alert as I creep out, and head around to the front—keeping behind the tall bushes against the

house. I peek through the thick branches, and I spot a familiar car... the same one that sped off earlier today.

“Fuck,” I mutter. *Carl*. I step out from behind the bushes, and take several long strides to my ex. “The first warning wasn’t enough for you, Carl?”

“Here me out, Tobias.” Carl raises his hands in surrender.

“You have nothing to say that I want to hear.” I turn my back to him. “You know how to leave.”

Carl grips my arm and tries to stop me. I turn around to tell him to let go, when he plants an open mouth kiss on me.

Stunned by my ex’s action, I stand there for an entire beat before I reel back and push the asshole off me. Carl stumbles back, almost falling on his ass, but I don’t give a shit.

Then I hear, “What the hell?”

I spin around to find Danny standing there in my boxers, no shirt on, with Saint at his side. My man might be a head shorter than my ex, but Danny’s glare could melt half of Antarctica.

He’s pissed, but I’m not sure if it’s at me or Carl. Or both of us.

“Dan—,” I start to explain, but he raises a hand and cuts me off.

“Carl, when my boyfriend tells you to leave, it doesn’t mean to come back and kiss him,” Danny hisses, stepping off the stoop and striding toward me with Saint at his side.

My dog starts growling at Carl, but Danny snaps his fingers and Saint stops.

“I know you’re not his boyfriend. My brother told me all about you. Danny Raven Wells, a singer from some no fame rock band,” Carl sneers. “You’re only a client Tobias has to babysit.”

Danny sucks in a breath and looks at me before turning back to my ex. “You’re right,” he says with some defeat. “Tobias and I aren’t boyfriends, yet. But we want to see where

this leads. And you're wrong about my band. Warrior Black is going places, and I don't give two fucks what a stupid dumb shit like you thinks."

Carl's smugness drops from his face, and he's ready to spew his venom.

I step between my ex and Danny. "I'll take it up with Dean on how you found out about Danny. He can deal with you. But you're wrong, Carl. Danny's with me. We're together."

"I don't believe you," Carl shoots back. "Besides, can't you see I'm here alone? I left Brandon. For you."

I ignore Carl and reach for Danny, kiss him with all the desperate need I have for the singer. When I pull back, Danny's trembling in my arms. "Did I tell you how much I love your mouth?"

His growing smile melts my heart. Danny chuckles and says, "Yes. Many times." He then nuzzles his face to my chest.

"This can't be happening!" Carl's voice rises to a pitch that could wake the dead and he steps toward us. "I came here to win you back."

Saint growls again, this time much louder, which halts Carl immediately.

"Leave, Carl," I say without taking my gaze off Danny. "Don't bother coming back here."

"I don't care what you say, Tobias. I'll prove I'm better than this loser singer."

A surge of anger erupts and I turn to give Carl a better understanding of what my fist can do to his face. But Danny tightens his arms around my waist, capturing my attention.

"Tobias, he's not worth it," Danny says softly. "Let's go back inside. I'm tired. And hungry. And then after, you can sex me up."

I draw short at Danny's words, my eyes dropping to his beautiful face. I hate seeing the weariness in his eyes. "Okay."

I don't bother looking to see if Carl has left as I lead Danny back into the house, make something for him to eat, and love on the man for the rest of the night.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

DANNY

The next two days flew by in a whirlwind. Tobias and I talked about everything from how we grew up and our dreams, to where we are now in our lives. We even talked about my tattoos and what each of them mean to me.

He brought up Siles, again, but I quickly skirted that topic with sex.

Oh, and we had a shit-ton of sex.

Now, as I pack up my things, I'm sad to leave this place. I still worry about the person that's after me. But Tobias assures me that he and his team will protect me and the band this upcoming weekend.

"I thought we were going to meet the tour bus at Black Rock," I say, glancing at Tobias, who's closing his duffle. I still can't get over the fact that I'm dating my bodyguard. How fucking cliché is that.

"John decided that it would be best if they come to us. We should expect them later this afternoon." Tobias scoops me up into his arms. "Are you done?"

"Almost. Now put me down," I chuckle, feeling light like a feather.

He grins wickedly, his gleaming white teeth on full display. I know the look on his face and what's going through

his devious mind. I shake my head. “I don’t think my ass can take any more.”

“That’s okay. I’m just hungry.” He waggles his brows before lowering me to my feet and then dropping to his knees. Tobias quickly undoes my jeans, then pulls them and my jock down.

Before I can deny him—which I won’t, since my dick approves, a hiss leaves my lips as my cock’s engulfed by wet heat.

“Oh fuck.” I grip his blond hair tightly, throw my head back and close my eyes. “That feels good, baby. Yeah—just like that.”

With both hands on my ass, he swallows me down, pulls off and aims for my balls.

A low groan escapes me, as I anticipate what he wants. I won’t deny this man anything. And since my greedy hole is a needy whore for Tobias’s cock, I demand he fucks me.

“Fuck me, Tobias,” I moan in glorious pleasure.

“Demanding,” he rasps, then pops off and drags my pants completely off.

I bend over the bed, with my right leg to my chest and the other foot stationed on the floor, exposing my vulnerable area.

“Baby.” Tobias’s guttural endearment has my ass clenching with anticipation. He leans forward and swipes his tongue against my pucker. “I love the way you taste.”

“Fucking hell,” I growl in desire. His talented tongue works up a frenzy in my body. “Tobias.”

“Patience,” He titters as he glides two slick fingers inside.

“Fuck patience. We don’t have time.” My tolerance for his easy pace is wearing so thin that I’m about to spin around, shove him to the bed and climb on top of him like some horny slut. Or, I could just put my pants back on and be done, but... Umm. No. I don’t have the willpower to stay away from Tobias, not when I want him so much.

“You’re thinking way too hard,” Tobias says with another swipe of his tongue along my rim.

“Yes, *hard* is the operative word. Jesus, you can drive a man insane,” I say, while stroking my dick, feeling the familiar tingle in my balls.

I glance over my shoulder and my entire body shivers from the headiness of Tobias’s eager laps and sucks between my cheeks.

A keening moan slips past my lips and I’m about to cum, when a loud honking horn sounds off three times, disrupting our carnal delirium.

“What the fuck?” Tobias lifts his head and says through gritted teeth.

I close my eyes, drop my head on the pillow, and immediately know who that is. “The tour bus is here.”

CHAPTER TWENTY

TOBIAS

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” I growl, pulling away from Danny and adjusting my granite hard cock in my jeans.

“Bad timing, as always,” Danny muffles out through the pillow he’s smashing his face against. “I told you so.”

I roll my eyes, knowing he’s right. I’d be balls deep into him otherwise. “Might as well head out there. Go get cleaned up,” I say, now annoyed as hell.

Danny gets up and presses into me. “I guess it wasn’t meant to be.” He plants a soft kiss to my cheek, but that’s not enough for me.

I wrap my arms around the man and thoroughly snog the shit out of him. When we finally drag air into our lungs, several loud knocks echo from the locked front door.

“You get that while I clean up.” With one more quick kiss to my lips, Danny disappears behind the closed door. I, on the other hand, wait a few more beats until I hear threatening shouts from the band members. I chuckle as I take easy steps to the front door.

The second I open it, the band and John swarm inside, all talking at once. Connor approaches me first. “Where’s Danny?”

“Bathroom.” I point in its direction.

Connor looks me over, then his eyes stray to my lips. Something's working behind those green depths of his. Like a damn lightbulb, he quickly figures out what we've been doing here.

"If—" It's all Connor gets out before Danny strides into the chaos in the living room.

"Hey, guys," he chirps with a wide smile, lips all swollen, and his skin still flushed from our fooling around.

I feel a level of satisfaction that I'm the one who put that smile on the singer's face.

"Damn," Bobby crows, an equally wide smile on his face. "You—"

Raef shoves the keyboardist. "Danny, you look great."

If I wasn't looking at the lead guitarist's face, I would have taken what he said at face value. But the man's waggling his eyebrows.

A deeper bloom of red spreads across Danny's skin, especially when he looks directly at me. Something bursts in my chest from that single look. I want to rush him, put Danny over my shoulder and run.

Instead, I remain stoic and shift my attention to my partner, who happens to glance between me and Danny, with a shit eating grin.

Fuck. He knows, too.

"Can I have a word with you, Danny?" Connor's clipped tone is followed by a frown so deep that it could match the San Andreas fault.

Danny's smile drops and he expels a breath. "Yeah." He heads back toward the bedroom, with Connor on his heels.

Callum Fitz leans toward me and says in a low voice, "Don't worry about Connor. He's always been overly protective of Danny. Especially after what Siles put him through."

"Yeah. Siles is a grade A dough bag."

“Danny told you?” Shock mars the bassist’s face. “Did he also tell you we all went to high school together?”

“Yeah, he did,” I admit, while keeping on a neutral mask. Showing my rage over the atrocities done to Danny won’t help anyone in this room, especially me. I need to keep my shit locked down. I want to hunt that fucker down and hurt him.

“Well, I’m glad Danny told you the details of what Siles did to him for years. And I just got to say it out loud, that motherfucker is lucky to be alive.” Callum’s sharp voice cuts through the sudden silence in the room.

“If that bastard comes around Danny at the festival—”

“What?” I whirl around and face Raef. “What do you mean ‘if he comes around Danny?’ Is Barrett going to be there this weekend?”

“We got the desert if he does.” Bobby slices a finger across his neck. “We’ll bury his ass, deep.”

That said, Bobby, Callum, and Raef head straight for the kitchen counter, where all the food we had left is boxed up.

“I can see your brain is working overtime,” John utters.

“Why didn’t you tell me that Siles Barrett is attending Rocktoberfest?”

“I just found out myself,” John pulls out his phone. “You should have gotten a message from Dean. Ron also sent a group text to the band.”

“Well, Danny doesn’t know. His phone has been turned off,” I explain, running a hand over my face. “I need to talk to Danny.”

“Let Connor talk to him,” John says, stepping in my path.

I shake my head. “He’ll need me.”

“What do you mean?” John leans in and scrutinizes my face before adding, “You like him.”

“It’s not up for discussion,” I cut him off, glaring at my now smirking partner. “Show me the bus.”

John chuffs out quietly, “Fine. You’re not going to believe what this monster has inside it.”

I take one last glance toward the bedroom, knowing that Danny won’t take the news of Siles being at the festival well. And it doesn’t matter who’s telling him. He’s going to be upset.

The idea of that bastard getting close to *my* singer has my hackles way up, and I conjure up all the ways to get Siles Barrett out of Danny’s life for good.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

DANNY

“Tell me you didn’t,” Connor says, as he closes the door and rounds on me.

“I didn’t,” I reply, attempting to look innocent while trying not to give anything away. And yet, I can’t wipe the bliss off my face.

Everything that has happened since Tobias and I got here has been...

“You lie,” Connor huffs out, pulling me out of my thoughts. “Why couldn’t you find a different fuck buddy—why your bodyguard?”

From the time I started dating back in high school, Connor has always been there for me. All the guys have. But I never felt this way for a guy. Ever. Not even for Siles. And to hide my excitement and feelings toward Tobias seems wrong.

“Danny, get your head out of the man’s ass, and explain to me why.”

I glare at my friend. “Don’t talk to me about hooking up, asshole. How many of Ron’s interns have you fucked around with, broke their hearts, and they quit?”

“Okay, you got me there. But, still...”

“No, Connor. *This* is different.”

“I’m just worried.” He takes a seat on the bed, then bounces right back up. He looks at the bed and grimaces.

“I get it. You and the guys have always been there for me. But you don’t have a clue what’s happened here,” I say, dropping onto the mattress.

“I don’t want to see you hurt again,” he says earnestly, “And how do you know this is different? He looks like he can throw you against the wall with one arm.”

“Tobias is a sweet guy,” I blurt out. “He thinks of me first.”

“That’s his job.”

“It’s more than that.”

“You had sex with him.”

“Is that a question?” I counter.

“You did. I can smell it in the air.” Connor sniffs, before returning hard eyes to me.

“So what?” I glare right back, folding my arms across my chest. “We’re two grown adults.”

“He’s your bodyguard,” he says with disgust, like I molested Tobias or vice versa. Connor then adds, “While he was fucking you, who was watching your back? Or his?”

Damn it. He’s right.

But then, we are surrounded by nature. The closest neighbor is over a mile away. The only incident we had was when Tobias’s ex showed up... twice. But nothing came of it.

“Listen to me, Connor.” I stand and face my friend. “I don’t know why you’re up my ass about this. It’s not like we ran off and got married like some stupid teenagers. Tobias might be my bodyguard, but he’s a good guy. He makes me feel good about myself. He makes me feel safe.” He also infuriates the fuck out of me, but I keep that bit to myself. “Do you get that?”

Connor wraps me up in his arms and squeezes tight. “I’m sorry for shoving my gigantic dick up your ass.”

I shove him away. “You wish your dick was that large.”

We both bust out laughing. Connor hugs me again, then I drop to the mattress. He sits next to me and grips my hand tight. “I got to tell you something else.”

All of the easy attitude I’m floating on is evaporated by my best friend’s words. I swallow hard, stare at him, knowing this is bad news. “What is it?”

Connor’s green eyes slice to me. They are light with anger and I have to turn away, because it is indeed bad news. “Siles will be at Rocktoberfest.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

TOBIAS

Right after John showed me the interior of the large bus, we headed back into the house and gathered all of Danny's luggage and my duffle. As I grab Saint's water and food bowls, Danny quietly steps out of the bedroom, looking dejected. I expected a gut-punch angry reaction from the singer, but Danny's reaction is quite the opposite.

Watching him get on the bus with his bandmates, there's no doubt he has his walls built back up. There's no chance glances my way as he passes me. Just a sullen frown and watery eyes.

Danny keeps his eyes forward and spine stiff as he walks to the back bedroom where he's bunking. I want to reach out to him, tell everyone to fuck off and hide him back in the lake house. But I can't do that. If distance from me is what Danny needs, I'll give it to him. Even if staying away is going to be the toughest hardship I've ever had.

With Connor by his side, I have a feeling I'm not going to get a chance to talk to Danny. The drummer's worse than a rottweiler while guarding his best friend.

We're barely on the road, and already the sixteen-hour drive is torture. All I want to do is wrap Danny up in my arms and tell him I'm here and no one—not even his douche bag ex, will get near him.

But at the same time, I knew this was coming. I knew this time between us wouldn't last. I hate the fact that my gut is telling me we are through. He doesn't need me anymore. And what we had at the lake house was only temporary.

The need between my legs, however, is a whole other factor I'm trying to ignore, but it's getting more difficult with every passing mile.

Focus, damn it.

"Now why are we stopping in Ridgecrest?" Callum asks as he strums on his Stratocaster.

"Saint can't go with us," I say, stroking the top of my dog's head. He must know he's not coming because he's whining a bit. "You be good for Cal."

Another whine.

"That sucks. I thought he'd be our mascot," Bobby says as he pops a piece of jerky into his mouth and then tosses a small piece to Saint, who snatches it in the air with a single snap. "See? He'd be a perfect mascot for us."

I shake my head, then move toward the front where Dom is talking to the driver.

Dom turns to me. "We are nearly to Ridgecrest. Cal is good driving him to your friend's place in Los Angeles?"

"Yeah. It's good timing too, since there's turmoil in his household and he has to get back," I explain.

Dom scowls. "I know."

We all know about Cal's miserable predicament with his family—especially his alcoholic father. I just hope all that shit doesn't get laid on his shoulders.

It doesn't take long to rent a car for Cal and, after I said goodbye to Saint, and off they head west while we continue north to Black Rock.

Once the band settles, it's our turn to work out the schedule. Amid all the concerns my team will be running into

at this festival, Danny's words keep playing like a broken record in my head. "*I'm yours.*"

Was he lying to me? I guess it doesn't matter now—yes, it does.

I can't ignore my instincts that Danny needs me.

Since we took off, he hasn't come out of that back room. Danny might have fallen back into his dark headspace, but I'm the one who's going to pull him out. And I won't take no for an answer.

I storm past Danny's friends, who are chilling in living area.

"Hey, where are you going?" Connor steps in front of me.

"I'm talking to Danny."

"No." The drummer shakes his head. "Danny needs time to process."

"That's bullshit and you know it. He doesn't need to process. He needs to face this head on and I'll be there when he does," I clip out.

"Connor, let him go. Maybe the guy's right," Callum says, waving his hand at the drummer to move out of my way.

"Stop being an asshole," Bobby throws in between sips of his... apple cider? I glance over at Pen, who's smirking, then looks at me and shrugs. This must be his doing.

"Don't hurt him," I hear Connor say, before he moves out of my path.

I look at Danny's friend. "I won't." Then I move past him, striding down the short hall until I reach the closed door. I think about knocking, but fuck that. Danny's going to get a dose of real, and I'm going to show him he isn't alone in this. His band is here and so am I.

"Danny." I call out his name and open the door. What I find isn't what I expected.

The singer is curled up in a ball and crying. I don't say another word, just close and locking the door, then climb onto

the bed and try to wrap him up in my arms. Danny uncurls his body, turns, and he lets me pull him in.

“I’m here, baby,” I whisper in his ear. “I’m here.”

My arms tighten around his thin frame as he tucks his face into the crook of my neck where I can feel the wetness from his tears.

He then winds his arms around my waist, plasters his body to mine, and I welcome his shivering form.

“I’m such an idiot,” he whispers

“No, you’re not.”

“Then why am I crying over that fucker?”

“Because this is a knee jerk reaction. You didn’t expect to see him here. But I promise you, he won’t get near you.” I kiss the top of his head. Danny tilts his head up, meeting my clear, affirming gaze. “Do you trust me?”

“Yes, I do.” His eyes drop to my lips and then he kisses me. I don’t hesitate and open my mouth for him, letting Danny take what he needs from me.

Danny shifts to straddle me. He pulls off his shirt and looks into my eyes. “I need you, Tobias.”

“I always need you.” I sit up, and Danny helps me out of my shirt. We quickly remove our pants and underwear and climb back onto the bed in the same position as before.

Danny angles his body forward, grabs hold of my stiff prick and begins feeding it into his tight hole.

He tips his head back, his beautiful hair loose down his back, and moans. “Yes.”

“Oh, sweetheart,” I groan, then he kisses me into silence.

As his mouth and tongue feasts on my mouth, Danny glides his hips up and down my shaft in a slow, languid slide. It’s torture and pleasure all in the same instant.

I shift and, getting a better angle, I take over. My hands tightly grip his ass cheeks apart, I bend my knees slightly and

thrust up into him over and over until Danny releases my lips and cries out my name in pure ecstasy. But I'm not done.

I pull out and switch positions, having Danny on his back, and his legs over my shoulders. I drive right back in, until that familiar buzz pulsates throughout my body, and I pull out and cum over his chest and abs as though I'm marking my territory. Because Danny Raven Wells is mine.

He's mine to protect. Mine to cherish. No one will tear me away from him. I know this. All I have to do now is prove to Danny that I'm his.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

DANNY

I wake up a few hours later, finding Tobias missing from the bed. I must have passed out because I don't remember cleaning or being cleaned up. I find a note on the pillow next to me. It reads, *Miss you already.*

A burst of joy and calm fills me because Tobias took the time to write me a note. It's simple, but heartfelt.

I fold the piece of paper and put it on the nightstand. Then I go the bathroom. After a quick shower, I dry my hair and begin to feel more like myself. I pick up Tobias's note and tuck it into my jeans pocket.

As I step out of the bedroom, I run smack into Connor. His eyes land on me with heavy judgment.

"Don't look at me like that." Heat suddenly blooms across my face.

"Like what?" A single brow rises.

"As my best friend, you should be the last person to judge," I counter with narrowed eyes.

He leans in and frowns, "The entire bus knows what you two were doing."

"Jealous?" It's my turn with the raised brow. I'm not going to be shamed for having sex on the bus... even if it's with my bodyguard/boyfriend.

“No... Yes—but that’s not the point. Can’t you two be a little more discreet?”

“Yeah, like you’re discreet when jacking off,” I snort. “The whole damn condo can hear you blow a nut.”

“Leave my dick and nuts out of this.” Connor pulls me in for a hug. “At least you’re not moping anymore.”

“Fuck you.” I push him away with a weak effort.

“What’s going on?”

We both spin and find Tobias looking at us like we’re kindergarteners.

“Do me a favor, big guy.” Connor releases me and steps up to Tobias, tapping his biceps. “Next time, put a muzzle on my friend here before you two fuck around. None of us wants to hear the loud moaning and screaming.”

“We did none of that,” I defend. “Unless your fat head was plastered to the walls and you were listening to us.”

“Whatever.” Connor stalks off, giving me the finger.

I glance up at Tobias, who’s watching me with such ferocity and hunger in his eyes that my dick takes notice and my asshole clenches. His intense stare leaves me quite breathless.

“Were we that loud?” I ask, feeling only slightly guilty.

“No. Not at all.” He’s lying right through his teeth. I screamed out his name like a banshee.

Then Tobias frowns. “I need to talk to you about the festival.”

“Is that what we’re calling it these days?” Connor shouts out from living area.

“Shut up,” I hear Bobby, Raef, and Callum say at the same time.

I bust out laughing, before tugging Tobias into the room. “I should—”

My words are cut off the second the door slides shut and Tobias's mouth slams onto mine. I'm not going to deny this man anything he wants, or needs. I wrap my arms around his middle and smash our bodies together, using my tongue to give him the mouth fucking he deserves.

Minutes go by before we come up for air.

"I need you," I say against his lips.

"I'm not sure..."

Kiss. "I am," I whisper. "They won't hear us."

"Danny," Tobias whispers back, then nips at my bottom lip. "I want to—boy, do I want to, but the last thing either of us wants is your bandmates storming in here while we're latched at the hips."

The bus abruptly stops, jolting us sideways onto the bed.

"What the—did we hit something? Is that why the bus stopped like that?"

"Stay here, and lock the door." Tobias quickly stands and leaves the room.

I want to say *No, I'm coming with you*, but a trickle of fear has me staying put.

A good ten minutes passes before I'm tired of waiting to hear why we stopped.

I make my way to the front of the bus, where the driver, Hal, is frantically rubbing the back of his neck and sweating profusely.

"Hal?"

He startles, then turns to me, his face pale and his eyes full of weary shock. "Danny."

"Are you okay?" I ask, worry inching into me for the older man.

He shakes his head no. "This never happened to me before. I've been a driver for thirty plus years and I never..." He shifts

his attention to the front windshield. I follow his gaze and see my friends, John and Tobias surrounding... Laney?

What the hell?

I step out of the bus and walk toward the group gathering around my personal assistant. Tobias sees me first, breaks off, and heads toward me.

“What’s going on?” I ask, my eyes shifting to Laney, who’s smiling at an unhappy Connor.

“Laney’s car broke down,” Tobias grates out, his agitation clearly evident by his tense jaw line.

“Why is she out here?” I glance between Laney and her VW bug that’s spewing white smoke from the engine.

“Apparently, she *was* coming to pick you up. But after my call, she decided to head straight to Black Rock,” Tobias explains.

“But that still doesn’t make sense. Why would she be on this road now, when you called her two days ago?”

“I asked her the same thing.”

“And?”

“Evidently, she got lost, so she decided to stay a couple nights around here,” he explains, but by his tone, he doesn’t believe her excuse. And neither do I.

“And she happened to be on the road when our bus drove up?” I glance at Laney before giving Tobias my full attention again.

“Isn’t that just coincidental,” Tobias sardonically says, then adds. “And very convenient.”

I shake my head. “What’s wrong with her car?”

“I don’t know and, at the moment, I don’t care. She nearly caused a major accident. She almost got herself run over by the bus when she stepped in front of it.”

“What?”

“Yeah. The driver says she stepped onto the middle of the road, waving her hands.”

I want to reach out and smooth the angry creases on Tobias’s forehead. Then kiss the frown off his face. Instead, I lean in and say, “Let me talk to her.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea.” Tobias leans in closer. “I don’t trust her.”

I dart a surprised look at Tobias. “Really? Why?”

“I can’t explain, but if you must talk to her, I’m not leaving your side.”

I release a sigh, eyeing my P.A., who turns her attention to me and frowns. I avoid her stare and touch Tobias’s hand. “Okay.”

“And after?”

I know what he’s asking. “I guess there’s only one thing to do. She’s coming on the bus.”

“Are you sure?” he asks. I want to say *no*, but as Tobias steps closer, our chest touches, and I inhale his scent. I would rather pull him back to the bus, lock ourselves in the tiny bedroom, and do dirty things to my bodyguard.

“Hey.” Laney strides up with an angry glare across her face before quickly pasting on a remorseful smile. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to cause such trouble.”

“Are you alright?” I ask, stepping back from Tobias and scanning her face for any signs of the old bruises from her attack.

“I’m fine. Just a little shaken up. That’s all. How are you?” She shakes out her hands, then drops her face, the heavy wisps of brown hair falling forward to hide her features.

“What were you thinking to step out in front of the bus,” I scold. “You could have been killed.”

Laney darts a look to Tobias before plastering on a pout. “I guess I wasn’t thinking. I saw your tour bus coming up and had to do something to stop it before it drove past me.”

“When this is all over, we’re going to have a chat,” I say before turning to Tobias. “Can we leave now? Ron has stuff for us early tomorrow.”

“What about my car? I don’t want to leave it here,” Laney says in a huff.

“You have two choices, Laney. You either ride with us to Rocktoberfest, or stay with your car. Your choice,” Tobias explains plainly.

Not waiting for her answer, I return to the bus, with Tobias right behind me. What was supposed to be an easy drive is becoming a nightmare.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

TOBIAS

Not even fifteen minutes back on the road, Laney starts whining that she doesn't have a place to sleep.

"Black Rock is about ten hours away, Laney. No one's going to sleep," Raef says, trying to assuage her and elude further bitching. "If you're that tired, you can crash on the sofa here."

"You can have my bed," Callum offers. "I can sleep on this comfy couch." He pats the cushion next to him.

"I don't think I should sleep in a room with other men. I don't trust men," she says with a pinched expression. "Except for Danny. He's a gentleman."

Danny opens his mouth, but I discreetly shake my head at the singer. He quickly snaps it shut.

Laney must have seen this because she says, "Do you want to share your bed with me, Danny?"

My spine snaps straight and the possessive side of me vaults to the stratosphere at her suggestion.

No one sleeps with Danny but me, I want to demand. I'm about to say so, and spew some bullshit security reason, but Danny beats me to it.

"That's not happening, Laney. One, it's not professional. And two, I'm gay. I told you that. And I have a boyfriend. You can either take Callum's bunk, or you can have the soft sofa,"

he says with a gentle formality that doesn't reach his dark blue eyes.

Laney's shoulders slump and she drops next to Bobby. "I guess I can take Callum's bed—if you don't mind." She glances to the bassist.

"I don't mind at all. I wouldn't have offered otherwise," Callum says as he gets up and grabs the beer out of Bobby's hand.

It's his third beer in twenty minutes. Seriously, the band needs to keep an eye on that one. If Bobby's not careful, he'll end in rehab with a fuck-ton of worse problems. I've seen it first hand from an uncle on my mother's side. I look around for Pen, who seems to have a handle on Bobby, but the bodyguard isn't in sight.

"Well, it's nice and all to chat, but I need to freshen up, because it's been a rough few days. Is there a clean bathroom?" Laney scans the men with her hands on her hips. Everyone, except Danny, shies away from her scrutiny. "There's my answer."

"You can use my bathroom," Danny offers. "There are clean towels in the small closet next to the door."

"Thank you, Danny." She touches his arm. "I'll clean up after I'm done. Promise." She then flounces—yes, flounces, out of the room.

Not one band member speaks until there's the click of a closed door.

Then Connor drops into one of the seats and points to Danny. "I blame this shit on you. I told you to fire her before we left for Rocktoberfest. She's nothing but a pain in the ass."

"What was I supposed to do? Fire her right after she got beat up? Fuck no. I'll wait until after this event is over and break it to her gently."

"You and your fucking gently," Connor counters with an arm swinging out in annoyance.

Silence. Then a roar of laughter ensues, all pointing at Danny.

“You all can suck off, especially you, Wildman.” Danny grabs a small square pillow and hurls it at the drummer’s head. He ducks, but snatches it up mid-air and sails it right back, hitting Raef in the face instead.

“I didn’t know this job was more babysitting than security,” John mutters under his breath.

I chuckle. “I guess.” Connor’s glare shoots to John and then to me, while Raef, Bobby, and Callum launch themselves at each other with headlocks and knuckle rubs. All the while Danny sits back and watches the ruckus.

The next hour isn’t any better. Bobby checks in on Laney, since she never came out of Danny’s bedroom, and finds her sleeping on the singer’s bed. The idea of her snuggling in his sheets and smelling his pillow has me seeing red, but Danny shrugs it off and pulls me out of my ire with a quick kiss. Too quick for my liking, but I don’t press for more.

The band ends up hanging in the living area, along with rest of the security team. They decide to sing the song lineup Ron sent them. Aside from his humming at the lake house, I’ve only heard Danny sing that one time at the recording studio. So I’m eager to hear him sing again.

And I’m not disappointed. Granted, I don’t listen to rock songs, but I was an instant fan of Warrior Black. When I took this job, I assumed Danny was talented, but his voice is magic. Not only does he sing, but he adds beauty and charm to the mix, and there’s no way I’m ever going to let Danny Raven Wells go. He’s mine.

“So, what do you think?” Danny finally asks, pulling me out of my reverie. He touches my arm, caressing it lightly, sending a cascade of desire throughout my body. God, I can’t get enough of this guy.

It doesn’t help that we’re nestled right next to each other on the couch.

I'm slow to answer because Connor, who I'm learning is a nosy bastard, is sitting on the other side of Danny, peering over Danny's shoulder at me while he lightly taps his drumsticks on a smaller drum anchored between his knees.

He repeats Danny's question. "Well, what do you think?"

"About what?" I ignore the drummer and gaze solely at Danny.

He rolls his eyes and then asks me again. "Do you like the songs?"

"Sure." I take his hand and squeeze. "But you already know I'm a country boy at heart."

"I knew it." Connor rips out a laugh, pointing at me. "So typical."

"What's going on?" Laney stumbles out, hair all mussed and creases from the sheets marking her face. Her bloodshot eyes land on Danny and she frowns. "I must have fallen asleep. I'm sorry for taking the bed."

"No worries. We're having fun out here," Danny says, but his eyes never leave mine. He tightens his hold on my hand. "Besides, it gave us time to work out the song lineup for Rocktoberfest."

"Sorry that I missed it," Laney says, her frown deepening while she keeps her eyes on us.

"How much longer before we get to Black Rock?" Bobby asks. He's elbow deep in a big bag of corn pops.

John looks at his watch. "I gauge about five and a half hours."

"Hal said he's stopping in about a half hour for gas and to stretch his legs," Jordon adds as he strides into view from the front of the bus.

"Sounds good to me," Danny announces, and abruptly gets up and turns to me, eyes filled with hunger. "Tobias." It isn't a request, as he strides toward the back bedroom.

"Where are you going, Danny?" Laney calls out.

“It’s none of your business.” I hear Connor’s rebuke to the P.A. As frustrating as the drummer is, I’m beginning to like him.

I don’t bother waiting to hear Laney’s response. My ass rushes after Danny, knowing exactly what he wants. Good thing, too, as my dick is a hundred percent on board.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

DANNY

It's nearing eight in the morning, and we've finally made it to Black Rock, but not without some hiccups. About ten miles outside the town of Fallon, the bus blew two left tires. It took almost six hours before we got someone to replace them.

Now, we're here and the atmosphere in this part of the desert is ramping up with excitement. My bandmates and I are also eager, and we can't wait for this kick ass experience to begin.

Except that Laney is driving all of us crazy. With her constant bitching about one thing or another, I've had it.

In these tight quarters, you can hear everything. And I mean *everything*. Then I think back to those quickies between Tobias and me in the bedroom and bathroom... shit. Connor wasn't kidding when he mentioned how loud I am. Even with Tobias's hand over my mouth.

But I'm too agitated to be embarrassed when I have my soon-to-be-ex P.A. griping noisily about how much piss is all over the toilet seat.

"I can't handle this anymore. I need out of this bus," I whisper to Tobias.

"Give me five," he whispers back and nods to John to follow him out of the bus.

True his word, Tobias comes back a few minutes later with a smile on his face. He leans in and says, “You got your wish, sweetheart.”

I tip my head back and train my eyes on his handsome face. “What do you mean?”

He takes my hand and yanks me off the couch. “Where’s Laney?”

“In the bathroom. Why?”

“Follow me.” He puts his index finger to his lips and then waves at the band to do as he says.

As we step off the bus, our security detail surrounds us. It’s funny if you think about our career in this music business. We’re babies compared to most of the legendary rock bands around us. Yet, here we are, surrounded by bodyguards like we’re important.

Then I immediately see where we’re parked. Our bus is right next to Embrace the Fear. *Jesus Christ*. I feel like I’m dreaming and all of this will go away if I blink my eyes.

“This is real,” Callum whispers, awe lining his voice.

“We are *in* this.” That’s Raef. He, too, is feeling the charge in the air.

“Fucking A,” Bobby says in wonder, followed by a high five with one of the bodyguards. I think his name is Dom.

“There’s Ron,” Callum announces, while bouncing on the balls of his feet. It’s obvious he’s feeling the same current that’s running through each of us.

Connor stands silently next to me, his hands tucked into his pockets, his eyes cast down at his feet.

I nudge him. “What’s with you? You’ve been quiet since we got back on the bus in Fallon.”

“Nothing.” Connor dips his chin further, like he’s trying to avoid looking at me. I glance up and see John moving closer, but his face is a mask of indifference. I ignore him and center my attention back on my friend, who’s not acting like himself.

“Oh, no. Spill, Wild,” I insist, pushing him like he usually pushes me.

Connor steps back, nearly bumping into John, and then shakes his head. “It’s nothing, Danny. Just drop it.”

For a second, I think my best friend is joking, but with one look into his steely green eyes, I know he isn’t. So I slowly nod. “Alright.”

My gaze bounces between my best friend and the bodyguard. I see Connor glare at John and then immediately look away. John on the other hand, has a smirk on his face.

Hmmm. I don’t know what it is, but something is going on between them, and I’ll pull that information out of Connor later.

Ron approaches us with another man, who’s quite the opposite in dress and size to our manager. While Ron is dressed to perfection in a black Brunello Cuccinelli tailored suit, white crisp shirt, and Giorgio Armani loafers, the other guy is in a pair of dark blue jeans, a black t-shirt and gym shoes. He towers over Ron by six inches and his bulky muscles are almost equals to Tobias’s.

John leans in close and whispers, “Maybe he didn’t get his own memo about the suits?”

I want to laugh, I remain quiet and keep my eyes on our boss and Warrior Black’s manager.

“Finally, you’re all here.” Ron begins passing out lanyards with a plastic VIP tag clipped to each one. “Don’t lose these. Now, this is Dean Harper, owner of Harper Security. He and the rest of his team will be with us through Sunday. Mr. Harper can quickly explain the schedule for this weekend. So I need everyone to follow his cues.”

Dean opens his mouth, but a loud squeal from behind us shifts our attention. “Ronny,” Laney hollers as she steps off the bus and flounces in the man’s direction.

Ron’s spine stiffens and his lips pinch tight. “I told you *not* to call me that.” His words are like sharp barbs, but they have no effect on the clueless woman.

“Everyone must be on their periods today,” Laney says under her breath, but her words are loud enough that we all hear them. She then turns to me. “I’m here to do your bidding. What do you need me to do? Fetch you anything? Food. Water. A hug?”

Laney takes a step toward me, but Tobias gets in front of her and says with a thin smile, “Water for everyone, please.”

“O-kay,” she mutters, then tilts her head slightly until I’m in her line of sight. “Danny?”

“Water would be good. Thanks,” I add, then refocus on the owner of Harper Security.

“Be right back.” She winks at me and strides away with purpose.

“I thought you were going to fire her,” Ron clips with annoyance.

“He didn’t have the heart to,” Connor interrupts, sounding more like his smart-ass self.

Ron rolls his eyes. “I’ll do it then.”

“No. I’ll do it,” I relent.

“No. I hired her. So I will fire her,” Ron declares. “I’ll go talk to her now, while you all listen to Dean.”

I can’t help notice more and more buses, box trucks and other vehicles arriving as we stand here. Then I see our truck with the Warrior Black logo on the side and breathe a sigh of relief that our crew and equipment are here.

Our roadies include George J, who’s behind electrical, lighting and sound. Mack and Vinnie run a small crew that gets our instruments to and from the venues and then takes care of setting up and tearing down. We couldn’t do our thing without them.

“I need everyone’s attention on me,” Dean says with civility, but there’s also an edge to his tone that pulls everyone’s attention to him.

As I refocus on the man, I feel heat behind me. Not able to help myself, I lean back slightly, knowing Tobias is right there, keeping me safe.

His right hand slides down my lower back and cups my ass cheek. I'm about to tell him to stop, when I hear *him*. The one asshole I'm hoping to stay clear of, to avoid at all cost. But the bastard is like a bad penny. He shows up at all the wrong times.

I turn and frown at the man who used to make my life miserable. "Hello, Siles."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

TOBIAS

The moment Danny says that name, I get in front of my lover, like some sentinel. Siles Barrett is standing there looking smug until I enter his line of sight. And that smugness evaporates. He might think he's better than everyone here, but that's far from the truth.

“This is a private meeting. Leave,” I growl, not giving a fuck who's watching us.

“Whoa. I don't know who you are, but I'm friends with these—”

Connor strides forward and gets in Barrett's face. “You're no friend of ours. Now get the fuck out of here, or I'll pick up where I left off the last time I saw you.”

Siles stumbles back a couple of steps, eyes wide with fear. “I came to say sorry and I thought since—”

“He says beat it. That means get yourself gone,” Callum says through gritted teeth. Bobby, Raef, and the rest of our security form a line in front of and around Danny, and each man folds his arms across his chest.

“Jesus. Fine. Don't say I didn't offer you—”

“Quit while you're ahead, Siles,” Bobby says, then turns his back to the asshole. So does the rest of the band.

“Wait,” Danny calls out and steps past the wall of men. “I have something to say.”

Siles wears a triumphant grin as his eyes greedily take in Danny's body. I want to wage war on this fucker by beating the shit out of him, but then I would be no better than he is. So I wait to see what Danny's going to say.

"I'm glad you can see past the mistakes we made," Siles says, and offers a handshake.

Danny stares down at the proffered hand but doesn't take it. "I just want to say that I won't accept your apology. What you did to me for years was terrible, and no amount of sorries will absolve you, Siles. I will always remember what you did to me, but you need to know that you never broke me."

I pull Danny into my arms. "Are you done?" I ask him, then look at Siles, whose face has gone from pink to red. A deep scowl forms as his eyes dart from me to Danny.

Danny turns in my arms and hugs me. "Thank you for being you." Those precious words mean everything to me.

"You'll see he's not worth the trouble." Siles lands a verbal blow, but neither Danny nor I move as our eyes lock onto each other.

"You're not worth it," Danny throws Siles's words back at him, but he never looks away from my face. "But this man is."

I squeeze Danny tighter to me, not caring who's watching us. I lean down and take his mouth with greedy passion. If he's claiming me in front of everyone—especially in front of my boss and Danny's ex, then I'll claim him right back.

Hoots and hollers from the guys echo off the gigantic tents and between the touring buses.

"Enough of that shit. We have a schedule to go over," Dean says seriously. "And Tobias, we're having words later."

I grunt in acknowledgement, before John suggests, "Let's get back on the bus."

We pile inside and find our places, Danny sitting next to me. Then we listen to Dean's strategy for today through our Sunday departure.

Ron gets on the bus twenty minutes later with a not-too-happy look on his face.

“What’s wrong?” Callum asks.

“The deed is done. She’s gone. And I don’t want her back on this bus, so if she has her stuff in here, someone get it and put it outside,” Ron says with disgust.

Dean points to one of the guys and they go to retrieve Laney’s things.

“Was it hard?” Danny asks, a glint of worry in his voice.

“Nothing I couldn’t handle. Now what did I miss?”

While Dean reprises the details for Ron, my eyes drop to Danny’s open hand. I desperately want to take it, but out of respect for my boss, and because I’m still on the job, I don’t.

A look of disappointment crosses Danny’s face, but I know he understands why I don’t take his offered hand.

“As much as she’s annoying, I’ll make sure she has a ride home. Or at least to her car,” Dean explains.

“Thank you. I don’t want her to be stranded with no way back.” Danny’s genuine smile is so sweet that I want to kiss him.

“Tobias. A word?” Dean grates out.

I stiffen for a second before I stand. “Be right back.”

“Okay.”

I follow Dean outside and to the other side of the bus. He turns on me with furrowed brows. “Am I going to have to send you home?”

His words are like a whip, the hard crack of his voice striking me. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying, I need your head in the game. Focused.”

“I am.”

“Not from where I was standing, Tobias. You two look like love sick fools. So I’m asking you, should I send your ass

home? Or are you going to do your job, and I don't mean by fucking your man."

Wait. Did he just call Danny my man?

I straighten to my full height, and look Dean dead in the eyes. "I will do what I have to do to keep Danny safe. Even if I have to eat a bullet. Got me?"

Danny might have claimed me. But it's my turn to convey to Dean that the singer means everything to me. I might not know where this relationship is going, but for now, Danny's mine. And I protect what is mine. The entire crew knows it. And now so does Dean.

"Then enough with the fucking googly eyes bullshit."

"Really? Googly eyes?" I chuff out.

"Are you two done? Ron's about to take the guys to see the stage," John declares.

"Fine," Dean says. "But I think it's best now if we split up. Tobias, you and John stay with the band for the entirety of the festival. You go where they go, no matter what."

"Got it," John and I say at the same time.

"What about the rest of us?"

I turn and see the rest of Warrior Black's security team standing there, watching us.

"Pen and Jordan will stay with the bus. You'll make sure no one gets on unless it's us. Dom, Fig, and I will meet with the festival security and do a perimeter checks." Dean explains.

We all agree and disperse.

As John and I meet Ron, Danny, and the band as they are coming out of the bus. Before anyone can speak, a scream tears through the air.

"That sounds like Laney," Danny says in a rush. "Tobias."

"On it. Danny, you and the guys get back on the bus," I say and take off. To my right, Dean and John races alongside me.

When we reach a large huddle of people, I order, “Move.” And like the parting of the Red Sea, the group splits. I see Laney, flat on her back, blood trickling from her mouth.

Just as John gets on the phone and calls for an ambulance, Rocktoberfest security arrives. Dean bends down and touches her neck. He looks at me and then to the head security guy. “She’s alive.”

Thank Christ. The last thing I want is for Danny to blame himself for whatever happened to Laney.

“Who saw what happened to her?” I demand to the group of onlookers.

“We don’t know, man,” one guys says. Pinched between his fingers is a roach.

“Dude, she was talking to some suit before he punched her and then he took off,” one of the stoner’s friends explains.

“Which direction?” John insists.

“That way, man.” The guy points in the direction of the food tent.

“I got this here,” Dean says. With that, John and I take off toward the tent.

As we round the corner, we are hit with a wall of people four bodies thick. They’re standing there taking pictures and getting autographs from some men, who I assume are rock stars.

“Social Sinners and Maiden Voyage,” John enlightens me.

I glance at my partner with mild surprise. “You know them?”

“I’m a metalhead. What do you think? Shit—Isn’t that Danny’s ex?” John points to the other end of the tent, where Siles is sitting with a group of guys who look like they just got out of bed.

John and I make our way around the back of the tent until we reach the table where Siles is sitting.

A look of surprise crosses the man's face as I stare him down. "Where were you not five minutes ago?" I demand.

His lips thin, bouncing a look to John and then to me. "I was here the entire time," Siles says stridently. "Why?"

"Someone attacked Danny's P.A. and they came this way," John explains and then asks the band. "Can you corroborate that this guy was here with you the entire time?"

"Dude, talk softer. My head's pounding," a white blond whines, his bent head encased in his hands. "But I think so."

"What are you implying?" Siles stands, his back stiff and a sneer on his face.

"We aren't implying a thing," John shoots back.

"Witnesses says that a guy dressed like you was the one who hurt Laney," I say, taking a step toward the asshole, but John's pulling me back.

"Stay clear of Warrior Black." It's all John says before we turn and stalk back to the bus.

"What do you think?" John asks as he looks over his shoulder.

"He did it. I know it. It's obvious—did you see the way he tried calming his breathing?" I glance back to where we left Siles and he's still glaring at us.

"Obviously," John adds. "But no proof."

"What I don't get is why go after Laney?" I ask, rounding another tent and spotting the entirety of Warrior Black standing by the food tent talking to some men. One in particular is standing a little too close to Danny, and I don't fucking like it.

John guffaws, which catches my attention. I turn and watch my friend's face light up like a rocket flare. "That's..." he swallows hard.

"Who?" I insist.

"Social Sinners," he says with a gulp. "They are one of my favorite bands."

I have never seen John like this. He's usually resigned, aloof where his emotions are concerned, but lately the man's full of surprises. I know he likes heavy metal music, but I now realize it's more than *like* from the way he's acting.

"Are you okay?" I ask, as we approach the group.

John quickly swipes at his mouth before clearing his throat. "Yeah." He then strides to Dean who's talking to a guy in a black security shirt.

I head to the group and eye the person who's close to my guy. "Danny," I clip, grabbing everyone's attention. I move to Danny's side, though I don't reach for him. Instead, I eye the guy in front of me.

"It's fucking awesome meeting you all," the guy says to the band. "We hear nothing but kick ass things about your band and your music." A chorus of *yep* and *fuck yea* comes from the other guys around him. "Can't wait to listen to you jam." He gives us a tiny salute, chuckling, and then grabs the hand of the guy next to him before he and the rest of his group stroll off.

"Who's that guy?" I ask Danny, noting the awed expression on his face. He's so wide eyed that I begin to worry. "Babe?"

"You don't know who that was?" Connor queries with equal amounts of shock and humor on his face.

"Dude, that's Social Sinners. One of the headliners for this festival," Callum throws in with a wide grin.

"And that guy was Joey Hayes, their lead singer. The others were his bandmates, Stoli, Mickey, and Diamond, and some of their significant others," Raef explains, snickering. "So Danny was telling the truth. You really don't listen to metal."

I drop my eyes to Danny, who's blushing profusely. Yeah, I figured he was going to tell the guys about my music choices.

"There's nothing wrong with country," I defend.

“Sure, there isn’t.” Connor busts out laughing. He turns away, his shoulders bouncing around like an idiot.

“Get it out,” I say to the group.

“If you’re done, Tobias. I need a word,” Dean states with a frown.

Danny leans in and whispers, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s all good, babe.” I give him a squeeze and then stride to Dean. “How’s Laney?” I ask him.

“She’s fine. Just some scrapes and a bump on her head. Festival security took her to the medical tent to patch her back up. But that’s not why I called you over here. Hale found some stuff out.”

John moves in closer and so does the rest of the team.

“What is it?” I finally ask.

“That gunshot you two thought, wasn’t. Hale found footage from a security surveillance camera five buildings down and it was a backfire from a shit box Chevy Corolla, sitting across the street from the store.”

“What about the bullet I found in the wall?” John asks.

“That bullet could have been fired at any other time. It was just luck you discovered it,” Dean explains. “There’s more.”

His eyes go flinty and his jawline tenses. So I brace, knowing it’s going to be bad news.

“The handwriting analysis came back.”

“And?” I urge, feeling unsettled that Danny’s not by my side. I trust the men I work with, but they won’t protect him like I would.

“My friend from Quantico says a female wrote those notes. And the familiarity of using Danny’s name in the last letter says that he knows the woman,” Dean further clarifies. “They also found a partial print, maybe enough to trace who it is.”

My entire body stills at his words. “Are they running it?”

“As we speak, but it might take time.” A tiny glint of satisfaction shows on my boss’s face.

“It’s one step closer than we’ve been in weeks,” John adds, visibly hyped.

“Yes. All we have to do is keep with the schedule until the results come in,” Dean says with nod.

I’m patient, but not when we’re so close to finding out who’s after Danny.

I turn and spot the very man standing there fidgety, arms loosely folded across his chest, and watching me.

There’s worry emanating from his eyes. The last thing I want to do is burden him with this new information, especially when this event is such a big deal for him and the band.

So I paste on a smile, like everything is fine, and move toward Danny.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

DANNY

The rest of Thursday is uneventful, which is good compared to the fiasco of seeing Siles and the calamity that is Laney.

The guys and I start to run the lineup of songs we're playing on Friday, but being stuck inside the bus fucking blows. At Ron's suggestion, for purely PR purposes, we walk around the festival, showing our faces to the ever-growing crowd of fans.

These are our people. The metalheads, headbangers and the rock and roll thrashers. We greet, fist bump, take pictures and sign autographs on whatever surface they request.

Our security team stays with us, especially Tobias, but the weary look on his face conveys his unhappiness with our manager's decision.

Once we've made our rounds, we're back inside the bus and we finish the rest of the lineup. Now it's time to head to the stage for a sound check.

Tobias keeps his distance, and I'm not happy about it. Yet, I understand that he's giving me the space the band and I need. However, it feels like there's something more—something he's not telling me. But I can't worry about it now.

I'm nervous about getting on that main stage, even though it's only for the sound check.

Connor is no better. He's drawn tight, his fingers have a death grip on his drumsticks as he taps them against his thighs in a rapid rhythm. Raef, Callum, and Bobby are standing back, all stoically waiting for Ron to call us up.

I still can't get over the fact we are here. Amongst the bands we worship and the fans that love their music. I hope they love our music, too. And after this, we have an interview with Metal Times. So fucking surreal.

"You're up," Ron says loudly, pointing toward the stage.

Mack and Vinnie stand there with Raef's guitar and Callum's bass, while George is in the sound control center ready for our cue.

We quickly run through three songs, before the sound check is set. With a thumbs up from George, we head off stage and straight into the interview with Donavon Right. That takes twenty minutes.

By the time we get back to the bus, I'm mentally exhausted. And we still have an interview with Rock Magazine at noon tomorrow, a fan signing at three and then we play that night. I'm just glad Saturday is for us to enjoy the music.

The guys end up partying with the other bands, whereas I end up in bed decompressing.

I must have dozed off because I slowly rouse to someone sliding in next to me. As strong arms wrap around me, I snuggle into the heat at my back and inhale, and freeze. The familiar scent hits me like a battering ram slamming into my nose.

"Siles." I try to jerk away, but too late. He tightens his arm around my chest like an iron band while his other hand slaps across my mouth in a vise grip.

"Don't struggle, Danny boy," he whispers into my ear. "You'll never learn. You're making it harder for yourself."

I muffle out, "Let me go." *Oh, fuck.* I can feel his stiff prick poking at my ass as he grinds his pelvis against me.

“I promise it’ll be good for us.” He kisses my temple.

My lungs seize at the meaning of those words. I try to shake him off, but he adjusts his body to where he’s on top of me now. I’m face to face with the man who has tormented me for way too long. But I’m not the same man that left that day. I’m stronger.

For a brief second, Siles loosens his hold on my face, so I take that moment and bite down hard on his finger. He yelps, then reels back and, before I can defend myself, he slaps my face with the back of his hand.

I immediately curl up onto my side, my hands covering my face and I feel wetness on my palms. But my position won’t be a deterrent to what Siles wants from me. I know him so well that what he’s getting out of this isn’t sexual gratification, but dominance. He’s done this to me before and it took my ass a while to heal from his rough dry fucking.

Oblivious as he always is, Siles slides his arms around me again, spooning in tight against my back. “Come on, baby. One more fuck for old time’s sake,” he says gruffly into my ear before biting down on my lobe. The shot of pain has me yanking my head away, which ultimately has me slamming the back of my skull to his face. Siles wrenches back and falls off the bed.

I scramble off the mattress but end up trapped on the side opposite the door. Pressing tight against the wall, I gather whatever resolve I have and face my tormentor.

“Stupid motherfucker, you broke my nose,” he muffles out through his hands. “Now you’re going to pay for everything you did to me. Then and now.” Siles lunges for me. I dodge and take that free moment to punch out, hitting his face.

He screams and comes after me. I try to hurdle the mattress but I’m not quick enough and he has me by the hair. With a firm grip, he slams me down onto the mattress. “You deserve everything you’re gonna get from me.”

Just as I twist, the door to the room crashes open and Tobias barrels in. He launches himself on Siles, knocking the

asshole down onto the floor.

Through the chaos, I don't realize that two other men appear inside the small room until one of them turns on the light, and immediately wrangles Siles to his stomach.

"I'm going to fucking sue all your asses for bodily assault. Especially you." His crazed eyes are on me as he tries to twist out of the men's hold. I can't look away as he continues his rant. "I'm going to take everything, especially your fucking balls. Once I'm done with you, you'll wish I'd fucked you instead."

"That's not happening," Tobias declares as John and Dean haul Siles to his feet.

"Don't talk to me, dumb fuck," Siles spits out and turns back to me. "Danny, you owe me."

Dean shoulders Siles, and whispers something in his ear. All the color drains from Siles's face before John and Dean drag him out of the bedroom.

I'm physically shaking as I realize what could have happened if Tobias hadn't raced in. I doubt I would have had enough strength to fend off Siles another minute.

As the rush from fighting back and then the guys storming in to save the day subsides, I finally begin to feel the pain from the backhand Siles gave to my face, especially my lips, and the ache on the side of my head. I glance down at my shoulder and see blood droplets running down my chest.

My hand automatically goes to touch my ear but Tobias stops me. "Don't, Danny."

He pulls me into the bathroom and has me sit on the toilet in the tiny space. "I can take care of it myself, Tobias," I say shakily, not looking at him. My shame over what happened overwhelms me.

"Is the bathroom cold?" I ask as chills run across my skin, and I shiver. I can't seem to stop, either.

"Hold on." He leaves, then quickly comes back and wraps the thin comforter around me. The warmth of the blanket and

of Tobias's action eases some of the cold from my body.

"Thank you," I quietly say, still not looking at him.

"Look at me, sweetheart," Tobias says softly.

I shake my head, but Tobias crooks a finger under my chin and slowly lifts my face up. What I see in those amber-green depths scares me more than anything Siles slung at me.

"I'm fine," I say, hoping to ease the anger lines at the corners of his eyes.

"He hit you," he admits with another guttural growl, while running a gentle finger along my cheek. The strain on his face says so much. Tobias is holding back his rage. For me. And to my surprise, I'm not afraid.

Maybe in the beginning, when I first met the man, I would have run from him. But now, knowing how gentle Tobias is, and how fiercely he protects, I'm not scared.

"He did, but that's all he did." I give Tobias a quivering smile. "And you saved me before he did anything else."

"Yeah," he grunts and then proceeds to clean me up. I love it that he wants to take care of me. And really, aside from my friends, no one has taken care of me or made sure that I'm good for a long time.

Tobias wipes all the blood off, and then tenderly washes the area where Siles bit me. More grunts and noises emanate from him, before he puts a bandage on my earlobe.

As I step back into the bedroom, I hear, "I'm sorry." Tobias's hushed words catch me off guard.

"What?" I turn around, dropping the blanket. I inhale sharply at the anguish I see in his eyes. "Tobias."

"I should have been here. But that son—"

"Tobias," I beg. "This isn't your fault."

He steps into the room, leaving mere inches of space between us. But it might as well be miles.

“Are you listening to me?” I wrap both hands around the back of his neck and tug him down to me. Face to face. “Tobias, this isn’t your fault.”

He nods slightly.

“No. I need words,” I demand quietly.

He threads his arms under mine and lifts me up so I can wrap my legs around his waist. “Yes,” he finally says into the crook of my neck.

I pull back slightly, so we’re eye to eye. We stand there in silence lost in each other for who knows how long. Then the words slip right out, like I’ve turned off any filter or controller of my feelings. “I love you.”

His eyes widen, his arms loosens, but he doesn’t say a word.

“I know it’s so fast, and I don’t know how or why but I do. I love you, Tobias Grant. I just wanted to you to know that. If you don’t feel the same way, I’m okay with that.”

Please say something. Please say you do, too.

But I go on. “And if nothing comes of this—whatever this is between us—”

I don’t get a chance to finish before Tobias lets me go.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

TOBIAS

He loves me. Danny Raven Wells says he loves me... But then why can't I say it back?

Do I feel the same way? Abso-fucking-lutely. But saying those words back is difficult. Especially when I have been royally screwed by different men in my past, especially by my ex.

Yeah, I know it's been two years. I should be over it by now, but something is holding me back. Is it fear of commitment? I can't break down what's in my head. Every time I open my mouth to say those words to Danny, nothing comes out.

So I stand there, with Danny in front of me, all mute. The precious moment of bliss between us quickly spirals into silence. His face crumbles, and his eyes drop to the ground. I open my mouth to talk—to say anything to return the happiness to Danny's face, and still nothing comes out of my mouth.

Danny slowly backs away. "I'm... sorry. I don't know what came over me. I mean I love that you were here to save me from Siles, and I appreciate it. And I can't help my feelings. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything." He backs away more. Each step back is like a knife slicing into me.

"Danny?" Connor rushes inside the room. By this point, Danny is an arm's length away from me.

“I need a drink,” Danny says. “Come with me?” That is directed to Connor, which burns like I’ve been doused with acid.

“Okay. The guys are outside waiting,” the drummer says as he pulls his best friend into his arms.

Without another word, Danny and Connor leave the bedroom, and where I remain standing there like an asshole. My chest has a hollowed out ache from the absence of Danny, who has my heart.

“Tobias.” I hear Dean call my name. Ignoring the heavy regret circling like a vulture, I heave out a breath, and leave the haven of the bedroom and the memories of Danny’s declaration.

I stop at the threshold of the living area, where Dean and John have Siles in one of the chairs, his hands at his back, zip tied.

“You motherfuckers are in so much trouble. You wait until the cops and my lawyer find out what you’re doing to me. I have rights and I will own all your asses,” Siles shouts and jerks at his plastic bindings.

“Mr. Barrett, we have every right to detain you. You entered this bus without permission from the band, the manager or us. We also know you didn’t get consent from Mr. Wells to join him in bed. That is why you are here, to explain yourself before we call the police, who you’re so insistent be here.” Dean lays it out as plainly as possible, but from the sneer on Siles’s face, the asshole isn’t taking in the ramifications of his illegal entry or the assault.

“I was invited,” Siles hisses.

“Lie,” I counter in a growl.

Siles shifts his glare to me. “Who the fuck are you?”

“Not your fucking business. But Danny is. And I know for a fact that he didn’t ask you to come to his bed, nor would he ever ask you to.” Enlightening the man further, I continue. “I don’t think, after what you did to him, Danny would ever want you anywhere near him.”

Siles straightens in the chair. “I love him and I’ve done everything for him.”

“Including taping him up in a chair, after you knocked him out? Then beating on him as though he’s your punching bag?” The room goes quiet.

Barrett looks around, pales even more and then shrinks into the chair. Like that is going to keep him safe from the anger boiling over in the room.

“He did what?” I don’t know who says that, but apparently Dean didn’t share the news.

“He taped Danny to a chair and what? Beat him?” That’s Pen. I recognize his east coast tag.

“There’s no proof,” Siles defends weakly. But no one believes him.

I straighten, but my eyes never leave Siles’s face. “Yes, there is. Connor has pictures of what you did to Danny. Did you conveniently forget the conversation with the drummer?”

Siles shakes his head, his mouth tightly shut that his lips disappear from his features.

“Call the police,” Dean speaks up.

“Wait.” Siles tries to stand, but John shoves him back down.

“What?” Dean quirks a brows.

“I have information you might need,” he says pleadingly.

“There’s nothing you can say that’s going to get you out of this,” I explain, folding my arms across my chest. I’d rather kick the shit out of the guy for what he did to Danny, but I contain that urge.

“I know who’s sending the notes to Danny.” My entire body locks up at his admission.

I grab his shirt and haul him up until we are face to face. “Talk.”

“Tobias.” Dean’s demanding tone doesn’t nullify my fury.
“Put him down.”

“No fucking way,” I say over my shoulder and then turn back to Siles. “Fucking spill.”

“It’s that P.A. It was all her idea,” he says. I drop him back into the chair and step back.

“What do you mean?”

“She’s the one who’s been sending the letters. She’s obsessed with Danny. I tried to warn her off.”

John leans in and barks, “How?”

Siles swings his eyes to John, to me and then to Dean. “I tried to reason with her, but—but,” he rushes to say. “But she slapped me and I pushed her away. I swear to you, she is certifiably crazy,” he pleads.

“Why should we believe you?” Dean ask with pure disgust. “Why would she tell you that she’s sending notes to Danny?”

“Because...” he drops his eyes to the floor. “I was helping her.”

“Please tell me I can put in my time with this bastard,” I howl at Dean, clenching and unclenching my hands. “Just five minutes is all I need.”

He shakes his head. “Tobias, find Danny and the band and stay with them. John, go with him.”

“I swear, I didn’t know it was going to escalate into something bad.” Siles starts tearing up.

“I don’t fucking believe it.” I storm out of the bus, with John on my heels. “Whose with them and where did they say they were going?” I ask John.

“The food tent. But it’s nearing nine and I think it shut down at six—Tobias, none of our security is with them,” he says, matching my long stride step for step.

When we reach the closed tent, Connor, Callum, Raef, Bobby, and the roadies are sitting at an empty table, talking.

“Where’s Danny?” I demand with urgency. Not seeing Danny with his friends has my heart racing and my pulse pounding in my ears, and I almost missed what Connor says.

“He went with Laney to get gas. They’ll be back in an hour,” Connor explains but loses his smile when he glances at John. “What’s going on?”

“It’s Laney. She’s Danny’s stalker.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

DANNY

I climb into Laney's VW bug that was dropped off earlier today, and close the door.

"We'll be back in an hour," Laney says as she starts the car. "Gerlach is only thirty minutes away. And thanks for coming with me."

"When are you going?" I ask, not bothering to look at her.

"I'm going to stay for the rest of the festival, but this way I can head out right after and not have to worry about getting gas."

I nod, without saying another word. I don't want to be rude, but I'd rather sit here and be quiet with my thoughts.

Leaning my forehead against the window, I watch as the vast darkness of the desert passes by. The quiet of these moments gives me no semblance of peace. And why should it?

Tomorrow might be one of the greatest days of my life. But today has been one of the worst.

I fucked everything up with Tobias.

My heart hurts and my gut twists tight at the memory of the bleak expression on Tobias's face. It is something I will never forget. Or the mortification that flooded my body with his silence.

Those three simple words shattered what friendship and affection we had. And I know I can't get it back. I know this is the end of us.

Why did I have to say those three words to him? Why couldn't I keep my mouth shut, for once? Why doesn't he love me back?

A firm hand on my arm jostles my thoughts back to the present.

"Danny?" Laney's less than gentle voice has me turning to her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I say, moving my arm and shifting my attention back to the window.

"You know you can talk to me, Danny. I'm your friend. And as your friend, we don't keep secrets from each other. Ever"

I angle my head back around. "What?" I'm confused and surprised that she thinks that we're friends when we hardly know each other.

She pulls over to the side of the road, puts the car in park and faces me. "Don't you see me as your friend, Danny?" Her tone might be mild, but the light from the dashboard shows her eyes sparking with rage.

I suck in a breath. "Laney," I barely finish saying her name before she backhands me across my bruised face and the back of my head slams against the window. Stars explode across my vision, and it's a few seconds before I'm able to see the enraged woman before me. For a small person, Laney's hit packs a punch.

If I thought my day was horrible before, now I'm colossally fucked.

"No, Danny. You will listen to me. I've done everything for you. *Everything*. And this is how you repay me?" Her face softens into an easy but evil smile and then she pulls out a knife from under her thigh and points the tip right at my face. "I love you. And I will do whatever it takes for you to love me back. And that includes hijacking you from all the trash."

Oh my God. "I love you. And I will do whatever it takes for you to love me back."

Those words gnarl up inside my gut. Earlier today, I was thinking the same thing about Tobias—okay, maybe not exactly those words, but close enough to make me shudder. You won't see me sending threatening notes to Tobias, though.

Then the rest of what she said hits me. "Trash? What are you talking about?"

"Your so-called friends. That fucking bodyguard. They are not dependable or good enough for you. Nobody is but me," she says matter-of-factly.

"And you're sitting there with a knife pointed at my face?" I counter.

"It's for your protection, Danny. Now stop it arguing. We have to get on the road before your twat-waffle of an ex tells those boneheads what I'm up to."

I don't know if Tobias will come after me. He and the security team don't even know I'm gone. Will they find out soon? Or maybe it won't be until I'm a no show for tomorrow's meet up. Will they be able to track me down? Can they find Laney before she truly goes off the fucking rails?

Before I get a chance to open my mouth to tell her that this won't work between us, she slaps me across the face again. This time much harder. "Pay attention to me, Danny. I need your full attention and I'm not getting it. Now I don't want to hurt you, but I will if I have to."

Since I don't hit women, psychotic or not, I grapple with the handle to open the car door, at the same time I hit the unlock button. I have to get away from this cracked bitch.

However, I'm not quick enough. The point of the knife pricks my neck and I feel a sting above my collarbone. "I wouldn't move if I was you, Danny."

I freeze immediately. "What do you want from me, Laney?" I slowly move my head and neck away from the sharp edge, my back to the freedom I'm desperate for.

“Don’t you know?” she asks with a slight tilt of her head, as though we’re having a casual conversation. “Wasn’t my explanation enough?”

“No,” I say with trepidation.

“All those notes I sent you. Did you read any of them?” She leans forward and the knife pricks my skin again. This time, the sting comes with a sensation of liquid sliding down my neck. *Blood.*

Don’t panic.

“Yes.”

“Then what don’t you understand?”

“All of it. Explain it all to me, Laney. Because I didn’t feel the love while reading them.” I know I’m taking the risk of inciting her anger, but I’ll do anything to prolong the time for either a chance to escape or for Tobias and the rest of Harper Security to find me. If they even know I’m gone.

She raises the knife an inch, but not enough for my jugular to be clear of the honed blade.

“I’m devoting my life to you. You see, Danny, you don’t need anyone else—can’t have anyone else but me. Not your fuckwit friend, Connor. Or any of the band. They weigh you down.”

“Why?” I ask, through unshed tears.

She blows out an exasperated breath and rolls her eyes at me like I’m some errant child. Laney drops the knife to her lap, moves closer and whispers like she’s sharing some great secret with me. “Siles told me that you’re greedy for rough sex and like to be slapped around. Is that true?”

I swallow hard before answering. “No.”

She slaps the steering wheel in anger. “I knew it. I should have killed that fucker when I had a chance.”

There’s a long beat of silence and I hope she’s done talking but she turns back to me and asks, “I wonder...” She taps her finger to her lips. “Are you a gentle lover?”

I nod quickly, not sure what to say. I'm not about air out my sexual preference to her. And what she heard from Siles wasn't about my sexual desires at all. What my ex put me through was nothing but abuse, and even at times I was violated without my consent.

Then my eyes drop to the knife in her lap and I contemplate whether I have time to grab for it. But Laney must have sensed my intent because she picks up the knife and shakes her head.

"I told you I don't want to hurt you, but I will," she says, raising the knife back up.

My eyes meet hers and I ask, "If you sent the notes, then who beat you up?"

That question throws her for a second before a wide smile slides onto her pixie-like face. "Siles. I wanted you to feel sorry for me. And you did. I also wanted to throw off the cops, so I even planted the note they found with me." This entire time, she's been manipulating all of us, and it's worked her way.

I don't want to ask this next question but I need to know. "Were you the one who attacked me at The Independence?"

She chuckles. "No, silly. That was all Siles. It was his idea to knock you out and take you then, but the band came in too fast."

"Then how did you find us on the road—like you knew the bus was coming."

"That's easy," she says, waving the knife around. "I tracked Connor's cell. That dumbass didn't know I went into his phone and linked my number. I know exactly where he is at all times." Laney giggles. "And you too. The entire time you were at the lake house with that idiot bodyguard. I could have taken you at any time, but it was fun watching from across the lake."

"You what?" It's as though the oxygen in the car turn to poison and I couldn't breathe.

“Don’t play stupid, Danny. You saw me—I know you did,” she says with narrowed eyes.

I have to get away from Laney before her twisted mind changes and she kills me. I rotate slightly, my right hand at my back, my fingers tucked under the door handle.

“Then why did Siles—”

“That’s enough questions. Now that you know it’s me who wrote the letters, you know our love is perfect,” she says with another maniacal chuckle. Laney leans slightly back, which gives me the precious seconds I need to flee.

“Not perfect,” I utter before I pull on the handle and fall out of the car. Thank Christ for yoga and my flexibility, because I’m quickly on my feet and hauling ass down the desert road.

Laney is soon running after me, screeching her head off. But I don’t turn around. My focus is on getting back to the guys—back to Tobias. Even if he doesn’t love me, it doesn’t matter. I love him and I’m willing to stick it out to see where this relationship heads.

“Oh no, you don’t,” Laney hisses, her fingers grabbing my long hair and yanking back, causing my feet to falter. But I’m not deterred by the sharp pain on my scalp. Losing a few strands of hair I can deal with, but I won’t risk my life any longer with this crazy bitch.

I whip around to push her away, and she comes at me with the knife. She swipes the blade at my face and arms. Then she tries to jab forward, to plant the knife in my gut.

She misses, but the edge tags the outer part of my thigh when I kick at her. Laney stumbles back and I take off again. I might be fast on my feet, but she’s faster and knocks me down onto the dirt.

With my back to the ground, she straddles my hips and attempts to plunge the knife into my chest, but I buck her off.

My scream tears through the night, as I keep fighting and try to stay alive.

CHAPTER THIRTY

TOBIAS

When Connor told me that Danny was with Laney, my world flipped upside down.

John took off back to the bus to tell Dean what was happening while I stood there frozen.

“Tobias.” Connor shouts in my face. “Damn it. You promised to protect him.”

I shove the drummer back. “How long have they been gone?” I demand.

“About ten minutes,” Callum quickly snaps out.

“Grant,” Dean calls to me.

“ETD ten minutes ago,” I relay as I run toward him.

Dean barks out to Pen to call for the authorities, as John and I climb into Dean’s SUV. My heart is a jackhammer in my chest, and my palms are so sweaty that I wipe them on my jeans. From my seat as shotgun, I dart a look back and forth from one side of the road to the other, not wanting to miss Laney’s car.

I have never been so scared in my life, until now. Every horrific scenario is running through my head, from Danny being hurt to worse. But I quickly try to shake off that last thought and focus on seeing Danny alive and well. It’s all I can hope for.

Fuck. Why didn't I just tell him that I love him? Why does it take a threat to his life to straighten my ass out and make me be brave enough to admit that he's mine?

"What's that?" John leans forward from the back seat and points straight ahead.

Lights from a vehicle are shining in the distance. As the SUV rapidly approaches, I see two bodies wrangling in the sandy dirt.

"Danny," I shout. Fear creeps up my throat as I impatiently watch him fighting a losing battle with Laney, who's on top of him.

Before the SUV comes to a halt, I jump out and take off toward them. Then I see it, a glint of light, and I realize that the headlights of our SUV are reflecting metal. A knife.

Operating purely on instinct, I pull out my gun and, before Laney plunges the knife into Danny's chest, I pull the trigger.

Laney jerks forward, turns and falls sideways. Danny scrambles away from her body, eyes wide with horror and shock. He stares at Laney and then me.

Dean and John round on Laney's unmoving body and check for her vitals. Dean subtly shake his head. She's dead. But my worry is for the man in front of me.

"Sweetheart," I say gently, my hands out toward him, but he stumbles back several steps like I'm the devil. Realizing that I still have the gun in my hand, I slide it into my shoulder holster and turn back to Danny.

"Stay back," he trembles. Tears are sliding down his cheeks, and they're mixing with the dirt and blood that's smeared on his face. But it's the fear emanating from his eyes that has me stilling.

"Danny," I say softly, one hand extended out to him. "I love you."

"You don't mean that," he says, angrily rubbing at his eyes.

“I do. I love you. And I’m sorry I didn’t say it back to you when I had the chance. I’m an idiot. Please, baby. Let me hold you.” I take a slow step toward him.

He takes a slow step back. “Why now?”

“Because I realize that without you in my life, I have nothing. Without you in my space, I have no happiness. And without your love, I’m no one but a fool.”

Danny releases a heart wrenching cry before he rushes to me. “I love you,” he says as his arm circles my neck in a strangle hold.

I wrap my arms around him, then kiss his lips. “Are you okay?”

As we stand there, our bodies locked in each other’s hold, the Nevada State Police and the Pershing County Sheriff arrive on the scene. They take control, and between Dean and John, I know what’s going to happen next. I might not like it, but it will surely affect Danny.

I glance over to John, who gives me a single nod of understanding. Protect Danny.

As standard procedure goes, in a situation like this, I relinquish my firearm. And once I’m read my Miranda rights, I’m handcuffed and taken in for questioning.

Danny freaks out as the cops take me into custody. He’s yelling at them to let me go, but John holds onto my man and whispers something to him. He stops fighting, but the agony on his face splits me in two.

“I’ll be back before you get on that stage,” I say, cracking a smile I’m not feeling.

“I’m holding you to that,” he replies with watery grin. He, too, is putting up a false front.

“John?” I call out before they try to push me in the back of the squad.

“I will not let anything happen to him,” he promises.

I then drop into the back seat and take a slow, deep breath. God, I hope I'm right and I'm back before Danny and Warrior Black get on that stage.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

DANNY

As I watch the officers drive away with Tobias in the back seat, I can't hold in my anguish and I burst out crying. John, being the good guy he is, gives me his shoulder.

"He'll be back. This is all part of the procedure," he keeps repeating, but I can't see past the fact that Tobias is heading to jail, procedural or not.

"That's what Tobias said, but what if this is different? What if these cops won't let him go?" I ask between wiping my eyes with a wet wipe John gave me and blowing my nose.

"That won't happen. Dean called Mark, the agency's lawyer. He's on it. I promise you, Tobias will see you on that stage," he encourages me while handing me another wipe.

Once the EMTs look over my cuts and scrapes, I'm clear to leave. Dean and John then drive me to a small building in Gerlach that houses the sheriff's office. There, I'm asked a whole bunch of questions about Laney, what transpired in the car, the notes, and what she said to me in the car. Then they shift the topic to Tobias. With Dean by my side, I proceed to explain my and Tobias's relationship.

I ask about Tobias, but the sheriff isn't forthcoming with any details. I ask to see him, but come to find out, he isn't here. They have him somewhere else. My heart plummets at that information.

A good two hours pass before they let me go. As John and Dean drives me to the Black Rock, the air in the vehicle is thick with quiet tension.

When we pull through the gate, I'm surprised that there are tons of activity.

What was a semi-quiet venue yesterday, has exploded with people and noise. I glance down at the time on the dash. It reads five a.m. I didn't realize we'd been gone that long.

I thought yesterday was crazy, but as I walk past a line of people—all giving me chin lifts, fist bumps and hellos, I finally find my smile. It's not the same I have for Tobias, but it's all I can muster until I'm inside the bus.

Ron rushes up as I get out of the vehicle. "Thank fucking God, you're okay. You gave me a heart attack, damn it. Don't do that to me again." He finally takes a deep breath, his right hand to his chest and looks down at me. "You are okay, right?" He takes my hand and squeezes.

I know what he's silently asking. "I'm good to go on, Ron," I say, squeezing his hand back.

"Okay. You have plenty time to rest, get your bearings or whatever you need to do." He raises a finger. "You can skip the interview at noon, but Warrior Black has a meet up with the fans from three to four. Will you be ready for then?"

"I will," I chuckle.

We pass a group of five people, three guys and two women with VIP lanyards.

They look at me and rush over, calling out *Raven*. Dean and John stop them immediately before they reach Ron and me. With my dusty, disheveled clothes, a bandaged ear, and my face marred by several small cuts and reddened cheeks, I'm a glorified mess for a rockstar, but apparently, they don't care.

At my insistence, John and Dean let the fans approach. Between them babbling about how Warrior Black is fucking kick ass, and how they love the three singles we have out, they ask me to autograph their t-shirts, posters, and... the two

women want their tits signed with permanent black marker. Yeah, their tits.

It's not surprising, but oh so surreal.

After signing the last signature, exhaustion catches up to me. Dean sees it and so does Ron, because he tells the group to come around three for the fan signing before he nudges me to walk.

As we reach the bus, my four friends pour out and invade my space with hugs and words of relief. Especially Connor, whose eyes are filled with unshed tears.

"I'm fine." I try to ease his worry, but he shakes his head.

"I should have known," he says as he squeezes me so tight, I can hardly breathe.

"It wasn't your fault. If anything, it's mine. So, please don't burden yourself. I'm here, I'm alive, and after a hot shower, I'll be as good as new." I don't say that I'm desperate for some alone time. It would only hurt my best friend's feelings.

"Yeah, you do. You stink like someone shit all over you," Connor chuckles as he urges me onto the bus and toward the back bedroom. "Go and I'll keep these assholes busy."

"Who you calling an asshole, fuck-nucket," Raef chides.

"Yeah. Don't you have to go spanky-your-wanky or something?" Bobby chuffs.

Giving my friends one more look over my shoulder, I close myself off in the bedroom and lean against the door for a long moment. Exhaustion is winning out, but before I fall asleep, I shower, and dress in my yoga pants, and one of Tobias's t-shirts that I stole while we were at the lake house.

I glance in the mirror and wince at the growing bruises along my jaw and swollen lip. I seriously look like shit, but nothing a good cover up will hide the colors on my skin. At a distance, no one in the crowd would see the discoloration.

As for my lips, I won't be able to hide the puffiness. *Oh, well.* I thought as I gently glide the velvety tip of the raspberry

gloss across my lips and breathe.

Then I climb into bed, aiming to sleep for a few hours, but I can't help thinking about Tobias and what he's going through right now. I miss his warmth. The smile he shows only to me. And the way he growls in frustration when I don't listen to him. I miss everything about my bodyguard. I love him.

I tuck part of my face into his shirt I'm wearing and inhale. "Come back to me," I whisper.

Then Tobias's words flood my brain.

"Because I realize without you in my life, I have nothing. Without you in my space, I have no happiness. And without your love, I'm no one but a fool."

Those words are on repeat in my head until a song begins to form. I bolt up from the bed, grab my guitar and my song book, and start writing down the lyrics.

After an hour, I lean back against the headboard and stare down at the pages, a smile gracing my face. This song is a love ballad, which Warrior Black usually doesn't sing. But tracing over the words—no, my vow to my man, I know this song will see its debut on stage tonight... for Tobias.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

TOBIAS

Although I'm exhausted and hungry as I step out of the sheriff's office in Lovelock, my mind is centered on one thing—or should I say, one person. Danny.

I hope he's okay. I made a promise that I'd be there before he gets on that stage, but knowing the time, I won't make it beforehand.

"Here," Dean calls out, throwing a clean shirt and my security lanyard at me. "Get in."

I jump into the SUV and my boss takes off. "How's Danny?" I ask, as I slide the clean shirt on and then buckle my seatbelt.

"He's holding his own."

I grunt, not sure what to say.

"Mark called. He says everything is cleared up, especially with all the evidence we had put together. I don't know if the sheriff told you, but SFPD found further damning evidence in Laney's apartment. Photographs of Danny and the band, but mainly him. You and Danny at your granddad's lake house."

I swivel my head toward Dean. "Are you fucking kidding me?" That news has my mind spinning. "All those times, when I thought we were being watched..." I grind my teeth.

"It's over. But there's one other thing."

“What?”

“Laney isn’t her real name. It’s Macy Clark. And she has a record a mile long of misdemeanors, like break ins, harassments, a few assaults, and resisting arrest.”

“Jail time?”

“In twenty fifteen. She was supposed to serve two years but she was let out six months later for good behavior. And a year and a half for assaulting an officer back in twenty seventeen, when she remained inside for the entirety of her sentence.”

“Any connection to Siles?”

“No. Not yet. But we will find it,” Dean says with absolute assurance. “But you don’t worry about that. Leave that up to John. You focus on Danny.”

I glance at my boss, and nod. “I will.”

It’s nearing five forty-five p.m., and we still have over an hour’s drive before we make it to Black Rock. As soon as we get off of I-80, and onto NV-447 North, Dean has the accelerator nearly down to the floor.

He books it past the gates, until we can’t go any farther. I jump out, and haul ass to the stage. The entire time, my ears are trained on Danny’s voice. As I reach the entrance to the back and side stages, Warrior Black finishes a song.

I climb up the steps, hitting the main stage, and I lock eyes with Danny, who’s standing there frozen, watching me. A huge smile slowly appears on his beautiful face. He then turns and says something to Raef, who then slides a stool over to Danny and hands him his Gibson.

Danny takes the guitar, sits on the stool, and adjusts the mike to his level. “I was hoping to end our time with a song you all know and fucking love,” he shouts, and the crowd goes wild. He raises a hand to quiet the fans and they comply. “But I want to share with you exclusively a song I wrote earlier today.”

He then looks over to me with so much love that my heart feels like it's going to burst.

“Through our journey coming here, I fell in love.” The screams and shrill whistles of the audience is nearly ear-piercing, and once again Danny raises his hands. “So since we're both here, I want to sing this song for him, and for all of you. *Here's 'Without You'.*”

A quiet rush runs over the fans as Danny begins playing on the guitar.

As Danny's sweet melodic voice croons the lyrics, I recognize my own words out of his mouth. My heart erupts with so much love for the singer sitting center stage. It takes all my restraint to keep from running onto the stage and taking Danny into my arms.

Without you, I have nothing.

Life's adrift in an empty heart,

Without you, anchoring me in passion.

There's no purpose in me to love.

Without you in my space,

I have no happiness or reason.

And without your love,

I'm no one but a fool, without you.

As he continues on with the chorus, and the boys—one after the other, join Danny, the audience responds with camera phone lights, lighters, and glow wands. By the end of the song, the roar of the fans is deafening.

With bows and a goodbye, Danny runs off stage and right into my welcoming arms.

“I love you,” he says against my lips.

“I love you right back.” I kiss his mouth and pull back slightly. “Raspberry.” And then I carry him off the stage, as the fans scream for an encore.

EPILOGUE

SEVEN MONTHS LATER

DANNY

As I step out onto the deck and stretch my body, I inhale the fresh spring air. Pine, earth, and water fill my soul and clear my senses as I take another deep breath. The crispness of the morning and the good fucking Tobias gave me not thirty minutes ago is like a reset for my mind and body.

Right after Rocktoberfest, Tobias did quit Harper Security, but promised Dean that he'd think about coming back after Warrior Black's tour. Since he's the new head of security for our band, I doubt Tobias would go back.

After coming off a wildly successful six-month tour, Tobias and I needed this month of vacation before I meet up with the band and start putting together another set of songs for our next album.

“*Without You*” will definitely be on the album. It ran up the charts and stayed at number one for the duration of our tour. I knew that ballad would be a hit.

A soft yip and the clicking of nails on the decking signals Saint's arrival. The dog sits by my feet and waits. I glance down at the tongue-lolling, tail-wagging dog.

“Good morning, boy.” I rub his head. He then takes off toward the woods to relieve himself or chase that pesky squirrel. But he always comes back later, after he tires of the chase.

“What did I tell you about coming out here alone?” Tobias growls in my ear. He wraps both arms around me and kisses my neck.

I angle my head a little, then reach back to wrap one arm around his neck and lean into his warmth. “I told you, I’m a big boy. I can take care of myself.”

“I know,” he chuckles and resumes nibbling my neck. “I missed you in our bed.”

“How can you miss me? I’m right here,” I say, turning my face to his.

He leans in and devours my mouth. As I deepen the kiss, Tobias’s phone goes off.

“All the damn time,” I mutter against his mouth. “Might as well answer it. You know it’s Dean or John.”

I pull out of his arms so he can grab his cell from his pocket. To give Tobias some privacy, I walk to the railing and lean against it. I focus on the water and the tiny ripples lapping upon the shoreline, as he talks to whoever it is on the line.

“Yeah?” Pause. “Really?” Pause. “Okay.” Pause. “Bye, Dean.”

I twirl around before Tobias is back on me. “So that was Dean.”

“Yep.”

“Well?”

“Well what?”

I huff and push at him. “Stop playing games. Tell me what was so important that he’d call us on your vacation.”

His arms tighten around me and he places a soft kiss on my lips. Hmm. I love when he’s gentle. But I also love when he’s rough with me.

I narrow my eyes in agitation.

He laughs and says, “Dean was giving me the updates about Barrett.”

“And?”

“Baby, you don’t have to worry about him anymore. He is going to jail.” Tobias runs his fingers through my hair. “Don’t ever cut your hair.”

I snuggle closer to him. “Good,” I say, as peace finally settles over me. I don’t have to deal with Siles Barrett anymore.

“There’s one more thing.” He loses his smile.

I tense at his reaction. “What?”

“It was confirmed by an ex-manager of The Independence, that Siles paid him off to erase the surveillance footage the day of your attack. But out of conscience, the man confessed the truth, once he saw the news about what Laney did and Siles’s assault case.”

“Tobias?” I say, wrapping my arms around his neck.

“What, baby?”

“I don’t want to talk about Laney or Siles anymore. It’s done,” I confess and lean my head against his shoulder. Granted, in small regards to them, if it weren’t for them, I wouldn’t have met Tobias.

“I know, baby. And I know how to keep from talking about them.” He waggles his brows and quickly cradles me. I let out a yowl, but that doesn’t deter Tobias, my bodyguard and the love of my life, from carrying me inside to our bed and showing me how much he loves me.

In many, many ways.

A LETTER FROM CJ

Hello Reader,

Thank you so much for reading Killer Notes: Warrior Black debut in The Road to Rocktoberfest world.

I hope you enjoyed the journey of Danny and Tobias's love story. I was truly excited to write these characters, and bringing out so many wonderful personalities in this book.

Will there be more in books with Warrior Black's band members? Maybe. To find out more, join my group on facebook and subscribe to my newsletter.

And speaking of love, please leave a review on all platforms. I would truly appreciate it.

It was a dream writing in TL Travis's world. If you haven't already, check out all the stories in The Road to Rocktoberfest.

[The Road to Rocktoberfest 2023 series](#)

Smooches,

CJ

ABOUT CJ BARLOWE

CJ Barlowe is the alter ego of CJ Warrant.

She is a coffeeholic, loves reading, audiobooks, and writing mm romance. With the belief that everyone deserves happiness and love, CJ hopes her stories will inspire, help create and spread love.

If you want to know more about CJ Barlowe and her books, check out :
<https://www.cjbarloweauthor.com>

