







# The Masks We Wear

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**Category:** Romance

**Description:** BRODY

Okay, so I made a few mistakes. Well, eight separate mistakes if we're counting all the charges the state is holding against me. I'm not worried though. Our manager, Selene, can fix it all with her killer legal team.

That's what I thought at least, before Selene informed me that she'd be putting a stop to my rockstar lifestyle. You see, in light of my recent legal troubles, Selene has issued a zero alcohol and drug policy for me and plans to hold me accountable by having a live-in babysitter move into my home and watch me all day and night. He thinks he can tame me, Brody Drake, singer and drummer for Satan's Angels, by keeping me locked up in my own home. He thinks he'll have me bending to his will but I know I'm going to make it impossible for him at every opportunity I get.

They call me Sticks and I do whatever I want, whenever I want, and I don't take orders from anyone. Especially not live-in babysitters who think they're gonna fix me up and get me clean and sober. Harvey Taylor thinks he has me under his control but I'm about to throw his entire world off its axis and smile while I do it.

HARVEY

I'm a man of order and routine. I start my day early and finish it after all my work is done, taking no days off. After dedicating years to the military and selling my private security company, I've opted for a simpler career set around taming out of control celebrities, that allows me to spend more time with my younger sister.

When Selene Stone found me and offered me a three month contract to get Brody Drake under my control, I quickly signed the dotted line. I know I'll have the little rockstar bending to my will in no time, clean and sober.

What I wasn't expecting was for her to challenge me at every opportunity, to snap at me with her smart mouth and quick wit. It's become a game we play, always on opposite sides and I refuse to lose. She thinks she's gonna have me packing my bags in days, little does she know I'm not going anywhere.

Brody Drake is my opposite in every way possible but I won't let her smart mouth stop me from doing my job and when our three months are up, I'll be heading home to Nevada, all thoughts of her and Satan's Angels left behind.

The Masks We Wear is a stand alone Dual POV, rockstar romance, set in the world of Satan's Angels, a band of three out of control

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:16 am*

## Prologue

### Brody

I learned how to play the drums in high school marching band. Pathetic, I know. Back then I still had braces, still wore glasses, and was unquestionably a virgin. I thought I was a pretty shitty drummer but apparently, I was pretty good. I mean, they call me “Sticks” for a reason so, I must be good at hitting shit with two wooden sticks, right? Right.

My best friend since the sixth grade, Selene Stone, encouraged me to continue playing even when I wanted to quit because I was so sure I sounded horrible. Selene is wicked smart and boringly rational. She knew she wanted to be a lawyer from the ripe age of seven. In elementary through high school, Selene was almost my unofficial lawyer. The girl had to break into my locker and destroy evidence a few times when I was in the principal’s office for my usual trouble of the week. She also instructed me on what I shouldn’t say when being questioned by both the principal and that one minor run in with the cops. That carried over into adulthood, but before we get there, there’s a few more things you should know.

I ditched the braces and the glasses and opted to let my golden strands get some attention. I also learned how to do makeup and dress myself better. By my eighteenth birthday, Selene was the one trying to get me to quit the drums and go to college, but fuck that. I love the sound of the sticks hitting the instrument.

I met Aria Kane at Mickey’s, a music store on the Sunset Strip. Oh yeah, totally forgot to mention we live in LA. Key plot information, so keep that in mind.

Anyways, I met Aria who was stealing a Gibson electric guitar by entering with an empty case and leaving with it full. The store's staff didn't catch her, but I sure did. I followed her out, unsure of what I was going to say or do. I totally didn't give a shit that she stole and if I'm being honest, I thought it was pretty badass. So badass, that I desperately wanted to be her friend and I didn't even know who she was or even her name. I approached her, and after an awkward conversation -in which I reassured her multiple times that I wouldn't snitch- we exchanged numbers and became best friends soon after. When we hung out, Aria played the stolen guitar, and I played the drums. We actually sounded pretty good together, but it was just for shits and giggles. Until it wasn't. Pretty soon, Aria was raising the question of starting a band. I didn't like the idea of being in a real band. I was a marching band drummer for Christ's sake. I shut down the band idea. Until Ivory Aslan came around.

Ivory Aslan had moved to West Hollywood from New York. We met her at a bar on the strip. I at the time required the usage of a fake ID, but Aria, who is two years older than me, was of legal age. We went to the dive bar, surprised to find that it was an open mic night. We heard a bass guitar playing and both turned to watch, completely mesmerized by the sound. On the stage, in pink cowboy boots and a white glittery mini dress, stood Ivory Aslan, with a hot pink glittery Squier guitar. The girl sang like shit but her guitar playing was insane. She really knew what she was doing. After her performance, we found our way over to her and started chatting, only to find that Ivory's father had recently passed and left her a guitar and a broken dream of his own. Her sudden move to West Hollywood was due to her father's death and she moved here with her brother and widowed mother. Ivory is a few months younger than I am and so we bonded over alcohol and maybe a little bit of marijuana usage. A few days later, Aria and I invited Ivory to a hang out. She brought her guitar and we got to playing.

Aria and I thought we sounded good before, but with Ivory playing the bass along with Aria, and the sound coming from my drums, we had created a sound that nobody had ever heard before. We took rock and metal to a whole new level, and it gave us

chills. We were unique and if we truly wanted to start a band, there was no doubt in any of our minds that we would be successful. We just needed a singer.

Turns out, in addition to playing the drums and piano, I can actually sing. Now we had two guitar players, a drummer and singer combined, and no name for ourselves. We needed a name and fast. That was how Satan's Angels were born.

Now, remember when I said Selene had always cleaned up my messes? Well, Selene was now not only cleaning up my messes, but the messes of Aria and Ivory. The three had all gotten along amazingly and we had our own little friend group. Selene wanted no part in being in the band, but soon enough, she found herself managing us.

We started at a local bar. We had one little show with four songs Ivory and Aria had written. I myself have never been good at using words so I left the songwriting to the people that actually knew what they were doing. People apparently enjoyed our songs that night, which led to us being able to perform at another bar and then another bigger bar and well...shit. The gigs just kept getting bigger and bigger after that. Eventually we found ourselves performing at The Novo and the Honda Center. Satan's Angels only grew from there and we had Selene and her sick manager skills to thank for that.

All of that was two years ago and now, we're on our first tour as a rock band of girls. Do you know what it's like to be on tour as a rock band of girls? I'm gonna take a lucky guess and go with no.

Let me tell you what a day in my life looks like on tour. Here, I'll even write it out.

## DAILY TOUR SCHEDULE BY STICKS

5 p.m.- Wake up to Selene banging on my hotel room door and demanding I get up for the show. Remember absolutely nothing from the night before.

7:30 p.m.- Hang out backstage, and come back to life. Snort copious lines of cocaine and wash that down with some Jack Daniels. Ask Ivory if she drank my whiskey. Why is the bottle empty? Oh shit, I did drink it.

9:30 p.m.- Showtime, baby!

11 p.m.- Finish the show. Time to party, motherfuckers! Get on tour bus and drink more, trash the fuck out of the bus, smoke, snort, swallow, WOAHH! HAHAHA....Aria did that earlier. WHAT!? Who said that?

4 a.m.- Make it to the next location. Are we in Michigan? Not sure. Party at the nearest strip club, make sure to tip the strippers good! Find a guy to take back to the hotel for some late night activities. (SEX!)

6 a.m.- Kick out the guy from the stripclub, we don't do sleepovers. Redecorate the hotel room by smashing the TV and tearing the furniture apart. Make a bed for the chicken I stole from a tractor supply store down the street. (Her name is Gloria and she's beautiful.)

6:30 a.m.- Wake up Selene with my redecorating. Selene yells at me to go to bed and I try to escape and find Aria and Ivory to party. Selene handcuffs me to my own bed so I can't leave.

6:45 a.m.- Knocked out.

5 p.m.the next day - Same as yesterday, Wake up to Selene banging on my hotel room door and demanding I get up for the show. Remember absolutely nothing from the night before. Where the fuck did that chicken come from? And who smashed the TV?

Think you can handle all that? Doubtful. See, our little group works in a very specific

way. Ivory, Aria, and I fuck shit up, Selene takes care of it, and we continue fucking up in the future. And it's every single day! It's totally awesome! We're the bad girls of Los Angeles and everyone either wishes they could be us or wishes they could party with us.

Imagine living this life for three months in a row on tour! It's a party every day and we love it! Absolutely nothing can ruin this for us. Not one single thing.

## Chapter 1

### Brody

“Aggravated assault, possession of drugs, public indecency, damage and destruction of property, vandalism, indecent exposure, disturbing the peace, and my personal favorite, driving while under the influence of drugs and alcohol!” Selene reads our offenses off a piece of legal paper, her tone enraged. She slams the piece of paper down on her desk, her palm slapping against the mahogany wood. Her cheeks and ears flare an angry red color as she stares each of us in the eye. Her shoulder length, curly black hair is swept into a neat bun at the nape of her neck, her pale skin flushed with rage. Her thick, black eyebrows are creased, and her chocolate eyes are wide and angry. She wears a charcoal gray pants suit that screams “I mean business,” and leaves it unbuttoned to reveal a white dress shirt tucked into her pants and a pearl necklace around her neck with matching pearl earrings. “Do you not realize what a shit storm this is? You guys are looking at potential jail time!” She reprimands.

I sit between Ivory and Aria, turning my head to my left to meet Ivory's amber colored eyes. She gives me a wide-eyed look of discomfort, but when she realizes that there is not one ounce of worry on my face, her shoulders relax. Why is Selene shocked anyway? We're fucking rockstars. Did she expect us to stay home and knit sweaters all day and night?



Ivory's waist-length coffee-colored hair is curled slightly, especially on the ends where her hair fades into a fiery pink ombre. The pink starts around her shoulders and ends at her waist. It's pretty cool. She wears a denim jacket and matching jeans, a pastel pink cropped top underneath.

## Page 2

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We call Ivory, “Satan’s Baby.” We call her that because she may be one of Satan’s Angels, but she is also his right-hand. Don’t let her obsession with the color pink fool you, the girl’s heart is black and I love it! Satan’s Baby quickly became a stage name and now it’s her Instagram username. Everyone knows Ivory Aslan as Satan’s Baby.

“Are you listening to me? Hello? Brody!” Selene snaps, losing her patience.

I focus my attention back on her. “What?”

Selene grunts. “Did you not hear a word I said?”

I cross my arms over my chest. “I heard you.”

She raises a brow, “And what do you have to say about it?”

I glance back at Ivory and then to my right at Aria, who’s watching to see what I’m going to say. She wears a baby blue leather jacket and a cropped white tank underneath. She wears matching leather pants and has her thick black sunglasses pushed onto the crown of her head, sweeping amber strands of hair away from her face. I notice that Aria has a few strands of baby blue poking out of her mid-length hair and I love the way it looks. Aria occasionally will throw the strands in to spice things up and she prefers to keep everyone on their toes. Her eyes are a similar shade to Ivory’s but a little lighter and more caramel colored.

Everyone knows Aria as R6. We called her R as a nickname and she demanded we add the six since there are six strings on her guitar. We obliged and the nickname got popular.

I turn back to Selene and shrug, “I plead the fifth.” I keep my tone serious and unconcerned, hoping it will lighten the mood. Aria and Ivory snort laughs and cough to cover them up.

Selene growls, “This is not funny, Moron! Do you have anything to say for yourselves?”

I look around Selene’s office, taking in the colorless walls and furniture. She likes to keep things minimal, and I respect it, though if this were my office, there’d probably be a Satan’s Angels poster on the wall in big, angry red letters. Almost as red as Selene’s face is right now because I still haven’t given her a response. Shit, come up with something, Brody! “I can explain.” I give her the most generic sentence anyone could ever come up with. Aria chuckles and Ivory covers her mouth with her hand to hide her smile.

Selene rights her posture, crossing her arms over her chest and tapping her heeled foot on the floor. “Please, I’d love to hear what you have to say.” She says sarcastically.

I uncross my arms and place my hands neatly on my black, ripped jean clad thighs, feigning innocence. The cropped wife-beater style top I have on definitely isn’t making me look innocent. Nor are the layered chain necklaces around my neck and all eight of my mini hoop earrings. I quickly push a strand of my sunshine-colored hair behind my shoulder, the black strands catching my eye for a split second. I’m a natural blond, but I dyed a bunch of strands black and often put chains in my hair to decorate it. “The aggravated assault accusation is crazy! That fan was rabid and kept touching Ivory while she was on stage. She told him to stop and he didn’t listen. Therefore, he deserved to get smacked across the face with her guitar and he deserved it when she leapt off the stage and beat his ass, and when we jumped off the stage to help.

“It totally isn’t my fault that Aria dared me to streak in the hotel. She dared me and I don’t turn down dares. Therefore, we are both innocent. Also, it’s totally not my fault that that old lady was offended by my nudity. Old people are supposed to be asleep at that time anyway. So, if it’s anyone’s fault, it’s hers! I look hot naked! Calling that public indecency is just bullshit.” I continue. Selene does not look pleased with my explanation.

I sit up straighter in my seat, hoping the good posture makes me look confident as I add, “We can’t control what we do when we drink! Totally not our fault the hotel rooms were trashed and that the hotels are suing us. Calling that property damage is extreme.” I defend.

Selene nods, “Right, so was it property damage when you stopped your car in the middle of oncoming traffic to destroy a paparazzi’s car with a crowbar? Just want to be sure because he’s suing you for destroying his property. A shattered windshield, shattered windows, and ripped off, side view mirrors. Oh! And slashed tires, how could I forget?” She continues in her sarcastic tone.

Ivory comes to my defense, “That pap was harassing her! He was getting in her face and was following her home.”

Selene looks at me, “And why exactly do you have a crowbar in your car?”

I shrug, “I plead the fifth.”

Aria snorts and I fight the smile from forming on my lips. “I consider that to be self-defense. That man harassed me. You know what? Sue him. If he wants to sue me for ‘destruction of property,’ I’ll sue his ass right back for harassment.”

Selene gives me an irritated look, “You think any court is going to listen to you after what you did to his car? You would’ve beaten him with the crowbar if the cops

hadn't arrested you! And you owe me for that bail, by the way." She adds that last part in solely for the principal because we pay Selene an insane amount of money to manage us. That's why she's put up with us for so long. "Oh, and while we're on the topic of destruction, anything to say about your vandalism? Hm?"

Aria speaks up this time, stretching her long legs in the process. Selene's chairs are uncomfortable as hell. "We didn't put those condoms all over that guy's car and we certainly didn't spray paint it and put raw hot dogs on it."

Selene takes a deep breath before speaking, "Are you idiots forgetting that you spray painted Satan's Angel on the car? And that you took a selfie with the car after you vandalized it and posted it on social media?"

Okay, she may have gotten us there. "Again, totally not our fault. We were drunk." I defend, holding my hands up in surrender.

"Oh, so let me guess, you were also drunk and not at fault when you committed indecent exposure?" Selene asks, again with the sarcastic tone.

Ivory gives her a confused look, "Remind me exactly what we're being accused of."

Aria answers for Selene, incriminating us without even realizing it, "She's talking about that hotel we were at on tour. The one with the glass elevator and all those old people in the lobby. Remember we put our ass cheeks against the glass to fuck with them?"

Ivory remembers, laughing, "Oh yeah! That was dope!"

Selene fakes a laugh, "Yes, so dope guys. It was also dope when you were disturbing the peace with loud noises, screaming, fighting, and unruly behavior."

I speak up, “See? Totally not on us. All of those were misunderstandings.”

## Page 3

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“Driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol was a misunderstanding?” Selene asks doubtfully, a frown on her face.

Aria opens her mouth, but nothing comes out. Ivory speaks for me, “That was totally a misunderstanding.”

“How was that a misunderstanding exactly?” Selene cocks her head at Ivory.

Ivory whispers to me, “I’ve got nothing.”

I clear my throat, “It was simply a misunderstanding because we didn’t know the legal blood alcohol concentration for the state.”

Selene shakes her head, “You guys really have an excuse for everything, don’t you?”

“Yes we do.” Aria says proudly.

Selene asks, “Anything else to say?”

We all sit in silence for a moment, and I wonder if there is anything we haven’t covered. “Oh yes, one more thing. All of that, totally not our fault, and as for the possession of drugs...that we did do. But that’s really the only one, I swear!”

“You’re all filthy liars! All of you! I have lawyers working around the clock on this trying to do damage control and keep you three out of jail. Because if you go to jail, you’re also getting sued by your record label, because you signed a contract to have a new album out this year.” Selene explains the severity of our situation, and I’ll admit,

I do feel a little bad. But only a little, because that tour was fun. So much fun.

Ivory sighs, "Sorry, Selene."

"Sorry doesn't fix this disaster! I have the court on my back, prosecutors, and angry soccer moms that want the courts to make an example out of you three." Selene says frantically.

Aria frowns, "We're sorry. It won't happen again." Total lie. Absolute lie.

Selene doesn't look like she believes that for one second. "You bet your ass it won't because you three are gonna start getting your acts together. Starting with you, Miss Ringleader." Selene says to me, singling me out from the other two.

I point to my own chest innocently, "Me?"

She nods, "Yes, you. I know how you three work and the root of every problem is you." She says sternly. "And do you want to know what's going to happen to you if you want to avoid jail?"

"What?" I ask curiously.

She raises her chin at me, "You are going to get sober."

Ivory, Aria, and I all gasp in unison. "Selene! You can't ask me to do that! I'm a rockstar for crying out loud!" I beg.

She holds up her hand, not wanting to hear another plea from me. "Brody, I can't have this anymore. You're going to get sober. No more drugs and no more alcohol. The legal team thinks that if you three keep your noses clean and act like well mannered, respectful young women now, that you might have a good chance at



getting off clean. Now, I know you two are capable of getting your shit together on your own.” She points at Ivory and Aria. “But you, Brody, are out of control. So out of control, that someone else is going to have to supervise you and make sure you actually keep your nose clean and sober. Therefore, I found a live-in bodyguard who is going to stay with you at your house and also serve as your babysitter since you can’t be trusted.”

This finally gets my attention. I may have been doing my best to keep up the unaffected rockstar persona, but I don’t like the sound of this one bit. Any sign of amusement vanishes from my face and my sun kissed skin pales, “Selene, I don’t need a babysitter. I can get my shit together, I swea-”

She cuts me off, “No, you can’t. He will live with you until you get your shit together and until this legal disaster is taken care of. In the meantime, you are to obey his rules and listen to him. He is here to help you.”

“You can’t make me do that.” I argue.

She shrugs, “But I can. Because if you refuse this, Brody, you’re all on your own. I’ll let the soccer moms and the courts, and the prosecutors go after you with no defense of your own and I’ll stop managing you.”

My eyes go wide with shock. Selene has never made a threat like that before. She’s serious and the severity of our situation is just starting to sink in.

“His name is Harvey Taylor. He’s thirty-two and from Nevada. He’s ex-military and has recently sold his private security company. Now, he coaches people like you on the side and does it well. He’s the best in the business. His things are being brought to your house as we speak.” She announces.

I gasp, “What?”

She nods, “You heard me.”

“Selene, please!” I beg. She can’t do this to me! She can’t!

Selene sighs, growing irritated with me. “I don’t know what else to do with you, Brody. Besides, it’s only for three months. Just long enough for you to clean up your act and keep your nose out of trouble. Hopefully by then we’ll have all these legal problems settled.”

## Page 4

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“Selene!” I panic. “How can you expect us to be rockstars and stay completely sober with zero alcohol?” I demand an answer because there isn’t a probable one.

Selene raises a brow, “I don’t expect you to never drink again. A few drinks is okay, but when you three get any more than that, I usually end up having to bail one of you or all three of you out of jail. I’m not doing it anymore. For the next three months, you are allsober. Got it?”

Ivory leans in a little in her seat, “Just to clarify if I may,” she clears her throat. “By sober, do you mean no drugs either or...”

“No drugs!” Selene slams an angry fist down on the desk.

Aria throws her head back, groaning. “The next three months are going to blow.”

Ivory scoffs. “Apparently they won’t blow because we aren’t allowed to do anylinesof blow!”

I chuckle, unable to contain my sense of humor. That was a good one, I’ll give Ivory that even though our situation is enough to make me want to rip chunks of my hair out. Ivory’s favorite was always cocaine. Mine too. Aria enjoyed it as well, but she preferred more of the party drugs like ecstasy.

Aria slaps my arm to reel my laughter in. I brush it off and quickly cough to stifle the remaining bits of laughter.

“Laugh all you want now, Brody because you won’t be laughing when you go home.

Harvey Taylor will be waiting for you.” Selene threatens.

I roll my eyes. Selene can sign me up for an unwanted bodyguard slash live-in babysitter, but she can't sign me up to actually obey him. I'll have Harvey Taylor running away in tears in hours. This guy has absolutely no idea what he signed up for and a wicked grin curves my lips as plans start forming.

## Chapter 2

### Harvey

I know exactly what I'm getting into. While Selene Stone was having all of the things I'd need for the next three months moved into the seven-million dollar modern home owned by her out of control client, I took the time to figure out just what I was getting myself into. I blindly accepted the offer Selene gave me and not for the money but simply because I love a challenge. When she called, she claimed to have the most difficult, reckless, and animalistic client and I didn't believe her at first. I've worked with hundreds of unruly clients and I've tamed every single one of them and left when my contract was up, leaving desired results, but after watching videos of Brody Drake online...I think I'll definitely have my hands full, though I know I'll have her straightened out in no time. I'll have the little rockstar bending to my will in only a few hours.

I sit in her luxurious kitchen that has modern accents and a stove that looks like it's never been used. When I opened her refrigerator to get myself some water, I was shocked to find it almost empty as well. The only things inside were a few snacks and half drunk bottles of liquor. Does the girl not eat sufficient food? If she bled, would it just be whiskey or actual blood? I shake my head and sigh audibly as I pull out my tablet and start surfing the web.

I've already spent about an hour exploring her home, committing it to memory and

noting objects or hints of who Brody Drake really is. Her home is a mix of neutral colors, but I noticed she has a lot of Japanese decor in her home. She must appreciate the culture because the profile Selene Stone sent me revealed that Brody is completely English. Her patio is decorated in bonsai trees of various shapes and styles and there's a stone waterfall on her spacious lawn. I even noticed a Buddha statue on top of the waterfall.

While exploring, I hesitated outside her bedroom door, not wanting to invade her personal space, but then I reminded myself that it was my job to invade her space so I shrugged it off, entering her bedroom. The room was large, and I first noticed an electric drum set in the corner, the sticks left on the seat as if Brody had used them only moments before. The floors are a dark hard wood and the bed is made of a similar black frame, decorated with white sheets and a few red accent pillows. Above her bed is an LED sign of two koi fish, one of which was illuminated by white lights and the other in red. Her nightstands are bare save for a pair of black drumsticks and a bonsai tree on each stand. She has a black shoji lamp on each nightstand as well and on the right one, which I assume is the one she uses the most, is a small clear baggie with a white powder in it. I confiscated it immediately and also took the liberty of searching her room for more drugs. I found a few pills in her nightstand but nothing else after that. Connecting to her room was her closet and I peeked inside out of pure curiosity. It was massive and one wall was just dedicated to the costumes and outfits she's worn on stage. There are labels above each piece, stating where it was worn and what year it was. Brody must have a sense of nostalgia or sentimentality for her costumes which would suggest that she's not as carefree as she seems.

After walking through her in-home studio, full of different drum sets and recording equipment, I gave up, deciding I'd seen enough. I flushed the drugs down the toilet and also took the liberty of pouring all of her liquor down the drain. I did all of that and here I am now. At the counter with my tablet and Brody Drake's name in the search bar.

The first thing I investigated was her Instagram. The most recent image was from the “Better In Hell” tour that Satan’s Angels just returned from. It’s a picture of Brody seated at her drum set on stage, the fuchsia and cerulean lights highlighting the sharp features of her face and casting her face in colored shadows. She wears little to no clothing, covered in only a black leather lace up top that barely covers her breasts and leaves all of her stomach and torso visible. She wears matching lace up pants and has thick assorted chain necklaces around her neck. Her sunshine-colored hair looks colored because of the lighting but what you notice first upon looking at the image, is Brody with her head tipped back and her tongue darting out of her mouth. With her right hand she pours whiskey straight from the bottle and into her mouth. The caption reads, “What the fuck is up, Oklahoma?! Thanks for having Satan’s Angels. We love you and are so stoked to have wrapped up the Better in Hell tour in one of our favorite states. Until next time, see you in Hell

I continue scrolling down her posts, noting quite a few images of Brody and her bandmates. I think the other two are Aria and White. I click on the tagged people and see Ivory Aslan tagged. I thought it was White but I was close, the colors are the same. I didn’t take the time to research the other two considering my contract is only for Brody Drake. From scrolling on her page, I notice two things right away. The first, is that Brody Drake is obscenely close with her friends. They do everything together. I find an image of a drunk Brody and an equally drunk Ivory on their backs in the middle of the street laughing, most likely taken after leaving a club of some kind. I also find a few images of them partying and a picture of the three of them skinny dipping in a retirement community pool though all their ladyparts are covered by either their hands or photoshopped stars. Aria poses with the “No Trespassing” sign while Ivory flips the camera the bird close by and Brody stands in the pool up to her waist, funneling liquor into her mouth though half of the whiskey has clearly mixed with the pool water.

The second thing I notice is that Brody loves what she does. The girl is obsessed with the drums. There’s a picture of her playing the drums in her underwear along with an

image of her playing at the recording studio with a joint between her lips. There's even a video of her playing and I'll be honest, she's pretty good. She obviously knows what she's doing.

I close Instagram and open the web. I search her name and find links to videos. I click the first one I find without reading the title and find a video taken from inside of a hotel. Whoever holds the phone isn't holding it very steady and they're giggling and wheezing. Aria appears, running down the hall, wearing a cropped tank top and her...underwear. She giggles and whisper yells "Come on, they're coming!" To whom I assume must be either Brody or Ivory. The person holding the phone runs behind Aria, the camera shaking the entire time. Aria then grabs her arm and drags her into an open hotel room. Yelling sounds from somewhere close by and it sounds like two masculine voices are yelling, "Stop!" The girls make no move to close the hotel room door and I watch as Brody Drake sprints down the hall, completely naked, away from two chubby police officers who are trying to catch her. Her hand and arm wrap around her breasts to conceal them, and she uses her other hand to cover her front. She's hysterically laughing as she disappears down the hallway, the police officers still chasing her.

I exit that video and find another one. In this one, Brody is talking directly to the camera, "Watch this." She commands as she takes a long drag of a joint and exhales smoke rings. Next, she presses a finger over one nostril and inhales the smokering with the other nostril. I shake my head as I move onto the next. In this video, Brody is pounding on the drums at the most recent tour. I'm about to skip the video but something stops me. I watch her intently. She seems to be in her own little world when she's hitting the drums. Her wild blond hair flows around her shoulders as she sings the lyrics to the song, throwing her head back. Black streaks of her hair stick to her chest and face from either sweat or liquor of some kind and she looks almost joyful.

I find a short video of Brody making faces at the camera while she twirls drumsticks

between her fingers and another video of her and Ivory dancing on a bar in New York. In the video, a drunk man grabs her ankle and tries to pull her towards him, but she kicks him straight in the teeth. Ivory bends down, slamming the man's head on the bar, a tooth flying out of his mouth. Aria, who was apparently behind the bar the entire time, leaps on top of the bar to join the fray and grabs the man by the hair, turning his face towards the ceiling with his head against the bar. Ivory, Brody, and Aria all lean over him with wicked grins as Aria begins force feeding him vodka.

The last video I watch is of the paparazzi hounding Brody while she walks to her car. She's on the sidewalk, having just left someplace and she wears loose fitted ripped jeans and a cropped white wife-beater style top that reveals the lower portions of her breasts. Her toned stomach is on display and her black and blond hair is pulled into a messy half-up half-down style bun on the back of her head, loose tendrils framing her face. A pap gets in her face, and she clenches her jaw, doing her best to ignore him. Once she gets in her car, he bangs on her window and she starts the Bugatti, peeling out of her spot and away from the pap. He rushes to his car to follow her, and I frown. The paparazzi are invasive and don't have respect for anyone. They forget that these celebrities they harass are people too. I don't blame half of them for being rude to the paps. They suck. That small shred of sympathy for Brody is erased when the pap pulls up behind her at a red light after following her for ten minutes. Brody stops her car in the middle of traffic, puts it in park and kicks her door open, stepping onto the pavement with a crowbar in her hand. She charges over to the pap's car, raising the crowbar and bashing his windshield. She swings the crowbar back and into the side view mirror that goes flying off and into the street. She takes a step closer to his window and uses the crowbar to make a hole in the window. From there, she punches through the glass and grabs the man by the collar of his t-shirt. She brings his face closer to hers and screams at him, calling him all sorts of names.

Deciding I've seen enough, I shut off my tablet and rub the crease that formed between my eyes from the videos and the pictures. What goes through this girl's mind that she thinks it's okay to act the way she does? Does anything go through her



mind at all? I doubt it does. These musicians are a dime a dozen. They're filthy rich and instead of using their money for something useful, they spend it on drugs and alcohol, acting stupid in the process and giving people like Selene Stone dozens of messes to clean up.

Brody Drake has another thing coming if she thinks any of that is going to stand from this point on. This little rockstar is getting her shit together and the first thing I'm going to do is ensure that there aren't any crowbars or weapons of any kind in her vehicles.

### Chapter 3

Brody

After the less than successful meeting with Selene, I went back to Ivory's house with her to avoid my new live-in nanny. Call me a coward, but I wasn't yet ready to face him. I'm still fuming over the idea of having a babysitter and I'm still planning on having him quit in a few days, but I haven't yet worked out the plan in my mind.

Ivory offered to let me stay the night at her house, but I declined. I'll have to meet the nanny sooner or later and I'd prefer to just get it over with so I sucked it up and drove my sleek Lamborghini home. I entered through the garage, anxiousness swimming through me with every step the closer I get to the door. I have no idea what I'm about to walk into. I slowly open the door and step inside, quietly walking through my own home on the lightest of feet. The house is dark as if nobody is here. Maybe he isn't here? My shoulders drop and the tension leaves my body at the idea. My steps pick up and I decide to down half the bottle of whiskey in the refrigerator before he gets back.

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I open the stainless-steel door and immediately jerk back and furrow my brows when I'm faced with a completely empty refrigerator save for a few snacks I never finished. Where the fuck did all my whiskey go?

Almost as if to answer my question, a light flicks on from behind me, lighting up the whole kitchen. "If you're looking for alcohol, don't. I already got rid of every drop you had." A deep and husky voice asserts from behind me.

I turn immediately and stop breathing when I realize the babysitter I was trying to avoid is standing right across the kitchen. He has his hands in his dress pants pockets and his white button-down shirt is wrinkle free and unbuttoned at the top. I didn't expect my babysitter to look so...hot. He's about six-foot-three and is clearly made of solid muscle most likely from going to the gym religiously. He has dark stubble around his strong jaw and his lips are frowning at me. I take in his eyes which are so dark they almost look black. His hair is styled neatly, not too long but long enough that I could run my fingers through it if I wanted to-Oh my God?! I scold myself. Do not get attracted to the babysitter, he is an enemy! A very hot enemy but still an enemy. I feel my cheeks redden and my blood boils in response. How dare he come into my home and make me blush? This is my house; I make the rules and he'll learn that. "You must be the babysitter." I frown, crossing my arms over my chest. From where I'm standing, I don't have to look up at him to speak to him and I'm grateful for that because the last thing I want is for him to see me as inferior. This is my circus, God dammit!

His furrowed brows don't move, "Harvey Taylor." He introduces himself, but it doesn't come across friendly in the slightest.

I raise a brow of my own, mocking his expression. “Didn’t ask and don’t care. You’ll have your bags packed by tomorrow so no need for me to learn your name if you won’t be sticking around.” I cock my head at him in a challenge.

He snorts an arrogant laugh, “I’ll overlook your naivety and assume you’ve never heard of me. I have a stellar reputation for working with and fixing people such as yourself, people who are out of control and need to be reigned in. Hence why Selene Stone contacted me.” His smile falls, “So you can call me ‘the babysitter’ if you want but get comfortable calling mesomethingbecause I’m not going anywhere.”

My eye twitches in irritation. I straighten my posture, displaying confidence and lacing as much intimidation into my tone as I can for a man of his size and stature, “I don’t really give a shit about your ‘stellar reputation,’ nor do I give a fuck about your qualifications and experience. None of it matters because like I said, you won’t be around much longer.”

He raises an amused brow. “I’ll have you on a leash in a week, just watch. By the end of our three months, I’ll have done what Selene hired me to do and you’ll be a good little rockstar. You’ll be sober and clean, and you’ll do what you’re told. Then, I’ll move on to my next deranged client.”

I clench my jaw in anger. Nobody, and I mean, nobody tells me what to do. I walk around the island and slowly saunter over to where he stands, stopping only two feet away and looking up at him with pure, undiluted rage in my eyes, “Since you wanted to share your credentials, let me share mine.” I take a step closer to him and he looks down at me with amusement on his features. I desperately want to punch it off, but Selene would scream my ear off if I got into another lawsuit she had to settle on my behalf. “My name is Brody Drake and I do whatever the fuck I want, whenever the fuck I want to. I don’t take orders from anyone, hence why I’m a rockstar. I’m my own boss and I don’t give a shit what Selene or anyone else has to say about it. You can convince yourself all you want that I’m gonna bend to your will but just know

you have another thing coming.” I declare before stepping around him and walking down the hall and up the stairs. I plan on staying in my room for the rest of the night and possibly dipping into the little baggie of blow I have left. Selene can think all she wants that I’m going to be sober, and Harvey can convince himself that he’s gonna keep me in line, but they’re both wrong. There is no Sticks without drugs and alcohol, it’s literally my brand. Who am I not to give the people what they want? They want Sticks and I’ll give them Sticks.

Just as I turn the knob to enter my bedroom Harvey calls from downstairs, “Oh, and don’t bother looking for the cocaine you had on your nightstand or the Xanax that was in your drawer because I took that too. Tomorrow, when you decide to stop acting like a moody teenager, we can go over the new rules you’ll have to abide by, but until then, go to bed.”

I freeze. There’s absolutely no way he just said that to me. He has to be lying. I shove the door open and immediately rush over to the nightstand to find the cocaine really missing. My eyes widen in a panicked frenzy. I rifle through all of my drawers, searching for the pills but I find nothing. He really did take them all.

My chest tightens as reality sinks in, and I realize I have absolutely no drugs or alcohol at my disposal. I realize what this means for me. Everyone expects me to be a drug using rockstar who knows how to party and get into trouble. My fans count on me to be that person and so do my friends and Selene when it benefits our brand, but now? Nobody gives a fuck about boring Brody Drake. They only care about Sticks and now Harvey Taylor wants to lock Sticks in a little cage and throw away the key. Anxiety creeps in as I realize that this may be the start of the end for Sticks and for Satan’s Angels. That is if he stays around of course.

I wipe my sweaty palms on my jeans and take a deep breath. The solution here is simple though it may take some hard work and effort. All I have to do is make Harvey Taylor tap out and leave and then I can go back to being the person everyone

wants me to be in peace. I smirk to myself as the gears start turning in my head and I think of ways to make Harvey wish he never took this job.

## Chapter 4

### Harvey

I woke up at four a.m. to run. I wake up every morning at exactly four and run five miles before going to the closest gym and finishing my workout. After that I eat breakfast and start my day by six a.m. Having a routine grounds me. I'm not one for change and the mere thought of change makes my stomach twist into knots. Sure, my job requires me to move around a lot, but what I'm actually doing on the job stays the same. The job never changes aside from one client being trickier to tame than the next, though even the strongest of wills all crack eventually. They're all challenges to me and I love to be challenged. That's why I love my job so much.

My routine and my job are the most important things in my life aside from Lucy. She's the only thing in my life that I would move Heaven and Earth for. Anytime I get stressed I think of her and suddenly the stress dissipates. For example, last night when Brody tried to talk down to me like I'm the one with a live-in babysitter, I thought of Lucy and suddenly, I wasn't furious anymore. I don't care about the fact that Lucy is a huge Satan's Angels fan, -something I'm gonna have to put a stop to after doing my homework on these girls- I'm not going easy on the little rockstar. The amount of cocaine I found in her room was enough to tranquilize a woolly mammoth. I shake my head at the thought as I spoon my daily oatmeal into my mouth. I like it plain and flavorless.

I knew it wouldn't be a problem if I left Brody alone from four in the morning to six. She was just on tour and from what Selene told me, the girls went to bed at four to six in the morning anyway and woke up around five in the evening. I scoff at the choice in lifestyle. I guess when you have absolutely zero responsibilities in life and sense of

direction the lifestyle works, though no normal functioning person can live that way. When I'm through with Brody, she'll be going to bed at eight p.m sharp.

After my morning run in the blaring heat of California, I used Brody's home gym that met every fitness need with thousands of dollars' worth of machines that look like they've never been touched. When you have millions and millions of dollars to spend, celebrities like to spend it on gym equipment when everyone knows they get surgeries and procedures to look perfect. I like to think of myself as an exception to that even though I'm not a celebrity. While I'm in the same tax bracket they're in, I actually use my home gym in each of my homes across the country when I'm not under contract with a client.

I rinse the bowl of oatmeal and load it into the dishwasher once I'm finished before making my way upstairs and into one of the guest bedrooms. I chose this one for myself because it's close enough to Brody's that I'll be able to hear noise that comes from the room and check on her quickly. I change into a pair of black slacks and a white button up shirt that I cuff on the elbows. I wear the same outfit every day. My closet consists of dozens of pairs of the same slacks and dozens of the same shirt. Like I said, I'm fond of my routine.

After changing, I head downstairs and pull out my laptop. I have a couple of hours before Brody decides to wake up and until then, I could use the time to go through work emails. I get lost in the dozens of messages and suddenly come to attention when I hear footsteps padding down the stairs. I'm seated at the island in the kitchen, but I can still hear her walking into the room. She enters and when her eyes land on me, she scowls. "Good morning," I greet her, feigning politeness. I know my presence gets under her skin and I can't help but admit that I enjoy it. It makes the challenge all the more challenging.

She ignores me and shows me her back as she starts pressing buttons on the five-star restaurant grade coffee machine. She places a mug below it and continues her effort

and I can't help but take her in. My eyes betray my better judgment and travel down her body. Her sunshine-colored hair is streaked with black all throughout and it's messy as it falls down her back. She wears a pair of scarlet colored silk sleep shorts and a matching tank top. Her arms are bare, and I notice the small tattoo on the back of her left arm, right above her elbow. There are two small angel wings, slightly shaded but they almost seem to shine. I roll my eyes. Of course she would get a tattoo for her band, how pathetic. Tattoos are meaningful and should give insight into someone's personality. Brody has no personality traits aside from the fact that she's in a band. Everything about her is bland and average aside from her income. I don't have any tattoos myself, but if I did, they would be meaningful unlike Brody's.

Almost as if she feels my eyes on her, she turns and looks at me over her shoulder, her scowl never fading or budging. "You know, I'm not really a fan of strange men living with me, let alone staring at me in my own kitchen when I'm trying to make myself coffee." Her voice comes out harsh.

My lips curl into a small smile at the sound. "You have nobody to thank for that but yourself and your behavior."

She turns fully and leans against the countertop, crossing her arms over her chest. "My behavior wasn't a problem until yesterday."

I tilt my head at her cockily, "Your behavior was always a problem, but you just got yourself into God only knows how many lawsuits which resulted in my presence."

She ignores me, at a loss for words, as she turns and grabs her fresh mug of coffee and tries to exit the kitchen. I stop her, "We have a few things to discuss and then you can be dismissed."

Brody practically chokes on her coffee as she turns, brown liquid sloshing dangerously close to the rim of the mug with the force of her movement. "Dismissed?"

I'm sorry, who the fuck do you think you are speaking to me like that? I'm not your child nor will you speak to me like one." She snaps sharply.

Getting under her skin is something I'm so good at and I barely have to try. It's becoming a game to me, one that has the potential to get addictive. I ignore her outburst knowing she'll only get angrier. "There are some rules you'll have to live by during the duration of our time together. In our contracted three months, you will not do drugs, nor will you drink any alcoholic beverages of any kind. The only places you're permitted to go are the recording studio for work along with events Selene has booked for you. If there is another place you would like to be, you can request I accompany you. You are not permitted to go anywhere without me. Until I feel confident in your ability to follow my rules, you're not leaving this house or venturing past the recording studio. We'll see how you do and then if you behave, I'll consider accompanying you to other places."

Her jaw drops. "That isn't reasonable! You can't demand I stay in my house like a hermit!"



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I shrug, “I didn’t. I said you were permitted to go to the studio. If you behave and fall into line, I’ll consider other places.”

“No!” She snaps, practically tossing her coffee mug onto the counter. Liquid spills over the sides and covers the countertop. “Those rules are unreasonable and you have another thing coming if you think I’m abiding by them.”

“Big word. I’m impressed you know it.” I mock her.

She scowls, “Are you calling me stupid?”

I smirk, “Perhaps. It isn’t like I lied.”

She grimaces, her mouth popping open with her shock. A gleam of what looks like hurt crosses her eyes before she quickly forces the anger to take over her expression. “Fuck you and fuck your rules.” She charges out of the kitchen and back up the stairs to her bedroom.

Once she makes it to the top I shout, “Get cozy in your room unless you plan on going to the studio because otherwise, you aren’t going anywhere.” Her door slams in response and my smile widens. Oh, how easy it is to rile her up. I could get used to this game.

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BRODY HASN’T COME DOWN from her room all day. Not to eat or drink anything. I’m sure her stubbornness is to thank for her absence and the thought that I

got so deep under her skin that I ruined her whole day appeals to my pride. My job is to babysit her and make sure she stays sober and clean. She's making that pretty easy by staying in her room. I knew she'd fall in line, but I didn't expect it to happen this quickly. She strikes me as the type to give me difficulty at every step, so her absence seems a little bizarre. Something seems off, she wouldn't make it this easy for me. I leap out of my seat where I'm eating dinner and charge up the stairs to her bedroom. I knock in case she's undressed but there's no response from the other side. "Open the door." I command her but still I hear nothing on the other side. No Brody and no footsteps walking towards the door to open it. She hasn't eaten or drank anything aside from the coffee she didn't finish this morning, too hellbent on being stubborn and hiding in her room away from me. What if she got dehydrated and passed out? My job is to keep her sober and well and I can't do that if she's unconscious and malnourished. Shit. I panic. I shouldn't have let my pride get in the way of checking on her. I bang on the door one more time and there's still no answer.

I make the panicked decision to knock the door down. I raise a leg and kick through it with force once, but repeating once more until the door caves in at the middle and pops off the hinges. I leap into the room and scan the area for an unconscious form, my chest tightening in distress, but the pressure dissipates when my eyes land on Brody, conscious and certainly not malnourished as she sits at the electric drum set in the corner, her headphones over her ears and her mind wrapped up in whatever sound she's creating. The sound must all be in the headphones, flowing the notes she's creating into her ears and canceling out all other sound. That would explain why I couldn't hear anything and why she couldn't hear me either. She hasn't noticed that I destroyed her door or invaded her space. She's too wrapped up in what she's doing with her eyes closed and her expression relaxed and almost...serene.

And here I thought the little rockstar had no personality aside from her band. I guess that's partly true considering playing the drums is her role in the band along with vocals. But it seems she truly enjoys the instrument. The expression she's making is one of peacefulness. No tabloid or Instagram photo has ever showcased Brody

making such an expression and feeling this way. The look on her face intrigues me and I can't quite place why. Perhaps it's because I've only ever seen her scowling or grimacing at me, but it feels like something else. I'll chalk it up to curiosity, not wanting to delve into that further.

I watch her, unable to turn around. My feet are completely planted to the ground. It's silent in the room aside from the sounds of her sticks hitting the pads but it's not loud. I should leave her room and give her privacy. While I'm not a very morally correct man most of the time, it doesn't feel right to watch her. It seems like this is a private moment that I'm violating. It's just impossible not to watch her. She's changed since this morning, wearing a new pair of black lounge shorts and a matching crewneck with silver stars on the front. Her chin is tipped up and her brows furrow as her pace picks up and her rhythm becomes more aggressive. Her brows pull in the middle forming a frown line and the sight is so mesmerizing.

A moment later, she abruptly stops and opens her eyes. They immediately land on me and she jumps in her seat, startled by the sight of me in her room when she thought she was alone. She looks between me and her ruined door and shrieks, "What the fuck did you do to my door?"

I look behind me and glance at the door before shrugging, feigning nonchalance. "You weren't responding to me, so I broke it down. Keep that in mind if you ever try ignoring me again." I threaten, allowing my usual disdain for her to rise back to the surface. The image of her in her own world, completely mesmerizing me as she gets lost in her melody vanishes, replaced by my usual animosity towards her.

She rises to her feet, squeezing her drumsticks in each hand so hard that her knuckles turn white. "I wasn't ignoring you, Asshole! I had my headphones on! They're noise canceling." She roars, baring her teeth.

I glance between the broken door and her before shrugging. "Consider it a warning."

“You just destroyed my door for nothing! I didn’t even do anything!”

I roll my eyes, “You’ll get it fixed.”

She growls, “And until then? I now have no sense of privacy.”

“Your bathroom locks.” I raise a brow.

She tosses her drumsticks at my head, but I dodge both of them with minimal effort. “That’s not the point! The point is that I now have no privacy in my own fucking bedroom.”

Do I feel bad? No. Do I regret what I did? Also no. “It’s my job to ensure your safety in addition to being your babysitter. How was I to know you weren’t unconscious on the floor in here perhaps from drug usage or something else? You weren’t responding, so I made a decision.” That’s a weak argument and even I know it but it’s the truth. It’s also not a valid excuse as to why I was watching her. I don’t think I even know the answer to that.

She rushes towards me and tries her best to shove my chest with two open palms but I don’t stumble or move so much as a muscle. She’s shorter than me and has far less body mass than me. She tries again and grunts when she gets the same result. “How would I have been unconscious from drug usage, when you took all the drugs?” Her voice cracks as she yells her question.

I raise a brow and don’t react to her anger. She doesn’t get to me the way I get to her. “You could’ve been unconscious from dehydration or malnourishment. You haven’t left your room all day and you haven’t eaten or drank anything.”

She recoils, looking over her shoulder at her window. She looks surprised to find that it’s dark out. “I lost track of time.” Her voice calms, coming out as almost a whisper.

“Well, go downstairs and eat. Your chef made dinner that I’m sure is now cold.”

Her anger resurfaces, “You may think you dictate my schedule but you will not tell me when I eat.”

I lean in closer to her and whisper, “That’s where you’re wrong, Little Rockstar. I dictate every aspect of your life, starting with when you wake up to the minute you go to bed. I let you off easy today but I won’t be so generous tomorrow.”

She raises her chin in defiance, “You don’t dictate shit.” She charges past me and tries to shoulder check me on her way but my mass makes her stumble on her feet, causing her to grunt in irritation. I can’t fight the grin that curls my lips at how riled she is. She stops next to the destroyed door and narrows her eyes, “You just started a war. Gear up because I plan on making your job absolutely miserable until you quit.”

She disappears down the hall and once I hear another guest bedroom door shut upstairs, I slide my phone out of my pocket and text Elanor about Brody’s mutilated door. Selene gave me Elanor’s number because apparently, she does all the personal assistant type of things for Brody, Aria, and Ivory. I feel only slightly guilty that Brody’s privacy was breached for nothing, so I’ll fix it by having it fixed tomorrow. I’ll tell the little rockstar that Selene set up the repair. I don’t need her to think that I care because I most certainly don’t, especially after she just declared war between us, one I fully intend on winning.

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### Chapter 5

#### Brody

I fell asleep in one of the guest bedrooms and woke up to the sound of drilling and hammering. I leap out of bed, startled. What could that asshole babysitter be up to now? Knowing him he's probably installing some kind of prison system in my house to keep me locked up and miserable. I swing the door open and hurry towards the cause of the noise. I stop in my tracks when I find a man there, repairing my door. He looks up at me, his gaze roving over my bare legs and up my body to my frowning face. He gives me a slimy smile and I take a step back in response.

A figure appears before me, blocking the man from my view. I look up to find Harvey fucking Taylor himself standing between the man and I. He looks over his shoulder at the man and when they make eye contact, the man suddenly stops staring at me like I'm some kind of meal and continues installing a brand-new door to my bedroom. Harvey looks down at me and smirks, "Good morning."

"You got my door fixed?" I ask, my voice puzzled.

He shakes his head, "Selene did. I just told her what happened."

I sigh. Of course, he doesn't feel guilty at all for destroying my door. What a scumbag. I'm so angry at the memory of finding him in my room yesterday. I'm more angry about the door being broken than I am about him being in my room, in my personal space, when I was so lost in my music. The thought concerns me. I'm angry about the door but even angrier that I'm not more angry at him for watching.

I'm just so fucking angry! Ateverything! Fuck!

I'm losing my shit here. I have a live-in babysitter I didn't ask for who happens to be a gigantic tool and he's cruel. He tries to tell me what to do in my own home and then breaks my door and strips me of my basic human right to privacy? I'm so fucking livid and being trapped with him in this house isn't helping. I need out, alone, and without him.

The hammering noise stops abruptly, pulling me from my thoughts. "It's finished."  
The man says.

"Great." I step around Harvey and towards my newly installed door. The man stands outside my room and the heat of his eyes on me makes my skin crawl because he wears his thoughts on his face and they aren't PG-13. I grab the knob and speak to the man. "You can give him the bill since he's the one that broke the door." I enter my room and slam the door behind me, locking it.

I hear Harvey's muffled voice from outside as he talks to the man, but I ignore him. I walk to my en-suite bathroom and lock that door behind me as well for some added security. I pull my phone out of my shorts pocket and dial Ivory. She doesn't answer, most likely sleeping so instead I dial Aria who answers on the fourth ring. "Hello?" Her voice comes out scratchy like she just woke up.

"R, I need help." I sigh into the phone.

"What's wrong?" She asks, her voice now alert.

I squeeze the phone tighter to my ear. "This fucking babysitter is the worst. He came in here, took all my drugs, dumped all my liquor, and then destroyed my bedroom door after giving me his stupid rules and telling me I'm not allowed to leave my house unless it's to go to the studio. And he's a giant douche!" I add as if my

explanation didn't already say as much.

"Is he hot?" She asks, amused.

"No, pay attention! I'm complaining!"

"I am paying attention. The guy sounds like a total dick. Especially the part with the drugs. That sucks, Dude. I'm so sorry." Her voice is empathetic. "But is he hot?" She asks again and I can practically hear the smile in her voice.

I grunt. "Not the point here, Aria."

"Why are you avoiding answering? It's because he's hot, isn't it? Oh my God he's hot for sure. Tell me how hot we're talking, Timothee Chalamet hot or Channing Tatum hot?" She asks.

I furrow my brows, "Timothee Chalamet isn't hot."

"That's where you're wrong." She protests.

"How are you gonna put Timothee Chalamet on a hot scale with Channing Tatum? That makes no sense."

She sighs on the other end, "Because they're two types of hot."

"But Timothee isn't hot." I argue.

"Which is your shitty opinion even though it's wrong." She argues back.

I roll my eyes, "An opinion can't be wrong. That's literally the definition of an opinion. Mine is going to be different from yours and mine says he isn't hot."



“And mine says he is.”

“We’re gonna have to agree to disagree on that.” I shake my head in irritation.

She chuckles, “But for real, how hot are we talking?”

I look around the room even though I know I’m alone and Harvey can’t hear me. I decide to be honest. He may be a complete and total douche but there’s no denying the guy is good looking. “Chris Hemsworth’s height on Michael B. Jordan’s body but his skin tone is more James Franco. His face is like if Henry Cavill and Sebastian Stan had a love child.” I admit in her language, sighing.

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The line goes silent for a minute before she squeals. “He’s that hot?”

I sigh. “Yeah. He’s hot as hell and under normal circumstances, I’d probably sleep with him but he’s such a gigantic asshole that the thought of being anywhere near him turns me off completely.”

“Dude, you need to sleep with him.” She encourages, a wicked note to her voice.

I roll my eyes, “No way. His personality is a turn off.”

“Simple solution is hate sex.”

I scoff, “I’m not interested in any sex with him.”

“You should consider having sex with someone because your sexual frustration is contagious through the phone.” She complains.

I lean my hip against the bathroom sink. It isn’t a horrible idea. It could be a temporary solution. “Maybe I’ll call Rocco soon.” Rocco is a big rapper that I met at a few events. We hit it off since we’re in the same industry and we both like having fun. We also both like sex so we decided to form a mutually beneficial arrangement where we’re fuck buddies with no strings attached. He’s a solid lay and I haven’t seen or slept with him since we left for the tour. Maybe Aria’s idea isn’t that bad. “Aside from sex, I could seriously use some girl time. The babysitter won’t let me leave so I’m gonna sneak out when he isn’t paying attention. I’ll come to your place, and I also need a favor.” I plot.

“What’s up?”

“I need drugs. Blow, edibles, pills, whatever the fuck it is, I need it. He took all of it away and I have nothing. I’m losing my shit.” I whisper into the phone.

She pauses before responding. “Is that a good idea? Selene gave you the babysitter specifically because of the drug usage.”

I raise an annoyed brow, “No, Selene gave me the babysitter because of the lawsuits, some of which aren’t even my fault. And last I checked, I’m the only one with a babysitter while you two are free to do whatever you please, drugs included.”

She sighs, “True.” She takes a beat before starting again, “We haven’t stopped using. Come over and I’ll give you a bag of edibles I have, and I also have some blow leftover from last night. It’s all I have left, I’m getting more tonight.”

The tension in my body eases. “Bet, I’ll try to sneak out of here in an hour. Call Ivory and wake that bitch up. Tell her she has to join.”

Aria giggles on the line, “I’ll call her now.”

“Cool, see you soon.”

“Later.” She says before I hang up the phone.

Just as I’m about to put my phone back in my pocket it rings with a new incoming call from Selene. I scowl at her name on the phone. She’s the reason I’m in this mess and whether or not she’s my best friend since childhood, I’m pissed. No, pissed is an understatement. I’m fucking pissed. I decline her call only for her to call again. I decline it a second time but the phone rings once more. I grimace at the screen as I impulsively decide to press the green button and answer her call, “What do you

want?" I greet rudely.

"Good morning to you too, Brody. I see you're as chipper as ever." Her voice is cheery.

I scoff, "Selene, I'm not interested in speaking to you right now let alone being kind to you after you just fucked me in six different positions raw with no lubricant by putting this asshole in my house who mind you, broke my bedroom door." I bark.

She chuckles on the other end which only heightens my anger. "I see sobriety is working wonders."

"Fuck you, what do you want?" I ask impatiently.

Her tone becomes stern, "I want to speak to you not as your manager but as your friend. I know this is a lot and you're pissed right now but I need you to know I did this with your best interest at heart."

My tone softens only slightly. "I get that you wanted what's best for me and you got the point across. Get this guy out of here, Selene. He's disrupting my peace."

She exhales, "I can't, Brody. I know it sucks but I need him to look after you and make sure you don't dig yourself into a deeper hole than the one you're in. The attorneys think there's a chance they can get you all off and they're doing everything on their end. You and the other two knuckleheads need to do your part and stay sober. Unfortunately, I can't count on you to do that alone like I can the other two, so you require Harvey's help."

I want to point out that her stupid plan isn't working because Aria and Ivory are still using, but I don't because that would hinder my ability to obtain drugs behind her back. "I have free will, you know? I can leave and there's nothing you or my

babysitter can do about it.” I threaten her.

I can hear the doubt in her voice. “Go ahead. But good luck finding a new manager because if you do that I quit. And also good luck staying out of jail because if I leave, I’m taking your attorney’s with me because they’re my friends from law school.”

And there’s the ultimatum. The only reason I haven’t yet sent Harvey fucking Taylor on his way. At the end of the day, as angry as I am at Selene for doing this, she’s still my best friend. I can’t do any of this without her and she knows it. “And if he quits?”

“He won’t.”

“But if he does?”

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She grumbles, “I just said he won’t.”

I sigh, “I’m over this convo. You’re boring me and I’m still pissed at you. I’m hanging up now.”

“Brody, I-” I hang up on her before she can finish and exit my bathroom with a cocky expression on my face. I’m getting those drugs and just as they enter my system, the mask will slip on with them and I’ll be Sticks again.

The drugs, parties, and lifestyle help me be who they want me to be and without them? I can’t do any of it. I change into a pair of ripped baggy jeans and sneakers before finishing the outfit with a Dolce & Gabbana tank top that’s cut beneath my breasts, revealing the skin that’s a shade lighter from not seeing sunlight. I tip toe over to my door and open it, peeking out to make sure Harvey isn’t nearby. I take the staircase down the hall that doesn’t lead to the main rooms which I assume he’ll be in. I hear shuffling in the kitchen and duck into the dining room and over to the window. I try to carefully and silently slide it open and just when I’m confident, I step a leg out. I fit the rest of my body out the window and stay close to the side of the house as I walk through the backyard and to the front. I have a driver waiting to pick me up at the curb thanks to my handy dandy cellphone. I open the gate and close it behind me, grinning a wicked grin of arrogance. Harvey can kiss my little white ass if he thinks I’m just going to obey him.

I lock it behind me and turn to enter the car when a husky voice calls out, “Going somewhere? Did you forget you’re not allowed out unless it’s to the studio or to a work event?”

I clench my jaw so tight in anger I'm almost positive I cracked a molar. "Motherfucker." I grunt under my breath. I look up at him to find him leaning against the side of the garage, smirking at me.

I give him a dark look. "I didn't forget, I just don't give a fuck."

He raises a brow, "Well you should because every time you try to sneak out, I'm gonna ruin it for you. Where did you think you were going anyway?"

I cross my arms over my chest. I could be honest but where's the fun in that? He wants to play games; little does he know I'm undefeated. "Rocco's house. You know who that is, right?" Let's see if he did his homework on me like he thinks he did.

He tilts his head at me as if in thought but stays silent.

I grin, "Oh come on, don't tell me you don't know Rocco. I thought you did your homework on me, Boy Scout."

"I did." His voice is dark.

I take a dangerous step towards him and then another, stopping only when I'm two feet away. I can read his eyes like a book for the first time since I met the guy. Usually, he's a little hard to read but he's wearing it all on his face right now. He doesn't like the idea that he missed something one bit. He thrives off his knowledge and the idea of not knowing something angers him. I'm using that to my advantage. "Well, if you did you would know that Rocco is my fuck buddy and I was sneaking off to see him." I tease him.

His brows crease in the middle and his jaw tightens. "Too bad Rocco's house isn't on the list of places you're allowed to go."

My nostrils flare in annoyance. It seems like I won't be going to Aria's today after all. But a new thought occurs to me and I smile at him, the fakest smile I've ever formed. "Okay." I walk past him with a pep in my step and bask in not only his confusion over my lack of argument but in what I have planned.

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FOUR HOURS LATER, Ilay sprawled out on the leather couch in the living room, scrolling through Instagram on my phone and keeping my expression bored. Harvey watches me closely from the kitchen as if he thinks I'm gonna try to ditch him again. I keep my body language relaxed so as not to tip him off for what's to come.

Harvey Taylor will rue the day he took this job when I'm through with him. Hell, he'll rue the day he met me. I fight back a devious grin at the thought. A knock raps on the door a moment later and I toss my phone aside to answer the door. Harvey's eyes narrow, "Who's that?"

I smirk and ignore him as I walk towards the door and open it to find Rocco on the other side. "Hey, Babe." He greets and my stomach churns. I'm not a fan of his word of endearment but I ignore it, instead focusing on how angry his presence will make Harvey. Harvey is a man that is obeyed and I disobey him. He didn't expect me to undermine him and find a loophole in his outrageous rules but here Rocco is. I step aside and let Rocco enter and catch a glimpse of Harvey storming down the entry hall.

"What's this?" Harvey's brows pull together as he takes Rocco in. The sight of the two of them in the same room is an anomaly. Harvey is all rigid muscle and height in a pair of slacks and a button down while Rocco wears baggy jeans and a Gucci t-shirt that's even baggier than the jeans. And of course, how could I forget the thick Cuban chains that are diamond encrusted around Rocco's neck, emphasizing his chocolate colored skin.



I lean in close to Rocco's side and grin at Harvey. "You said I couldn't go anywhere but you never said anything about anyone coming here." I bat my lashes at him because I know it'll piss him off more.

His nostrils flare as his eyes leave mine and rove over Rocco. "Who's this?" Rocco points toward Harvey with his thumb.

I shrug, "The babysitter Selene hired to keep me sober and miserable." I wait for Harvey to say something but he doesn't. I look up at Rocco, "Ignore him, he's rude and has no manners. Come on, let's go upstairs."

I grab Rocco's hand and begin to lead him out of the room when Harvey finally speaks. "Absolutely not."

I ignore him and continue walking with Rocco at my back. I lead him all the way up the stairs and to my bedroom door all while Harvey follows us with loud protests I choose to ignore. I shove Rocco into my room and tilt my head at Harvey. "Next time you want to tell me what to do, make sure there aren't any loopholes in your stupid ass rules." I'm about to slam the door in his face but then another thought occurs to me. "Oh and don't wait up. We'll be awhile. Bye, Harvey." I feign innocence as I slam the door so hard in his face the entire frame rattles. I turn to face Rocco who's made himself comfortable on my bed as I mutter "motherfucker" under my breath.

Rocco raises a confused brow, "What was that all about?"

"What do you mean?"

He laughs, "You used me to make him mad."

I smirk, "It worked, didn't it."

He chuckles, “Girl, you are lucky I like you otherwise I’d be out the door right now for how awkward that whole situation was.”

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*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:16 am*

I plop into the bed next to him. “Did you bring what I asked for?”

He gives me a look of doubt. “When have I ever not delivered?”

“Good point.”

Rocco slips a hand into his pocket and pulls out a baggie of blow and some edibles in another baggie. My eyes light up at the sight and relief washes through me. He hands them to me and I immediately start with the baggie of blow. I open it and pour some on my nightstand, making quick work of forming two lines. Rocco watches me with a relaxed expression, “What’s the deal with him anyway? You guys fucking or something?”

I whip my head at him. “No. He’s a prick and I can’t stand him. He wouldn’t let me go see Aria or Ivory today and he talks down to me like I’m a dog he’s doing obedience training with. I can’t stand the guy.”

He looks at me as if he doesn’t believe me. “What?” I ask.

He snorts, “No guy gets mad at another guy’s presence unless he’s jealous and that man downstairs is jealous.”

I sigh and let out a pent up, irritated breath. “I don’t want to talk about Harvey. Do you want a line or not?”

Rocco leans closer to me and places his hand on my thigh, “You thought I was gonna let you have all the fun?” He grins as his head dips past mine and down to the

nightstand. He snorts the first line and wipes his nose after. He gives me a look of expectation and I grin. This is who everyone knows me to be. As I lean down to snort the second line, my shoulders relax and the tension in my body eases. All the stress and anger I've been holding in these last two days dissipates and once I sit up and wipe my nose with the back of my hand, I exhale. I throw my body back onto the bed and Rocco does the same. We don't have sex every time we hangout. I'd consider Rocco a friend and I enjoy his company as much as I enjoy the sex which is a fair amount. Aria had the right idea about needing to get laid. I think it would really relax me to have a good orgasm but for some reason I'm not interested in going there with Rocco right now. He isn't on my mind like that.

Once the blow kicks in twenty minutes later. Rocco and I are silently staring at the ceiling. "You sure you haven't fucked him?" He asks doubtfully and I know immediately he's talking about Harvey. "There's too much sexual tension there."

"I didn't fuck him." I answer but for some reason I wish it weren't true. I blame the drugs but even sober there's no denying that Harvey Taylor is a God brought to life. From his broad shoulders to his chiseled muscle and jaw, he's most women's wet dream. Hell, he may even be mine. A mental image of him shirtless and on top of me, pounding into me with sweat dripping down his body and his hair sticking to his forehead creeps into my mind and I feel a pulse between my legs and warmth in my lower belly. He's the last person I should be turned on over for so many reasons. The first is that he's off limits to me and the second is that he's an asshole. But why then can't I get him off my mind? Especially when Rocco is laying on the far side of the bed. I'm so in need of release right now I'm almost ready to put my hand between my legs which also confuses me since I have access to a man who's already in my bed and more than willing to have sex with me.

"But you want to." He assesses.

I bask in the happiness flowing through my veins in the form of cocaine, mixing with

my blood and filling my head with silly and happy thoughts. “I do.” I laugh at the ceiling.

## Chapter 6

### Harvey

I want to strangle her. No, scratch that. I want to strangle him. Rocco comes to her house knowing she’s using him for God only knows what upstairs in her room right now while I’m pacing the lower level of her home. She’s successfully rattled me, and I don’t get rattled. Every time I push her, she pushes back and nobody has ever been as persistent as she has. It’s infuriating.

She knew the rules and of course she found a loophole. She only did it to piss me off and it’s working. The image of Rocco’s smug face in my head, of him knowing he’s able to touch her sets me off. Not because I’m jealous. I’m most certainly not jealous, but his smug face... I didn’t see this coming and that’s why I’m this angry, it has to be. The possibility that the churning feeling in my gut could be because of another emotion I’d rather not open the door to infuriates me even more. Not even a full two days and Brody Drake has me questioning myself and my...emotions.

They’ve been up there for hours. I haven’t heard much noise aside from a laugh here and there both from her and from him but I haven’t heard anything else and the thought satisfies me. I have no right to be angry over the idea of the two of them sleeping together but for some unknown reason the idea bothers me. So much so, that I’m contemplating destroying her brand-new door just to ruin their fun.

I grunt as I force myself to sit on the black leather couch in the living room. I rub my face aggressively with my calloused palms and sigh audibly. By now, my clients usually bend to my will and obey me. Of course, she has to be the outlier in the trend. I just have to be patient and consistent. She may be a little tougher than my previous

clients but that doesn't mean she's impossible. I'll still have her bending to my will and doing whatever I say in no time. It may take a little longer than usual but I'll get it done. I've never failed, and I won't let Brody Drake be my first failure.

The bedroom door opens, and they exit together, laughing at something I'm not aware of. The sound of her laughter is so genuine and sounds almost strange coming from her. I'm used to her scowling and stomping around in fits of anger; I've never seen her smile a genuine smile and I've never heard her laugh. The sound is intoxicating, and I feel a burning sensation in my chest that Rocco is the reason she's making that sound.

They make their way down the stairs, and I leap off the couch immediately. My eyes find Brody immediately and I scan my gaze over every inch of her, hoping her appearance will give away what they were doing upstairs. I exhale when I find that she looks exactly as she did when she went into the bedroom. She doesn't look like she just had sex and neither does Rocco who she's still smiling at, the stupid fucker. She doesn't spare me a glance as she walks him out and says goodbye. He kisses her cheek and she doesn't return the sentiment which satisfies me but I want to castrate him for putting his lips on her.

Once she locks the door behind him, she turns and avoids my eyes, keeping her gaze on the floor as she stalks past me and towards the kitchen silently. "No witty comments for me?" I start but she doesn't respond.

I follow her closely and watch as she opens the refrigerator and scans the newly stocked contents -thanks to her assistant- for something to eat. She pulls out a bowl of freshly chopped fruit and starts picking out all the strawberries. I watch her mouth as she chews. I almost have to force my eyes to move and my brain to focus. What is this girl doing to me? It's so infuriating. This has never happened to me before, but then again, I've never had a client as cunning and devious as her. "You don't feel like talking?" I question with a sudden harshness to my voice. My patience with her is

wearing thin. “Too bad I don’t give a fuck what you feel like doing. What was that, huh? Are you trying to prove a point to me or something? Do you like playing games?” I snap on her, raising my voice.

She finally meets my gaze but for some reason it looks like she isn’t really here even though she’s physically here. I raise a brow as I assess her closer. Her lids look heavier, and she quickly focuses back on her fruit. “You started it, I finished it.” She says nonchalantly, talking around a mouthful of strawberries.

Her calm expression and tone sets me off even more. I want her to be fuming the way I am right now. “You planned that whole thing out to get back at me. Does Rocco know you used him?” I try cutting deep with the last part, hoping to take in her reaction and get a better understanding of her feelings towards Rocco.

She smiles weakly, still avoiding my eyes. “Rocco knows you’re a tool, yes, and he knows why I asked him to come over. He doesn’t care.” She giggles, “Call us even now.”

It seems she doesn’t have actual feelings for him and that he knows he was a pawn in her game. The knowledge satisfies me for some unknown reason, but that satisfaction is quickly overruled by the strange lull in her voice. Her voice sounds different, almost sleepy but honeyed. It doesn’t sound like her usual silvery voice, the one I’ve come to know so well already from her yelling at me. Something is off about her. “Did something happen with Rocco?” My anger dissipates at the possibility that something bad happened. Did he touch her? Hurt her? I’d kill him for touching my client. It’s my job to protect her and if something happened behind that door...

She scoffs, her voice muffled as she chews the fruit, “What? No.”

I raise a brow, “You’re acting different.”

Her eyes widen and she suddenly puts the lid back on the fruit and shoves it back in the refrigerator. She tries to duck past me and out of the kitchen, muttering, “This has been fun, but I’m going to bed.”



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Realization sets in. Her heavy lids, her change in voice, her avoiding my eyes. I clench my jaw and curl my hands into fists, wanting to toss this whole house upside down. I grab her before she can slip past me and push her against the foyer wall, cutting her off from the staircase. Her head hits the wall with a dull thud and if I weren't so furious with her right now, I may have stopped and asked her if she was okay, but all I can see is red right now. I squeeze her lithe upper arms in each of my fists and she shrinks in on herself, afraid of what she sees on my face or what I'm doing to her but I don't care. Her expression is worried, anxious and she tries her best to hide from my eyes, but I won't let her. As close as we are, she's still a lot shorter than I am so I have to lean down to rip her apart. "You're fucking high."

"Let me go!" She demands, anxiousness laced into her tone.

I seethe, "He brought you the drugs. You didn't just use him to get back at me, you used him as a fucking mule." I lean in closer to her and squeeze her arms harder as she tries to squirm out of my grip but it's no use, I'm far stronger than her. "What did he give you?"

She yells, "I said, let me go!"

I release one of her arms and grab her face with one hand, forcing her eyes to meet mine and once I get a close-up view, my anger grows as if that were even possible. Her eyes are bloodshot, making the turquoise color stand out more. "What did you take?" My face feels hot with my anger as I snarl at her. She shudders at the look on my face and tries to turn her chin away from my grip, but I don't let go. I shake her, "Now!" I slam my fist into the wall beside her head, not hard enough to put a hole in the wall but hard enough to scare a response out of her.

“Coke! He brought me coke!” She admits, flinching as if she actually thinks I’d hit her. I would never put my hands on a woman, especially not a client, but Brody doesn’t need to know that. She needs to fear me so that she obeys me.

I growl, “You are not to see Rocco again, understood?”

She doesn’t respond but I don’t think she cares much. The girl doesn’t seem to care much about anything aside from her band. She’s ruthless, arrogant, cocky, all the things I hate in a human being. She’s my opposite in every way and I can’t stand it, I can’t stand her.

“How much did he give you? I want all the leftovers, now.” I demand.

Real fear flashes through her eyes for a brief moment as if the prospect of not having access to drugs actually petrifies her. “I’m not giving you shit.” The deviant I met yesterday finally comes back to the conversation as some sobriety returns to her expression. She’s the Brody I know now. The one that argues with me at every opportunity and doesn’t back down. “And I’m telling Selene you put your hands on me.”

I smirk at her as I lean in, “Go ahead and tell her, I don’t care. You know why? Because then you’ll have to tell her you used again, and she’s going to ditch your ass and let you go to jail.”

The truth in my words sinks in and she chews on her bottom lip anxiously. I release her and take a step away from her, putting enough space between us so that the leather and sage scent of her doesn’t seep into my nostrils and cloud my judgment further. I shouldn’t have gotten so close to her.

She sighs, “I’m gonna ask you nicely. Please, don’t take it all away.” Her eyes glaze over and she looks so vulnerable. In an hour I saw two sides of her I’ve never seen

from her when she's sober. This one is weak and the other was happy but even I, the grumpiest and most miserable of people, was able to see it wasn't real. I could see right through her.

"You're an addict. I can't let you keep anything." I say sternly as I turn and start for the stairs to her bedroom. I'll toss the whole thing apart to find what I need to find.

She follows me, hot on my heels, and having to use twice as much energy to keep up with me. "Please! I'll get on my hands and fucking knees if that's what you want, just don't take it!"

I ignore her and continue to her bedroom. I find a small baggie of cocaine on her nightstand and immediately grab it and pocket it before she can get to it first. She fists my button-down shirt in her hands and tries to tug me away from the nightstand. "Harvey, please!"

I turn and face her, "Why do you want it so bad?" I ask, genuinely curious. I'll let her think I'm considering allowing her to keep them even though I most certainly am not.

"I don't want it. Ineedit." A tear finally rolls down her cheek and I find I have a sudden urge to wipe it away, but I refrain from the action, keeping my hand glued to my side.

I shake my head. "No, you don't."

"I do! You don't understand!" She protests as I lift her mattress and find another bag, removing it and pocketing it.

I continue my search, "So explain it to me."

She opens her mouth to speak but thinks better of it, clamping her jaw shut. A

moment later she settles with, “I just do. I don’t expect you to get it because you’ve probably been a boy scout all your life. But this is who I am and I need it.”

This is who I am. What does that even mean? I want to press her for answers, but she doesn’t seem like she’d be willing to share. She doesn’t trust me and I don’t blame her, she doesn’t know me. I’m just the guy who came in to ruin her life in here. I find three more baggies of cocaine around her room all while she sobs and begs me to let it go. Once I’m satisfied that I’ve found everything, I exit her room. She sits on the edge of her bed with her head in her hands. I glance at her over my shoulder before I leave the room. “You’ll be getting drug tested every week, so if there’s anything else you’re hiding in here, I would get rid of it.” I keep my voice calm even though my remaining anger from earlier is lingering. The disheveled state of her is enough to evoke only a small amount of sympathy from me.

I have no sympathy for drug addicts, nor do I have sympathy for users in general, but the sight of the strong willed and hot tempered little rockstar who always has something witty and snappy to say to me, completely in tears and vulnerable is enough for me to extend a small olive branch in the form of my calm exterior. I won’t yell at her and berate her anymore tonight. I’ll wait until she isn’t a crying mess anymore.

I leave her door open a crack and make quick work of flushing the cocaine down the toilet in my guest en-suite. I watch as the white powder mixes with the water and disappears down the toilet, with it Brody Drake’s feigned happiness.

## Chapter 7

### Brody

You know when you sleep but it’s all shitty and you don’t feel rested or relaxed in any way, shape, or form the next morning? That’s how I feel right now. All sorts of

fucked up and not only is it because I snorted enough blow to tranquilize a baby elephant yesterday, but because my douchebag babysitter is banging on my door demanding I wake up.

“Brody, I will break this new door down and make sure you don’t get a replacement if you don’t wake up now.” Harvey growls from outside my door.

Maybe if I ignore him he’ll go away, I think to myself as I close my eyes and turn my head away from the door. I have a crippling headache and it’s too early for me to be functioning. I peek at the clock on my nightstand. It’s eight in the morning. My business hours start at noon so Harvey can either wait till then or go fuck himself altogether. I pull the sheet over my head and sigh into my pillow as a brief moment of silence passes.

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Just as my mind wanders into rest, the incessant banging continues. “Door is getting broken down in three...” He wouldn’t dare. “Two...” He continues and I leap out of bed afraid of what’ll happen when he gets to- “One.” He thunders just as I make it to the door and swing it open, avoiding his extended leg which was surely just about to break my door down mid kick.

“Do not touch my door!” I bark, my voice raspy from lack of restful sleep.

He collects himself and forces his expression to calm only a little. I’ll never understand how he does it. Harvey Taylor is able to be fully wide awake and dressed for the day at every moment. I’m convinced he doesn’t sleep. Maybe he isn’t even human. That would totally make sense actually. I raise a suspicious brow at him and question if he’s a robot. “Get dressed.” He demands and I notice then that his gaze is directly on my tank top that’s hanging off my shoulder and revealing most of my stomach. My skin feels hot under his gaze, and it isn’t until his eyes flicker down for a brief moment before he forces himself to look away. I look down to see what’s caused the reaction from him only to realize I’m not wearing any pants. Or shorts. I’m in my tighty whities. Fuck.

I could do one of two things. One, I could get embarrassed and listen to him. Or two, I could make this ten times more uncomfortable and difficult for him and feign confidence. I choose option two, the rational options are never fun anyway.

“Nah. I’d rather go back to bed and forget you’re still taking up unwanted residence in my home.” I smirk at him as I lace my voice with disdain.

He flares his nostrils. “Too bad.” He makes burning eye contact with me. “Because

you have to be downtown in an hour.”

My brows pull together. “For what?”

He sighs, “Selene has you three on a press photoshoot. She thinks it’s good PR since you’re all public enemies right now. At least to the law.”

I throw my head back and groan. “What’s the shoot for?”

I hear the irritation in his voice. “I’m not your manager. It isn’t my job to explain all of this to you, it’s Selene’s so you can call her and ask. My job is to get you there in one piece sober and ready to get work done. So go get dressed and be downstairs in ten minutes.” He turns on his heel and storms down the hall, his loud footsteps sounding on the stairs as he descends.

What a dick. “Hey, Harvey?” I call to his back, keeping my voice neutral so he doesn’t know what to expect from me. I keep my head in the hallway even though he can’t see me from where he is on the stairs.

“What?” He calls back.

“Fuck you!” I yell as I slam my door hard enough to rattle the house.

I rest my back against the door and sigh, grinning from ear to ear. I have a new philosophy I’d like to adopt when it comes to Harvey Taylor. I was aggressive before and that didn’t drive him out. So maybe driving him bat shit crazy will. I can’t wipe the menacing grin off my lips as I push off the door and start for my closet.

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THERE ARE A LOT of things I hate. Examples you ask? Well, I hate Kiss. I also

hate floral perfumes and books because the words stress me out. I hate heels and gold jewelry. School is also high up on my list of things I hate, but there is not one thing on that list that I hate more than I hate Harvey Taylor. You heard it here first. I would rather walk around in a pair of stilettos smelling like a Goddamned gardenia than spend another minute with the guy, but I digress.

I made sure to take longer than Harvey demanded I take to get ready, just to peeve him. I also have been humming the entire time we've been in the back of the Escalade driving downtown. Harvey hasn't said anything, but I can tell from the way his jaw is clenched and he's aggressively typing on his phone that I'm getting on his nerves. Perfect. I keep humming but do so louder and I also start using my hands to tap out a beat on my thighs. I'm killing two birds with one stone right now; I'm coming up with a beat for a new melody and annoying Harvey Taylor to no end.

Just when I'm convinced his pride won't allow him to talk to me, he snaps, "Can you stop?"

I grin, "Stop what?"

He flares his nostrils in his signature angry face that I'm sure is meant to elicit some form of intimidation but isn't doing much of anything for me aside from encouraging my behavior. "The humming and the tapping. Stop it."

I chuckle, "No."

His eyes widen in frustration.

"You said so yourself. Your job is to make sure I get to the shoot sober or whatever and ready to work, not to have an opinion, so shut up." I remark.

He raises a brow as if he's offended but there's a brief look of pride that flashes



through his eyes before he hides it with his usual stony expression. It couldn't have been pride. Harvey wouldn't be proud of me, right? Especially not for insulting him. He remains silent as he shakes his head and continues texting.

I flinch like I was just slapped aggressively and spat on by someone who doesn't brush their teeth. How dare he not respond to me after I just insulted him? "Excuse me?" I snap.

He gives me a look as if he's completely unaffected. "Yes?"

"Nothing to say? No witty response? No threats of breaking doors down in a house that doesn't belong to you?" I raise a suspicious brow. I changed my tactic this morning, but did he also change his?

He stares at me in silence before his lip curls into a faint smile in the corner. "I don't have anything to say to you not only because it would be a waste of my time but because we're here and you have work to do." He turns and opens the door, holding it open for me as my security detail appears at the door to escort us into the building.

I sigh, "Right. I have work to do."

He looks down at me and raises a questioning brow.

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I shake my head, muttering under my breath. “I hate photoshoots.”

“Why’s that?” He asks, curiosity evident in his tone.

I shrug. “Because they’re using me for my face and my body and not for my talent.” He looks at me as if he’s seeing me for the first time and I scowl. “Don’t look at me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like...that.” I wave a hand in front of his face to emphasize my point and he shakes his head, a small almost inaudible laugh under his breath. My eyes widen and I suck in a surprised breath. Did I...just make Harvey Taylor laugh?

I’m about to say something else, almost desperate to hear the sound again to make sure I didn’t make it up when a pair of Louboutins make their way over to where we stand. I know the sound of those heels well, along with the rushed footsteps of the person walking. I groan as Selene comes into view. I love my best friend very much, but I’m still pissed and I’m good at holding grudges. “There you are.” Selene appears in one of her signature pantsuits and slicked back bun.

“Here I am.” I say sarcastically.

She shakes her head. “Lose the attitude. This shoot is for BuildingBlox’s adult line of Blox sets.” BuildingBlox is a company that makes kids toys. Specifically toys they build from small plastic pieces by following directions. They’re making an adult line of three Blox sets. One is R6’s guitar, another is Satan’s Baby’s guitar, and the third

is my drum set.

“How fun.” I don’t lose the attitude.

Selene yanks me to the side, away from Harvey and the security detail. “Cut it out, Brody. I’m serious. This shoot and collab has been in the works for months and it’s perfect timing that it’s happening now. We need all the good press we can get right now so you’re gonna go sit in hair and makeup and then get your ass on the set.”

I roll my eyes and start for the makeup station. I don’t have to turn to know that Harvey is following me, but I ignore him and am quickly swept up into a mass of makeup artists who force me into a seat and start touching my face with an array of products. I look around the room in search of Aria and Ivory, but I don’t see them. An artist forces my face forward and continues working and I sigh, letting him do his job even though I don’t like when people touch my face.

I make eye contact with Harvey in the mirror and expect to find him basking in my discomfort, but I’m shocked to find him frowning, a deep crease between his brows. I look down, suddenly embarrassed for some unknown reason. I hear chuckles and laughter coming from down the hall and getting louder and I know it’s Aria and Ivory. I’d know those laughs anywhere just as I’d know Selene’s stilettos anywhere.

I turn to look at them but the same artist from before jerks my face forward aggressively and scoffs in my face. Harvey clears his throat from behind me, loud enough to steal my focus and for the rude artist’s face to turn red. From that point on, he’s gentle with me and carries himself like a dog with its tail between its legs. I make eye contact with Harvey once more to find his eyes burning holes through the artist. A flutter of something runs through my belly that almost feels like gratitude mixed with a little bit of attraction. I try to tell myself it isn’t attraction, but I’m no fool. I know from the clench in his jaw and the flare in his nostrils all the way to the crease between his brows, all in my defense that I’m attracted to Harvey Taylor. That

doesn't mean he isn't still an asshole though. You can be attracted to someone you hate...I think.

I'm grateful to Harvey for this small token of kindness and I make a mental note to cut him a break just a little today. Only a tiny little itty-bitty bit.

Once the artists finish my face, I get a glimpse of myself in the mirror. My eyes look bold and dark. They're sultry and alluring the same way they look on stage. The blue in my eyes stands out more and the look is all tied together with a crimson lipstick.

Aria and Ivory appear as the hairstylists come over and start working on my hair. "Hey, guys," I greet. They're arm in arm, makeup and hair completely done up, and hysterical laughing over something I don't know. I frown but try to force the expression into neutrality. Aria's hair is curled and styled in a half up half down style on top of her head, baby blue streaks running through it. She wears an electric blue lace bralette that shows her ample cleavage and a pair of black leather pants that rest low enough on her hips to leave little to nothing to the imagination. Ivory's hair is straightened and the hot pink ombre looks freshly dyed. She wears a long-sleeved baby pink velvety top that has a deep cut v neckline and stops right below her breasts. She has a miniskirt on that matches and the whole look is tied together with rhinestones on the fabric and thigh high white leather boots. They look stunning and the sight of them all done up makes me miss the tour when things were normal. Well, normal for us.

Aria glances at me with heavy lids, "Sticks!"

They rush over and hug me and I hug them back, basking in the connection. I've missed my friends so much. "I miss you guys."

"Aw, we miss you too, B." Ivory squeezes me so tight it feels like my air supply has been cut off.

Aria leans into my ear and breathes out a whisper laugh, “I’ve got crazy ganja. You want a joint?”

They’re high, I knew it. They’re high and Selene is here which means she probably knows they’re high and isn’t doing anything about it. Why is it okay that they’re high and I’m not? Selene set these ridiculous standards for me but doesn’t expect the others to follow them when we’re all in the same amount of trouble. I squeeze the armrests of my chair so tight my knuckles turn white. Harvey raises a brow at me in the mirror and I look away, ignoring him because his face is a reminder of everything that isn’t fair.

“I would love to, but I have a babysitter and I’m getting drug tested now.” I whisper in a dark tone.

Aria glances up at the same time Ivory does and they both take Harvey in before Aria licks her lips and whispers, “I see the Henry Cavill and Sebastian Stan in him. He’s hot as fuck. Tell me you’ve tapped that.” She practically salivates, hearts in her eyes.

My mood has been killed by Selene’s inconsistent expectations for all of us and her clear targeting of me. I’m not in the mood to joke with Aria and Ivory over sleeping with Harvey regardless of how hot he is. “I haven’t and I don’t plan on it,” I say dryly.

Ivory groans, “Boring. But if you aren’t would you care if I-”

I snap, my voice raising, “I would care so don’t even think about it.”

Aria and Ivory exchange confused looks, “Woah, calm down,” Aria laughs.

My anger takes over, “Calm down? You want me to calm down when I’m being held to a different standard than you guys are?”

Aria rolls her eyes, “B, we all know you were the worst of us with the drugs. You need to chill.” She fishes around her pocket and pulls out a joint, handing it to me for all to see. Harvey takes a step forward immediately as if to intercept it before I can smoke the whole thing in two seconds, but I make no move to grab it.

Instead, I look at Aria through dark lashes and a face warm with anger. “Don’t try to cover up the inequality with a fucking joint. Have you forgotten we’re all supposed to be sober? Not just me. All of us. So why am I the only one that’s sober and getting drug tested?”

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Harvey stops in his tracks, satisfied with my ability to turn down the joint. Ivory speaks up, “Brody, relax. She was trying to be nice.”

Okay, I’ve had enough. I jump out of the seat just as the hairdresser finishes in perfect timing and charge away from them. “Fuck that! You want to be nice? Get clean with me and stop waving drugs in my face when you know I’m struggling.”

I charge away and into a dressing room, sliding the curtain closed and sighing audibly. I hear Ivory and Aria laughing about something completely unrelated and feel my chest sink. I’m already the odd man out. All it took was sobriety. I knew this would happen. This is the start of the end. Now that I’m sober and they aren’t, they’ll get bored of me and think I’m no fun and they’ll either kick me out of the band and replace me or ice me out until I leave on my own, and from there the fans will do the same. Because the truth is, Brody Drake is a fucking nobody. She’s average in height, weight, size, personality, everything, but Sticks...she isn’t. She’s unique and she’s talented and people love her and find her fun. Sticks can only be Sticks when she’s high or drunk or both and now...I don’t have access to either of those things anymore which means I’m just boring Brody Drake.

### Chapter 8

#### Harvey

Brody rushes into the dressing room, closing the curtain behind her after her little outburst. I’ll admit I didn’t see it coming. I expected her to take the joint Aria Kane offered her and run with it, locking herself in some room until she smoked the entire thing, but she didn’t. I was fully prepared to have to confiscate it and argue with her,

but she refused it on her own. A small wave of pride washes through me at the thought. Maybe Brody Drake is stronger than I thought.

I didn't know she had this side to her, one that was able to put her foot down on something. The Brody Drake I've come to know this week has been stubborn and argumentative at every given opportunity. She likes pushing my buttons and getting me riled up, she likes to argue and fight, but this one? Maybe there's more to the girl than what meets the eye.

I followed her to the dressing room, remaining a foot outside. She's perfectly safe in the dressing room so she doesn't need me for anything, but for some reason I wasn't able to stay away. I felt a tug in my chest the minute she stormed off and my feet started following her before my brain could tell me to stop. I realize what she's supposed to be doing in the dressing room, changing, which means she could be naked or almost naked in there. The image of her this morning, rustled with sleep with her tank top barely covering any skin and her tanned legs in just her underwear. I felt arousal stir inside myself and felt my cock twitch at the sight and I knew without a doubt that I had to put distance between us, so instead of arguing with her, I walked away. I've never been attracted to a client before. I've worked with models, singers, fashion designers, you name it. I've worked with so many beautiful women and have never once been attracted to any of them or aroused by any of them until Brody Drake. The thought pisses me off. This girl is a constant headache for me in every single area of my life.

The silence from inside the dressing room is deafening. I don't hear the rustling of clothing or her muttering, "motherfucker" under her breath. She's silent. Her silence concerns me because she's usually so vocal. Should I say something? What can I do for her if something is wrong? I'm not comforting or reassuring in any way. I'm not emotional and I can't deal with the emotions of others aside from Lucy. Brody has been off since she sat in the makeup chair. Once she heard her friends, she looked like an excited child whose parents just got home from work. She was desperate to



see them, and that makeup artist was getting aggressive with her face. I should've broken his nose but I thought it would piss off Selene Stone and probably ruin the shoot, so I refrained from the action even though my hands were balled into fists at my sides when I saw she was visibly annoyed by his aggressiveness. The best part about it is that I don't know why I was so enraged by him doing that to her. It isn't in my job description to defend her from a bully, but I couldn't help myself.

I could see in her eyes that something wasn't right when she was talking to her friends. She looked frustrated and almost hurt but I don't know why. I'm assuming whatever it is has to do with why she stormed off and is still hiding silently in the dressing room. She's been in there for a few minutes which I find worrisome considering the girl never shuts her damn mouth. "Brody?" I say, low so that straggling ears can't hear. She doesn't say anything. "Brody?" I call a little louder this time, a hint of worry creeping into my voice. Why isn't she responding?

"What?" She snaps from the other side of the curtain. There's that attitude.

"Are you...alright?" I instantly feel repulsed with myself. I don't care how she feels or if she's okay. I'm not here for mental or emotional protection, I'm here for physical protection and sobriety.

She sighs. "Fine."

I can hear the lie in the word, but it isn't my problem. I turn to walk away but stop after one step, unable to walk away from the dressing room. I huff under my breath and look over my shoulder to make sure nobody is watching. "Are you dressed?"

"Yes."

I push the curtain aside and step into the dressing room with her before my brain can convince me otherwise. I'll just ensure she's okay and then I'll leave and let her get

back to work. She sucks in a surprised gasp as I enter and close the curtain behind myself. The room is small which means I have to stand close to her and the heat that radiates from her body and into mine from how close we stand is enough to bring the thought of her this morning back to the forefront of my mind. Fuck.

“What are you doing?” She whisper yells.

“What happened with your friends?” I ask, ignoring her question.

She looks down and anxiously starts playing with her fingers. “Nothing, it’s fine.”

I raise a brow in clear disbelief, “Yeah and elephants can fly. What happened?” I press.

I watch as she wipes all the anxious emotion from her face and her features contort into anger. She puts a wall up between us right in front of my eyes and backs until she hits the wall, putting as much space between us as possible. “I don’t want to talk about it so get out. I have to change.”

I shake my head at her, “We’ll talk about it later.”

“No, we won’t.”

“We will.” I demand as I open the curtain and step out, leaving her to change.

“Motherfucker,” She mutters under her breath, and I can’t help but smile at the sound.

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“YES! STUNNING!” THE PHOTOGRAPHERpraises the girls as he snaps pictures

of them. Brody wears a fire engine red corset top with lacing up the sides and a heart cut out in the front the back, revealing plenty of her tanned flesh and leaving nothing to the imagination. I do my best not to look at her, but I can't help but steal a few glances. She's beautiful even though I hate to admit it and she looks sinful in red. I want to unlace the corset and see what's underneath, but I remind myself at every waking moment that she's a client and entirely off limits. Her corset is paired with a pair of matching red lace up pants which accentuate her curves.

Though the makeup artist was a total ass, he did a damn good job on her makeup. Her eyes are dark and sirenic, another temptation that feels specifically tailored to me even though I know it isn't. Her lips are glossed and full and for the slightest of seconds I imagine what it would be like to bite her bottom lip.

“Aria, turn your head more to the left. Yes! Perfect.” The photographer exclaims.

The set the girls are on is made up of life sized, BuildingBlox pieces. Brody sits at the center on a stack of Blox pieces and Aria stands beside her with Ivory on the other side. Ivory and Aria are into the shoot, genuine smiles on their faces though I think the smiles are mainly caused by their lack of sobriety. Brody's smile looks forced and unnatural on her face. Her eyes look empty, and she seems like she's mentally in a far off place while her body sits on the set.

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The next hour consists of new poses and new outfits for the girls and with each picture snapped I can see Brody drifting away further and further. By the time the shoot ends, and the photographer is satisfied, she looks almost...defeated. The look of defeat on her face causes a very small and very minor stinging sensation in my chest, one that I've never experienced before. I blame the excess of caffeine I consumed this morning rather than the dangerous territory of all things Brody Drake.

Once we're back in the car, Brody rests her head against the window in silence, just watching the sidewalks and people passing by. She hasn't uttered a single word, hasn't made any irritating noises to rile me, and hasn't cursed at me once. Something is definitely wrong with her, and I want to know what but then I remind myself that her emotional state isn't within my jurisdiction. I'm not an emotional man and I never will be. I don't care about the emotions of others, especially not spoiled rockstars who choose to pump poison through their veins. I don't care about Brody Drake.

### Chapter 9

#### Brody

There's always a method to my madness. Well, at least when I'm sober, though the madness I'm often trying to achieve when sober is getting violently high or drunk or both, exactly what I'm trying to achieve here. In this very specific situation however, the method to the madness is putting up a front and letting Harvey think that I've given in to him and his stupid ass rules. I've made myself scarce around the house this past week since the photoshoot and have limited conversations with him as much as possible. The reason for doing this is simply to ensure he doesn't suspect the plan I've concocted.

You see, Selene has Satan's Angels scheduled for a music video shoot, another thing I'm not looking forward to, especially considering I've barely spoken to the girls since my outburst at the shoot. I've been cooped up in my room for a week, bored, miserable, and so painfully sober even though I have a nice baggie of edibles hidden in my tampon box. I haven't taken them yet not because of Harvey's random drug tests -something he hasn't yet forced me to comply with- but because I'm waiting for the right moment. And the "right moment" is the video shoot.

"Brody, let's go." Harvey demands from downstairs.

I grin as I exit my room with the bag of edibles in my boot.

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I LOUNGE ON THE little leather couch in my personal dressing room, Harvey seated in the corner on his phone. He does that a lot. Texting, and I often find myself curious to know who he's texting. I've never asked because like I said, I'm trying to limit interaction, so he doesn't suspect anything. I sigh as I stare at the ceiling. Aria and Ivory are shooting guitar scenes right now so until it's my turn, I have to just sit here and wait, staring aimlessly at the ceiling and wondering how my life got to the point it's at right now.

My hair is styled in messy curls with chains and charms embedded into a few small golden braids that are only a quarter of an inch thick. My eyes are smoky like they usually are on tour and in last week's shoot, and my outfit consists of a lace up leather corset and matching lace up pants. Harvey has barely spoken two words to me and I'm unsure of his reasoning for being silent. Usually, he likes to argue back with me, but I also haven't initiated any arguments of late. The desire to do so has been there, but the execution hasn't in fear of messing up my devious plan. When I had to change, I left the edibles in my boot where Harvey would never find them. I don't want to get high; I need to. I've drifted so far from my friends in just one week and I'd

give just about anything to go back to how things used to be before all the lawsuits and the very sexy babysitter moved in. When I get high today, I'll be sure to hang with the girls so they see I can still be fun. I'll fight tooth and nail to remind them I'm special and I'm not replaceable.

I glance at Harvey who's still typing but there's a faint smile on his lips as if he's enjoying speaking to whoever he's texting. My brows pull together. I've never seen him smile like that and a small seed of jealousy plants in my stomach and sprouts. His job is to pay attention to me, and he hasn't been doing so, he's too busy talking to the girl on the phone. I know I should be happy to not have his attention on me but for some unknown fucking reason, I'm not. I want him to smile at me like that and not at her. I'm not usually one to get jealous but I choose to blame my deep-rooted hatred for Harvey. I love arguing with him and riling him up and I can't do that if he's focused on someone else.

I clear my throat to get his attention, but he doesn't look up. I clear it again and he looks up, his smile falling and his brow raised in question. "What?" He grunts.

I frown. "I'm bored." I complain, knowing that isn't why I interrupted him.

"I don't care." He shakes his head as he continues typing, his eyes dropping from mine.

I huff out a breath in defeat. A moment later, I'm still unbearably bored. I decide to roll off the couch and leave the dressing room. I'll walk around to pass the time. He rises from his seat immediately, "Where do you think you're going?"

I look at him over my shoulder with an annoyed expression on my face. "To walk around. I'm bored as fuck and you're not entertaining me. You're too busy texting."

He exhales and slides the phone into his pocket. "Sit," He demands, pointing at the

couch I vacated.

I cross my arms but don't sit. "No."

He shakes his head. "What do you usually do at these things?"

I raise a brow. "Get fucked up."

Harvey gives me a disapproving look. "Of course, that's all you used to do, but that isn't how it's gonna work anymore."

I roll my eyes and plop back onto the couch. "Yeah, yeah, we know. No drinking, no drugs, blah blah blah." I roll onto my side and face the back of the couch, so I don't have to look at him. I'm so painfully bored.

"You've been on good behavior lately. I told you I would have you on a leash in no time." He says arrogantly from his seat. Usually, I'm the one that starts in with him but I have a gut feeling him starting in with me is the only way he knows how to extend an olive branch and keep me entertained. This is probably his way of being nice.

I roll over onto my other side to face him as I prop my head up on my arm. "You totally got me. I'm practically a new woman," I answer sarcastically.

He snorts a laugh, "Better than the circus animal you were before."

I can't help but chuckle. Who knew he had a sense of humor? His phone pings with a new text and he slides it out of his pocket to answer, all of his attention on the phone. I frown. "Who are you texting all the time?" I ask, unable to keep my curiosity contained. He looks up at me with his black eyes, but they shine with protectiveness. Whoever it is, he loves her. Is she a girlfriend? A wife? Oh my God, is he married?

“Someone important.” Is all he says.

I sit up straight, “Are you married?” My stomach drops in anticipation.

He gives me a repulsed expression. “No.”



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“Is it a girlfriend?”

“No.”

I raise a brow. “Do you have a kid?”

He frowns, “No. Stop asking me questions. My life is none of your business.”

He’s single, unmarried, and has no kids, so who the hell is he texting? I’m about to ask a follow up question even though he told me not to, but the dressing room door opens and a girl in all black clothing enters. “Brody, you’re up.” She grins from ear to ear, genuinely excited about her job. Oh honey, I want to say. Hollywood will eat you up and spit you right out. But I don’t say either of those things. Instead, I follow her out and Harvey follows me. I need him to not follow me around. I can’t slip past him if he’s behind me at every waking moment. I need him distracted and out of my way.

I film my scene before Aria, Ivory, and I have wardrobe changes and updates to our hair and makeup. They change my makeup and make it look natural, almost as if I’m not wearing any at all. They take the chains out of my hair and style it in a low bun at the back of my head. They do the same to Ivory and Aria before they usher us all into identical schoolgirl outfits and have us film the last scenes. I notice Harvey, typing away on his phone the whole time and know he’s distracted. Once we finish, Aria and Ivory tell me about their night out at Veil, our favorite nightclub and how much fun they had. I have the bitter taste of jealousy on my tongue and in my belly, but I don’t say anything. I don’t expect them to isolate themselves because I’m isolated, but I expect them to be sympathetic and not rub it in my face. I can’t hold them accountable though, because again the two of them are fucked up. “How much blow

did you do today?” I ask, suspicion in my voice.

Aria snorts a laugh and Ivory giggles, “Like half a bag. Beatrix gave it to us last night when we were out. You know how good her stuff is.” Beatrix Banes is one of the most well-known faces in rock and metal. She’s a damn good singer but she doesn’t play any instruments. If you thought the shit that we did was bad, Beatrix is worse. She spent a month in jail for slapping a store employee across the face after said employee confronted her for peeing on the floor of the store, pants and panties down and all. She also crashed into the front of the same store only minutes after the first two offenses. She was so drugged up she didn’t even know what she was doing. Beatrix found us before we got big and asked us to open for her shows on her tour and we agreed, excited to work with our idol. We became super close with her and now she’s like an older, super mentally deranged older sister who falls off the face of the earth but then hits us up every now and then to do a shit ton of drugs and to fuck shit up in LA. Some of my best times have been with Beatrix so I’m jealous they got to hang with her while I was cooped up in my room with my drum set.

“Yeah.” I sigh as I look down. I look up at Harvey to find his eyes on me. We stare at each other for a split second before his phone rings and he takes the call with no hesitation. He turns his back on me and walks away so he can speak in private. This is the moment I’ve been waiting for. Harvey Taylor, FUCK YOU! “Let’s go to the studio.” I demand, grabbing both of their arms with excitement in my tone and in my eyes. My body just came alive.

“Now?” Ivory asks, confusion in her tone.

I drag them along, “Yes, now! Let’s go before the babysitter gets back. I got a bag of edibles.”

“Say less.” Aria starts running beside me and soon we’re a mess of giggles and chuckles. We continue running until we get our hands on the baggie and find our way

out of the building. We don't stop running until we make it to the street and then we flag a cab down.

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“MY MOUTH IS SOFucking dry.” Ivory complains from where she lies on the floor, staring up at the ceiling.

“Here.” Aria laughs as she passes Ivory the gigantic bottle of whiskey we've been sharing. Ivory takes a huge sip and sighs, relaxing.

This is exactly what I needed. A high, some whiskey, and my best friends. Throw in the fact that we made a song minus the lyrics, and I'm golden. We've been here for hours. Harvey free, Selene free, responsibility free, yet somehow still dressed in our schoolgirl uniforms. I jump off the couch and onto the coffee table, pointing at Aria, “This is fucking awesome.”

She laughs, “What is?”

I spin around on the table, “This! Us!”

Ivory chuckles, “We miss you.”

“I miss you guys too.” I lament, my features falling. “Thisbabysitter sucks. All he does is bitch me around and so does Selene. I get we're facing potential jail time but come on. I'm totally capable of staying out of jail and still getting high. They just wanna kill my vibe.” I complain as I jump off the table and snatch up the bottle of whiskey. I take a few large gulps and then hand it back to Ivory.

Aria frowns, “Sorry, Sticks.”

I shrug. “It’s only three months. Then he’s gone and we can go back to fucking shit up.”

“Wooooooo!” Ivory cheers.

“I’m shocked your phone hasn’t been going crazy with the babysitter trying to find you.” Aria admits.

I laugh, “I shut that shit off. He’s not finding me and he’s not ruining my vibe.”

I seat myself at my drum set and start slamming the sticks down on the drums. It’s the same song we just made, but I love the beat so much I can’t get it out of me. It’s the same song I was tapping out on my leg and humming last week on the way to the shoot. I liked the beat then and showed it to the girls today and they built on it from there. I slam the sticks down on the cymbals in excess, loving the sound. I twirl the sticks around my fingers when the parts of the song where the drums are silent come and then slam the sticks back down on the toms.

Aria picks up her guitar and adds to the song all while Ivory shoves handfuls of chips into her mouth. She always gets the worst munchies.

The door to our studio slams open and the sticks fall out of my hands and roll under the couch. The doorknob leaves a dent in the wall and Harvey storms into the room with his hands balled into fists at his sides. He lookspissed. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him so pissed. His eyes land on mine, and the pure fury that radiates off of him in waves says it all. He’s probably been looking for me for hours. I smirk at how pissed he is, loving that I’m the cause, but the smirk falls when he storms over to where I sit at the set and wraps a hand around my upper arm. He yanks me out of my seat so hard, I stumble on my feet, and he doesn’t do anything to steady me. Instead, he screams at me, only inches away from my face, “What the fuck is wrong with you?” His voice is so dark it almost scares me. Almost.

“A lot of shit.” I laugh.

He doesn't find me funny. “What did you take?” He demands.

I roll my eyes, but the movement feels so slow from the drugs. I laugh, “Why does it matter? I'm gonna fail your stupid ass drug test anyway and we both know it.”

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He yanks me forward and I almost fall but his grip is so tight on my arm, I can't go anywhere. Harvey tries to drag me out of the room even though I try to pull back, but it's no use. He's stronger than I am and I'm also cross faded. My arm hurts from where he holds me and I wince, "You're hurting me."

The look he gives me is menacing. "Do you have any idea what you put me through today? I had to search for you for hours. I only found you because your dumb friends posted a picture of you all here."

Ivory sits up straight and shrieks, "We are not dumb."

"Shut up." He snaps at her, and she coils in on herself, closing her mouth.

"Maybe if you didn't treat me like a prisoner I wouldn't have run away. Besides, you have nobody to blame but yourself. Your job is to watch me, and you failed at that." I grumble as I continue to try tugging out of his grip to no avail.

He leans in so close to my face I'm not sure if he's gonna kiss me or scream at me, but I wouldn't be opposed to the former. He keeps his voice low, "Well maybe if you weren't such a fuck up, I wouldn't have to babysit you in the first place."

His words hit home, and I open my mouth to argue but no words come out. He's right. I am a fuck up. My own parents can't stand to talk to me, they're embarrassed by my lifestyle choices. If it were up to my dad, I'd be working a boring nine to five office job in finance, crunching numbers all day and wishing for something more. My parents unofficially disowned me once I decided not to go to college. Aria and I spend holidays with Ivory's family and sometimes I fly to Florida to visit my brother,

but otherwise, I'm all alone. I'm all alone because I'm the biggest fuck up the world has ever seen and what's crazy about it is that I. Keep. Fucking. Up. I just can't stop.

Harvey drags me out of the studio, his grip never loosening on my arm. Not even when we take the elevator three floors down to the lobby. He doesn't release me until we're at his sleek black BMW and he shoves me into the passenger seat. I cross my arms over my chest and rest my forehead against the glass, allowing the coolness of the window to seep into my skin and calm my nerves. It starts to rain and drops drip down the windshield. I watch on the sidewalk as people start to hurry their steps, hoping to get to their destinations before they get too wet from the rain. Harvey drops into the driver's seat and speeds off, cutting in and out of traffic and driving like a mad man. The anger is still washing off of him in waves and I get why he's angry. I would be angry too if someone went out of their way to embarrass me and make me look a fool.

I knew what I was doing when I ran away in the first place. I knew it wouldn't end well but I was so desperate to keep the mask on for my friends so that they wouldn't think I'm a fuck up. I can deal with my parents hating me, but not my friends. I'm so afraid of them abandoning me and cutting me out because I'm not fun anymore. I need to be Sticks and Harvey will never understand that. My career, my friends, my fans, all of it rests on Sticks and Sticks can only be Sticks if she's in the news for some obscene thing she did while high.

The edibles are wearing off and the sadness is seeping in, the worry with it. Harvey doesn't look at me once the entire way home. Instead, he keeps his eyes glued to the road ahead, his knuckles wrapped around the wheel and turning white. Once we finally make it home, he cuts the engine and sits still, waiting for me to make a move. I open the door and step out, tripping over my own feet. I'm a little dizzy from all the whiskey still, so regaining my balance takes a bit of effort, but before I can figure it out, Harvey is at my side, gripping my elbow tight but not as tight as he did before. He leads me into the house and to my room and then turns on his heel and walks

away, his heavy footsteps echoing off the walls. His anger seems to have dissipated slightly, but I've come to know Harvey well and I know his silence is worse than anything. I've never wanted him to yell at me so badly. At least when he yells at me, I know he isn't this mad.

I sigh as I drop to my mattress and roll onto my side. Footsteps return a moment later, getting louder and louder. Harvey steps into my room and I turn my head to find his black eyes avoiding mine. My eyes drop to his hand next as he places a glass of water on my nightstand. "Drink that." He commands me.

I make no move, instead staring at him, completely shocked that he'd even care enough to get me water. I thought he'd rather let me suffer and rot. The only thing convincing me that what I'm seeing is real is the fact that weed isn't a hallucinogen. Otherwise, I wouldn't believe this sight one bit.

His voice gets deeper, more commanding. "Now."

I sit up slowly, reaching for the glass and bringing it to my lips. I take a sip and then another, not realizing how thirsty I was. I empty the glass and set it down, expecting him to leave right after but he doesn't. Instead, he looks at me and exhales. It almost seems like the anger is leaving his body and it's replaced by something else but I'm not sure what. What looks like a flash of pity runs through his eyes before he hardens his expression and furrows his brows. "I don't know why you do what you do and it isn't my job to know why. My job is to make sure you stop and that's what I'm gonna do." He turns to leave but stops at the door. He looks at me over his shoulder. "You're so self destructive and you don't even realize it." He leaves, closing the door behind himself and leaving me encased in darkness. I curl in on myself, hugging my knees to my chest as sleep slowly sinks its claws into me and pulls me under the surface and into the abyss.

Chapter 10



Brody

Another night of shitty sleep, except this time, add a mild hangover to the mix. Who knew not drinking for two weeks could result in my getting hungover? I haven't had a hangover in years, and I think it's because I usually drink every day. I wish this were the kind of hangover where I don't remember anything that happened the night before, but unfortunately, I remember. You're so self-destructive and you don't even realize it. He's right. And so, what if he's right? He doesn't understand and will never understand the reason why I do what I do. I have something to prove, and he doesn't, I could never expect him to get that. The world isn't relying on him to be someone that he isn't, but it's relying on me.

I roll out of bed against my better judgment and trudge into my bathroom, stripping my schoolgirl outfit off and tossing it on the floor. I step into the steaming hot shower after brushing my teeth and washing my face and let the water soothe the aches in my muscles. I must stay in there for thirty minutes before my fingers start to prune and I know it's time to get out. I stand in front of the mirror and dry my skin off and notice subtle bruising on my arm from where Harvey gripped me yesterday. Something about the way he grabbed me and was so aggressive turned me on and I'm not sure if that's something I should seek therapy over or should use a vibrator over. I'd like to believe I'm just sexually frustrated, but I know deep down that I'm attracted to him and I'm even more attracted to the aggressive side he has. I imagine him gripping my throat like that while he pounds into me, and I feel an ache between my legs before I squeeze my thighs together and force the thought from my brain completely.

I change into a pair of yoga pants and a tank top before heading downstairs. I'm starving and there's a lingering scent of food wafting from the kitchen which doesn't help my hunger. I don't want to look Harvey in the eye after last night so I'm hoping we can go back to how we were this week leading up to last night where we barely spoke and looked at each other.

I make it to the kitchen to find Harvey making a plate of scrambled eggs, alongside a smoothie bowl and a cup of coffee. It looks delicious and my mouth waters. His eyes land on me and slowly lower to the bruise on my arm. He clenches his jaw and then looks back up at me. “Good morning,” He greets, his expression and tone neutral.

I feel the tips of my ears turning red. “Morning.” I say awkwardly as I slide past him and open the fridge. He got me in the mood for eggs now so I can make myself some.

“What are you doing?” He asks. I guess we’re not ignoring each other.

I try to avoid his eyes. “I’m gonna make eggs.”

“Why would you make yourself eggs when I already made you some?”

I can’t help but meet his eyes with a shocked and confused expression on my face. I glance at the eggs he’s plated and find that he’s left them at the barstool seat I usually occupy when I eat. I raise a brow, “You made me breakfast?”

He nods once, “Yes.”

“Why?” I ask, suspicion lacing my tone.

He crosses his arms and leans against the counter. “Peace offering.”

I walk over to the food and assess it. It looks so fucking good I want to shove my whole face in it but then I remember how angry he was at me yesterday and suddenly the gesture isn’t adding up. “Did you poison it to get back at me?”

“Why would I poison you when my job is to keep you alive and sober?” He asks, doubt in his voice.

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I shrug, "Maybe because you hate me that much."

He shakes his head. "I don't hate you." He admits. "I just find you to be incredibly annoying."

I scoff, "That makes me feel so much better about eating something you made me."

Harvey's voice becomes more commanding. "Sit and eat before the eggs get cold."

I sit in my seat and can't help myself. I start tearing into the food and it actually tastes really good. "So why the nice gesture?" I was expecting cruelty from him today.

He leans his elbows on the counter. "Because I have a proposition for you and I'm trying to butter you up." He says honestly.

I raise a brow as I continue chewing. "Proposition?"

He nods. "I would like to propose that you play nice and don't run away on me again. You also don't drink or do any drugs and you behave yourself and I will in return, play nice as well and I will allow you to go to more locations of your choosing as long as you are accompanied by me and agree not to leave my sight."

"Not even to pee?" I tease but he raises a brow that suggests he doesn't find my joke funny. I think about it and make a big show of considering his proposition before I shrug. "I guess so. You promise you'll let me see my friends and go out though?"

He sighs, "Yes, but are you sure seeing your friends is a good idea? They're

constantly high and it seems that you have an issue being the only one not high.”

Am I that easy to read? I frown, chewing slower as I consider this. “They’re all I have.”

“You have Selene.”

I shake my head, “Selene doesn’t get me. She’s my bestest and oldest friend in the whole world but she doesn’t know the first thing about walking in, let alone wearing my shoes.”

“She cares about you. Enough that she almost terminated my contract yesterday for losing you.” He frowns, anger seeping into his black gaze.

The thought of Selene firing him doesn’t sit right with me. I’ve gotten used to my babysitter these past few weeks and the thought of having a new one replacing him bothers me. Maybe Harvey Taylor is growing on me only a little bit.

“You owe me an apology for that by the way.” He scowls at me.

I roll my eyes. “I don’t do apologies.”

“Well start doing them because you not only took advantage of my being on the phone but proceeded to have me searching for you for hours. You sent me on a wild goose chase.” He growls at me.

I rest my chin on my hand. “Well maybe if you weren’t so preoccupied with your phone and your secret little girlfriend or whatever, you wouldn’t have lost sight of me and nothing would’ve happened.” Eleven out of ten on the toxic behavior scale. One thing about me, I’m good at shifting the blame onto others. I know very well when I’m wrong, I just don’t like admitting it or apologizing for it.

He clenches his jaw. "I wasn't calling a girlfriend. I already told you I don't have one."

I raise my chin at him, "So who was it?"

"My little sister." He informs me. Raising a brow at me.

He has a younger sister. Relief washes through me knowing that he doesn't have a girlfriend even though I know I have no right. "Oh," Is all I say.

"Yeah, oh." He replies, a bite to his tone. "She was texting me yesterday because I just got her a phone for her birthday and she's excited about it. She also called me to tell me how her day was at school, hence the call I took. She's very important to meso forgive me for not paying attention to you for five seconds."

Well now I feel like a gigantic asshole. I don't say anything as I spoon the smoothie bowl into my mouth. "Do you accept my offer or not?" He changes the subject.

I nod. "Sure."

He grins a cocky grin as he reaches into his pocket. "Great." He pulls out a small plastic cup and I immediately feel my stomach churning, my breakfast threatening to make a reappearance. He places the hospital grade cup on the counter and slides it towards me. "Now pee in this."

"I-" I stutter, disbelief taking over my voice and my entire expression as I glance between him and the cup. "What?"

He crosses his arms. "Today is your first drug test."

"But you know I'm gonna fail." I protest.

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He nods. “Exactly why I want you to take it.” I give him a questioning look and he adds, “You’re gonna work towards sobriety and you’re gonna work towards a negative drug test and once you finally get there, you’ll feel like you accomplished something.”

I frown. “I can be sober without having to fill a plastic cup with my dignity.”

He doesn’t back down an inch. Instead, he just stares at me until I’m so uncomfortable that I jump off my seat and grab the plastic cup, heading to the downstairs bathroom.

### Chapter 11

Harvey

“Come here. I want you to see it,” I command Brody. She gives me a look of irritation, one I’ve come to know very well from her, from where she sits on the leather couch with her arms crossed and her lips pursed. She’s embarrassed. Good. I want her to feel embarrassed every time she gets drug tested so that the desire to do the drugs fizzles out.

She shakes her head. “I’m fine sitting right where I am, thanks.”

I bring the positive drug test over to her instead and she frowns deeper, her brows knotting in the middle. I hold it up in front of her face. “Look.”

She slaps the positive test out of my hand and rises to her feet, storming out of the

room. “I don’t need to look at it to know it’s positive, Asshole. I literally took edibles yesterday.”

I follow her out of the room, hot on her heels. “How does it make you feel?”

She snorts a laugh, “The drugs or the piss test?”

I raise a brow and contemplate the question before answering, “Both.”

She stops walking and turns to face me. She opens her mouth to speak but then closes it and thinks better of what she was going to say. She takes a minute to answer and finally speaks with a gleam in her eyes, “The drugs make me feel good. They make the hard feelings go away. When I take them, the things that bother me and worry me when I’m sober can’t get to me.” Her eyes glaze over as she speaks, and I can hear the heavy emotion behind her words but what could bother her so much when she’s sober that she feels a need to take drugs? What goes on in that head of hers? She wipes the emotion off her face and replaces it with a look of disgust, “As for the piss test, it makes me feel like shit. I don’t like the idea of you demanding I piss in cups. It’s weird.”

“What bothers you so much when you’re sober?” I ask. Maybe if I can get to the root of the problem, I can get rid of the problem itself.

She rolls her eyes and turns her back on me, walking away once more. “We’re not going there. It’s personal.”

“Come on, Little Rockstar, you told me you were gonna play nice so play nice.” I push her but she doesn’t budge. Instead, she continues walking and I follow her all the way up the stairs and to her bedroom, hoping she’ll give me something.

She’s about to shut the door in my face when emotion tears a small hole in the wall

she's built around her emotions. "It's better for me and for everyone else when I'm high." Is all she says as she closes the door and cuts off our connection.

It's better for me and for everyone else when I'm high. What does she mean by that?

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ANOTHER WEEK PASSES AND I'm pleased to report that the little rockstar has been on good behavior. She hasn't snuck out or attempted to sneak out, she hasn't taken any more of the edibles I know she still has hidden somewhere, she hasn't asked to see her friends, and all she's really been doing is playing the drums in her room or in the recording studio in the basement of her mansion. I don't eavesdrop on her while she plays because I know my presence makes her uncomfortable when she's playing but also because I'm not a fan of music. I think music is pointless. Why would someone waste their time listening to music when they could be listening to an audiobook or podcast that's going to make a difference in their lives and inspire them to be better?

I try to give her space because I know we have a tendency to fight when we're in the same room for too long. I don't want to argue with her. I know before I did because I liked the challenge that she presented me with, but that was before I saw her as a real human being. Don't get me wrong, I didn't go soft or anything, I just see that she is trying even if the effort is minimal and that's all I can ask for right now. I don't want to bicker or argue with her and make her go back five steps. Besides, she's grown on me but only a little. The other night, she ventured outside of her room and into the home theater to watch a mafia movie of some kind and I joined her without asking. I sat on the opposite end of the large couch, but I still watched it with her. She didn't complain about my presence and I didn't dare initiate a conversation. When the movie ended, we both went our separate ways with low "good nights" and we didn't speak again until breakfast the next morning.



I hear footsteps padding down the stairs and look up from where I'm plating her breakfast -the same way I have been every morning since our arrangement was made-to find her with a faraway expression on her face. "Morning," she greets but her voice sounds dead.

I raise a brow, "What's wrong?"

She shrugs, "Nothing."

She tries to dig into her breakfast, but I pull the plate away. "Talk."

Brody sighs, "I'm bored."

"Do you want to go somewhere?"

"Where do I even have to go?" She looks anywhere but at me. Her chest deflates as she speaks, and I feel a small tinge of pity in my chest.

I push the food towards her, and she no longer looks at it like she's starving. In fact, she doesn't look hungry at all. "You have to be at the studio in a few hours. Selene wants you three making a new album. Apparently, you have a contract with the record label and you guys have to put a new album out within the next three months. If you don't, they're gonna sue you and most likely drop you."

She throws her head back and groans. "Great, another lawsuit."

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“Not if you make the music. Besides, you’ve spent hours in your room with your drum set, I’m sure you have more than enough material.” I try to reassure her but it feels weird and also sounds disingenuous coming out of my mouth.

She rests her chin in her palm on the counter and meets my eyes lazily, “I start the songs and I like where they’re going but then I lose them halfway through. I don’t think the girls are gonna like what I have.”

I take a deep breath and try my best to sound sincere because I am, but the action is new territory for me. “Don’t underestimate what you have. I’m sure it sounds just fine and the girls will like it. It’ll all come together when you guys are together.”

She shrugs and picks at the food, still not putting any in her mouth.

“Brody.”

She looks up at me but says nothing.

“It’ll be fine. Stop worrying,” I encourage her. I have no experience being sympathetic or empathetic with anyone aside from Lucy. I practically helped raise Lucy after boyfriend number nine left mom alone with a newborn. Lucy is the only girl that I have a soft spot for. I’d do anything for her, be anything for her, and kill anyone for her and I’m trying my best to funnel a little bit of that into Brody because I can see that she needs it right now. Maybe you need it too. My inner voice inserts before I push it away. I don’t need it. Not one bit.

Besides, Brody and I made a truce agreement and this is me upholding my end.

That's all this is.

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I SIT IN THE far corner of the recording studio. Far enough away where Brody doesn't feel suffocated by my presence but close enough where I'm still able to watch her closely. It's not that I feel she needs the eagle eye on her like she needed three weeks ago, it's that I don't trust her friends one bit. Aria snorts so much cocaine I don't even know how the girl is still alive and semi-functional and Ivory is such a dingbat I don't think she knows how to count to ten while high or sober.

The two are horrible influences and I wish there was a way to keep them away from Brody. She's on the right path but Aria and Ivory could throw her off that path and send her into a spiral. I noticed that Brody has a faraway look in her eyes when she's around the girls now and I know exactly why without her having to say anything. She feels like the odd man out and she hates it. Aria and Ivory have no restrictions and they can do whatever they want but Brody can't and it kills her. She feels left out and hurt and I can see it on her face whenever she's around them and they're higher than kites and laughing about things she isn't in on or a part of.

Personally, I think Brody would be better off without them but that's my opinion and I know it would never happen. They're bandmates and best friends and that will never change. Still, watching the dynamic between these three while they're making music makes me pity Brody. Part of me wants to not care about her emotions and whether or not she's okay mentally but the other part of me, the stronger part of me, wants to whisk her out of here and back home where she may be bored but doesn't have to feel left out and not included. That same part wants to continue making her breakfast every morning and joining her for movie nights. Shit, I really have gone soft...No. I scold myself internally.

A loud, shrieking laugh draws my attention from my conflicting thoughts and I look

up to find Aria and Ivory laughing about something while Brody sits there and watches them, a frown on her face and a sad look in her eyes. Her hair is tied into a half-up half-down bun and she wears skinny jeans and a black cropped tank top that ends right under her breasts. The tanned skin of her stomach has been on display all day and I'd be lying if I said I wasn't imagining what the rest of her body looked like completely naked. Those thoughts wandered further into forbidden territory as I imagined what it would be like to touch every square inch of her bare flesh, the noises she would make, the expressions on her face. I shove the emotions away again as I have been all day, an internal war occurring inside me, and focus on what's really important here.

Brody looks so defeated and the sight of her face like that causes a stabbing sensation in my chest that feels a lot like empathy even though I'd hate to admit it. Aria strides over to Brody with a sheet of loose leaf paper in hand. She hands it to Brody and Brody reads through it, her face contorting into a disgusted expression. "I'm not singing this." She shakes her head as she speaks unwaveringly.

Aria stops in her tracks and Ivory looks shocked. "What do you mean you aren't singing it?" Aria asks, defensiveness creeping into her tone.

Brody stands and crumbles the paper in her hands, tossing the ball at Aria's face. "I mean, those lyrics are fucking stupid and I refuse to sing them."

"Excuse me?" Aria snaps, taking a step towards Brody as if poised to attack. She wouldn't touch her though, would she? I stiffen in my seat, leaning forward, ready to leap up at any moment to separate the two girls. Brody is average sized and I'm sure she can handle her own but Aria has about five inches on her and a little more muscle.

Brody doesn't back down. She takes a step closer to Aria, lifting her chin up in defiance the way she does with me when she's angry with me. "The lyrics are shit

and you know it. I'm not singing a song called 'Cum and Get It,' Aria. That title is stupid and the lyrics are even stupider."

Ivory speaks up, involving herself, "You would've liked it if you weren't sober."

"Exactly! Because it's fucking stupid! Nobody is gonna want to listen to that." Brody argues.

Aria's body language changes and it looks like she's fighting back the urge to put her hands on Brody. I watch her very closely because if she does decide to touch so much as a single hair on Brody's head, I'll snap on her myself. Brody is a thousand percent right in this situation but these two morons are so stupid they can't see it. "Don't shit talk my lyrics when you've been playing like shit all day. I mean seriously, how many times did you fuck up the beats and drop your sticks today, Sticks? You're off your game and you suck. Nobody is gonna want to listen to that." She uses Brody's own words against her. Aria is right on one front. Brody has been messing up a lot today, but I know it isn't because she isn't good at what she does. It's because she's rattled by the new dynamic of the band and it's weighing heavy on her. She's distracted which is why she's messing up. She's talented and damn good at what she does and everyone in this room knows it.

Brody loses her cool and shoves Aria hard in the chest, sending Aria stumbling a step before Aria charges her and pushes her back. Brody falls, her back hitting the stool she sits on to play the drums. Her ass hits the ground and before Ariacan do anything else, I'm between them, forming a protective barrier around Brody. "Back off," I threaten, using every intimidation tactic in the book to ward the girl off.

Aria retreats a step and walks away, Ivory with her the entire time. It isn't until they're out of the room that I turn to offer Brody a hand up. She ignores my gesture and helps herself off the ground, grabbing her drumsticks and tucking them into the back pocket of her jeans. She sits on the stool and covers her face with her hands. I

know I should probably leave and give her some space, but I don't want to leave her completely alone. She needs someone right now and her friends aren't acting like friends. They're the root of her problems. "Hey." I squat down in front of her and keep my voice low so she doesn't feel alarmed or threatened by it.

She sighs. "Just go."

I almost obey her. Almost. But I don't. I can't walk away from the little rockstar no matter how bad I wish I could. So instead of doing what's probably the smart thing to do, I grab her small wrists gently and pry her hands away from her face to find her crying. She tries to hide her face, but the damage is already done. I saw it and she knows it. She cries silently, tears streaming down her face and I keep my voice calm and comforting, "You aren't wrong, Little Rockstar. Everything you said to them was right, they just can't see it because they're high and not in the right mindset."

She shakes her head. "This is where it starts, isn't it?"

"Where what starts?" I ask, confusion rising to the surface of my voice.

She opens her eyes and looks at me, the sapphire color of her eyes standing out against the bloodshot whites. She looks so broken I wish that I could take all her pain and make it go away. "Them pushing me out of the band and replacing me." Fresh tears stream down her cheeks.

I squeeze her wrists a little tighter, "That isn't gonna happen."

She shakes her head. "Yes, it will. It's only a matter of time."

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“Brody, you’re irreplaceable. They’re also your best friends. They’ll come to their senses and see they were wrong. They would never kick you out,” I reassure her and I say it with such raw conviction that I think it helps her even if only a small amount.

Before I can say anything else, the door opens and Selene Stone storms in with Aria and Ivory behind her. Brody wipes her cheeks and I rise to my feet, my eyes on Selene who’s watching me with a suspicious look in her eye. She looks between Brody and I as if she wants to address what she walked in on, but thankfully she doesn’t. Instead, she says, “What is all the yelling?”

Brody doesn’t respond but Aria does. “Brody’s been fucking up her parts all day and then refused to sing the lyrics I wrote.”

Selene glances at Brody and raises a brow. “Brody, what’s going on?”

Brody scoffs, “The song was called ‘Cum and Get It’ and it’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard. If we got on stage and sang a song about cum, we’d be a laughing stock in the media the next day.”

Selene groans and for a split second it looks like she’s gonna side with Aria and Ivory. I clench my jaw, ready to speak up when Selene frowns at Aria, “She’s right, that’s the dumbest song I’ve ever heard, and I haven’t even heard it. Do not write anything stupid and from now on I approve whatever it is you put out. At least until the legal problems go away.”

Aria opens her mouth to protest but Selene holds up a hand. “The three of you cannot be arguing when an album has to be made and a tour is right around the corner.”

This grabs all of our attention. Nobody told me about a tour which means nobody told the girls either. Brody falters, “Whattour?” I watch as about a dozen emotions cross her face. First she looks excited then sad and that expression contorts into anxiousness.

Selene crosses her arms over her chest, looking the pristine businesswoman in her black pantsuit and stiletto heels. “I talked to the legal team, and they think that a small tour in the country with the three of you on good behavior would be a good idea. All you have to do is put on good shows with the material from the last tour and keep your noses clean to show the press and the state that you guys have changed and have left the bad behavior in the past.”

Hearing Selene’s explanation actually convinces me it isn’t a bad idea at all. She has a point and I think it could be a good opportunity for the girls if Aria and Ivory are capable of staying sober for five minutes. Brody throws her head back and groans. Selene doesn’t miss a beat, “What’s the problem, Brody?”

Brody rants, “I don’t understand the point of all that when I’m the only one being held accountable for getting sober and clean. I have a fucking babysitter for Christ’s sake, and you want us all to clean up our acts but I’m the only one doing it and you know it. So, forgive me Selene, for not wanting to go on tour sober while my friends are having fun without me.”

Selene sighs, “Brody-”

Brody holds up a hand to silence Selene, “Do not ‘Brody’ me. Fuck this, I’m done.” She snaps as she tries to step around me and walk out of the room.

Selene blocks her path. “Stop,” she commands and then leans into Brody so the other girls can’t hear. “I have a reason for everything I do. You know that. I just need you to trust me.”



Brody doesn't respond. She just looks at Selene with dead eyes and a hardened jaw. Selene raises her voice and points at the other two girls. "You two, you're clean and sober for this entire tour. And I will be drug testing you so don't think you're gonna fool me."

Ivory protests, "Selene!"

Selene ignores her. "I mean it."

Aria snaps, "And if we don't?"

Selene lowers her voice so it comes out stern and threatening. "If you don't, I'll tell the lawyers to step off and I'll let the prosecutors throw you in a little four by four prison cell. Don't test me, Aria Kane."

Selene Stone is one badass lady. It takes a special kind of talent, patience, and precision to manage these three and somehow, she does it. It's impressive, really. Aria mutters under her breath something to Ivory and Selene speaks up again, "What other lyrics have you written?"

"That was all we had." Ivory admits, shrugging as if she doesn't have a care in the world.

Selene sighs audibly, "Need I remind you that your deadline is in three months? Get writing and figure it out." She demands before turning on her four-inch heels and storming out of the room leaving a cloud of Chanel perfume in her wake.

Brody traipses back to her drum set and sits down. She takes the sticks out of her pocket and starts playing a beat she hasn't played yet. It starts off slow but then she pauses and slams the sticks down on the toms while her feet hit the bass drums. Aria and Ivory watch her and I notice that Ivory taps her thigh to the beat while Aria's

head bobs to the beat. It's fascinating and enamoring to watch as Aria and Ivory have their guitars around their chests in seconds, playing different melodies that pair perfectly with Brody's. The beat is good, I can't deny. Even for someone who hates music, I have to admit they sound good.

I stride back to my seat and sit, watching Brody the entire time she plays. I thought watching her in her room that one time was captivating but actually hearing the sound that goes with her movements while she drifts into her own little world of music notes is mesmerizing. The way her head bounces to the beat and her eyes close as she plays. I realize at this moment that I could watch her for hours and never get bored. I also realize that I find myself curious to know what it feels like to be as freeing to her as her music.

## Chapter 12

### Brody

I haven't spoken to the girls since our issue at the studio five days ago. We've had arguments before as all best friends do but it hasn't been that bad before. Aria and I have never physically put our hands on one another, and this feels like it's put a rift in our entire relationship. I haven't called or texted them to talk about anything, ranging from our fight to just life, and they haven't called me either, but I've seen on social media that they've been out publicly and hitting the clubs. I never harp on what people say about me or my music on social media but I'd be lying if I said I didn't sit and read comment after comment asking where I've been and if I'm still relevant the other night for three hours.

The fans are getting used to Ivory and Aria being alone together without me present. Some have theorized that we aren't friends anymore, some even said that I got pregnant and fell off the face of the earth because my baby bump started showing. Totally untrue but creative so I didn't reply to the comment.

Now, I'm in my basement in the studio, coming up with new beats because we're on a time crunch. Usually, we can make about five songs in three months' time without any contracts or labels rushing us or reminding us of contractual agreements, but now we have to double that in the same amount of time. So, I'd be lying if I said it wasn't stressing me out, especially when Aria and Ivory keep coming up with shitty lyrics.

I do what I do best. I allow my emotions to escape me, flowing out of my body and into my music. That's why I'm not surprised when my song comes out angry. It starts off slow and basic, an uncomplicated beat, and I keep it going, not sure what to make of it. Thoughts rise to the surface of my brain as I create the song, Harvey at the forefront of them. I think of the way he consoled me the other day and did his best to reassure me even though it required him to step out of his comfort zone so completely. He did that for me and I'd be lying if I said it didn't make me feel something aside from hate and irritation for him.

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*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:16 am*

I've never written lyrics to a song in my life. I've never tried and never had to because my friends do it all. But for some reason, words are coming to me as I'm playing and I stop to write them down, alternating between playing and writing. In about an hour, I've come up with the first verse.

The red and blue lights shine right in my eyes

She stops and demands I say my goodbyes

Anger arises as I learn I'll never be coming back

The Devil sends temptation as a form of attack

They told you I'm the serpent in disguise

But you know you're not in danger when you look in my eyes

I pour my heart into those words. It's my story and I feel like there's more to add to it, I just have to find the rest of the beat first. I stop the beat and think for a second. The guitar portions of this song can be left up to Aria and Ivory but even then I feel something would be missing from it, but I'm not sure what.

Just as I feel like a lightbulb is about to go off above my head, my phone rings from where it lays on the black leather couch at the other side of the room. I get up and walk over to it, curious to know if it's Ivory or Aria. I hold my breath in anticipation and once I finally get to it, the name that flashes on the screen has me jerking back in shock. I was most certainly not expecting to hear from Beatrix Banes right now. I lift

the phone off the couch and press the green answer button. “Hello?” I greet.

“Sticks, my favorite American!” Beatrix exclaims in her British accent, amused on the other end.

I grin at the sound of her voice and at the background noise. It sounds like she’s in a club packed full of people but it’s only two in the afternoon. Leave it to Beatrix to find a party at any and all times of day. God, it’s one of the many things I love about her. She’s so fucking cool. “What’s up? You sound like you’re having fun.” I chuckle, trying to be a good sport even though I’m green with envy.

She laughs on the other end, “I’m at a fucking party, Love. You have to come, I got the best blow you’ll ever have.” Her voice gets louder as she yells into the phone over the noise of the party.

I sigh, my face falling. “I would love to, Beatrix, but I’m on lockdown right now.”

“Bloody hell, Love. Do you need me to send someone to bail you out?” She queries.

Does she think I’m in jail? How would I be able to answer my phone from jail? “No, I’m not in jail. Selene is making me stay clean and sober. I have a babysitter living with me to keep me in check and he’s very strict, so unfortunately, no parties for me.”

She gasps on the other end, “Darling, I could have him killed for you if you’d like.”

Technically, I could have him killed if I wanted to. All it would take is one phone call to Ivy in New York and she’d fly here on her private jet with her gun fully loaded and the safety off. I never got a clear grip on what it is her and her fiancé do, but I know whatever it is, it isn’t legal and the girl has a lot of blood on her hands. But I’m not having anyone killed. I’ve grown to tolerate Harvey and I don’t want him dead as much as he does annoy me at the best of times. I’m slightly concerned to know that

Beatrix has lethal connections to people and I make a mental note to never, ever get on her bad side. “That’s okay. Thank you though.”

“Find a way to come here, Love. It’s been too long since I’ve seen you,” she complains.

I frown, my free hand reaching up to flatten the hair on top of my head even though there’s nothing wrong with it. “I wish I could, but I really can’t. I’ll tell you what, I’ve only got two and a half months left of this so when I’m free, we’ll party.” I promise, hoping a rain check will be enough for her. I can’t deal with my friends thinking I’m boring but Beatrix thinking I’m boring would send me over the edge. I look up to her and don’t want to disappoint her.

She pauses on the other end, the only sound coming from the speaker, the muffled murmurs of parties and upbeat music. Those sounds may be loud but nothing is louder than the disappointment in her silence. I squeeze my eyes shut in humiliation and feel my chest tighten.

A moment later, she finally speaks, sighing into the phone, “Fine. You owe me a good party, Darling.” Her voice sounds genuine and not at all disappointed, but I know it’s there. I heard it in the silence.

“I promise.” I assert, my grip tightening around the phone.

“Alright, you enjoy sobriety, Love. I’ll party for both of us.” She chuckles from the other end.

I force a smile even though she can’t see me. “Sounds good. Have fun.” My voice chokes and I force myself to hand up the phone before tears threaten to fall. I don’t want to be overly emotional and over dramatic crying over not being able to party but it isn’t about the party. It’s about what the party means. There’s a reason Beatrix

doesn't call me to go shopping and that she calls me to party. It's because my entire persona revolves around being a reckless troublemaker who snorts blow like nobody's business and always has run-ins with the cops. That's who I am to everyone and that's who they want me to be. I'd never be in the news for being charitable or well mannered, I'd only be in the news for the list of offenses Selene read off that sheet of paper what feels like ages ago.

I sigh and force the emotions at bay. I'm not crying over a stupid party. I walk right past the drums and sit at the bench of the piano. I rest my elbows on the keys and a dark and almost gothic sound escapes as I drop my head in my palms. My exhale gets cut off by that sound my elbows made. I remove my elbows and stare down at the keys. I haven't played the piano in years. My signature instrument is the drums, there's no room for piano in metal and rock. I learned piano when I was a kid, my parents wanted me to play what they considered to be a "classy" instrument -you can only imagine their reaction to my playing one of the most obnoxious instruments out there. -

I watch the keys in silence as if they could move at any moment of their own accord. What I love about the drums and all instruments is that they don't play themselves. They require a master, someone to play them, to command them. I place my right thumb on middle c and my other four fingers on d, e, f, and g. I keep my other hand in my lap for now, not sure if any notes will even come out of my fingers or if anything will come to me.

I press the keys and listen to the sounds but nothing piques my interest or inspires me. I exhale a disappointed breath. Not only did I completely disappoint Beatrix, but now I'm disappointing myself. I let my mind waver into the uncharted territory of self-loathing, of everything that's happened these last few weeks and how my entire world has completely turned upside down. My thoughts center around one thing in particular, someone. Harvey Taylor. Before I can think, my fingers start to create sound. The notes start flying out of me and before I know it, I've created thirty-four

beats. The notes are melancholy and cased in a serene sound that doesn't exactly fit the image of Harvey I have in my mind but reminds me more of myself and my life before Harvey stepped into it.

"Brody, come up!" Harvey's voice calls from the top of the staircase leading to the second floor. I didn't even hear the door open.

I rise from the bench, the faint whispers of my song playing in the back of my mind on a loop. The song I made on the drums still feels like it's missing something and so does the mixture of beats I created on the piano. I start to go down a rabbit hole in my head of just what could be missing as I march up the stairs and to the kitchen. The entire time I walk, the drum song and the piano song play in my head simultaneously. I stop a couple of steps away from the top as my eyes land on Harvey who's standing at the door just watching me with an amused expression on his face. The music dies in my head. "What?" I ask.

He shakes his head and forces a tiny smile away. "Nothing. You've been down there all day; you need to eat something."



*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:16 am*

I quirk a brow, “All day?”

Harvey nods, “It’s dinner time, Little Rockstar. You lost track of time. Again.” He emphasizes the last word but not with disdain or irritation. It sounds almost like he’s fascinated or impressed. There’s also a very small note of pride in his voice and in his eyes but I can’t imagine why.

A flicker of a smile tries to worm its way onto my face, but I force it away, completely confused as to why anything this man says would elicit a smile from me, though I can’t deny. The way the nickname “Little Rockstar” rolls off his tongue has a certain allure to it. It comes out of his mouth coated in honey and poison.

I take another step towards the top and he moves to the side, giving me room to slip past him. We walk silently to the kitchen and seat ourselves next to each other at the island. There are two plates of food for each of us and I know from the plating alone that my chef made it. “Chef was here?” I ask.

He nods. “Yes. She was here for hours but you didn’t notice because you were in your own little world.” Again, it doesn’t come out mocking.

“Is that a bad thing?” I raise a brow as I stab a piece of chicken with my fork and bring it to my mouth.

He shakes his head as he tears into his own dinner. “Not at all. It just fascinates me. I don’t know how you do it.”

I cock my head, “How I make music?”

He turns his head to meet my gaze, his onyx-colored eyes peering right into my soul. “No, how you lose yourself in it. It consumes you completely and I’ve never seen anything like it.”

I smirk, “Well, when you’re passionate about something and you love it with every ounce of your being, work doesn’t feel like work. I love music so much I never feel like I’m working when I’m actually working if that makes sense. It’s easy to lose track of time, the notes just start playing in my head and it’s like a big puzzle I have to solve. I always have a few pieces but there’s always so much missing and I can’t stop until I find them all and put them together.” I ramble on and feel the tips of my ears turn red with my embarrassment once I stop speaking. He could probably care less about anything I just said.

But when I look at him, it doesn’t look like disinterest on his face. It looks like intrigue, curiosity. “It must be nice to have something that makes you feel that way.” He says as he forces his gaze back to his plate.

I furrow my brows as a frown takes over my face. “You don’t have any passions? Hobbies?” I question. I can’t imagine not having music. What must it feel like to not have anything at all? A cold feeling washes over me and I feel the hair on the back of my neck rise with the thought. Harvey must have something that makes him feel the way music makes me feel.

He shakes his head, “No. Hobbies are a waste of time. There isn’t much room for passions and hobbies in my line of work.”

I feel a crack in my chest at how lonely that must make him feel. I never feel alone even when I am alone because I always have my music to comfort me. I can’t imagine not having anything and that must be what it’s like for him all the time. As much as I’d hate to admit it, I feel a twinge of sympathy for him. “They aren’t a waste of time if they’re something you love. You just haven’t found a true passion

yet.”

He snorts a laugh, “Since when are you in the business of lecturing me? That’s my job, remember?”

I can’t help but laugh even though I know he’s only trying to change the subject. “I think I’ve spent too much time around you. Pretty soon I’ll start waking up at the crack ass of dawn every morning and then showing my face in the same white button down and black slacks every day, scolding you and demanding you pee in a cup for me.”

The roar of laughter that escapes his throat is completely unexpected and almost stuns me for a second. I grin at the sound. It’s so pure and melodic, I find that I want to hear it again. His smile is so genuine I almost convince myself I’m dreaming because Harvey Taylor would never look at me and laugh, let alone smile. I’m so lost in the sight of his flawless smile that I almost forget about my earlier phone call with Beatrix and the absolute shit show that my relationship with my friends has become. Once the high of his smile vanishes, the after high sadness comes back and I remember just how messy my life has gotten.

I look down, my smile only a faded memory as I focus on my food. Everything starts to taste like cardboard and gets harder and harder to force down. I feel Harvey’s eyes on my face as I chew but don’t look at him. I just keep my head down and my eyes forward. We finish the meal in silence, and I leave my plate in the sink and start walking up to my room to change and go to bed. I know it’s early, it’s only eight thirty, but my brain hurts and my eyes are starting to burn. I’ve spent hours and hours thinking and exhausting myself mentally with making music, my brain could use some rest. I also don’t have anything else to do. I’m sure right now, Aria and Ivory are out at some club without me, high as kites, and drunk off their asses.

“Brody,” Harvey calls from the foot of the stairs.

I stop moving and turn to face him. I'm almost all the way upstairs, my room and cozy pajamas just around the bend, please don't let this be a dignity thieving, surprise drug test. "What?"

He stuffs his hands in his pockets uncomfortably and asks awkwardly, "Do you want to watch one of those mafia movies you like?"

I open my mouth, but no words come out. Did Harvey Taylor just ask me to watch a movie with him? First a laugh, then a smile, and now he wants to watch a movie. Where is the real Harvey Taylor who hates me and who is this strange man looking up at me from the foot of the stairs? He looks uncomfortable like he almost wishes he didn't ask but he waits to hear my response. This is so out of character for him I speak before he can change his mind, "Sure. I'll be right down."

He nods, "I'll put it on the TV. Do you want popcorn?"

"Sure," my lips twitch into a smile.

He turns on his heel and hurries out of the room as if he's been dying to get away this whole time. I can tell it makes him extremely uncomfortable to be kind to me but let's keep it real here, I'm growing on him and he doesn't want to admit it. That's why it bothers him so much to offer me anything but furrowed brows and frowns. I hurry up the last few stairs and into my room, quickly changing into a cozy pair of gray sweatpants and a matching gray crew neck. I march back down the stairs and into the theater, the whole time still in complete shock and disarray that Harvey initiated the movie watching. I know he enjoys the movies or at least enjoys not being alone and sitting in the theater with me when I watch them, but he never initiates it on his own and we never speak about it during or after the movies end.

When I enter the theater, I find him seated in his usual spot at the end of the couch. The TV shows the title scene for "Goodfellas," my all-time favorite and I notice the

bowl of popcorn placed on the further end of the couch on a tray. I take up my usual spot at the opposite end from him and wrap myself in a fluffy red blanket. Harvey presses play and the movie starts, but the whole time, I can't focus on anything aside from the man seated at the other end of the couch. The characters in the movie speak and key plot information happens but still, I can't focus on anything but Harvey's presence and the heat I feel between my legs at the mere thought of him.

“Why do you keep squirming?” He asks, a brow raised and a note of irritation in his voice.

I thank God silently that the room is dark, and he can't see how red my face has gotten. “It's hot in here.” I toss the blanket off me and grab the bowl of popcorn just to have something to do with my hands.

Neither of us continues the conversation as the movie continues and for the first time in my life, I'm peeved by the length of my favorite movie. I have to sit in Harvey's presence for two hours with my legs crossed at the ankles when I'd rather be anywhere else doing anything else. Fuck, why did I agree to this?

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*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:16 am*

THE TORTURERS OF THE medieval times used some of the most gruesome and most wicked torture methods of all time. From hanging to boiling people alive, they left no tortuous stone unturned. But they could've saved themselves the trouble of all that work and could've instead placed the person they were torturing in a room alone with a very handsome and very attractive Harvey Taylor who's just trying to watch a movie while you ogle him and mentally picture him doing very wicked and devious things to you with little to absolutely no fucking clothing on. There is no torture worse than that!

When the movie ended, I bolted from the room with a quickly muttered "goodnight" and raced to my room and closed the door behind me. That was about two hours ago and while my racing pulse has calmed down, my ability to sleep has escaped me. I've been tossing and turning for what feels like forever but every time I close my eyes, all I can think about is Harvey. It's a curse. A terrible, horrible curse. This has to be karma for something, but what? I mean, I've been on my best behavior lately, what did I do to deserve this? Unless it was before the good behavior... Oh God, this must be my karma for putting hot dogs on that old lady's car in New Jersey. I told Aria and Ivory it was probably not a good idea, yet I was the one who opened the sealed package of raw hot dogs and put them all over her car and in her exhaust pipes. This is totally my karma for that. Dear Karma, I really didn't mean it and I was under the influence of a lot of drugs and alcohol. Please forgive me and let me sleep. P.S. please stop making Harvey Taylor look so damn fine. Thank you

Another hour and a half later, I still can't sleep. My brain feels too awake and energized as if I already got a full twelve hours. Frustrated, I sit up and let my legs hang off the side of my bed. I accept that I won't be getting any sleep tonight right before I push myself off the bed and start walking towards my bedroom door.

## Chapter 13

### Harvey

Sleep will not come to me no matter how desperately I wish it would. I have to be up in only a few hours to start my day with my usual routine and it's irritating me that I can't get my mind to shut down. This never happens to me, I never have difficulty falling asleep, but for some reason, every time I close my eyes, all I can think of is the little rockstar with a filthy mouth and a horrible attitude that I'd just love to spank out of her. I'd love to discipline her for everything she did and continues to do wrong, in fact the thought is so thrilling that I feel my cock hardening painfully.

I'd discipline her for that foul mouth of hers and for every other thing she's ever done that irritates me, but I'd especially punish her for throwing me off and making me do things I would never do. She occupies my mind and holds it hostage, keeping me from sleep and in the process, my precious routine and that is unmistakably the largest offense on her very long list of offenses.

No matter how hard I try to force the image of her from my head, the scent of her bergamot and sandalwood shampoo, and that devilish little grin that she gives me before she says something completely out of line or knows she's about to rile me up, hold a collar of thorns around my neck that won't loosen. She's everything I hate yet I can't shake her no matter what I do or how hard I try. I'd like to tell myself it's because I haven't had sex since before I signed the contract for this job with that one night stand from the bar, but I know I can't when the image of that evil little grin comes back to mind.

The sound of a floorboard creaking grasps my attention and I sit up straight, looking around the room. I listen in the silence for another creak or a sound of any kind and sure enough, I hear footsteps falling quietly on the stairs, descending. I leap out of bed and hurry out of my bedroom. Does the little rockstar think she's going to sneak

past me? Does she think I'm sleeping and that I won't catch her? She couldn't be more wrong. Whatever it is that she's about to do, I'm gonna put a stop to it immediately.

I stride out of my room silently, not wanting to tip her off on my presence as I start descending the stairs. I look around the foyer and the sitting room but they're empty. I continue, in nothing but a pair of sweatpants, through the house. I check the kitchen, the family room, the theater, every room, and she's in none of them. How could she have disappeared so easily? I continue my search and wonder what it could be that she's doing that she thinks she won't get caught. Is she planning on taking drugs of some kind? I'm sure she has some hidden somewhere, but I was almost positive she stopped taking them after I announced she'd be getting drug tested and Selene threatened her. I feel a tug of disappointment in my chest at the thought of her taking a setback on her sobriety. I'd never admit it verbally but she's somewhat enjoyable to be around when she's sober. The personality she hides from her friends and her fans comes out and it's refreshing to see there's a real human being in there with real opinions and likes and dislikes instead of some dime-a-dozen celebrity.

Brody actually made me laugh tonight and she made me enjoy being around her. I liked seeing that side of her but what I didn't like was the side of myself that she brought out. I didn't know I had an awkward side to me. I've never asked anyone to watch a movie with me aside from Lucy, but that doesn't count because she's my little sister. I've never asked a woman to watch a movie with me and I've never offered to make a woman popcorn before. What is Brody Drake doing to me? My jaw clenches as I look in the garage to see if any of the cars are missing. They aren't.

I unlock my phone and check the security footage from outside to see if she slipped outside like she tried to do what feels like ages ago, but there's nothing. There aren't any blindspots she could've maneuvered herself around so that means she's somewhere in this house. With every step I take, the disappointment in my chest at her setback sinks deeper and deeper until it plants a seed in my stomach and starts



sprouting.

I'm about to check one more room when I hear a distant sound coming from the basement. Someone is playing the piano and the notes are dark and depressing. Not someone, but Brody. She must've gotten inspired or something in her sleep in only the way Brody Drake can and decided to start creating. Relief washes through me and kills the plant of disappointment inside of me, wilting it in the process. She didn't try to sneak out and she didn't do drugs. She's still on the right track. I should take that and go to bed, forgetting my wandering thoughts over her, but I'm incapable of the feat. Instead of turning around and putting as much space between myself and the little rockstar as possible, I continue towards the basement and open the door, walking down the stairs. She is temptation and I am unable to resist.

I keep my footsteps silent, curious to hear the melody she's creating. I'm fascinated and impressed by the way she works. I don't know how she does it, but she hears a note or a tune in her head and she builds and builds on it until she strings a song together. Her dedication and pure love for what she does is admirable. She's passionate about her music. She loses herself in it and time escapes her. I like watching her when she's in her own little world of music notes and songs, which is why I find myself standing right now, a few feet away from her as she plays a part of a new song she must be working on, but what I find most interesting about it, is that she isn't playing the drums.

Brody Drake is a drummer, everyone knows that. Satan's Angels have never played a song with a piano in it. Pianos don't usually fit in with rock and metal as far as I'm concerned, so I'm confused as to why she's creating a song on the stereotypically gentle sounding instrument. I didn't even know she knew how to play but I'll never question her talent again. I watch as her fingers fly over the keys. The song started lighthearted and almost playful, but she stopped it and shook her head at herself as if she was irritated by the sound.

I smirk as I watch her grow frustrated with herself. It's quite entertaining. A moment later, she brings her left hand up this time, and starts playing new notes that sound foreboding and gloomy. It almost sounds gothic in a way. The dark sounds contradict the lighthearted and pure ones she just created before she got annoyed with herself. She starts to hum a completely different tune while she continues to play this somber one and it almost sounds like she starts whispering, but I have to be wrong. Brody doesn't write lyrics and Aria's lyrics have been shit lately. Brody wouldn't be singing anything Aria wrote.

She stops abruptly and slams her fist down on the keys, making a mess of sounds. I can't help but grin at the sight of her frustration, amused. "What happened? I went to bed, so you had to take your anger out on the piano?"

Brody practically leaps off the bench with how startled she is. A gasp escapes her as she turns and faces me with a shocked expression on her face. She isn't used to people interrupting her or watching her create. "What the fuck?"

I walk a few steps closer to her and cross my arms over my bare chest. "Did I scare you, Little Rockstar?"

She raises an angry brow in the way I've grown quite fond of and flares her nostrils, "Who the fuck sneaks up on people in the middle of the night?"

"I wasn't sneaking up. I was making sure you weren't sneaking behind my back to do drugs." I defend even though I know it's a lie. Just because I know it, doesn't mean she has to.

She rolls her eyes. "Well, I'm not. You can leave now." She waves her hands in a shooing motion towards the basement steps.

I should take the chance to get as far away from her as possible, but I just can't.

Instead of doing what I should be doing, which is leaving, I walk closer to her and sit on the piano bench beside her, our thighs only inches apart. I've always prided myself on my self-control but it's all out of sorts tonight, yet another thing I can blame the little minx next to me for. "What are you doing?" Her big blue eyes widen even further in clear astonishment. It seems I've taken us both by surprise.

"Play." I nod at the piano with my chin.

She crosses her arms, the tension in her body coiling tighter. "No. I don't let people watch me when I'm making songs, it's distracting."

"Pretend I'm not here."

"No."

I don't speak for a moment, curious to see if she'll give in on her own, but she doesn't. I decide to shift the focus onto something else, something I'm curious about and have been curious about for a while. "Why aren't you sleeping?" I ask.

She immediately avoids my gaze and looks at the shiny white keys. "I'm not tired."

"I find that hard to believe."

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She snaps, “Well then I guess it’s a good thing I don’t give a shit what you believe.”

I smirk again and she finally looks up at me to catch sight of it. Her gaze flickers between my lips and my eyes before she forces her head back down. “Brody.”

“What?” She huffs, but this time it doesn’t sound aggressive, it sounds exhausted.

I lower my voice so that it comes out soothing if that’s even possible. I don’t know how to soothe or reassure or calm, it’s just not my thing. “What’s been up with you lately? Ever since the recording studio you’ve been smiling one minute and looking like you’re on the verge of tears the next. You did it today at dinner and you’re doing it now.”

She sighs. “You wouldn’t understand.” Her voice sounds detached and a bit hopeless and I find that I want to touch her, to reassure her maybe by placing a hand on her shoulder, I don’t know. That doesn’t seem right so instead, I keep my hands to myself.

“Doesn’t mean I can’t listen.”

She looks up at me and frowns. The look in her eyes is so broken I want to do any and everything in my power to fix it and to make it go away. “I’m just under stress, that’s all. Don’t worry, I’m not gonna fly off the rails and get all fucked up on drugs. I have a cup to pee in every week, remember? If that’s what you’re so worried about, you can go.”

My face is void of emotion. I’m pleased to hear that she’s not tempted to drink or do

drugs but I'm not pleased over her feeling stressed and overwhelmed. "That's not what I'm worried about," I say quietly, and I watch as a swarm of thoughts circle around in her head. "What's got you stressed? The tour?"

Brody throws her head back on a groan, "All of it." She looks back up at me and her eyes glaze over. "The tour, my friends, my fans, my family, everything." Her voice cracks on the last word but before any tears can fall, she wipes her eyes with the sleeve of her crew neck.

I knew her friends were partially to blame. I don't know much about her fans and her family though. "What's going on with your friends?" I probe.

She exhales and stays silent for a minute and just when I think she's going to remain silent and not give me anything to work with, she finally speaks, "I knew when Selene told me I had to get sober that it would only be a matter of time until I was the odd man out of the group, and I was right. They're my best friends and I love them but sometimes I feel like they don't really know me. We get along so well when we're all drunk or high and that's what our entire friendship was built on. We don't really know the sober versions of each other and it's even harder when I'm the only sober one." Her eyes remain on the piano keys, but it looks like she's staring right through them. "I'm just questioning how long it'll be before they shut me out of the group completely and decide I'm too boring for them and that they don't like me sober. I saw it starting at the photoshoot and then it escalated at the studio. I'm afraid this tour is gonna be the end of the road for me." Her voice completely shakes as she mutters the last statement.

I can't resist any longer. I place my hand on her thigh lightly, hoping the touch will send some comfort or reassurance through her even though I have no business comforting or reassuring anyone. She jolts at my touch but makes no move to remove my hand or move away from me. "They care about you. They won't just drop you. Once all three of you are sober, it'll be fine. Don't work yourself up over it. You're

going through some changes in your life that they aren't going through and they don't know what that feels like."

She shakes her head and looks up at me and tears freely stream down her cheeks. I desperately want to wipe them away, but I resist. "You don't get it. I'm already the odd man out. You saw how Aria reacted when I shit on her lyrics the other day and you saw how Ivory took her side. When we go on tour again, it'll only get worse until I'm cut out completely. And once they cut me out, the fans won't give a shit about me and I'll just be boring Brody Drake again and not Sticks."

I furrow my brows. "What do you mean boring Brody Drake? There's nothing boring about you," I protest.

She squeezes her eyes shut and more tears pour from her eyes. "My entire life I was average at everything. I passed classes but didn't excel, I never won any awards, I never did anything exciting and nothing exciting ever happened to me. Every single aspect of my life was mediocre and what made it worse was the fact that I am mediocre. I'm average sized, I weigh the average amount for a woman my size, I look average in appearance, I'm not gorgeous but I'm not ugly. There just isn't anything special about me aside from the fact that I can play the drums and even at that I can't even write decent lyrics." Sobs start wracking through her body as she speaks. Every word is a lie and it infuriates me that she doesn't even know it. She chokes on her next words, "When everyone realizes that sober Sticks is actually boring and average Brody Drake, my friends will get sick of me and move on, my fans won't give a shit about me anymore, and all I'll have left is my family that can't stand me and this stupid fucking piano I can't even make a decent melody on."

"You're wrong." I assert. "There is not one single thing about you that's average, Brody Drake. If the fans and your friends didn't see it, they wouldn't love and worship you. Hell, my little sister wouldn't worship you." I bring Lucy into the conversation as an extension of an olive branch. I don't talk about myself and my

personal life with Brody because I simply like keeping my information private and I also don't have many people in my life that I share things with. I've never gotten this personal with anyone before, especially not a client, but I can't help it when it comes to this broken blond seated beside me.

Her eyes are so bloodshot from crying, the deep blue color stands out and almost makes her eyes look like they're glowing. I've never noticed how ethereal her eyes are before. I've never seen anything like them. "Your little sister listens to our music?" Her voice shakes from tears.

I nod. "Lucy loves Satan's Angels. Of course, I didn't know who you guys were until I signed your contract and from there, I put the pieces together that I'd be babysitting my little sister's idol. If I told her she'd go absolutely insane." I smile at the thought of Lucy's excited little face, her jumping up and down in anticipation and pure joy. I miss that kid. I want to see her so badly, but I have another two and a half months to get through before that happens.

Brody's tears slow and a small smile forms on her lips. "You didn't tell her you were babysitting me?"

I shake my head. "Of course not."

"Why?"

"Because I signed a non-disclosure agreement, and it also wouldn't be very professional of me." I admit.

Brody laughs. "Always so uptight."

"One of us has to be." I nudge her shoulder with mine and another small laugh escapes her.

She looks up at me as her laugh dies down and silence grows between us as our eyes find each other's and time and our surroundings seem to vanish around us. I don't know how long it is that I look in her eyes, unable to distance myself from her, my eyes flicking from her full lips to her eyes coated in lashes damp with tears.

Before I can think better of it, I cross a line I've never crossed before. I grab Brody's face with one hand and bring her mouth to mine. I kiss her hard, like I've never kissed anyone before, tasting the saltiness of her tears on my tongue. She returns the kiss which only encourages me as I hungrily claim her lips like a man completely starved. I glide my tongue along her bottom lip, seeking entrance and she opens her mouth, her tongue finding mine. My other hand finds her waist and I turn her body towards mine. She shifts so that she straddles the bench and I tug her closer to me, never once breaking our kiss.

I pull my mouth away for a split second to whisper against her lips, "Nothing about you is average, Little Rockstar."

She tries to respond but I crash my mouth back onto hers and find all thoughts of reason have left me. I grab a hold of her hips with both hands, pulling her towards the edge of the bench and don't think anything of it. It's like I've left my own body and something has possessed me. I'm unable to stop. I need to touch her, taste her. I won't be satisfied until I do. I've never ever crossed this line with a client or been this desperate for a woman before but I can't bring myself to care at all in this moment, as selfish as it is. I have her exactly where I want her, and I don't plan on letting her go. At least not tonight.

**BRODY**

**HE DRAGS ME DOWN**to the edge of the bench and leans between my legs, still never letting me up for air, but I couldn't care less. Who needs air when they're kissing this man? I was attracted to Harvey before tonight. His personality may grate



on my nerves at the best of times but there's no denying his pure perfection. I may have imagined a time or two where I'd be in this exact position in this exact situation, but I never thought it would actually happen, the same way I never thought he'd come down here without a shirt on and displaying those perfect, chiseled abs tonight.

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I wrap my arms around his neck as his hands start to wander up my thighs. I'm still fully clothed which is frustrating and I wrap my legs around his waist, bringing his hard length down to my aching center. He pulls away, "What's wrong, LittleRockstar? You're squirming." He smirks, knowing exactly what he's doing to me and why I'm moving so much.

I breathe into his mouth, "You know what."

"I don't. I think you'll have to tell me."

I keep my jaw clenched tight and I don't speak.

He cocks his head at me, "Do you want something from me?" He asks as his hand finds my ass and he digs his fingers into the soft flesh, squeezing in question.

A small moan escapes my throat as he shifts and his cock rubs against my center through both of our clothes. "Do you?" He urges when I still don't speak.

I'm so desperate for him to touch me, to give me something that I gasp, "Yes."

"What do you want?" He urges, a satisfied smirk on his lips.

He's really gonna drag every word out of me. I know he won't give me what I want unless I admit it so I decide to give in, but I force confidence into my voice. "I want you to fuck me."

He groans, satisfied with my admission as he rubs himself against my center. A

second later, his mouth crashes back down to mine. Does this mean he's gonna give me what I want?

Harvey's hand moves until it finds my center. He palms my pussy through my sweats and I'm almost positive he can feel the warmth at my center, begging for release. He finds my clit through my sweatpants and uses his thumb to build pressure as he moves it in slow circles, his mouth never leaving mine.

A moan tears from my throat as the pressure builds and the warmth only grows between my legs. The sound I make must encourage him because his hand dips into my pants and under my panties until he finds my folds, slick with need for him. A low growl escapes his lips when he finds just how wet I am for him. "You're soaked for me, Little Rockstar. I thought you hated me." He teases.

"I do," I argue as his thick index finger pushes inside of me. I cry out at the sensation.

"But you don't hate when I finger fuck you." He doubts. "Do you?"

My back arches as he pushes another finger inside, stretching me as his fingers find a rhythm. He uses his thumb to rub circles on my clit and I pant. "Do you?" He presses, his voice hard.

I cry out as he finds that very specific spot inside of me. The pressure on that spot along with the sensation of his thumb on my clit is enough to have my head reeling, so much so that my words just spill out of me. "No, I don't hate it."

"I know you do." He kisses my jaw and then my neck, his tongue licking the skin. "You're a dirty little rockstar, aren't you?"

He works me so hard a foggy forms in my mind and I become putty in his hands. "Yes."

“Say it.” He commands.

“I’m a dirty little rockstar.”

He growls into my ear, “Good girl.” His fingers start to move faster and I cry out, my back arching so high up, but he uses his other hand to keep me where he wants me.

I feel the heat growing in the sensitive bundle of nerves he’s not sparing, and I know my orgasm is cresting. The slickness of my own arousal coats the inside of my thighs and I feel like such a mess of my own juices and the sweat beading the exposed skin of my neck and forehead. “Oh, God,” I cry out as I almost reach my climax.

“Are you gonna come?” He asks, his tone intense. He seems almost as out of breath as I am, though I know my rapid and short breaths are much worse.

“Yes, yes, I’m gonna come,” I moan so loud around the last word.

He picks up his pace. “If you want to come, you have to ask nicely.”

What an absolute motherfucker. If he didn’t have me in such a compromising position, I’d tell him to kiss my ass and then I’d probably find a way to piss him off either by plotting another escape or by destroying his personal property. However, I can’t do that at the moment. I’m too desperate to come and I feel it. It’s so close. I’ve never begged for anything before, but there’s something about Harvey that makes me do things I’ve never done before and makes me say things I’ve never said. When he has me like this, there really isn’t much I wouldn’t do if he asked me too, not if it makes me feel this good. And I’ve never felt something so good, so intense. “Please, let me come.” I beg, my eyes squeezing shut with my embarrassment.

I can hear the grin in his voice, “I didn’t know you could be so obedient when you want to come. If I knew that three weeks ago, I would’ve just finger fucked you

sooner.” He says arrogantly as he presses harder against my g-spot. I cry out in response, “Now come,” He demands, and I come immediately around his fingers, my walls tightening in response. My whole-body shudders as my orgasm shoots through me in waves and my eyes practically roll to the back of my head.

We both pant and when the aftereffects of my orgasm finally settle, he removes his fingers and sucks them into his mouth, licking and sucking my juices off himself. Once he’s satisfied with his work, he looks down at me and takes in my disheveled state.

The air goes silent between us, no filthy words and no witty remarks. I watch as his entire focus shifts and his conscience must kick in. He doesn’t look relaxed and at ease anymore, a man given in to his desires. He goes back to the arrogant and infuriating babysitter I met the day Selene informed me my life would be changing for the next three months. He shoves away from me and rises, his eyes avoiding mine. The look that flashes across his face is regret mixed with shock and guilt. He storms out of the room without another word leaving me alone, post orgasm, with a wet spot on my sweatpants and the taste of him on my lips.

Chapter 14

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:16 am*

Brody

In the fourth grade, I puked all over myself in front of everyone on sloppy joe Friday. In seventh grade, I got my first period at school and had a bloody little butt until my mom picked me up but by then everyone had already seen it. They called me “Bloody Butt Brody” for months. Fuckers. In high school, I had braces after everyone had already gotten theirs off.

Why am I sharing my most embarrassing moments you may ask? Well, simply because in each and every one of those moments, I thought I would never experience humiliation any worse. I thought that was as bad as it could get but boy, was I wrong. Nothing and I mean nothing is more embarrassing than getting finger fucked on a piano bench and then getting walked out on after you come on someone’s fingers.

In the days since Harvey humiliated me in my own home, I’ve barely seen him and when I do see him, he won’t make eye contact with me and tries as hard as possible to leave the room. Do I find it rude? Yes. Does it make me self-conscious? Yes. Does it drive me absolutely fucking insane? Fuck. Yes. Every time I see him, I remember what we did. I remember how good it felt and I also remember letting my guard down with him only for him to completely betray me after. It feels like we went back and completely erased all progress we’ve made. The distance between us reminds me of our relationship when I first met him, when I came home that day to find him in my kitchen, jaw clenched and a cocky expression on his face.

He makes himself scarce around the house and out of embarrassment, I’ve been hiding in my room all morning. You’d think the awkwardness would go away or at least dull down since it’s been a few days, but nope.

I have to be at the studio in an hour and as mad as I am at the girls right now, I'm relieved that I have to be there. Not only will it distract me from the awkwardness under my own roof, but it will be a good buffer between me and Harvey.

I wear a pair of low-rise jeans that have red stars on each butt cheek, and a red spaghetti strap tank top that stops right above my belly button. I style my hair in my signature, half up, half down messy bun and finish the look with some layered chain necklaces. Once I'm dressed, I hold my breath as I stride down the stairs and to the garage. I don't run into Harvey on my way, but once I spot the driver waiting for me, I know he's already in the car.

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THE DRIVE IS SILENT and I want to gouge my eyeballs out with a fork. I hate awkward silence. Harvey types messages out on his phone but his face betrays no emotions he's feeling. I assume he's texting Lucy, as he usually is, but I don't comment on it. The only interaction I've had with Harvey these last few days was the little plastic cup he left outside my bedroom door yesterday morning.

I assume I must've passed the drug test since I didn't get a scolding and also considering I haven't taken any drugs. The car stops and security appears at my door, ushering me out of the car as paparazzi swarm us with their flashing photos and their bullshit comments. "Brody, over here!" One yells from somewhere to my right. I ignore him of course, the same way I ignore the rest of them. It's one in particular that I find it nearly impossible to ignore. "How does it feel to know you're irrelevant? Your bandmates have been seen on multiple occasions without you, are you getting kicked out of Satan's Angels?" The pap questions and I grit my teeth so hard. I'm normally pretty good at ignoring the paps. Well, minus that one incident where I shattered that pap's windshield and fucked his car up with a crowbar. But there's something so triggering about the questions he asks me. Maybe it's because they hit close to home or maybe it's because they're true or at least, they will be soon. My

anger bubbles up inside of me and I suddenly lose control over my emotions, I shove away from security and charge towards him, ready to do God only knows what to him, until a firm arm wraps around my waist and secures me to a burly chest.

I kick and prod, trying to slip out of the hold but the arm never lets up. I know from the strength alone my captor is a man and it isn't until he's carried me inside by just my waist and sets me on my feet that I realize it's Harvey. I shove his chest hard, "Don't touch me," I snap.

He flares his nostrils but keeps his mouth shut and it only infuriates me more. He starts walking ahead of me, expecting me to follow and I make no move. He stops by the elevator and turns to glare at me, finally opening his mouth after days of silence, "Let's go," he demands.

My hands curl into fists and I open my mouth to argue but the words just won't come out. What am I gonna do? Argue and go home? I can't really do that when the paps are still flooding the streets just dying to snag a bad picture of me or to catch me doing something. I'm sure there'll be a headline tomorrow with a picture of me charging at that pap. "Brody Drake, Hostile from Pregnancy Hormones" or "Brody Drake, Blacklisted from Satan's Angels and has Hell to Pay." That last one actually sounds pretty cool if I'm being honest, even though the idea of being blacklisted throws me over the edge. I storm into the elevator and cross my arms over my chest when the metallic doors close in front of us. I stand as far from Harvey as possible, and he must have the same idea as he stands as close to the wall as he can. I'm almost positive his arm rests against the wall.

Once we finally make it to the studio, I'm not surprised to find Aria and Ivory already here. I am, however, surprised to find that they are higher than Mount Everest. I was sure after Selene's lecture and scolding at our last session that they'd actually listen. Once their eyes land on me, Aria grins and outstretches her arms, "Brody!" She greets excitedly as she rushes towards me and takes me in her arms. I awkwardly



return her hug, completely confused with her all over the place emotions. I pat her back as Ivory joins our hug, wrapping me up in her lanky arms from behind.

“We missed you,” Ivory says affectionately into my hair.

I pull out of the hug and wrap my arms around myself, uncomfortably. “I missed you too,” I lie. I haven’t missed this version of them. I miss my friends sober even though we haven’t been sober all at once in a long, long time.

“I wrote some great shit!” Aria cheers as she prances over to her purse and grabs a folded-up sheet of loose leaf. She rushes back over and hands it to me.

I unfold it and skim over the lyrics and while I do, I feel Harvey’s black eyes on me from across the room. He sits in the corner, shrouded in darkness and it almost seems like he isn’t here, but I can feel his presence anywhere. It looms over my head like a dark cloud that feels like raining sometimes but prefers to just keep its presence known while it acts in silence.

The song isn’t half bad. With a few tweaks, it could be good. It’s playful and tells a story of a night in Vegas with flashing lights and I could see the fans enjoying it. “This is good.” I compliment her, forcing a smile. I don’t know why it feels so hard to smile at her.

She beams, “I knew you’d love it!” She turns to Ivory and bumps her shoulder. “I told you she’d love it.”

Ivory smiles wide, flashing her perfect teeth, “Aren’t you so excited for the tour! It’ll be just like old times.”

I fold the paper up, so I have something to do with my hands and keep my eyes glued to the thin blue lines on the page. I walk over to my drum set and sit at the seat,

shoving the paper into my pocket. “Yeah, so excited.” My smile twitches and falters altogether.

They come closer to my drum set, “Are you okay?” Aria asks.

I nod. “I’m good. Can we just start playing? I’ve been working on some new stuff I want to show you.”

Ivory’s eyes light up. “Show us.”

The next forty-five minutes consists of me playing the new beats I’ve been making on the drums the last week from my basement. I leave out the song I was working on when I was switching between my drums and the piano, not wanting to share that with anyone just yet. The girls go all business and start playing different guitar sounds that pair well with my songs. In no time, we’ve managed to string two whole songs together, though both still require lyrics.

We take a lunch break, but I find I’m not really hungry. I pick at my food and ultimately decide to leave it unfinished on the table. While the girls eat, I work on perfecting the songs we’ve made. “So, tour next week.” Ivory starts.

I sigh, my chest deflating. “Yeah.”

Ivory shakes her head, “What’s up with you? Do you not want to go on this tour or something?” Her voice holds a note of defensiveness to it.

I shake my head. “I never said that.”

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:17 am*

“You didn’t have to. Your face and your whole attitude show it. What’s your problem, Brody?” Ivory snaps. I expected to bud heads with Aria today over Ivory. My last issue was with Aria and here I was a fool for thinking it would just be one of them I fought with.

I frown, “There’s no problem, Ivory.”

She pushes out of her seat and strides over to me. Aria remains in her seat the whole time, watching us as she chews on lettuce from her salad. Ivory stops in front of my drum set and leans in, “Bullshit. Speak up and say whatever it is you want to say but won’t. We know you have a problem.” See, what does it for me is the word choice here. The constant use of the word “we.” It shows me they’re a united front. It’s the two of them against me.

I feel my blood boiling. I jump out of my seat and walk around the set until I’m only inches away from Ivory’s face. We’re on eye level, both shorter than Aria by about five inches. “You want to know what I have to say? Fine. You’re right, I’m not fucking excited about this tour because the two of you are gonna be off doing God knows what on your own while I’m stuck in my little hotel room bored out of my mind and watching the news. Selene told all of us it was time to get sober and I’m doing my part to clean up our image but the two of you aren’t doing shit,” I snap, my face turning red with anger.

Ivory’s brows crease in the middle and I can practically see steam rolling out of her ears. “Are you forgetting that ninety percent of the trouble we got into was your fault from the very beginning?”

“Are you forgetting that you did plenty on your own too? Nobody forced you to do anything,” I argue. “Selene thought I was the problem here, but it’s been the two of you the entire time. You’re worse than I ever was and you know it, you just won’t admit it,” I seethe at her.

Ivory completely flies off the rail and snaps, grabbing my hair in her hands and tossing me to the ground. I fall and grab her shirt in the process. We both fall in a heap of limbs, scratching at each other’s faces like wild animals. For her, this is caused by whatever drugs she’d taken today. She would never do this clear headed. For me, this is all my anger, insecurity, and fear coming out to play. I’ve never fought with my friends before, not like this, but it seems we’re all falling apart and becoming people we aren’t. A hand reaches out to separate us but Ivory balls her hand into a fist and punches whoever it is in the face.

I roll on top of Ivory and tussle with her from on top but a body piles into us and joins the fray. Blood sprays and I’m not sure who it belongs to but it doesn’t stop me. I’m too blinded by rage to notice. Suddenly, the fight goes from one against one to three against three. Aria’s involved, blood on her lip, and she wrestles with Ivory while Ivory scratches and pulls at me, and I scratch and pull and wrestle with both of them.

Another person joins, pulling only me out from under Aria, and untangling my limbs from Ivory’s. I don’t know how I ended up at the bottom, but Aria was focusing her brutality on Ivory rather than me when I was below her and Ivory was rolled onto her side. The arms cage me into a broad chest and I’m reminded of when Harvey intercepted me from the pap. I know it’s him without having to look and for a second, my anger at him dissipates. I’m more angry with the girls right now anyway. My chest rises and falls with rapid breaths and I dig my nails into Harvey’s arm, itching to get out and get back to unleashing my rage.

Two security guards separate Ivory and Aria and I finally get a chance to take them in. Aria’s hair is a shit show. Her lip is bleeding, and a bruise is forming under her

left eye. Ivory's nose has a huge scratch, probably from my nails, running across it and onto her cheek, small beads of blood forming. Her shirt is also ripped and hangs off one shoulder. I can only imagine what I look like.

"Breathe. Calm down." Harvey whispers in my ear.

The door slams open and rebounds off the wall. Selene enters with angry, hurried footsteps. She wears one of her signature suits and enters in a cloud of Chanel perfume. "What the fuck is going on here?" She demands.

None of us answer. Selene only continues, "First of all, you two," She points between Aria and Ivory, "I told you to get sober and you didn't listen to me. Your drug tests start next week and I meant what I said. If you disobey me on this, I'm out and you're all on your own with the prosecutors and the state." She focuses on Ivory, "And you! How dare you put your hands on Brody and start this whole brawl?"

Ivory doesn't respond. She looks at the ground with a look of regret on her face. Selene turns on me, "You." She snaps. "You've been doing so well and I hear you charged at a pap? And then this....this-" She gestures between the mess we created in the room while murdering each other. "Cat fight." She finishes. She sighs and continues, "Do I need to sign you up for anger management? Because it looks to me like I do."

"I think you've done enough." My smart-ass mouth starts.

She raises a brow, "Brody Drake, remember what I said to you? I will walk away and you know it, so don't test me."

I don't respond. Selene looks at Harvey and the other security guards and nods at them. "Thank you for breaking that up. You can let go of them." She commands and they all obey. She speaks of us like we're children that were scolded in the principal's

office but I guess in a way, we are. The three of us stand on our own, awkward and uncomfortable. We sneak glances at each other and the regret on each of our faces at the damage we've done to each other speaks for itself. Selene lowers her voice to a sympathetic tone, "The three of you are best friends. Look what's happening to you. Pretty soon, there won't be a band at all if you keep this up. Are you all okay with never speaking to each other again and losing your band?" Selene asks all of us.

None of us answer.

"I didn't think so. Work this out before the tour or I'm upholding my threat." She fumes before turning on her heel and storming out of the room as fast as she entered.

I keep my eyes glued to the floor. "I'm so sorry, Brody." Ivory chokes and tears start streaming down her cheeks. "I don't feel like myself at all lately and I can't believe I just did that." She looks up at Aria, "I'm sorry I punched you. I was just so mad and I couldn't-" She searches for the right word, "Control myself."

"I'm sorry for getting involved. I only made it worse." Aria shakes her head at herself. "And for last week, Brody." She says only to me.

I take a deep breath. "What's happening to us?" I ask, my voice shaking. They don't answer me. "Selene is right. If we keep this up, we won't have a band at all. I'm sorry my attitude has been shit lately. I've just been feeling so left out and trapped in my home while you guys are having fun without me." Tears freely roll down my cheeks. "I'm not okay with never speaking to you guys again and I'm not okay with losing our band," I sob.

Ivory strides over to me and hugs me, Aria follows right after. We hug each other and just cry, and I realize how bizarre the last four hours have been. We've been all over the place and have hit wave after wave of emotions. I guess I did accomplish one thing today. I wanted to distract myself from my issues with Harvey and that worked,

but at what cost?

“No more drugs,” Ivory declares. “We’re all sober from now on.”

Aria nods, “Agreed. We’re sorry you felt left out, Brody. No drugs on the tour.” She agrees.

I smile through my tears, “Thank you, guys.”

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THE RIDE HOME FROM Hell is as expected, silent. Harvey hasn’t once mentioned the bloody scratches marring my cheek or the bruise forming on my cheekbone that I caught a glimpse of in the rearview mirror.

Once we make it home, I walk my sore body up to my room, Harvey on my heels. I immediately make my way into my bathroom to assess the real damage of my face and Harvey disappears somewhere down the hall, to his own room I assume.

I look in the mirror and find my cheek, slightly torn up with dried blood coming from three long scratches. The bruise on my cheekbone is turning a deep purple color, and I notice for the first time, a cut in my right eyebrow. I remember Ivory swinging a fist at me with her ringed fingers, so I assume the metal is to blame for the split skin. I turn the sink on and tie my hair up into a low bun so it’s out of the way while I clean my cuts.

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:17 am*

I pull the first aid kit out from under the cabinet and open the small red box. Just as I start rifling through the box for the proper supplies, my bathroom door barges open and I jolt, a squeal tearing from my throat. Harvey stands in the doorway, changed into a pair of loose fitted sweatpants and a black t-shirt. “What are you doing?” I ask, my tone outraged.

He assesses the state I’m in and strides over to me, stealing the first aid supplies from my grip. I watch in silence, completely awed, as he starts cleaning my scratches with gentle fingers. He applies a thin layer of healing ointment after and avoids my eyes the entire time. “Put ice on your cheek,” he instructs before taking a step back to retreat from my room.

“Stop,” I command him. He doesn’t get to walk away from me after ignoring me for days and then take care of me when I have a few scratches. He stops in the doorway and slowly turns around, his movements full of regret and discomfort. I cross my arms over my chest, “Is there something wrong with me or something?” I ask, needing to know the answer. It’s been on my mind since he walked out of that room.

He blinks slowly and then shakes his head, “There’s nothing wrong with you. Why would you ask that?” He looks up at me through dark lashes and I feel the breath get stolen from my lungs.

“Because you just walked away and didn’t talk to me for days. You went back to treating me like something you’d scrape off the bottom of your shoe,” I snap, raising my voice. I didn’t want to reveal just how bothered I was by what he did, how insecure it made me feel.



He sighs, “What we did was a mistake, Brody. It should never have happened.”

Rejection pierces a hole right through my chest with a scalding hot branding iron. “Is that what this has been about? Ignoring me? You kissed me, remember?” I remind him.

Harvey rubs the spot between his eyes with his index finger and thumb. “Yes, I remember, and it was a mistake. You are my client. I should never have crossed that line with you, and it will never happen again.”

I snort a laugh even though I want to curl in on myself, “You’re implying I’d ever want you to touch me again.”

He just stares at me for a fleeting moment in silence. I feel my cheeks turn red with my embarrassment. The truth is that I do want him to touch me again. I want him to do what he did to me the other night, again, and more. I’ve never felt as messy or as wild as I did with Harvey and that’s saying a lot because I’m a fucking rockstar for fucks sake. I’ve never been with someone who’s been so in control and who was capable of making me feel that way and I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want it all again, with Harvey.

We’d never actually work as anything non casual. He’s a stuck up, control freak who’s probably never taken a sip of alcohol in his life and I’m an all-over-the-place rockstar with a tendency to take too many drugs and drink too much whiskey. He wakes up at the crack of dawn to work out and I wake up at noon after drinking all night the night before, only to start drinking again. He craves order and I crave chaos. With all of these differences, we’d be doomed for failure before we even started but it feels nearly impossible to stay away.

He relaxes his shoulders, “Good, then I guess we’re on the same page. It will never happen again and we will go back to having a professional relationship.” He gestures between the two of us with his pointer finger.

I raise an apathetic brow, “Sounds good to me.” I lie. I clench my jaw so tight; my gums start to hurt.

“It’s settled then. Goodnight.” He nods at me before he turns around and walks away from me almost as quickly as he walked away from me the other night.

It felt shitty to get walked out on the first time and those wounds scabbed over. Him walking away from me tonight just reopened them. I exhale a pent-up breath before I close the bathroom door and lock it behind me. I turn the shower on scalding hot and strip out of my clothes.

I step into the shower and hope the water will wash away the memory of Harvey touching, kissing, licking, but it won’t go away no matter how hard I try. The night in the studio plays on a loop in my mind, wringing emotions out of me I’d rather not dissect. I scrub my scalp with some shampoo and force myself to push my wavering emotions towards Harvey aside. He obviously doesn’t feel the way I feel about that night and he regrets it, so that should speak for itself. We may have made progress when we made our truce and formed an almost friendship but that progress is a faded memory now.

chapter 15

Harvey

Unbelievable. My actions are unbelievable. Finger fucking a client on a piano bench after kissing her senselessly? Unbelievable and highly unprofessional. I have never crossed that line with a client, nor have I ever been tempted to and then Brody Drake walks in. She feels like my own personal temptation sent from the Devil. If this ever got out, my reputation in my industry would be destroyed, everything I’ve ever worked my ass off for, ruined. My contract could be terminated before our three months are over if Selene finds out about this.

My business would never recover from a hit like this to its reputation, which is why I have to ensure it never happens again no matter how bad I want it to. I enjoyed my lapse in judgment a little too much with Brody and I knew immediately after that it was the biggest mistake I've ever made in my life.

I have to put distance between us if I want to keep my job and ensure my reputation is intact. That night, walking away from her felt like it was the single hardest thing I've ever done in my life. I didn't sleep the rest of the night. My mind kept going back to her. Her writhing beneath me, the sounds she makes when she comes, the little gasps she sucks in when her back arches from her pleasure, and her coming undone because of me. I didn't want to stop there, but I knew I had to. When presented with the choice between Brody and my business, my business will win every time.

Besides, Brody and I are not suitable for each other. She's a walking tsunami and I'm a steady sea. At least, that's what I've been telling myself every time she enters the room, looking as tempting as ever. When she walks into the room, she glows and when she leaves, the room feels darker. I tried my best to ignore her and put distance between us and then she had to get herself into trouble at the studio, brawling with Aria and Ivory. I'll admit, Brody did get a few good punches or scratches on the other girls, but Aria is a force to be reckoned with. The girl is a wild animal and I felt my chest cave in on itself when she put her hands on Brody.

One thing I know for certain is that Brody can handle herself. She's proved it on multiple occasions with her "I don't give a fuck" attitude. Another thing I know for certain, I can not stand the sight of her injured. It makes my skin crawl. Seeing her face scratched up set off a primal part of me I didn't know I had and knowing two women were to blame set me off even more considering there was nothing I could do to defend her. It isn't my job to defend her, but I can't help but want to. That's why I felt obligated to patch her up when we got home. I couldn't harm anyone in her defense, so I had to settle for patching her up. The image of her face like that in my head, set me off and I couldn't sit still.

I wasn't expecting for her to confront me about my distance that night, though. She looked hurt and offended and I wished more than anything that I could've done something to stop her from looking that way and feeling that way but what could I have done? I can't be honest with her for fear of losing my job and hurting my business, and I want to lose myself in a fit of rage after lying to her about regretting what we did.

In the week that's passed, I've tried to push the memories and thoughts of her from my mind with great effort and poor results. I've continued to put distance between us and she seems to be doing the same which irritates me. I know it's hypocritical of me, but I can't bring myself to care.

I have loosened up on my coldness towards her only slightly and that is due to the fact that she's been obscenely anxious lately. We're on a plane flying to Nevada, my home state, with the whole band and crew, Selene included. Aria, Ivory, and Brody sit together on the couch while the rest of us take up the seats on the sides of the plane. In the days before we left, Brody was anxious. She wasn't sleeping and I know this because I heard faint piano melodies coming from the basement at odd hours of the night and she was barely eating, just picking at her food and never finishing anything. I never asked her if she was okay, not wanting to get too personal with her after how that ended last time, but I've wanted to. My concern for her grows as I watch her every minute, fidgeting with something or just looking uncomfortable and on edge.

Her friends are surprisingly sober, something I didn't know was possible, and they either notice and don't acknowledge Brody's discomfort or they just don't notice or don't care. The first show is tonight in Vegas and after that, the girls have three days off to work in a studio Selene rented for them. That seems to be the order of events for the entire tour.

"Brody," Selene interrupts my inner conflict by calling the cause of my issues. Brody

looks up at Selene and Selene continues. “Did you invite your parents to the show?”

Brody shakes her head and looks down at her hands in her lap. “Nope.”

Selene frowns, “What about Andrew?” I know who Andrew is. That’s Brody’s brother that she’s close with.

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She shakes her head, “He has a work thing.”

Selene frowns. “What about your cousins?”

Brody’s brows crease and she seems to grow irritated. “They have school, and my uncle hates our music. Besides, I already gave my VIP tickets away.”

“To who?” Selene raises a brow. I find my curiosity piqued as well.

Brody glances at me and quickly looks away. “Someone you don’t know.”

Aria interrupts, “I gave my VIP tickets to my mom and her girlfriend.”

“My brother is coming with my mom,” Ivory huffs out and I can tell she isn’t very excited.

Selene crosses her arms over her chest, “My family is coming.”

Brody’s eyes widen and a grin forms on her face. “They are?” She basically leans out of her seat in anticipation.

Selene nods. Why would the mention of Selene’s family excite Brody so much? Is she close with Selene’s family? “They’re coming here and then flying to visit Nan on the way home.”

“Nan?” Brody grins. “Why didn’t they bring her?”

Selene scoffs, “Because she’s the most annoying person on the planet and she skimped out on my birthday gift this year,” she complains about who I’m assuming is her grandmother.

Brody laughs, “Typical Nan. Gotta love her.”

Aria chuckles, “Do you guys remember when Nan came to the last concert?”

The girls all start hysterically laughing and Selene groans. “How could I ever forget?”

“She started a fight with a twenty-year-old and then called Selene from the floor to tell her we were too loud and to lower the volume mid-concert,” Brody recalls, a huge, carefree smile on her face.

Aria takes a sip of her water and laughs, “Gotta love that woman.”

“She’s insane. A shame she won’t be here,” Ivory shakes her head.

“A shame indeed,” Brody agrees as her calm state slowly fades and she goes back to worrying.

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AFTER THE FLIGHT TO Vegas, we settled into our hotel rooms, mine across the hall from Brody’s, and made our way to the concert venue. Brody, Ivory, and Aria were swept up quickly by makeup artists and hair stylists and they’ve been gone for hours getting all done up for their performance.

An hour before the show starts, Brody reappears looking ethereal. I can’t take my eyes off her. Her hair is adorned with chains and star charms woven into a few braids and the rest is curled loosely. The black strands in her hair mix into the blond curls

and she has dark eye makeup on both of her deep blue eyes. She wears a wine-red bra top that resembles a bikini top with matching lace up pants that reveal plenty of her tanned skin. Her outfit reveals parts of her I haven't yet seen and I note a tattoo of the tragedy comedy masks on the back of her left shoulder blade. She has another tattoo on her ribs, right below her breasts on the right side of her body but I can't make out the words from where I'm sitting on the leather couch in her dressing room, but I have a burning desire to get close enough to decipher them.

Brody's eyes land on me and she strides over to me and plops down on the couch about a foot away from me. "Can you say something rude like you normally would so I can focus on what a dick you are instead of worrying?" She asks, turning her head to face me.

I smirk, unable to help it. "Like what?"

She waves her hands at me, "Anything, you're good at being a dick so act natural."

I shake my head and snort a quiet laugh, "Why are you worrying?"

Her smile falls and she cocks her head at me like I'm stupid. "Have you seen the headlines about me? The articles? Because I'm sure all the fans out there have and they'll be looking at me even closer than they were before."

I frown, "Don't worry about other people. Do what you do best, get out there, perform, and then be done with it. At least until the next show."

She takes a deep breath and doesn't respond. Selene pops her head in the door and looks at Brody, a warm smile on her face, "Brody, your guests are here."

Brody tenses up, her eyes widening with the news. She leaps out of her seat and rushes towards the door. She looks at me over her shoulder, "Be right back." A small



smile forms on her lips as she rushes out of the room.

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:17 am*

Brody

I FOLLOW SELENE DOWN the hallway, passing event staff as we go. One staff member hands me my sticks as I walk and I tuck them into my back pocket. Selene looks at me over her shoulder, “Are you sure this is a good idea?”

I nod, “Yes.”

Selene grins like the Cheshire cat. “It’s a very nice thing to do. I’m proud of you.”

I give her a small smile. “Thanks.”

She takes a turn and I follow her. Immediately I find two burly security guards, blocking two women from entering. Selene gestures for them to let the girls in and she does. I take in the older woman first. She’s an inch or two taller than me with jet-black, shoulder length hair, curled loosely and she wears a pair of jeans and a Satan’s Angels t-shirt. Her eyes go wide when she spots me and she places a hand over her mouth in shock. The smaller woman, or girl rather, is about five inches shorter than me with olive skin and chocolate colored hair. She squeals when she sees me and bounces up and down on her feet. “Ohmygod! Ohmygod! Ohmygod!” She cries excitedly. She wears a pair of denim shorts with a t-shirt. On the t-shirt is a graphic of me at my drum set.

I grin when I see it. “Nice shirt.”

She blushes and rushes towards me, throwing her arms around my waist and hugging me. I hug her back and her mother apologizes on her behalf for her excitement. I

wave her off and smile down at the girl, she looks up at me with the widest, toothiest grin. “You must be Lucy. It’s nice to meet you. Your brother talks so much about you.”

Lucy’s big green eyes go wide, “He does?”

I nod. “Yep.” I whisper in her ear so her mom can’t hear, “I think you may be his favorite person. He’s a grump.”

Lucy laughs, her freckled cheeks turning red. “He’s always mad about something. Mom used to tell him when he was little that his face would freeze if he kept frowning.”

I can’t help but chuckle at the thought of a young Harvey. Lucy releases me and I grab her hand, looking up at her and Harvey’s mother, “It’s nice to meet you Mrs. Taylor. Do you mind if I steal Lucy for a bit?”

She waves me off, “Sure, have fun! And you can call me Melissa, I’m not married, and Harvey and I don’t share the same last name.”

I nod, “Right. Thanks, Melissa. I’ll bring her back soon.”

Selene and Melissa engage in a conversation of some sort while I lead Lucy down the hallway we came from. She asks me questions about myself as we walk and I answer them all for her. I bring her to both Ivory’s and Aria’s dressing rooms for photos and meet and greets before I steal her away again and bring her to my dressing room. I stop right outside the door and peer inside, finding Harvey on his phone, not typing but making a curious face.

Lucy whispers, “He’s been texting me for hours and I haven’t answered. I didn’t want to ruin the surprise.”

I whisper back, “That’s probably why he looks constipated. I’m gonna tell him I have a surprise for him and then you can come in.”

She nods and I wink at her before I step inside. “Hey,” I greet him.

Harvey looks up and nods before looking back down at his phone, his brows creasing.

“My guests came.”

He grunts in acknowledgement.

I roll my eyes, “Hello?”

He looks up, “I heard you.”

“I said my guests came.”

He flares his nostrils in annoyance. “And I said I heard you, what else do you want?”

I frown. “Well, I wanted to do something nice but since you’re being a dick, I don’t care anymore.” I call to the door. “You can come in,” I yell to Lucy.

She peeks her little head inside and Harvey’s eyes go wide with shock. She sprints into the room towards him and he jumps off the couch to catch her. “What are you doing here?” He says, a warm smile on his face as he holds her to him. It’s amazing how he can go from being the world’s biggest dickhead to being so kind and loving with a child.

Lucy squeals, “Brody invited me and Mom!”

Harvey’s eyes widen even further, and he glances at me. I don’t say anything, still

annoyed with his attitude. “You did that?”

I raise a brow and nod.

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:17 am*

“Mom’s here?” He asks Lucy and she nods. “Where is she?”

Lucy shrugs, “Talking to the lady with the suit and high heels.”

“Selene,” Harvey laughs.

Lucy wraps her arms around his neck and the sight of them together is so wholesome. I feel a stab of envy at how he lets his guard down with her but I know it isn’t fair of me to feel that way. I’m just his client, she’s his little sister.

Harvey and Lucy talk quietly, and I can’t quite make out what they’re saying but I get distracted as Ivory and Aria enter the room and take Harvey in. The puzzled expressions on their faces reveal a mirror of my thoughts. How is Harvey, asshole, Taylor, smiling and being loving towards a child? I asked myself when I first saw them together, it’s very odd to see this tender side of him.

Ivory wears a light pink chain bralette with a matching skirt, revealing plenty of skin. Her hair has recently been touched up with its baby pink ombre coloring and she has glitter and rhinestones on her eyes, but she doesn’t need all of it to sparkle on stage, her personality shines all on its own.

Aria, never a fan of skirts, wears an electric blue pair of leather shorts that leave a small amount of her rear on display, and she completes the look with a matching blue bralette top and fishnets with rhinestones. All of it ties in perfectly with the baby blue streaks in her hair. Her makeup is simple, the way she likes it.

Lucy’s focus homes in on us and she squirms out of Harvey’s grip and runs over to

us. “I can’t believe I’m really here.” She exclaims.

I ruffle her hair, “Better believe it, because you are.”

Aria smirks, “And not only that, but you’re backstage while we perform. You get the best seat in the house, Kid.”

Lucy shrieks in excitement and jumps up and down. I can’t help but grin at her excitement. She’s excited because of us. It feels comforting to know that I have at least one loyal fan that I don’t have to worry about being irrelevant to. I wish they were all like Lucy. She’s shorter than I am, so I easily drape my arm over her shoulders and pull her into me. “Harvey, take a picture of all of us for Lucy.”

He nods, his face not revealing any emotion, as he slides his phone out and snaps a few pictures of us. We all pose and make different faces, so Lucy has as many photos to look at as she wants later on.

Selene pops her head in and knocks on the door, “Show time in five.”

My chest deflates. Selene walks away and Ivory and Aria nod their heads at me to follow them as they start for the stage. “I’ll be out in a minute,” I say awkwardly.

They nod and wait in the hallway for me. Lucy looks up at me expectantly and I try to force a smile for her, not wanting to ruin her experience in any way. Harvey walks closer to us and looks down at Lucy, “Luce, can you wait in the hall with Ivory and Aria for a minute so I can talk to Brody?”

Lucy looks up at me and then at her big brother and the wide, devilish grin on her face says that she knows something but whatever it is, I don’t know it. “Okay,” she agrees as she skips out of the room, leaving me alone with Harvey.

“Thank you for doing that for her. This means a lot to her and she won’t forget it,” he thanks me.

I shrug, “I didn’t just do it for Lucy.”

He exhales, “Brody-”

I cut him off, “It’s not like that. I just felt like you’d stop being such a dick if she was around. I thought you could use some cheering up.” I ramble as I reach for a water bottle to occupy my hands and my eyes. “It was selfish really, I was just trying to butter you up so you’d be nicer to me, that’s all,” I lie as I sip the water.

He gives me a look like he doesn’t believe a word that came out of my mouth. “Right.”

“Anyway, I should go.” I put the cap back on the water and turn to leave but he grabs my arm, stopping me. I feel electricity jolt through my body and my veins from where he touches me. I wish my body didn’t react to him this way, but it feels unstoppable.

“Wait,” he says under his breath.

I look up at him expectantly, but I’m not sure what I expect him to say. He already made his feelings towards me very clear, so what could this be? “Yes?”

Harvey tries to speak, his mouth opens, but words don’t come out. He closes his mouth and seems to reevaluate his word choice and then he tries again, looking defeated. “Thank you. For her and for me.” Is all he says. Just five words but they mean something else entirely when they come out of his mouth.

I’m so stunned by the raw emotion on his face that I just nod, no witty responses



prepared on the fly. He lets go of my arm and I turn and leave the room, finding the others in the hallway. Together, we make our way to the stage, Lucy and Harvey behind us and with every step I take closer to the fans who'll be watching my every move, my legs feel like they're getting heavier and heavier. My heart thuds so loudly it sounds like its own drum, and my breaths become rapid. With every second I get closer to the stage, it feels like I'm going down a slippery slope.

## chapter 16

### Harvey

I've always hated music. I find it pointless to sit and listen to a song when you could be using that time to listen to a podcast meant to teach you something and better you or read a book on something of significance. That was my firm stance on the subject before I met Brody Drake. She's proven to be dangerous to me in many ways, but now she's adding another reason to my growing stack of reasons I keep in my head. I still hate music, don't get me wrong, but I hate it significantly less now, or I hate it only when she isn't making it. There's just something about the way she plays and the sounds she creates, they feel like a small glimpse into the heart of the woman that tries so hard to be something she isn't for other people.

The entire time she was on stage, I stood completely captivated backstage with a perfect view and Lucy right beside me, singing the lyrics with Brody and bobbing her head to the music. My mother is floating around somewhere, probably trying to find a rich boyfriend, leaving me all alone with Lucy which I have no issue with. I've missed my little sister so much, texting her and calling her hasn't been enough. Warmth spreads in my chest when I remember that Brody is responsible for bringing Lucy here, to me. We both know the reason she told me she did this was a lie. She did this with warm intentions even if she likes to lie and pretend she did it selfishly and that makes me question my wavering emotions over her all over again. Every time I think I have a grip on myself and that I can successfully build a wall between us and

shut her out, she does something like this to tear the wall down and leave me exposed and vulnerable, two emotions and feelings I never want to face because they make me feel like I'm not in control and I have to be in control. It's non-negotiable.

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:17 am*

Once the show ended, I assumed Lucy and Mom would be going home but apparently Brody planned to have them here until we leave Nevada which is two days from now. She even went as far as to have Selene book them each a room on our floor of the hotel. They rode to the hotel with us in the limo and the whole time, Lucy was peppering Brody with questions. Lucy has a lot of energy in her and without the proper patience, people can withdraw from her rather quickly and leave her anxious and unconfident in herself. It's why I worry so much about her. Mom gets irritated and impatient with Lucy often because the thirteen-year-old moves a mile a minute from one thing to the next. Part of me worried Brody wouldn't understand Lucy and that she would get impatient with her quickly and annoyed, but Brody surprised me by doing the exact opposite.

Every time Lucy rambled from one topic to the next, Brody paid attention and answered Lucy with long answers rather than quick, one-worded answers that signify you aren't interested in talking. Brody made Lucy feel comfortable, involved, and important and I know that means everything to Lucy and I can surely tell you it means something to me too. Mom, of course, was polite with Brody and engaged in small talk with her, but she was more interested in discussing the eligible bachelors of Hollywood with Aria and Ivory.

When we got to the hotel, Brody informed me she would hang out with Selene so I could have some time with Lucy alone. I played a few games with Lucy, and she ended up crashing and falling asleep in my hotel room in one of the two beds. Mom claimed she was going to bed in her room, but I know she was at the bar in the lobby. I don't care what she does, I've grown to accept that my mother will forever depend on men for everything and that she fears being alone, so much so that she neglects her own children at times. I was happy to be rid of her for a while, thankful to have time

with Lucy one on one. I love my sister as if she's my own daughter. Her father isn't very involved in her life and my mother is withdrawn. I'm the one that's been ensuring she gets to school every day, making sure she has money to buy lunch at school, buying her clothes, phones, and anything that puts a smile on her face for years. Lucy needs a stable male figure in her life that she can count on and trust to protect her and that figure is me.

I hear Brody's door close from across the hall and glance between a sleeping Lucy and my door. It's past midnight which means Selene most likely deposited Brody in her drug and alcohol-free hotel room and went to bed. This time and experience with Lucy has meant so much to me and I want to thank Brody for it again but I know now isn't a good time. It's late.

I change into a pair of loose fitted sweatpants and a t-shirt and lay in my own bed, trying to sleep but it doesn't come. I toss and turn, trying to stay quiet so as to not disturb Lucy, but no matter how much I move, I can't sleep. One thing, onepersoncontinues to creep into my mind. Brody Drake. I keep thinking about what she did for me and Lucy today, how perfect she was on stage, and our night in the studio at her home. The thoughts replay in my head at full volume, and suddenly the near silent room seems almost like a house party is at play. I sit up and the noise stops for a split second, the only sound the small breaths Lucy takes in and out.

If I just thank her, I can move on. All I have to do is walk across the hall, say thank you, and turn around and walk away. Then, it'll all be out of my system and I can move on and go to sleep. Deep down, I know it's a lie, but I use it as an excuse to see Brody because for some unknown reason, I have a burning desire to be near her right now.

I leave my room silently, careful not to wake Lucy, and walk across the hall. I knock on her door and when I hear no movement on the other side, regret washes over me and reason comes to play. This is a horrible idea. I turn my back on the door, ready to

retreat to my room when her door opens, and I freeze. “Harvey?” Brody’s husky voice questions from behind me.

I slowly turn to face her and feel my cock hardening immediately when my eyes land on her. Her hair no longer has the chains and charms in it, pulled into a low messy bun at the nape of her neck and her face is free of all her makeup. She looks ethereally beautiful, and the sight of her beauty is almost painful. My eyes rove over her and I find her in a tiny pair of red silk sleep shorts and a matching tank top. My gaze homes in particularly on the thin strap of silk that falls off her shoulder and I find my mind working to create images of what her breasts look like beneath the thin fabric, what they feel like.

“Harvey,” she repeats my name though it no longer sounds like a question leaving her lips.

My focus goes to her eyes as I scold myself for falling weak at the sight of her. I force my wall back up as I say coldly, “I wanted to say thank you. For staying with Selene so I could spend time with her.”

Brody nods, a small curve forming on her full lips. “You’re welcome.”

We stare at each other and wait for the other to speak but Brody is of course, as stubborn as ever and leaves the talking to me. “It means a lot to her, so thanks. And also, for what you did in the limo, being patient and engaged with her.”

She raises a confused brow, “Are people often impatient with her?”

My nostrils flare at the memories of teachers, principals, and our mother being impatient with her. “Sometimes. They just don’t understand her. Her mind moves from one thing to the next at the speed of light and it overwhelms a lot of people. They get overwhelmed and then withdraw from her and get irritated with her and

she's old enough to know it."

Brody frowns, "I'm sorry."

I shake my head, "It's fine," I lie, we both know it's not fine. I just want to be short with her before I do something I'll regret later like kissing her. I take a step back, ready to walk back to my room but it feels like I have a cinderblock tied to each leg.

"It's not fine," Brody sighs, looking at her bare feet. "I know how it feels to not be understood." A flicker of what looks like sorrow crosses her face before she forces it away and looks back up at me with big blue eyes full of years and years of being misunderstood.

The crease between my eyebrows forms and I take a step closer to her, "I understand you," is all I say, even though I know at the best of times, I don't understand why Brody does half the things she does. No, I don't understand her actions, but I understand the reasoning behind them. She's been pretending to be someone she isn't for years and there's nothing lonelier than that. The problem is that she's been doing it for so long, she doesn't know how to stop and she's scared of what will happen if she does. But I know that if Brody stopped pretending even for five minutes, a weight would be removed from her and she'd feel free. She just doesn't want to be free yet.

Her lips part and desperation crossed her face before she catches me off guard by fisting my t-shirt and pulling me down so that my lips crash onto hers. The familiarity of her lips and the scent of her flooding my nostrils consumes me and before the voice of reason within me can tell me this is a horrible idea, I push her into her room and close the door behind us. I fist her hair in one hand and pull her head back, angling her face towards mine. The small breath that escapes her lips as our eyes meet and we get lost in each other is soon stolen by my lips reclaiming hers. Our tongues connect and my other hand roams down the side of her body until I cup her ass in one hand. The small moan that escapes her is enough to have me hardening

beneath my sweatpants.

I lose control with her, ignoring all logic and promises to stay away from her. I'm too overwhelmed with appreciation for what she's done for my sister and just all things that I don't care about any consequences at this moment. Both my hands grab both sides of her thighs and lift her so that she wraps her legs around my waist and we're brought to eye level. I walk us to her bed, never breaking our kiss.

She pulls away to catch her breath and smirks, "What happened to last time being a mistake that we never repeat?"

"You happened." I growl as I toss her onto the bed and lean down over her, propping my elbows up on both sides of her head.

She wraps her arms around my neck and I bring a hand down to feel her breasts through the silky smooth material. Her nipples are pebbled under the fabric and I pinch one to tease her. The noise she makes in response only encourages me further as I slide a hand completely under her shirt, the calloused skin of my palm feeling the bare skin of her breast. I palm her until I get impatient and entirely desperate for more of her and I lift the hem of her top above her head, only breaking the kiss for a split second. She moans as I remove my mouth from hers and trail kisses down her neck until I stop at her bare breasts.

Her nipples are a light brown color, a few shades darker than her sun kissed skin and when my mouth closes over a peak, she cries out. I lick, suck, and palm her breasts, savoring the sounds she makes in response to me and the way her body reacts to my touch. My hunger for her grows and I become desperate for more of her. I remove my mouth and hover above her lips whispering, "What is it about you that makes it so incredibly hard to stay away?" A hint of irritation laces my tone but not at her, with myself.

She grins, “Probably the same thing that makes it impossible to stay away from you.”

Her response does something to me and I dip a hand into her shorts, beneath her panties until I find the slickness between her thighs. She exhales audibly and arches her back, her brows furrowing with arousal. I know right away that what we’re about to do is a mistake but at this moment, I can’t bring myself to care. I once looked down on Brody for being addicted to substances, but I can no longer look down on her since I’ve become addicted to a substance myself. The substance in question is her.

Brody

HIS FINGERS REENACT WHAT they did to me in my home studio. He finger fucks me into oblivion, all while whispering provocative seditions in my ears that only push me over the edge further. Just when my orgasm is about to find me, he withdraws his fingers and grins into my mouth, “You thought you were gonna come on my fingers again without asking?”

My nostrils flare with my irritation at the ruined orgasm. “Enough of your fucking games. I can make myself come if you won’t.”

The image my threat sends him must arouse him as his hard length presses into my center. He grabs my jaw with a firm grip, “If you want to come, Little Rockstar, you’ll have to ask nicely because the only way you’re coming tonight is if I’m responsible.”



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I push him, “Fuck. You.”

He catches me completely off guard as he slides my silk shorts down my thighs along with my panties and tosses them somewhere on the floor around the bed. I realize I’m completely bare and on display for him while he’s still fully clothed. He grabs both of my thighs and pushes them open and when he takes in the sight of me practically dripping for him, he smirks cockily and grins at me, looking up through a devilish expression, “You can pretend to hate me all you want but we both know it’s a lie.”

Before I can snap back with a witty response, he drops down until his mouth covers my pussy. The gasp that escapes me at the feeling of his warm mouth and his tongue on my clit surprises even me. His fingers dig into both of my thighs in a bruising grip, and I can’t bring myself to care, in pure bliss over the way he makes me feel.

He looks up at me to catch my reaction to him and pleased by whatever he sees on my face, he pushes two fingers inside of me and moves them in time with the lapping on my clit. “Do you like when I eat your pussy while my fingers are inside you, Little Rockstar?” He asks the filthiest of questions.

I nod, too overtaken by ecstasy to snap at him. “Yes.”

“Good girl,” he growls, pleased with my lack of attitude and smart comments.

He continues licking, sucking, and fingering, his hands moving up to cup my breasts and pinch my nipples and before I know it, I feel the familiar warmth pooling low in my belly and heat spreading from the bundle of nerves between my legs, up my body. My body starts to tremble beneath him as my orgasm reaches its peak. “You

remember the rules. Ask nicely and I'll let you come on my tongue.”

I squeeze my eyes shut at the loss of his mouth on my clit. The warmth starts to fade and I beg, desperately, “Please let me come.” Only Harvey can make me beg and plead and it's infuriating. I'd never beg a man for anything, but Harvey seems to be the only outlier in a sea full of men.

Pleased with my obedience, he lowers his head and works me and the fading sense of warmth comes back in full swing. I cry out as it reaches me and fist the bed sheets. Just when I think I've had enough, his fingers curl around my g-spot and another cry tears from my throat as my orgasm finds me and I come on his tongue and fingers.

When the waves of my orgasm have finally finished rolling through me, Harvey withdraws his fingers and sucks them clean the same way he did in the studio. I reach for the hem of his sweatpants, needing more of him but he stops me by grabbing my hands. “We can't go there,” he protests and the detached look that he had before leaving the studio comes back to his face.

I sit up, completely frustrated. “What?” I snap.

He avoids my eye, “Brody, we can't go that far,” he leaves no room for argument.

I guess it's a good thing I love to argue. “So let me get this straight, you can finger fuck me on two occasions and eat me out but we can't have sex?”

He sighs and frowns, “If we cross that line, we both know we'll never stop. We talked about this, my job and reputation are at stake here.”

I snort a laugh in pure sarcasm. “You're unbelievable,” I push away from him and gather my clothes from the floor. When I reluctantly turn to face him, he hasn't moved from the foot of the bed. He just watched me with a distant expression, the

same way he looked at me when he ignored me for days after our last encounter. “So now what? Are you gonna ignore me and treat me like I don’t exist again for a few days until we make another truce and then violate the truce?” I put my clothes back on and avoid looking at him. “Because if that’s what you think is gonna happen, you’re dead wrong. I’m not gonna be a toy you play with and then throw away when you’re done playing.” The hurt in my voice must force the reaction from him.

He rises from the foot of the bed and hovers over me. “Do you have any idea what’s on the line for me? The consequences of getting caught are worse for me than they are for you. My reputation and my job are on the line. Selene could terminate my contract. If you get caught, she’ll probably just yell at you a few times and then let you go back to doing whatever it is you do but you’ll have a new person watching you, living with you, and drug testing you.”

“If you’re so worried about consequences, why did you do it again?” I snap, raising my voice.

He sighs, rubbing the spot between his eyes. “Because I can’t control myself around you, Brody. We both know it.”

I flare my nostrils, “I don’t know what to tell you. I may have kissed you tonight, but you started it last time and then you finished it tonight.

“I know,” he says, irritated. “But if Selene finds out-”

“She won’t find out. I haven’t told anyone and I’m not going to,” I cut him off.

We both pause and wait for the other to speak. A full minute must pass before he lowers his voice and lets his guard down in a way I’ve never seen from him. He looks truly disappointed and defeated. “This won’t happen again, Brody. I know I said it last time and then tonight happened, but I mean it this time. I won’t touch you again

and that's final. I'll keep myself under control and keep this strictly professional from now on."

I scoff and he walks towards the door. He places a hand on it to open it but hesitates, "I'm not trying to play games with you or treat you like a toy. My job is important to me and I don't want to risk losing it or hurting my reputation. Tonight was another lapse in judgment, and it was another mistake. You and I aren't supposed to exist in each other's worlds, it's best for both of us if we remember that and go our separate ways once our time together is over in another month and a half." His voice comes out low before he opens the door and leaves me standing there alone and hurt for the second time.

## Chapter 17

### Brody

"Okay, B, try it again, it didn't sound that good," Aria speaks into the recording booth. Her and Ivory sit on the other side of the glass, recording my vocals. Our usual process involves me coming up with the base beats, Aria and Ivory building on that with Aria's guitar and Ivory's bass, and then Aria and Ivory writing vocals, and then me recording said vocals. Usually, I don't have to record more than five times max. Today is different however, because Aria and Ivory must be playing some kind of sick prank on me. This is the tenth time I've recorded the first verse.

I ball my hands into fists at my side as my nostrils flare and my brows pull together, "That's bullshit! It sounded fine that time. You guys are fucking with me," I argue, screaming at them from inside the booth. My voice comes out louder than usual because of these damn noise canceling headphones. Everything about today is annoying me. We're in Texas now and just had the second show of the tour last night. We have two more days here to work in the studio Selene rented and I don't know if it's my lingering irritation and anger towards Harvey that has me so on edge or if it's

my stress from being on this tour, but I'm not having any of this today.

Since you've asked so nicely, I'll let you know that Harvey has gone right back to ignoring me the same way he did after our stint in the studio at my house. If you ask me, this is bullshit. He's obviously attracted to me if he lost control twice, right? I mean, he put his job and reputation on the line to make me come twice, that has to mean something. I wouldn't know if it does because he won't even look at me. He just follows me around silently and refuses to make eye contact with me. The bastard has made me so insecure about myself for the second time now and he's humiliated me for the second time. There will be no third time. Harvey Taylor will never ever humiliate or embarrass me ever again because I simply will not let him. I refuse.

Aria tries to keep her expression neutral, but I can see the wicked smile forming on her lips. "One more time, come on. You're almost there." Bitch.

"Aria, I swear to God this is the last time I'm recording this fucking verse and if you have the balls to tell me it doesn't sound good when we both know it does, I'm gonna come out there and smash that fucking guitar," I threaten her, my voice darkening.

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Her eyes go wide, “You wouldn’t dare.”

I seethe, “Oh, I would. Fuck around and find out.”

Ivory interrupts, “Just record. I’m pressing play on the track,” she changes the topic as she does as she says. In seconds, the song starts playing and I read the lyrics off the sheet, perfectly I may add, all while flipping them both the bird.

What is all of the trouble about?

I’m happy in my position

The blow that I found ain’t gonna bring me down

I’m a junkie, the song my addiction

I won’t lie, I just wanna get high

Playing with the media’s leers

Everybody’s watching but nobody’s knocking

I can hear the fans cheers from here

I sing the first verse and execute it exactly the way it should be executed. I make no mistakes and we all know it. If any of these two knuckleheads have anything to say about that, I’m seriously sticking by my word and fucking up Aria’s guitar.

When the music cuts out, I remove my headphones and exit the booth with an angry stride and an equally angry expression on my face. I blatantly ignore the very frustrating and beautiful man sitting on the couch in the corner, typing away on his phone. My anger rises when the realization sinks in that he still hasn't glanced at me once. It's like I don't even exist to him and for a second, I wonder which is worse, having to put a mask on to make sure I stay relevant or not even existing to someone at all. I think I'd take the mask. They don't really know me, but at least everyone who knows Sticks acknowledges that I fucking exist. This bastard won't acknowledge that I exist or that he had me writhing beneath him, coming completely undone and begging for more. More of his lips, more of his fingers, more of his touch, and just more of him.

I turn my frustrated expression on my friends, "How was that? Because that's all you're getting."

They both laugh. "I thought it was good. Could use some minor improvement though," Ivory feigns wandering off in thought.

Aria picks up on her teasing and chimes in, looking at Ivory as if she just said something thought provoking. "You know what, Iv? You're right. I think we may need to record it again."

Now I know they're fucking with me, so I fuck with them back. "Where's your guitar?" I make my voice a warning.

Aria grabs me, holding me in place so that I can't find or touch her precious guitar. "We're kidding," she laughs as she yanks me into her lap and pulls me into a hug. I'm not in the mood for affection, but I let her hold me and smother me.

"You better be," I huff.

Ivory chuckles from her seat. “Seriously, B, you sounded perfect. This album is gonna be finished in no time and then we can tell the lawyers and prosecutors to stick it.”

Aria releases me and I rise to find Harvey watching me for the first time in days. When I catch him studying me, he quickly looks back down at his phone with a sour expression on his face like he was just sucking on a lemon. I roll my eyes and ignore thoughts of him and his presence, instead focusing on my friends. We actually have a good shot of finishing this album on time considering the progress we’ve made so far on the tour. It’s amazing what can be accomplished when we’re all sober. Our dynamic isn’t as chaotic, but we still seem to be getting along well and laughing, so I’m pleased with that.

I’ve taken some time to myself after the girls leave the studio to work on the song I started in the home studio before the tour started and before Harvey and I crossed that line. I haven’t told the girls about the song yet, nor have I played any parts of it for them, because I’m not finished, and it doesn’t feel ready for others to listen to just yet. I want to wait until the right moment, whenever that may be. Besides, the feeling of having something musical to myself comforts me in a way. It feels like coming home after sleeping in different hotel beds for months.

Things actually seem to be okay between me and the girls and I couldn’t be happier. I worry that soon, they’ll get sick of the sober act and resort to getting high again and that our progress will dwindle until we fail, but I have faith that they won’t. As for Harvey, I have no faith in him warming up to me again at all. He’s made his feelings clear and never gave me the chance to make mine clear. Fuck him. If he wants to be an asshole, I don’t care. Besides, I’ll be rid of him in a couple months anyway.

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SO REMEMBER HOW I said I had faith in the girls not derailing? Apparently, fuck my faith because the two of them are just days and minutes away from snorting or



smoking something. We left Texas a week ago and now we're in Colorado after performing in Oklahoma and staying there for a few extra days.

Our show is tomorrow, and we sit in the hotel lobby, just to get out of our rooms. My shadow sits in the corner a few tables away, as you guessed it, on his phone. He still barely utters more than one or two words to me and still refuses to look at me. Everytime my eyes land on him, my chest deflates, and my mood drops at the reminder of how good things were and how quickly they turned bitter. The memory brings a sour taste to my mouth, one that this large bottle of water can't wash away.

We sit in silence, and I take a sip of my water to have something to do with my hands. Selene is around somewhere, most likely bitching someone around or suing someone. Aria and Ivory sit with me at the table and I notice their eyes wandering over to the bar, particularly on the rum shelf for Ivory and the vodka shelf for Aria. I'm content with my water for now. I don't know if I've just been so distracted or if I genuinely haven't craved a drop of liquor, but the temptation I once knew no longer exists to me. I'm okay being sober physically, mentally I still worry the world will turn on me.

"Can I get you guys some drinks?" The perky waitress strolls over to our table and asks, a wide, toothy smile on her freckled face.

I raise my water bottle in answer, "I'm good with this, thanks."

"I'd like a mai tai," Ivory asserts and my eyes widen.

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The waitress begins to write her drink order and I interrupt her, waving a hand in front of her notepad. “She’s kidding. She’s good with a water please. No mai tai.”

The waitress gives me a confused look but nods and walks away to fetch Ivory a glass of water. I feel eyes boring holes into the back of my head the entire time and heat begins to scorch the surface of my skin. I turn to find Harvey’s black eyes on me with a neutral expression. I notice the very faint hint of pride that flashes in his eyes before he breaks eye contact and looks back down.

Ivory drops a fist onto the table, “What the fuck, B?”

I frown, “Did you forget we’re all sober for the tour?” I scold her.

Aria rolls her eyes, but inevitably gets involved. “Right. The ‘Better in Hell’ tour continued. Might as well call it the ‘No Fucking Fun’ tour. I mean seriously, this is already miserable, and the tour ends in two months.”

The waitress comes back with Ivory’s water and asks, “Is there anything else I can get you?”

Ivory gives me a threatening glare and then focuses her eyes on the waitress, grinning. “I’ll take that mai tai. Some people have a hard time remembering they don’t get to tell me what to do.”

My eye twitches as I look at the side of Ivory’s face with pure rage. The waitress glances at me, unsure what to do. “I’ll take a Moscow mule,” Aria asserts, her eyes on me the whole time.

The waitress nods awkwardly and walks away to fetch their drinks. “What the fuck is wrong with you two? Do you want Selene to quit on us?” I raise my voice, my anger getting the better of me.

Aria snorts a laugh, “Selene isn’t here so she won’t know. Not unless you decide to snitch.”

Ivory leans in closer to me and cocks her head, “Yeah, are you gonna snitch, B?”

I lean in, not backing down. “When have I ever snitched on you?”

“At the studio,” Aria replies. I know exactly what she’s talking about. The one time I ever ratted on them. It was at the studio, weeks ago, right before the tour started and I had my outburst about being the only sober one on the tour.

Ivory shrugs, “Who knows, you might snitch again. Hard to tell with you now that you’re sober and fucking boring.”

There it is. The thing I was scared of the most. I feel my heart sink into the pit of my stomach as my face falls. “Seriously, Brody, what happened to you? You used to be fun and then Selene tells you you’re getting sober and gives you this babysitter, but you don’t even try to have fun. The Sticks that we know would stop at nothing to have a good time,” Aria adds, sinking the knife in deeper.

The waitress returns with their drinks, and I struggle to find words. Instead, I push out of my chair and start walking away from them and to the elevators. Harvey follows behind me, close at my back and I just wish for once, I could be entirely and completely alone. I push the button for the elevator, and it pings, signaling the elevator is on its way down. I cross my arms over my chest and try to keep the tears at bay just a little longer. I feel that familiar feeling I get when I know Harvey is watching me, but when I turn and find the set of eyes on me, it isn’t Harvey because

Harvey is at my back. It's a man with an oily smile on his face and a dangerous gleam in his eyes, seated at the bar. I quickly look away, ignoring him, as the elevator doors open and I hurry inside. Harvey enters behind me and I make sure to stay as far from him as possible. He doesn't say anything to me, still hellbent on ignoring me I assume.

When the doors open to our floor, I hurry out of the elevator and down the hall to where our rooms are. I rustle in my pocket for the key as my chest starts to shake and the dam holding my tears back starts to break down. Warm, salty tears roll down my cheeks and I keep my head down as I scan the key over the reader. Just when I open my door and step inside, a hand lands on the doorknob to stop me from entering. I know it's Harvey's, but I don't turn to face him. He's seen me cry once and I won't let it happen again. "Brody," his voice is low, calm. I can't help but hear the pity in his tone.

"Don't," my voice cracks as I try to push the door open, avoiding his hand.

He exhales, "I know you aren't okay," his breath feels closer to my ear and I shake him off.

I shoulder the door and push it hard enough that his hand falls and he steps back, avoiding brushing my shoulder with his arm. The lengths he'd go to to avoid touching me is the final nail in my coffin. "I'm fine," I lie as I slam my door shut in his face. He doesn't say anything from the other side, nor does he try to come in. I watch through the peephole in the door as he just walks away as he always does. You'd think by now I'd get used to him walking away from me but for some reason it hurts more every time, especially now. Maybe it's because when I was having those issues with the girls before the tour, he was there. Now that I'm having issues again, he isn't there. He's here but he isn't there.

I sink to the floor as sobs wrack through my chest. They tear free from my throat and

I cry out. You're sober and fucking boring. Ivory's words cut through the walls of my heart and drive home. Might as well call it the "No Fucking Fun" tour. Aria's bitter words leave me broken. These are my best friends and everything I was afraid of happening, is happening. They're done with me and soon enough they'll replace me entirely and Brody Drake will exist to nobody. I'll be irrelevant again and all I'll have is my brother and my parents who can't stand to look at me, too disgusted with my choice in lifestyle. I'll have Selene but even she won't want to be bothered with me. She'll be too busy managing Satan's Angels, Ivory and Aria, and whatever fucking drummer they replace me with.

I bring my knees up to my chest and hug them as I cry into the denim of my jeans. I've worn a mask for so long, pretending to be someone I'm not so that people will worship and like me. I've tried so hard to be relevant and to stay at the top that I lost sight of who I was completely, and I accepted that fate. I thought it was a small price to pay to keep my fame and my friends but now? Now I'm losing it all and I won't even have Brody Drake when it's over. I don't know who I am if I'm not Sticks. I have an unfamiliar feeling in my gut like I just met a stranger but the stranger in question is myself.

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THE TEARS STOPPED SOMEtime ago and the headache settled in. I tried to sleep somewhere around midnight, but it just wouldn't come. My eyes burn from crying and they're puffy and bloodshot. My lips are also puffed up and the frown on my face feels almost permanent, like it will never go away. I decided to take a steaming hot bath, hoping it would at least cure the headache. I love a hot bath but I'm no fool, I know it isn't fixing the broken pieces of my heart. It may however just settle the pounding in my head and lull me to sleep.

It's after one in the morning now, and I close my eyes. The silence in the room pains me and I'm surprised to find that even in my pain, song still finds me. My song lyrics

I came up with before the tour started, come back and play in my head.

The red and blue lights shine right in my eyes

She stops and demands I say my goodbyes

Anger arises as I learn I'll never be coming back

The Devil sends temptation as a form of attack

They told you I'm the serpent in disguise

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But you know you're not in danger when you look in my eyes

The beat I created on the drums for this song plays with it and I know it's still missing something, that something being the sounds of Aria's guitar and Ivory's bass, but I accept that the song will never hear their melodies or chords. Not after this tour and not after our contract is up. I'm sure when it ends, they'll be finished with me too.

I feel a twinge of pain in my chest for the song that will never be finished. It would've been my first song I've ever written completely in both lyrics and melodies. I let the first verse play on a loop in my head and then suddenly, more words start coming to me.

Another curtain closes and the drugs funnel in

The darkness is our only sign it's time to begin

I see him, temptation of his own watching me, is he real?

Just one look from him and I know I've lost

The words just come to me and I play them together in my head, verse one and verse two. It still needs a chorus between them, but what's important and impressive to me, is that I was able to create these on my own. That I, Brody Drake, horrible user of words, was able to come up with lyrics and the world will never hear them.

My headache eases only slightly but the exhaustion creeps in. I push the drain in the

bathub with my foot and it makes a loud popping sound as water begins to disappear down the drain. I rise and grab a towel from the side of the tub, wrapping the fluffy fabric around myself. I step out of the tub, wiping the flyaway hairs from my face and pushing them up towards the messy bun of black and blond hair on my head.

The exhaustion weighs so heavy, I'm almost confident I can finally sleep. I traipse out of the bathroom and into the bedroom in search of my suitcase. I stop when I find that it's open. It was closed when I left, I was almost certain. I never leave my suitcase open because I have a lot of expensive things in it, mostly jewelry.

I drop to my knees and rustle through it, in search of pajamas. I probably left it open by mistake. My mind has been scrambled all day and I wasn't paying close attention to anything else. I find a pair of black sweat shorts and a matching crewneck and toss it to the bed. I rustle around, in search of a pair of underwear but frown when I don't find any in my suitcase. My assistant packs my suitcases for me and she has never once forgotten to send me on a trip with underwear. Maybe I put my underwear in a drawer without noticing?

I open the drawers and search for my belongings, but I find them all empty. Something doesn't feel right. An eerie feeling washes over me and I hug my shoulders, unsure what to do. Maybe I can call Selene. I know it's late but she's usually up at this time. The woman runs on no sleep and is fully functional at all hours of the day. I'm sure she'll be able to help me.

I walk over to the nightstand in search of my phone but stop when I realize it isn't there. My brows pull together and I freeze. I left my phone charging before I got in the bath. I left it right there except it's not here now. Something is seriously wrong.

No, I'm just overreacting, right? Everything is fine. We have loads of security in the hotel and nothing could go wrong. I've never felt unsafe on a tour or in a hotel. This has to be my exhaustion creeping up on me and playing games. I'm just paranoid and



mentally exhausted and that's why I can't remember where I left my phone or my underwear.

I force myself to inhale a deep breath and exhale, forcing the anxiety to leave me and the tension to ease from my shoulders as the breath leaves my lips. I'm just overreacting and I'm being paranoid for nothing. I convince myself of it and just when I feel somewhat at ease, something wraps around my waist and pulls me into a firm wall and covers my mouth in a tight grip. I try to scream, but the sound won't leave my lips because of the hand over my mouth. The hand. Oh my God, someone is in my room. Someone is touching me.

I try to wriggle away, using all of my strength while also trying to hold my towel around my body. The danger of my situation creeps in and I panic, completely taken away by fear. I need to form a plan and fast. If I manage to get out of this hold, the likelihood of me being able to run to the door without him catching me first is poor. If I can manage to find something to use as a weapon, my chances may be better. All I would have to do is run across the hall to Harvey's room.

I stomp on my attacker's boot with all of my strength, but it doesn't do much to the booted foot. He growls in my ear, annoyed with my feeble attempt at freedom, and grabs both of my arms, tossing me down on the mattress so hard, the wind gets knocked out of me. I try to kick him away as my hands shake and tremble while I search for the ends of the towel to hold it in place. I look up and finally lay my eyes on the attacker. It's the man with the oily smile from the lobby. My eyes widen in pure terror and I open my mouth to scream but he leaps on top of me and grabs my throat in his calloused palm.

He squeezes my throat tight enough that no sound will escape me and I try to scratch and slap him away but he pins me down and doesn't react to my attempts. He leans in close to my face and I wince away from him as his hot breath fans my cheek. "Try to scream and I'll kill you."

I squeeze my eyes shut as tears start forming. I'm going to die in this hotel room. I'm going to be another rockstar that died young and I'll have been murdered while my friends sleep down the hall and Harvey across from me. I'll have died with my friends hating me and my fans giving up on me. "You weren't supposed to leave the bathroom so quick. I would've just taken your shit and left but you just had to come out while I was in here. You did this to yourself," I keep my eyes closed but I can hear the arrogant smirk in his voice.

He's robbing me. That's why my stuff wasn't where I left it but that doesn't explain where my underwear went. Not unless he pocketed the lacy pieces of fabric for himself. My stomach churns at the thought and the idea that he could be here for something other than my valuables has bile threatening to rise up my throat. "You stay there and keep your pretty mouth shut, and I'll be on my way. You scream or try to run, and I'll kill you, got it?" He squeezes my throat a little harder to make his point and my eyes shoot open as my air supply gets cut off.

I nod aggressively just so he'll release me and he does, very slowly. He slowly lifts himself off me and steps away from the bed and I gasp for air. Goosebumps rise on my skin as his cold eyes wander over the exposed skin of my thighs. I squeeze my legs together and hold the towel tighter as he starts to rustle through my drawers. My breaths are rapid with fear and I try my hardest to come up with a plan to survive. I refuse to be another rockstar who dies young. You won't see Brody Drake on the news later or a trending hashtag that reads "RIPBRODYDRAKE." I will not die in this hotel and not in this state of mind. A million mistakes I've made filter through my mind and all I feel in this moment is regret and a sense of determination. I need a plan and I need to execute it so well that he doesn't get the chance to kill me.

He turns to look at me over his shoulder with a raised, bushy black brow and I freeze. Satisfied with my obedience, he continues going through my items. I look at the door and then at him and I make my decision then. The only thing I can do is scream loud enough and hope Harvey, or someone hears me because he stands in the pathway of

the door. I'd never be able to get out, but someone else may be able to get in. Harvey has access to my room via room key.

I send a silent prayer up to whatever God is watching over me and vow to right my wrongs if I make it out of this alive. I lean up slowly, and suck in a deep breath. I take the biggest risk I've ever made and scream at the top of my lungs, loud enough to wake up the entire hotel. My scream gets cut off a second later by him slapping me across the face so hard that my head spins and I see stars. He snaps, grabbing my throat and squeezing hard once more. "You stupid bitch!" he growls as he leans in.

There's a banging on my door a second later and I relax only a small fraction. It has to be Harvey. I've never been so desperate to see him in my life. Tears roll down my cheeks as he panics, looking between me and the door. He loses all sense of control and slaps me again, "I'm going to fucking kill you."

Harvey

I WASN'T ABLE TO sleep. Not after I saw the broken look on her face caused by none other than her alleged "best friends." I've been treating her like shit. I've been aware of it. I don't want to treat her this way. I don't want to ignore her and I don't want to treat her this way but I have no choice. She's forbidden to me, a client. I signed a contract and when that contract is up, I'll go home to Nevada and she'll go back to living her out of control life in LA. We'll go back to being strangers because Brody Drake and I were never meant to exist in the same world, we're opposite each other in every way like the sun and the moon. She rises when I fall, the night to my day. So then, why does it always feel like I'm leaving a piece of myself behind when I walk away from her?

I've been tossing and turning in bed, unable to sleep because every time I close my eyes all I can see or think of is the sight of her perfect face, streaked with tears. I was proud of her for having the strength to walk away. It finally feels like she's changing

for the better and I'm impressed with her and proud of her for how far she's come. I'm even prouder that her friends weren't able to push her to temptation tonight.

I continue to toss and turn, worry for her creeping into my chest the entire time. I almost give in and walk across the hall, demanding to make her feel better in the only way I know how to, but I made a promise to her that I wouldn't treat her like a toy and I never wanted to do that to her or hurt her so I stay in my unfamiliar bed with these unfamiliar sheets and these beige, unfamiliar walls.

It isn't until somewhere past one in the morning that my eyes start to grow tired and I feel sleep creeping in on me. Just when I'm about to close my eyes, and just when sleep is about to find me, a piercing scream comes from across the hall. From Brody's room. My eyes widen immediately, and I leap out of bed, running towards her door without question. My heart sinks with every anxious step I take at the very possibility that something could be terribly wrong, that she could be hurt in some way.

I swing my door open and try to open her door but it's locked from the inside. I quickly run back to my room and grab the spare key I have to her room and hurry back across the hall. Her room has gone silent, no more screams coming from inside. The silence terrifies me. I slam her door open, barging into her room and quickly scanning my surroundings. I hear a scuffling noise and a growl that sounds masculine. Pain shoots through my chest at the idea that there's another man in here with her, doing things to her that I've done, but then I remember the sound of her scream, and all possibilities of it being a consensual hookup vanish. I continue into the suite, closer to her bedroom, completely confused. The room is completely silent, almost as if she was never in here.

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:17 am*

An eerie and shadowy feeling overwhelms me with every step I take closer to the bedroom. The air doesn't feel right in here. I have a painful feeling in my gut that something is terribly wrong and the unease and sheer worry that I have for the girl I've treated like shit recently sinks its sharp claws deep into my skin, drawing blood and searching to engrave itself in my bones.

I hear a groan come from the bedroom and hurry, walking slowly and silently enough so as not to tip off whoever could be in here. When I make it to her bedroom, I press my back against the wall and slowly, ever so slowly, peek inside. The sight that I find tears my heart clean out of my chest and squeezes it to ash. Brody lays on her bed in a towel, the tanned skin of her thighs exposed, while a man in all black pins her down by her throat and strangles her. Her face is turning red and her eyes are starting to roll to the back of her head.

I snap immediately, all logic and reason escaping me. I would once consider myself to have been the most rational man I know, but one look at Brody in the position that she's in has me ready to walk into that gray area I try my best to keep out of. I see red, scarlet and angry with a need to see more in the form of blood.

Brody

I'M SEEING STARS AND not the rock kind. Spots blur my vision as the man above me squeezes my throat tighter and the realization that I am going to die in this hotel room, murdered nonetheless, creeps in. My eyes start to flutter shut and just when they're about to close completely, the man is torn away from me and I suck in a giant gulp of air.

I turn onto my side, curling into a ball as I gasp for air and sobs start to wrack my chest uncontrollably. I hold my throat where his hands just were, my hands trembling as shock sets in. I hear grunts and destruction at the foot of the bed but I can't bring myself to pay attention to them, I'm too overwhelmed with the fact that I almost just died.

A set of hands land on me and I scream, afraid that it could be him coming to finally finish me off but when my eyes widen and land on the person placing gentle hands on me, I sit up and let her wrap her arms around me while she hugs me to her chest. I cough as I sob into Selene's chest and she whispers reassurances and comfort into my ear. Two more figures come into view but the whole time, the grunting and groaning noises never go away. Ivory's face appears with Aria's and the looks of worry on their faces are enough to send me spiraling. The shock fades as I realize they're making those faces because this really did just happen. This man just broke into my room and tried to rob and kill me.

"Come on, B. We're gonna get you out of here, okay?" Aria says in a soothing voice as she takes me from Selene's arms and into her own. Ivory assists her in ushering me out of the room and Selene stays behind, talking in low voices with someone in the room. I can't bring myself to focus on anything aside from my panic.

They take me to one of their rooms and Aria quickly tosses me a pair of navy-blue sweatpants and a matching sweatshirt. I dress myself with shaking hands and trembling limbs. I feel the pitying looks my friends are giving me like hot coals on my skin. When I'm dressed, Ivory wraps a fuzzy plush blanket around my shoulders and rubs my arm affectionately, "The police are on their way, B. It's gonna be okay, Harvey handled him."

Harvey? Harvey was there? My brows furrow and a frown sets into place on my face as more tears stream down my cheeks silently. The last thing I want is pity from Harvey and if he saw me like that or if he saw...something...I squeeze my eyes shut

and sob uncontrollably. Ivory and Aria hold me and I take comfort in their embraces. We may have fought earlier and I may have thought they hated me, but they're here for me when I need them the most and they're still sober or at least, sober enough to be here for me. "I love you guys," I whisper through choked sobs.

"We love you too," Aria reassures.

Ivory nods, "We know things haven't been easy and we haven't been much help lately but we'll always be here for you."

I nod, sobbing and sobbing and I don't even know how much time passes. I get lost in the memory of what just happened to me, the fear of my life slipping out of my grip, my friends and how loyal they are after everything we've been through recently, and Harvey. All roads lead back to Harvey Taylor. If I would've confided in him earlier, would he have come into my room? Would I have gone to his? If so, would what just happened to me still have happened?

The door to Aria's room opens and I jump, afraid that it could be my attacker, but when I look up I find Selene with a startled and very worried expression on her face and a disheveled looking Harvey who has a look of torment on his. His eyes roam over me desperately as if he's looking for signs of something and his eyes hover over my cheek and my throat a little longer than the rest of me. His face contorts into an expression of pure rage and I watch him as his eyes finally meet mine. It feels like we're the only two in the room because I am completely unable to take my eyes off him and I feel this primal need to be in the safety of his arms. His eyes soften as he pushes past Selene and stops in front of me about a foot away. He reaches out to touch me but hesitates, remembering what just happened to me.

I take him in. The split and bleeding knuckles on his large hands, the drying bloody cut on his bottom lip. The splatter of blood on his cheek and bare chest, all of it. He must've been the one that came in the room and pulled him off me, he must've beaten

him bloody. He could've stopped at tearing him off me but from what I heard in the room, he lost control. He lost control because of me. More tears pour out of me as his softened expression watches me closely as if I could break at any minute and he wants to catch all the pieces and glue them back together. Before I can think better of it, I push out of my friends' arms and into his chest, wrapping my arms around his waist and sobbing into his warmth.

He hesitates before wrapping his arms around me and holding me tightly. He grounds me with his touch, his warmth, the slow breaths he takes into his chest, and the rapid pounding of his heart. He cups the back of my head to him with one hand and allows the other to rest on my back. I may have been furious with him before but all thoughts of anger vanish in this moment because Harvey Taylor just saved my life. Whether he did it for me or for his job and reputation, I can't bring myself to care at this moment. All I can care about is the blanket of protection his arms shield me in.

"It's okay, Brody. The police arrested him, he's gone," Harvey's voice lowers as he tries to reassure me.

I nod, staying silent. Selene interrupts, "They wanted a statement from you, but I told them to call tomorrow."

There's nothing that can be done, nothing to do. I force myself to take a gulp of air and step out of Harvey's hold, keeping my eyes on the floor. Harvey's hands fall slowly, as if not wanting to leave me. "Thank you. All of you. I'm sorry you all had to get woken up. You should go back to bed. I don't want to ruin your night," my voice comes out shaky and scratchy, hoarse from crying.

They all give me looks of concern that make me want to fall apart at the seams. I don't want to ruin anyone's night, especially not Harvey after he just saved my ass. "Brody-," he interrupts.



I shake my head, “No, it’s okay. I’m fine.”

He frowns, “You aren’t fine.”

I’m about to argue when Selene speaks first. “It’s okay, Brody. What you just went through was really scary. You can stay in one of our rooms if you don’t want to be alone.”

I don’t want to be alone, but the idea of being anywhere away from Harvey right now scares me. I glance at him and he assesses my expression and just knows immediately what I need. “She can stay in my room. It’s safer for her there and I have two beds. That’s if you’re comfortable with that, Brody.”

I nod almost immediately. I don’t want to keep him up all night and ruin his night, but I also don’t think I can stand to not be near him right now. I need the safety and comfort only he can bring me. Selene studies us and for a second I think she knows everything that’s happened between us, but she inevitably nods. “That’s probably for the best.”

Harvey drapes his arm over my shoulder and starts to usher me out of the room, close to his side. I lean into him as much as possible and he allows it. This is the closest I’ve ever felt to him, the most intimate we’ve been and he’s seen me naked twice and done unspeakable things to me. We continue until we make it to his already open door, and he waits for me to enter before following behind me. He closes the door and says quietly, “Do you want it locked or unlocked?”

“Locked,” I almost whisper.

He locks it and I continue to one of the two beds, sitting on the edge. The shock has worn off and in its place are lingering effects of fear. What if Harvey had been a minute later? What if he actually killed me and Harvey had found my dead body?

Seeing something on my face, Harvey walks over to me and kneels before me on the floor, grabbing both of my hands in his. “Hey, look at me.”

I look into his black eyes, the bottomless pits I can lose myself in every time I glance at him. “I would never have let anything happen to you,” he declares and I can see the conviction in his eyes, in the hard set of his jaw and the flare in his nostrils.

I nod, “I know.” Just two words but they mean something much greater to both of us. I can see it in his eyes and how they soften when they look at me. My eyes lower to the dried blood on his lip, “Are you hurt?”

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He shakes his head, “You just got attacked and you’re asking me if I’m hurt?”

I frown.

“I’m fine, Brody. I can’t say the same for him. I would’ve torn him limb from limb if Selene hadn’t stopped me,” his voice darkens and becomes laced with violence.

“Thank you for what you did.”

His brows pull together, “You never have to thank me for wanting to protect you. It’s my job to keep you safe.”

I sigh and exhale as the sting of the reminder sets in. “Right. Your job.”

He gently places his fingers at the base of my chin and forces my gaze back up to his. “My job is to protect you and that is why I pulled him off you.” The sting deepens and he continues, completely catching me off guard. “But that isn’t why I beat him bloody and nearly killed him.”

This catches my attention. My eyes widen even though they yearn to close from the stinging of the many tears shed and the overall exhaustion. “Why did you do it then?”

He clenches his jaw so hard I don’t think he’ll respond but he surprises me when he says, “I beat him bloody and nearly killed him because the sight of another man touching you or anywhere near you infuriates me like nothing I’ve ever experienced. I lost complete control over myself and all I knew was that I wanted to kill him. I wanted to kill him for looking at you, for touching you, and for daring to think he

could ever get away with hurting you.” His fingers leave my chin and caress my still-stinging cheek from where I was slapped. “You aren’t mine to protect, Little Rockstar, but that doesn’t mean I wouldn’t still kill for you.”

His words are so pure and honest from the emotion behind them to the gentle side of him I don’t often see. They send me over the edge and fresh tears stream down my cheeks. He wipes them away quickly with his thumbs and shushes, “Come here,” he opens his arms for me and I wrap mine around his neck, burying my face in the crook of his shoulder. He lifts me off the edge of the bed and sits with me, positioning us so that he lays with his back against the headboard, and I lay curled up into his side with my face on his chest. The overwhelming feeling of being held and comforted by this man causes fresh tears to spill from my eyes. We’ve been rocky these last few days and we’ve never gotten along but in my time of need he made sure to move heaven and earth to save me, to protect me. I’ve never had someone care about me enough to nearly kill someone and the thought forces a surge of loneliness through me. It’s ironic because I live a life full of people, but I’m still alone.

He rubs my back in soothing circles and I whisper, “I thought I was going to die, Harvey.”

His voice darkens, “I told you I would never let that happen.”

“You don’t understand. I thought I was going to die,” I choke out the words. “I would’ve been another rockstar reported dead on the news. Everyone would post a picture of me with a headline and I’d be a trending hashtag for a week but then by the next I’d be forgotten. I would’ve had nothing to leave behind aside from a mask of someone I’m not.”

His lips press against my temple. “Then show them who you are.”

I go quiet at his words. The idea was never possible before because I was so

concerned with my image and what people thought of me. But after nearly dying? I don't want to be remembered by the mask I wear, I want to be remembered for who I really am, whoever that is. I promise myself in this moment that I will find out who I am and I will move past this. I will fix my reputation and be who I want to be, not who everyone else wants me to be. My whole life I've been a puppet on the string with different masters pulling me in different directions. From my parents to my brother to my friends and to my fans, they've strung me up and conducted my movements. The only person who's never wanted me to be someone I'm not is the man holding me right now. I let that realization sink in as I listen to the sound of his breaths, his heartbeat lulling me to sleep on his chest.

## Chapter 18

Harvey

"We'll cancel the show," Selene demands from where she paces back and forth in my hotel room. Brody sits, curled into a ball in the bed we shared last night, still in sweats and a solemn expression. She fell asleep on my chest last night and as much as reason demanded I move her; I couldn't bring myself to move her. I needed to be touching her as much as she needed to be held by me. The sheer terror that the thought of her harmed in any way brought me still doesn't sit right with me. I care about the little rockstar way more than I care to admit and my actions of last night speak for themselves.

I can still hear the sounds of his bones cracking under my fists and the feeling of his warm blood splattering across my face and chest. I can still recall the feral part of me that wanted to kill him for touching her, for hurting her, and for scaring her. I remember especially wanting to kill him for the image I still have burned into my memory of him on top of her with her in just a towel, the life draining from her eyes. I've seen Brody in a plethora of moods. I've seen her semi-happy, I've seen her sad, I've seen her angry, I've seen her tired, but never have I seen Brody the way she was

last night. She was broken and her pain radiated off of her in waves. I wish more than anything that I could take her pain away and inflict it on myself. Anything to protect her but I know I can't.

I've been very gentle and calm with her since, not wanting to throw her off in any way. This morning she woke up and looked startled when she found she was still laying on my chest just when I thought she was going to flee, she put her head back down and stayed silent. I was shocked to find I didn't mind in the slightest. I've accepted now that I care about her in a way that is entirely different from that of a client. I gathered as much about my own emotions after I found I was unable to sleep a wink last night. I couldn't bring myself to close my eyes. I needed to be watching her in case she needed me, in case she woke up afraid, anything. I was ready to be anything she needed me to be and to do anything she needed me to do and I still feel that way for her.

"No," Brody's small voice breaks through my inner monologue.

I cross my arms over my chest from where I stand at the foot of the bed, watching her. "You can't perform."

She shakes her head, rubbing her eyes with the heels of her palms, "We're performing. These people paid a lot of money to see us and I don't want to disappoint them."

Aria frowns, biting her bottom lip. She glances at Ivory with a look of question but Ivory doesn't look like she has any ideas. I'll admit, I'm not the fondest of the two girls but they were there for Brody last night in her time of need and that means something to Brody so it means something to me too. Aria speaks up, "We can refund the tickets or just reschedule the show for a later date. Honestly, B, nobody is gonna be upset with you if you want to cancel this show or the rest of the tour."

Brody's eyes widen but not in fear, in conviction. "We're not canceling. The show is on and so is the tour."

Ivory adds, "Brody, I don't want to upset you but what happened is all over the news. It's all-over social media and it broke the internet. Everyone knows. It is totally okay to not want to do this."

Brody sits up, her eyes glaze over as if she's going to cry but she forces the emotions at bay. "I want to perform."

Selene, Aria, and Ivory look at each other with worried expressions. I whisper to them, "Can you give me a minute alone with her?"

They nod reluctantly before exiting the room. Once they're gone, I sit at the foot of the bed and watch her. "Why do you want to do this so badly?"

She sits up, hugging her knees to her chest. "You said it yourself. I have to show them who I am and I am not someone who will be victimized by a robbery gone awry."

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I sigh, shaking my head, “Brody-”

“No. I’m doing this, Harvey,” she declares.

My chest deflates. “You don’t have anything to prove to anyone.”

“I know. I’m doing this for me.”

All it takes are those words and one glance at her to know she isn’t budging. To know that she is stronger than I ever gave her credit for and I couldn’t be any prouder of her. “Okay, then the show is on.”

She nods as I rise to tell the girls and just when I’m about to open the door she calls, “Harvey?”

I look over my shoulder to give her my attention. “Yes?”

She gives me a weak, shaky smile, but a smile nonetheless, “Thank you.”

“For?” I raise a brow in confusion. I didn’t do anything for her. What could she possibly have to thank me for?

“For being the only person who’s seen who I am without the mask and still believing in me.”

I give her a genuine smile, a small one, but a real one. “You’re worth so much more than you give yourself credit for.”



She smiles back at me as I open the door to let the girls back in. They take one look at me with hopeful expressions on their faces, most likely hoping I convinced her to cancel the tour but when they see the look on my face, theirs fall. “The show is on.”

Selene pushes past me and charges inside. “Brody, are you sure about this?” she panics. I’ve come to know Selene Stone fairly well recently and I’ve never seen the put together, calculated, and rational woman this way. She’s always presentable and controlled and right now, her usually slicked back and styled hair falls in tightly coiled curls at her shoulders, her makeup undone, and she wears a sweat suit. The sight of a disheveled Selene is so reassuring to me because it shows me she genuinely cares about Brody and loves her, not that I ever had to question it.

Brody nods, “I’m sure.”

Ivory laments, “Well, if you change your mind, that’s okay too.”

“Say the word and we’ll fly back home, B,” Aria adds, nodding.

Brody shakes her head, “I’m fine.”

That’s all she’s been muttering all day. “I’m fine.” To her friends, to the cops when they came to take her statement, to everyone. I know it’s a lie, we all do, but we don’t argue with her.

Selene sighs, rubbing her forehead. “Your parents saw the news. They’ve been calling me off the hook and I’ve been giving them bare minimum answers. They want to come here.”

Brody blows out an annoyed breath, “I don’t feel like seeing them right now. My mother will find a way to make my attack about herself and when I call her out for it, she’ll get my dad involved and he’ll tell me to shut my mouth just so he doesn’t have

to hear her talk anymore.”

Selene frowns, “I know.” She pauses. “What about Andrew? He’s been calling too and he wants to see you.”

Brody shrugs, “I don’t know if I’m ready to see any of my family yet. Just hold them off if you can.”

Selene nods and takes her phone out of her pocket, making quick work of calling who I can only assume is one of Brody’s family members. “Got it,” she says confidently as she charges out of the room with purpose, slipping back into manager mode.

Brody

PART OF ME REGRETS being so adamant about continuing with the concert. I wasn’t entirely sure of my regret until we left the hotel to drive to the show and paps were snapping photos of me and shooting questions at me about my attack. I wanted to break down every time a camera flashed in my face and at one point, I was almost positive I was going to until Harvey shielded me from their view and broke one of their cameras.

Now, we’re waiting backstage. Aria and Ivory are in my dressing room with me and the three of us are in our show clothes, hair and makeup styled to perfection. We look picture perfect in the mirror, but I most certainly do not feel picture perfect inside. Harvey has been seated in the corner, watching me as if ready to leap out of his chair and catch me at any second should I fall, metaphorically speaking, of course. Every time we make eye contact, he gives me gentle nods and smiles of encouragement. It’s fucked up really, the way that it took me nearly dying for him to be nicer to me and for me to be nicer back in return. I guess everything happens for a reason and it makes the sting of the attack hurt a little less.

Selene comes into view, peering into the dressing room, “You’re on in five.”

Aria and Ivory nod, the usual excitement of a new show filling them with anticipation. I, on the other hand, focus on my breathing. I take deep breaths in and deep breaths out, but it doesn’t seem to help with the nerves or the fear over what I could be walking into. I feel warmth at my back in a second and know without having to turn around that it’s Harvey, here to catch me from falling. I turn and look up at him and when he sees my face, he knows every thought going on in my head. He interrupts Aria and Ivory’s chit chat with, “Do you guys mind if I talk to Brody for a moment? I’ll walk her onto the stage when it’s time. We have a few things to go over concerning recent events.”

I raise a confused brow as Aria and Ivory nod, giving Harvey what he asked for as they exit the dressing room, closing the door behind them. “What do we have to go over?” I ask, confused, once we’re alone.

Harvey raises two gentle hands to my face, cupping each cheek in one of his abnormally large, calloused hands. “Nothing. I just wanted to check on you and see how you were doing. You look like you’re gonna turn blue in the face.”

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I exhale and close my eyes as the pent-up breath leaves. “I’m just afraid that the music and the show won’t be a spectacle but I will and what happened will.”

He shakes his head, “Don’t worry about any of that. These people are all here because they love the music you make and they love the sound of your voice. They love you, Brody. Don’t let him take this from you.”

He’s right and I know it. I nod and take one final breath. As I exhale, I force my anxiety to leave with it. This may feel like the hardest show I’ve ever had to put on but Harvey somehow just made it feel easier. “Thank you.”

He releases me and takes a step back, gesturing towards the door with his chin. “Come on, I’ll walk you.”

I follow behind him as we walk down the long hallway to the stage. The entire time we walk, I stick close to his back not wanting to be far from him. He just has this way of breathing air into my lungs when it feels like I’m suffocating.

We make it to the stage and I walk up the stairs with my friends to perform, leaving Harvey behind. I feel his eyes on my back as I disappear and the lights cut out.

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THE SHOW WASN’T AS bad as I thought it would be. I focused on my friends and the music, ignoring the eyes on me that were searching for cracks in my mask. Harvey was right about showing them who I really am and tonight I showed all of them that I’m stronger than they ever thought possible.

Ivory and Aria disappeared after the show, most likely finding their way back to their dressing rooms. I did the same, finding my way back to my own and when I entered, I found Harvey's eyes immediately. I close the door behind myself and give him a weak smile, "Unless you want to see me naked again, I suggest you get out so I can change," I tease him.

His nostrils flare as wickedness coasts across his face. He licks his lips but inevitably looks down as if scolding himself for wanting me. "You did great tonight. Are you feeling okay?" he changes the subject.

The wavering emotions that his question brings me is enough to wipe the smile off my face. I fold my arms over my chest in a weak attempt to ground myself and shrug, "I guess."

He cocks his head, "Brody," he prods, knowing me well enough to know there's more to say.

I exhale, "I would be lying if I said I wasn't still shaken up from last night. I'd also be lying if I said I wasn't afraid."

"Afraid of what?" he asks in a low voice as he takes a few steps closer to me.

I meet his dark gaze, "Afraid that if I turn around he'll be there to finish what he started and kill me for getting him caught."

Harvey's brows pull together and a look of malice contorts his perfect features. "He's going to jail, Brody. You have nothing to be afraid of. You are safe and even if you weren't, I would never let anything happen to you, not even a scratch."

I nod, swallowing. "I know."

He frowns, “I’m worried that you’re pretending to be okay and you’re pretending to be put together when you really aren’t. You can always come to me to talk about anything. I know I’m not the most in touch with my emotions or the emotions of others, but I can try at the very least to help you,” his voice comes out low and soothing, comforting in a way.

I squeeze my eyes shut and mutter before I can bite my tongue, “Only when it isn’t about you.”

“What?” he asks, his tone laced with confusion.

My eyes reluctantly open and I wince when I realize what I just said. Motherfucker, why can you never keep your mouth shut? I ask myself. I shake my head, “Nothing.”

I try to walk past him but he grabs my arm, stopping me. I hesitate to meet his gaze over my shoulder. “No, that wasn’t nothing. Is there something you want to talk to me about, about me?”

I pull out of his grip and give him a dry look. “Harvey, did you forget that you were hellbent on ignoring me for days and my near death was the only thing that made you soften up? You treated me like I didn’t exist and then all of a sudden you care because I would’ve died on your job.”

The rage that crosses his features has me taking a step back. His nostrils flare and his eyes darken, his lips pull into a frown. “I ignored you to put space between us, not to treat you like shit,” he corrects. “And you getting attacked is partially the reason that I’ve been softer with you, so you have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about.”

“What’s the whole reason then?” I push him, raising a brow.

He opens his mouth to answer my question but stops himself, closing his mouth a

second later. He then gives me a dark glare full of anger, irritation, and what looks like lust and just when I think he's frozen, unable to move, he reaches behind himself and locks the door to the dressing room. I swallow and feel butterflies swarm my stomach when the lock clicks, locking us in here together, alone with our issues. He charges towards me a second later and I'm not sure what he's going to do until he grabs a fistful of my hair and tugs my head back, crashing his lips down on mine. He kisses me hungrily, passionately, and I kiss him back equally. This kiss feels different than our previous kisses. Where they were desperate and depraved, this one feels like coming home after being on the road for months.

Harvey pulls back and we both catch our breath. I expect him to tear away from me with a look of regret as if touching me burned third degree burns into his skin and to ignore me for a week but he surprises me and catches me completely off guard by growling, "The whole reason, Little Rockstar, is that I find it impossible to stay away from you. Ignoring you is like tearing my bleeding heart out of my chest and trying to survive without it."

I suck in a small, surprised breath and just stare at him wide eyed at his words. "So then why?" I ask so faintly it almost comes out as a breathy whisper.

His mouth hovers over mine. "Because I love my job and I want to keep it and I can't keep you and the job."

"So, you choose the job?"

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He breathes into my mouth, “No. I want both.”

My brows furrow, “And when your contract is up?”

“We go our separate ways. I go back to Nevada and you go back to living your rockstar life in LA,” he says with conviction.

I feel a sharp twinge of sadness in my gut at his suggestion. I know Harvey and I come from two completely different worlds and I know we don’t belong together because we would never work. We’re far too different, but that doesn’t stop sadness and disappointment from washing over me. I nod, “And until then?”

He smirks in answer as he closes the gap between our lips and kisses me with the same passion as before. I wrap my arms around his neck and he lifts me off the ground and grabs the backs of my thighs, wrapping my legs around his waist, pressing his already hard length against my dampening center.

Harvey walks us over to the leather couch and places me on my back as he settles between my legs and trails kisses down my neck as his hands begin to wander. I may not like the idea of his proposition, of us walking away from each other in just another month and a half, but I don’t like the idea of not kissing him, of not touching him, even more. I would rather have him now than not have him at all and I want all of him now.

I start to unbutton his white dress shirt but inevitably get so impatient, I tear it open, buttons flying all over the room. He growls in anticipation as he starts to unlace the black leather of my top and when he finally removes the small scrap of fabric from



my body, his mouth lowers to my breasts, sucking my nipples into his mouth and teasing the sensitive peaks with his hands. I throw my head back on a moan, the warmth of his tongue on my skin throwing me into pure ecstasy.

His hands travel down to my leather pants, making quick work of unlacing the strings and pulling them down my thighs leaving me in just my panties. Every time we've been together it's always been me completely naked beneath him while he remains clothed. This time will be different I decide as I begin fumbling for the buckle of his belt with anticipatory fingers. I'm so desperate to see all of him, to touch all of him, and to feel all of him inside me that I fuck up while I'm unbuckling his pants. He smirks playfully as a small laugh escapes his lips at my desperation. I open my mouth to make a witty comment in my defense but I lose all train of thought when he removes his belt and unzips his pants, pushing the fabric down his large thighs. We're both left in our underwear and the thought drives me wild. His fingers start to rub me through my panties and I arch my back, needing more of him. I have a fire inside of me that won't be extinguished until I feel his skin on mine, touching me in all the most carnal places in all the most wicked of ways.

He groans, "You're fucking soaked." He rubs the dampspot on my panties and I roll my hips onto his fingers in encouragement.

Picking up on my need, he pushes my panties to the side and slides his fingers through my bare folds, exposed to him. He licks his lips when his eyes land on my sex and his fingers move in a steady rhythm, rubbing my clit and spreading the juices from my entrance all over my folds, slickening them with my arousal. I'm so desperate for more, I'm growing impatient. "Please, Harvey," I beg, rolling my hips as he continues to stroke my clit.

His voice darkens, "Please what?"

"Fuck me. Please fuck me," I plead with him, my eyes squeezing shut.

He growls, pushing two fingers inside of me abruptly and using his thumb to stimulate my clit. I moan at the sensation, at the feeling of being filled but I greedily want more. I want to be so full of him that I can't think. I don't just want his fingers; I want his cock. I want all of him. "You've gotten so good at begging, Baby." He praises as he picks up his pace. I don't know if it's my desperation or how utterly turned on I am by him right now, but within seconds, I feel an orgasm building up.

I cry out as my walls clench around his fingers once my orgasm finally finds me. He withdraws his fingers and starts rustling around in his pants pocket for something while I catch my breath. My sex feels warm where his fingers just were but it wasn't enough for me. I already want more of him, crave more of him with everything I am. I open my eyes to beg for more but clamp my jaw shut when I find him opening a condom he removed from his wallet and sliding it onto his thick base. My eyes widen and my mouth forms a small o shape when I take in his size. He removed himself from his boxers while I was still coming down from cloud nine and while I've touched him through his pants before, I've never seen him with my own eyes. I must admit, I knew he was big, but seeing him in person is an entirely new level of big.

He takes in the surprised expression on my face and grins, "What's wrong?"

"You're fucking huge. I don't think the whole thing will fit in me," I admit, still wide eyed with shock. His length is impressive and thick with veins that run under his crown to his base. I've never seen such a big cock before and my mouth salivates at the sight of Harvey in his full glory. The man is built like a God in every way, from his defined abs and muscles to the rigid length aimed directly towards me.

He strokes himself through the condom, "What's the matter, Little Rockstar? Scared of putting your money where your mouth is?" he teases.

I respond by wrapping my legs around his waist and pulling him closer to me. I reach between us and start stroking him, rubbing my clit with his tip. His cock twitches in

my grip and I smirk back, “Shut up and fuck me already,” I demand sassily as I squeeze his shaft gently to emphasize my point.

He goes feral, gripping my wrist and removing my hand from his length. He grabs my other wrist in the same hand and pins my arms above my head, leaving me completely vulnerable. He uses his other hand to slide his cock through my folds, lubricating the condom with my arousal. “You’re being a little bratty. What happened to the good girl that begged me to fuck her a few minutes ago?”

“She’s impatient and needs you to hurry up before she ditches you completely in favor of her vibrator,” I push him with a wicked tone, my brows pull together in the middle and my eyes darken.

He leans in close to my lips and kisses me hungrily, biting my bottom lip hard enough that I taste the metallic tang of blood. He pulls away and our eyes open, but he still bites my bottom lip as he pulls away. Once he finally releases it, I spot a drop of my blood on his lips and my clit throbs when he licks it off and grins. “You’re such a brat. I’m gonna have to fuck that attitude out of you, I guess,” he threatens and just when I’m about to argue with him, to push him harder, he silences me before I’ve even spoken by pushing inside my entrance with his thick, rock-solid length.

My chin tilts up and I moan loudly as my back arches in response. His cock stretches me and fills me up and the feeling is so otherworldly, I’ve never experienced anything like it. I’ve never been this full before. He releases my wrists and grabs my throat in a gentle grip, but a grip that is dominant and territorial, nonetheless. He leans in close, “That’s only half, Baby. Think you can handle the rest?”

“Only half?” my eyes widen in surprise.

He raises a brow and I tighten my legs around his waist, drawing him in closer, urging him on. My arms wrap around his neck, my fingers threading through his

perfectly groomed hair. “Do you want more?” he asks, his tone curious.

I roll my hips in question and pull him even closer with my legs. “Yes, I want all of you,” I say breathily.

He slowly pushes further inside of me and when I cry out, he slows, “Is it too much?”

“No. Give me more. Please,” I beg.

“Stop me if it’s too much,” he demands as he slowly sinks himself to the hilt in one thrust. It feels like I’m being torn apart from the inside and I gasp at the intrusion. I know immediately that there’s no going back now. Harvey Taylor has already staked his claim over me in every way that counts and he has undoubtedly just ruined me for every other man. He squeezes my throat only slightly, “You okay, Baby?” I nod. He kisses my jaw, “I need you to breathe, you’re holding your breath.”

I didn’t even realize that’s what I’d been doing. I take a deep breath as he slowly pulls out only to push back inside me. “Does it feel okay?” he asks, concern lacing his tone.

I nod, “It feels so fucking good,” I moan.

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Satisfied with my response, he finds a rhythm of thrusting in and out of me, his cock stretching me with every beautiful slapping sound of his skin on mine. My fingernails dig into the skin of his back and he looks down at me with his onyx eyes. They don't look so dark to me anymore. His hand on my throat tightens only slightly and I cry out in pure ecstasy. The feeling of him claiming me in his grip, in such a primal way while he fucks and stretches me has me slickening even more, my arousal dripping from my entrance. He growls, "You still feel like being a brat?"

"Only if it gets you to keep fucking me like this," I moan.

He snorts a laugh as he continues to pound into me. He uses his free hand to rub my clit while he fucks me and I feel my legs start to shake at the sensation. Within moments, he's wrung another orgasm from me and I tighten around him. He groans, "Fuck, you're so tight."

When the high of my orgasm fades, he pulls out and flips me onto my stomach. The sudden change in position catches me so off guard that I don't say anything and I don't make any noises at all. At least until he lifts my hips and props me on my knees, pressing my upper back down into the couch so my back is arched and my sex is on display for him. He thrusts back into me in one push and moans as my walls tighten around him. A cry tears from my chest at the intrusion and the overall sensation of him filling me up once more.

He finds a rhythm and reaches up, grabbing a fistfull of my hair in his fist. He pulls my head back by my hair and I moan at how rough he is. I love every second of it. He leans in close and growls in my ear, "Do you like getting fucked like a whore, Little Rockstar?"

I moan, “Yes!” as he pounds harder.

“Tell me how much. Tell me who this pussy belongs to,” he demands, his voice primal.

“I love it,” I admit breathily. “My pussy belongs to you!” my voice cracks on the last word as he thrusts into me so deep, my head starts to spin.

He pulls my head back further so that I stand on my knees with his arms locked around my torso. He holds my forehead so that the back of my head rests against his chest as he drives into me. “Such a good girl.”

His praise does something to me that his thrusts can't. I feel another orgasm building and sensing it, he pushes inside me deeper, his hand coming between us to stroke my clit. My body starts convulsing around him and my legs shake, suddenly unable to support my weight. I fall forward but he catches me and continues pounding into me as I tighten around him and cry out with the effects of my orgasm.

He changes our position a third time while still inside of me, by sitting on the couch and pulling me into his lap so that my legs straddle him on each side. One of his large hands finds my ass cheek, squeezing and slapping the flesh until it stings, while the other wraps around my throat. He yanks my mouth towards his and kisses me roughly. I kiss him back with the same passion and start to grind my hips against his while he starts pounding into me from below. “Ride me,” he commands as he slaps my ass cheek. He rubs the sting away as I obey him, my hips working him as I move up and down.

Sweat starts to form on both of our skin, my hair sticking in wet strands to my shoulders, chest, and back as his own sticks to his forehead. His cock gets deeper than ever in this position and I moan as my walls stretch for him with every thrust. “Oh God, Harvey!” I cry out as he starts to stroke my clit again. I don't think I can

physically handle another orgasm.

He breathes, “Fuck, I love the way my name sounds coming from your mouth while I fuck you,” he gets a wave of primal energy or something close to it as he completely surprises me by rising off the couch with my legs around his waist and his cock still deep inside me. He lowers me to my back on the coffee table and pins my legs down by the backs of my knees, driving so deep inside of me, I start to see stars. I feel another orgasm building as the familiar feeling of warmth spreads from that small bundle of nerves like fire igniting in my veins. It spreads throughout my whole body. “Are you gonna come again, Little Rockstar?”

“Yes,” I yelp.

He presses his thumb against my clit as he continues his rhythm. “Good girl, come on my cock again,” he demands and almost as if on command, my orgasm rips right through my chest with a loud cry. I start spasming beneath him and he stills, his orgasm finding him as he spills himself inside the condom while still fully sheathed by my walls.

He slowly releases the backs of my thighs once his orgasm fades but my body is still a mess of convulsions, the aftershocks of the orgasm pure bliss. He slowly slides out of me and wraps me in his arms, lifting me off the coffee table and into his lap as he seats himself on the couch. He presses my face to his chest and I hear the rapid beat of his heart, his usual intoxicating scent of espresso and pine mixing with the heat of sex. He strokes my hair as he catches his breath, “Are you still feeling bratty?”

I snort a laugh as I try to steady my breathing. “No,” I take a deep breath and close my eyes, exhaustion creeping in on me. I use his chest as a pillow as I mutter, “But I might in a few minutes.”

He laughs into my hair and as I slowly start to drift off into sleep, he whispers,

“Good, because I’m just getting started with you, Little Rockstar.”

## Chapter 19

Brody

I frown, a crease forming between my brows as a documentary on Kiss plays on the hotel TV. It’s like the TV just knew I absolutely fucking hate them and wanted to play it just to spite me. A clip of Eric Singer plays of him twirling his drumsticks in his fingers and I scoff, tossing a pillow with unnecessary aggression at the TV. “Fuck you,” I mutter distastefully.

“What did Eric Singer do to you?” Harvey interrupts my little outburst as he enters the room, his hair dripping water into his eyes from his shower. My eyes dip to the white fluffy hotel towel draped around his waist that looks like it’s about to fall at any second. I lick my lips as my eyes rove over his chiseled abs and rigid chest, remembering the feeling of his body against mine. He clears his throat to grab my attention and when my eyes meet his he gives me a knowing, teasing look as he dries his dark tendrils of hair with a separate towel.

I clear my lustful thoughts of him from my mind when I remember how sore I am from all the sex and orgasms he’s given me these last few days. Since our tryst in my dressing room after the show in Colorado, we went for round two in my hotel room. And then in his. And then in the shower the next morning before we had to hop on the plane to Illinois. Oh and then once we got to Illinois, we fucked in my new hotel room, and then again in the studio after the girls left, and again in his hotel room. Am I forgetting anything? Oh, yes! There was the fuck on the private balcony of my suite. I woke up next to Harvey this morning, curled into his side with my head on his chest and I’ve never felt safer in my life. I don’t worry about my attacker coming back to finish me off, I don’t get panic attacks over what happened, and I just feel relaxed, at peace around him. There is something about Harvey Taylor that makes me feel so



protected and encased in an impenetrable shield of dark eyes and a hulking frame. There's also his magnificently full ass that I catch myself staring at quite often.

Tonight is the show and until then, I have the day to myself and I'm choosing to spend it with Harvey. It fascinates me how I could've gone from hating his guts to wanting to be with him every minute of my day, but I don't question it in fear of losing precious time. I know our time is limited and with every day that goes by, we're one day closer to having to go our separate ways and return to our completely different lives in other states.

Ivory and Aria are spending the day at the hotel spa and invited me to join but I declined and said I was exhausted and wanted to rest up for the show. It wasn't a complete lie considering Harvey and I have been up at all hours of the night, most definitely not sleeping, and I am tired. That just isn't the reason I'm not at the spa with them right now. The reason is because I would much rather be having delicious sex with my grumpy babysitter, though that may be off the table at the moment considering how sore I am.

I roll onto my side, propping my head up in my palm as it rests on my elbow. The gray t-shirt I stole from Harvey rides up my thigh with the movement, revealing the black lacy thong I have on underneath. His eyes don't miss a thing, completely homed in on my exposed flesh and undergarments. I raise an annoyed brow at the conversation topic and frown even deeper as if that were even possible, "I fucking hate that guy," I grumble.

He shakes his head on a low laugh as he removes his towel and puts on a pair of boxers. "Care to explain why?"

I answer as I ogle him, "Because he's overrated. I'm a better drummer for starters," I say arrogantly before adding, "And the green circles around the eyes? Distasteful if you ask me. Oh! And how could I forget the fact that he does his makeup like a

Goddamn cat?" I rant, my voice rising on the last part. I quickly remind myself to keep my voice down just in case Selene is somewhere close by. The last thing we need is her finding out about us.

He steps into a pair of sweatpants and meets my eyes with a doubtful expression. "Is it the whole band you hate or just Eric Singer?"

I sit up and speak passionately, anger clear in my tone, "I hate them all!"

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He laughs under his breath as he walks over to the bed and joins me. His calloused fingers trail over the exposed flesh of my thigh, sending goosebumps rising all over my skin. I almost forget what we were talking about, too distracted by his touch. “Why do you hate Kiss?”

“Because they fucking suck,” I spit. I toss my head back into the plethora of pillows Harvey has on his bed and huff, “They’re way too try hard. Aerosmith came first and they’re way better. I can’t believe people actually put Kiss in the rock and metal hall of fame let alone consider them one of the greatest of all time. If you ask me, Metallica, Guns N’ Roses, M?tley Crüe, Aerosmith, and Ozzy are the greatest of all time. Kiss could never compare, let alone Eric fucking Singer,” I ramble on and stop when I catch him staring at the side of my face with an amused expression on his. “What?” I ask, suddenly feeling self-conscious. I know he isn’t a huge music fan, I probably just annoyed the shit out of him.

He smiles slightly, “I like how passionate you are about music. It isn’t just a career to you, it’s your life and you love it. You get so lost in it and watching you create, listening to you sing is like nothing I’ve ever seen or heard before. I could get lost in you while you get lost in music.”

A swarm of butterflies chooses this exact moment to go absolutely ballistic in my stomach at his words. My anger towards Eric Singer and Kiss dissipates, replaced entirely by emotions towards the man looking at me like nobody has ever looked at me before. His black eyes stare into my blues with such depth, it feels more intimate than all the times we’ve had sex. Walking away from him in just another five weeks is going to be impossible. “I thought you didn’t like music,” I tease him, my cheeks flushing with color.

He grabs me by the back of my neck and pulls my mouth to his, kissing me. I kiss him back and roll on top of him so that I straddle his waist with my already damp center with his already rigid length. He pulls away for a split second, “I don’t like music. I never said I didn’t like your music.”

I feign surprise, “Have you been a closeted Satan’s Angels fan this whole time?”

He rolls his eyes, “Yeah, I have a poster of you in my closet and a shrine to you under my bed.”

“Kinky,” I tease as I grind down on his length.

He grunts as his fingers dig into the flesh of my ass, controlling my movements over his groin. He nips my jaw and breathes, “Your music has grown on me the same way that you have.”

“So romantic,” I say, sarcasm lacing my tone.

He grins wickedly as he tosses me onto my back and settles between my legs. “Someone is getting a little bratty. You remember what happens when you get bratty don’t you?”

The pulse between my legs runs rampant with need, with anticipation. I might still be sore but fuck it. I need him over and over again like a hunger that just can’t be satiated. The reminder of what he did to me the last time I got bratty with him, the time in my dressing room, comes to mind and my nipples pucker at how filthy and primal we got. Remembering the same thing, he practically tears his t-shirt off my body and sucks a nipple into his mouth. I throw my head back and moan, covering my face with one of his pillows that smells like him, inhaling his scent deep. While he sucks and licks the puckered flesh, his other hand dips between my legs, spreading my juices through my folds and I ask myself how I’ll ever be able to part ways with

him? It may have started as hate, as sexual tension and frustration that turned into attraction and then evolved into a friends with benefits type of thing, but this feels entirely different. We don't just have sex and go back to opposite sides of the hallway. We sleep together, entwined by our legs or with my head on his chest, we wake up together, we spend all day together either watching TV in our hotel rooms and relaxing or going out into the cities and getting food or going shopping, even just exploring or going for walks while trying to hide from the paps.

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THE SHOW LAST NIGHT went perfectly, though all I could think about the entire time was running back to my dressing room when the show ended and locking Harvey and I inside. Selene seems suspicious of us, but she hasn't mentioned anything to me. I haven't told the girls either, knowing Ivory has a tendency to blurt out information at the worst of times.

We're in Chicago until tomorrow morning and then we head to Michigan but for now, we sit in the studio, heads bent together as we work on our new album. So far, we have about six completed songs and according to our pain in the ass contract with the record label, we need about six more. We only have about five weeks left and while we work to make new music, Selene has been working tirelessly, having virtual meetings with the legal and PR teams to see if there have been any updates on our cases. So far there haven't been many updates and Selene feels that it's a good sign but I'm not feeling too optimistic.

I've written some more of my own song but I still haven't told anyone about it since I'm still not entirely confident in my song writing abilities, and I also don't know if it's going anywhere. There still seem to be big pieces missing in both my lyrics and the piano interlude. I know with Ivory and Aria playing their guitars the song would sound worlds better, but I haven't mustered up the confidence to tell them about it yet. I also like having a puzzle I have to work out on my own.

Aria hums a melody as she writes in messy, almost illegible cursive, on the crumpled up sheet of loose leaf on her thigh. Her handwriting looks like hieroglyphics but somehow, I'm able to read it, though it used to be easier to read when I wasn't sober. Ivory experiments with different riffs on her bass and I tap out different beats that sound good with what she's playing.

"Okay, check this out," Aria hands me the sheet of loose leaf that was in her lap and I skim through the lyrics, actually liking what she came up with. The song portrays someone coming to LA to pursue musical dreams but the city eats them alive inevitably and turns them into a super fucked up rockstar. I love these lyrics so much I almost drool all over the paper.

"This," I flap the paper around in the air to emphasize my point, "Isfuckingamazing," I rise from my seat, fisting my sticks in one hand. I cup both sides of Aria's face in my full hands, the paper and the wood of the sticks pressing into her cheeks as I look up at her, "Aria Kane, you are a fucking genius and I love you," I praise her as I stand on my toes to kiss her cheek, dramatizing the muah sound.

Ivory excitedly strides over, swiping the sheet from my grip. She reads through it and her eyes widen as she grins, "This is killer, Six."

I add, "Keep this up, dude. We're almost finished. After this we only have five more."

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ARIA SCOFFS AROUND Amouthful of chicken nuggets. She claims greasy chicken nuggets are her brain food and she can't write good lyrics or play good music unless she has them but we all know the truth. Aria Kane loves chicken nuggets and just wants an excuse to eat them as a twenty-something adult. "Get this one," Aria flips her phone in my direction for me to read the screen. She has Instagram pulled up with

our band page's most recent post of us at our concert last night. More specifically, she has the comment section opened.

Mandy63: Anyone else think the rumors are true and Brody is actually pregnant? Why hasn't she drunk a drop on stage?

I roll my eyes at the comment and pretend to brush it off though my insecurities are rising to the surface below my skin.

Rockerbabe224: None of them have been drinking lol

Thank you, Rockerbabe224! She clearly has been paying attention to the entire group and not just me.

KissFanOfficial: They're boring now. Hard to watch them. Nothing about them keeps me entertained. They just aren't fun. I won't be listening to them anymore.

Well, you stupid motherfucker. I think to myself. As if I would ever take anything KissFanOfficial said seriously when they clearly lack good taste in music just based on their username. "Fuck that guy," I rage as I point to the screen.

The girls read the comment too and scoff, "I'm replying," Aria snaps as her thumbs start flying over the keyboard of her phone.

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“Don’t!” Ivory grabs the phone from her hands and tosses it to the corner of the room where my very sexy babysitter is sitting, his eyes glued to me with a look of concern and a trace of amusement in his eyes. He raises a brow at me in question and I nod as if to tell him I’m fine. “Selene said to stay off socials and not make ourselves a spectacle,” Ivory reminds Aria.

I rise from my folded up position on the floor, wiping the dust off my baggy fitted jeans with a graffiti Japanese dragon on the left leg. I walk over to where Harvey is seated to retrieve Aria’s phone and he bends down to grab it, handing it to me. My fingers brush against his as I take the phone from him and immediately, fire has ignited inside my veins. I know he feels it too based on the sultry look he gives me. “You okay?”

I nod, “Just haters being haters,” I reassure him even though deep down, I am bothered by them. I’ve been quiet about the anxiety I’ve had from the attack and about the comments I’ve been reading, some of which have been bashing the band or just me, in fear of coming across as problematic. I don’t want Harvey to think I’m too high maintenance and I don’t want him to worry about me. I just want us to enjoy our limited time together, happy as we can be, before it’s too late and we go separate ways. Then and only then will I allow myself to truly be upset and bothered by my personal issues.

I turn to walk away before he does what he does best and reads the emotions I’m feeling like he’s feeling them himself but he stops me by wrapping a hand around my wrist. “Are you forgetting how well I know you?” he asks. “Talk to me. What’s going on?”



I shake my head and look down. “I don’t wanna talk about it right now.”

He hesitates before inevitably releasing my wrist and letting me return to the girls. I give Aria back her phone with strict instructions to stay off socials and to not read hate comments while Ivory basically repeats everything I said in different words. I navigate us back to making music, working on songs, hoping to remove the weight of what just happened but it feels like the weight leaves the room and just falls on my chest and mine alone.

## Chapter 20

### Brody

I’ve been all over the world. I have been to some of the shittiest, most absolutely disgusting and fucked up places, seen some of the worst things you would never believe if I told you, but nothing is worse than the smell of Detroit, Michigan to me. There is a heavy scent of rotten eggs that just festers in the air and latches on to the insides of your nostrils, making you nauseous all day and just overall disgusted and peeved.

We’ve been here for three hours and already I want to hop back on the plane back to LA but we have a lot of fans here waiting to see us so I push through. I’ve had a disgusted expression on my face all day that’s starting to feel permanent and even when I’m in my hotel room, I can still smell it.

The door jolts open and I gasp, completely caught off guard and ripped from my thoughts. The aggressive entrance brings me back to that night and a rush of anxiety takes me over and has me gasping in fear, my stomach dropping. I inhale and relax when I find it’s Harvey and when he sees the fear on my face he scowls. A second later, his expression softens, “Just me,” he drops a brown bag off on my nightstand and cups my chin in his large hand. “You never have to be afraid of anyone coming

into your room, Brody. I told you I would never let anything happen to you,” he reassures me, the anger rising back to the surface of his expression. I know it isn’t anger with me but rather anger with the man that traumatized me, anger that he wasn’t there to stop it earlier.

I nod, exhaling as I look down. I didn’t want to ruin the good mood he seemed to be in when he entered but it seems I did what I do best and fucked it up. He tips my chin up slightly in silent command for me to meet his eyes and I oblige. “Talk to me. You still never told me what was bothering you in the studio yesterday and right now you’re making the same face,” his voice is gentle, concerned.

I shake my head and force a smile, “I don’t want to talk about it, it’s stupid.” I glance at the brown bag and give him a curious look while hoping to change the topic of conversation, “What’s in the bag?”

He gives me a disappointed look that tells me he knows exactly what I’m doing. “Tell me what’s wrong and I’ll show you,” he presents the ultimatum.

I frown, weighing out how curious I am about the contents of the bag and sharing my feelings. Fuck him and fuck the bag I don’t need to know what’s in it. But I know I’m full of shit and that the suspense will kill me. Fine. “Ugh,” I huff, rising from the bed and walking around the room so that I don’t have to face him. “I was just bothered by the hate comments.”

“Brody, fuck them,” he says angrily. “There will always be people who don’t like you or don’t support you for whatever stupid reasons they have. That isn’t just part of being a rockstar, that goes for everyone. Do you know how many people would love to watch me crash and burn? But I don’t let them get to me because I don’t care about what other people think and you shouldn’t either. People will hate on you because they know they’ll never be as talented as you or nearly as beautiful and at the best of times, extremely annoying,” his lips curve into a smile that elicits a matching one

from me as I lean against the dresser with my arms crossed. Only he can produce a smile in a time like this. He walks closer to me, stopping only a few inches away. “You’ll never actually live your life if you continue living it for other people. Show them who you are, take the mask off, and stop hiding how perfect you are from the world, Brody Drake.”

His eyes gleam with something I can’t quite place but I’m in complete awe of him. The rush of sentimental emotions washes through me and pumps my veins with something that I’d rather not address at this moment, but they’re enough to have color rising to my cheeks and a smile forming on my lips. Nobody has ever said such kind things to me nor has anyone actually meant them. Harvey has seen me without the mask and he sees someone worthy of so much, I wish I could see in me what he sees. It gets a little easier though, the more time I spend with him. I grow more confident by the day and don’t feel a need to resort to drugs or alcohol, in fact I haven’t thought of either in so long I nearly forgot they existed. He caresses my cheek with his fingers and I say quietly, “Thank you.”

He leans in and kisses me chastely before smirking, “Anytime, Little Rockstar,” he pulls away a second later and walks back toward the brown bag, removing it from the nightstand. “As for your anxiety, I think it might be a good idea to talk to someone because what happened to you was traumatizing. It doesn’t have to be me or your friends, not even Selene, but maybe someone else. You shouldn’t keep things inside, it isn’t healthy,” his tone becomes serious.

My smile falls, “And you know all about being open and talking about your feelings?” I raise a doubtful brow at him.

He smirks, “Of course not. I’m a hypocrite but you know I’m right.”

I mutter irritatedly under my breath, “Yeah, yeah.”

“What was that?” he prods, a knowing look of arrogance on his face.

I frown, “I said fuck off and eat shit.”

He smiles, “That isn’t very nice. I’ll have to fuck that attitude out of you after I show you what I got.”

I clench my thighs together as heat pools low in my belly at his promise. My attention quickly shifts however, to the brown bag as he sets it down on the bed and starts rustling through it. “I got a few things for you,” he says as he rummages around in search of something specific.

I take a step closer to him, my curiosity piqued, “Gifts, you say?”

He removes a large, three wicked candle from the bag and I gasp when I read the label on the front. It’s my favorite candle, the one I have in every single room of my house back home, the Japanese cherry blossom candle. “Oh my God,” I gasp as he hands it to me and I open the lid to sniff it, my eyes practically rolling to the back of my head.

“I know the smell of Detroit has been bugging you and I also know you’ve been a little homesick so I figured you could use that,” he explains.

I beam at him, “Thank you. I love it. How did you know this was my favorite?”

He tilts his head at me, “It’s in every room of your house.”

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“Always so observational. I’m impressed,” I compliment him.

He reaches back into the bag, “There’s more,” he says as he removes a scratchy looking gray cardigan, a pair of skinny jeans with not one rip in them, black framed glasses, and a brown wig.

He holds the items out to me and I frown as I look at them. “What the fuck is that?” I point at the clothes like they’re toxic.

He snorts a laugh, “Clothes.”

I cross my arms over my chest, “Yeah maybe for someone’s grandma but not me.”

He rolls his eyes. “That’s the point. It’s a disguise.”

“A disguise?” I ask, doubtfully. “What is this, a fucking Fast and Furious movie?”

He gives me an impatient look, “No this is me wanting to take you out without cameras and paps following us around.”

My lips part. That’s actually pretty sweet. “When?”

He checks his watch and then smirks, “Half past right after I fuck that attitude out of you,” he jokes but before I can react, he grabs me by my hips and tosses me onto the bed. I giggle as I land on a pile of pillows and he crawls into the bed to hover over me.

He kisses me hard and I kiss him back with just as much need. No amount of time with him will ever feel like enough and every time he touches me, it still feels just as good as it did the first time. In a matter of seconds, he's torn my clothes off my body and exposed me to him. He rolls a condom onto his impressive length and slides his tip through my already soaked folds. He lubricates himself with my arousal and presses the tip against my entrance to tease me. "Sometimes I think you give me attitude on purpose just so you can get fucked."

I smirk, "You wouldn't be wrong."

He tisks, "Such a bad girl."

He leaps off me, removing the rest of his clothes, and standing at the side of the bed. Once he's fully naked, I grip his length in my fist and start working him. He groans as my hand moves up and down his shaft, "Fuck."

"Take the condom off and let me taste you," I demand. He's licked and sucked me so many times and I've never returned the favor. He's never asked or expressed interest in me using my mouth.

He removes my hand from his shaft and strokes himself, "Not now. I'm too impatient. I need to fuck you before I explode inside this condom," he practically growls and I'm about to push him, ready to argue that he's made me come countless times with his mouth but never let me give him the same pleasure, but he silences me by catching me completely off guard. He grips my hips and drags me to the edge of the bed, pushing my thighs apart. With one beautiful, heady thrust, he pushes all the way inside me and I cry out at the feeling of being full of him.

He reaches between us and grips my wrists tightly in his palms while he develops a rhythm, pushing in and out of me. He holds my wrists in place as he pounds into me and the feeling of giving up all control to him ignites a fire within me. I'm so used to

vanilla, boring sex that sex with Harvey has changed and ruined me entirely. I'll never be the same or want the same from anyone else. It will always be him I think of.

His skin slaps against mine and the sound is so beautiful to me. "You still feel like being a brat?"

I moan, "No."

"Good girl," he growls as he pushes deeper and deeper. I feel an orgasm building inside of me within minutes and he releases my wrists in favor of stroking my clit instead. He sends me over the edge and I tighten around him as my orgasm rushes through me.

He moans and pulls out of me, repositioning us so that I'm on my belly. He climbs on the bed and uses his knee to part my thighs. He lifts my hips slightly and places a pillow beneath them before sliding back inside me in one delicious thrust. I moan at the feel of him. He resumes his previous pace, driving into me like a madman and already I feel another orgasm building. He grabs the back of my neck in a claiming grip, "You feel so fucking good squeezing my cock when you come on it, Baby."

His filthy words throw me over the edge and I come around him again, my moans muffled by the pillows. He growls and stops moving, his orgasm finding him at the same time. He spills into the condom, still inside me and pulls out only a second later, his body falling on top of mine. He wraps his arms around me and strokes my hair as he rolls onto his side. I place my head on his chest and we both sit in silence, panting and trying to catch our breath.

When we've both regulated our breathing, he kisses my forehead and whispers against my skin, "Get dressed, we're going out and you aren't Brody Drake, rockstar and public enemy number one tonight."

Harvey

“I CAN NOT GO out like this,” she complains from inside the bathroom. I’m still not entirely sure why she felt the need to get dressed in a separate room considering I’ve been inside her and seen her naked countless times, but I have a suspicion it’s because the clothes and the wig are making her self-conscious.

I roll my eyes as I button up the last button of my white dress shirt. My routine has been thrown completely off kilter this week because of her. I used to have a strict regimen that I followed but then enter Brody Drake and I’m finding myself voluntarily choosing not to follow my routine in favor of spending time with her, whether it be in the form of morning sex or just cuddling. Cuddling. Can you believe it? I’ve never cuddled or had a desire to cuddle with anyone. Sex to me has always been a transaction of sorts. Both parties enter willingly, both parties exit after feeling fulfilled, and both parties never speak again in fear of growing attached. It seems I’ve said “to hell” with all of my rules and values because of her and I can’t say I’m mad at it. Besides, our time together is limited and in just a few more weeks, I won’t have her at all. I’d rather not regret not spending enough time with her and focusing too much on my routine because soon enough, we’ll both go back to our separate worlds and we’ll never see each other again.

The thought sends a burn to my chest that I rub with hard fingers and try my best to ignore. It can never be anything serious between us. We live separate lives, come from different worlds, and aside from the fact that we’re opposites in every way, I could never live in the spotlight. I’ll take advantage of the time we have left and then after that I can go back to my strict routine and values. For now though, I really need her to hurry up and get out of the bathroom. “Stop being ridiculous, Brody. Get out here,” I command her, raising my voice.

I hear a loud groan and a mutter of “fucking guy” before the bathroom door slides open and she steps out. My jaw drops when my eyes land on her. I can’t help but



burst into laughter. She doesn't seem to like my reaction much because she reaches for a discarded shoe on the floor and tosses it at me. It bounces right off my chest and doesn't phase me. I only continue laughing. "Fuck you!"

"You've already done that," I tease. My eyes rove over her and I slide my phone out to snap a picture before it's too late. She gasps when she catches me and demands I delete it but I put it back in my pocket, determined to make that my lock screen. The sight is just too good. She looks absolutely nothing like herself. Brody never wears clothes that don't reveal even a sliver of skin so seeing her in a cardigan and non-ripped jeans is a sight for sore eyes. Paired with the large framed glasses on her face and the straightened head of dark hair that isn't hers, she looks like a stranger. I guess the disguise idea may work after all. I had my doubts about it but I was willing to take whatever risks necessary to give her just one night away from the press, and free of the paps that harass her. She deserves it after everything she's been through.

She crosses her arms over her chest and pouts, looking very much like an angry child. "I can not leave like this."

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I smile at her, “You can and you will because nobody is gonna know who you are when you’re dressed like that.”

I inevitably win our argument and usher a reluctant and hesitant Brody out of the hotel through the back entrance that is typically reserved for staff only. I bribed an employee with a large stack of bills to get him to help me out when I planned the night, but I don’t regret it one bit because it worked. I got Brody into a blacked out car and drove off with her, parking on a nearby street.

We spent the night walking around the city that smells so foul, yet I couldn’t bring myself to notice, completely enamored by her the whole time. The way her nose scrunches at the odor and the way her eyes light up when people walk past her without recognizing her. The many personalities in the city, everything. Sometimes I forget her life isn’t normal and that these experiences aren’t realistic for her. It makes me even happier that I did this.

I took her to get dinner at a quiet little Japanese restaurant and then I took her to a local art gallery that was showcasing bonsai tree art. I knew she would love it and I was right. Her eyes were bright the entire time and she had the biggest smile on her face. I wish I could take a picture of her smile without her noticing, just so I could stare at it all day. The sight of Brody Drake alone is enough to send a man to his knees but even in glasses and some very unattractive clothes, she’s still the most stunning creature in the room every time she enters.

The night was special, even I could admit that. Now, we’re walking down the hall to our hotel rooms and I can tell from the wicked gleam in her eyes and the smirk on her lips that she wants something else from me, something I’m more than willing to give.

She leads me to her room and I follow like some kind of puppy, another thing I would never be caught dead doing before Brody Drake. She slides the key into the door just as I smack her ass playfully, the devious look in her eye and the sirenic laugh that comes out of her mouth is enough to have me stripping her naked in this very hallway but I resist the urge, not wanting Selene or the girls to catch us together like this.

Brody opens the door to her room and I follow behind her. I'm about to kiss her and by the looks of it, she's expecting me to, but I resist and take a step back when I realize we aren't alone. Inside her room, sitting on her bed are three people who look suspiciously like my little rockstar. There's an older man, probably in his sixties, with no hair and a short gray beard. His eyes are the same shade as Brody's sapphire blue gems, and he's lean and muscular. He stands a couple of inches shorter than me. I take in the woman at his side. She's tan with black hair that's tied into a knot on the back of her head, not one hair out of place. Her eyes are a hazel color and she crosses her arms over her chest and scowls. I take in the last person, a man who appears to be about Brody's age with the same shade of sunshine hair as hers and the very same eyes as hers too. He takes us in with a raised brow and an amused expression on his face. This must be Andrew, Brody's younger brother.

Brody's mother frowns, "Well, Brody, you must be completely fine if you're bringing men back to your hotel room only days after being attacked." Brody's body immediately tenses. Her mother looks her over with a disgusted expression, "And what on God's earth are you wearing?"

I watch as Brody retreats inside herself, the spunky and witty girl I know who doesn't take shit from anyone, disappearing before my very eyes. She becomes a shell of her outgoing self and molds into someone who I don't recognize. I immediately clench my jaw, angry at her parents for blowing out the candle that is Brody Drake. Her voice comes out shaky as she starts removing the wig and the fake glasses, "It's a disguise so I could leave the hotel without paparazzi harassing me," she explains as she looks down at her feet. "And he's not just a random person I'm bringing back to

my room, he's my babysitter."

Brody's father raises a brow, "The one Selene told us would be coaching you?"

She nods and I speak up, reaching a hand out to Brody's father, "I'm Harvey Taylor."

He takes my hand in his tight grip and shakes. I proceed to shake Brody's mother's hand and Andrew's. "And how has she been doing?" Brody's father asks, curiously. I want to punch him in the jaw for speaking about her like she isn't in this very room with us but I hold back out of respect for the girl at my side that looks extremely uncomfortable.

I raise my chin and force confidence into my tone, "She's doing great. I'm very impressed with how far she's come. You have a wonderful and very talented daughter, Sir."

Her father responds, "Please, call me Robert and my wife's name is Adriana." He pauses as he recalls what I just said and snorts a laugh, "Well, she gets that from me of course. I just wish she would use her talents for a more acceptable career."

Brody exhales and I lean closer to her to offer her support without making our current relationship too obvious to her family. "She has an amazing voice and tremendous talent. It would be a shame for the world not to hear it," I say politely.

Brody looks up at me and I swear her eyes sparkle. I give her a grim smile and our moment gets interrupted by her mother's plummy voice, "I agree with your father. You would've never gotten attacked if you lived a more appropriate lifestyle, Brody. And what's this about you not calling us after it happened? We had to find out about it from the news and not from our own daughter and then Selene called us to talk to us about it before you did and that was days ago. You still never reached out. Do you have any idea how selfish you are?"

Brody snaps, “I’m selfish for not calling you about my attack? Do you even hear yourself? Maybe I didn’t call because you find a way to make every single thing about yourself.” There she is, my little spitfire. I knew she was still in there.

Andrew sucks in a sharp breath and exhales, muttering, “Oh, here we fucking go.”

Adriana’s nose scrunches with anger and her overly made up face barely moves, most likely from copious amounts of botox treatments. “How dare you?” She snaps at Brody and I watch Brody’s defense crumble. “You’re a selfish little brat and your fame and fortune have gotten to your head. You forget that respectable people once earned the things they had and worked normal jobs rather than revealing too much of their bodies and abusing substances.”

Andrew seems to not like the words coming out of his mother’s mouth that are directed at his sister as he argues, “Really, Mom? You’re gonna lecture her on working when you’ve never had a job in your life? Dad has done everything for you so you have no business lecturing my sister on working a ‘normal’ job when you don’t have one.”

I really like her brother. Adriana gives Robert a threatening glare and he sighs before getting worked up and raising his voice at his son. “Don’t speak to your mother that way,” Is all he says. It seems Robert wants no part in the argument but that Adriana is his puppet master. It seems the whole family can’t really stand her and that doesn’t surprise me one bit after I’ve gotten the displeasure of meeting the woman.

Andrew rolls his eyes. “This is bullshit. We came here because she was attacked and instead of offering support, you’re making this about you,” he gives his mother a death glare.

Adriana stomps her foot on the ground like an angry child and shrieks, “Shut your mouth, Andrew.” She turns on Brody, “Whatever biases you’ve placed within your

brother, make quick work of removing them or your life will become difficult.”

Did she just threaten Brody? Fuck. No. This is where I draw the line. “Was that a threat? It seems to me like it was one but I’m not understanding how you could actually think Brody turned him against you when you’ve done that all on your own.” Adriana’s eyes widen, not expecting me to intervene but I continue before she can speak, “And your daughter was viciously attacked and could’ve been killed. All you care about is yourself and your image and you actually have the audacity to blame her for her own attack. Your daughter is the most talented person I’ve ever met and she was intelligent enough to make her talent her career, and she’s happy with what she’s doing so why isn’t that enough for you?” I snap, my voice raising as my anger rises.

Robert’s eyes darken. He isn’t pleased with me cornering his wife like that but maybe not from loyalty but rather from the fact that she’ll yap into his ear if he doesn’t. Andrew gives me a nod of appreciation and Brody’s jaw hangs wide open with surprise. Adriana seethes, “You are not involved in our family and therefore, have no business forming any opinions or sticking your nose where it doesn’t belong. Why don’t you see yourself out?”

Brody interjects, “He’s not going anywhere because I want him here. I feel more comfortable with him here because you constantly victimize yourself and make me miserable every time I’m near you.”

“Brody Drake, shut your mouth.” Adriana points a finger in Brody’s face.

Brody looks up at me and inhales a deep breath. She reluctantly looks back at her parents but I see a split in the mask she wears, the Brody I know creeping through. “You’ve gone out of your way to make me miserable since I was a kid. You’ve never been happy with anything I’ve done, you’ve never told me you were proud of me, hell, you’ve never even hugged me, Mom. So get this, I’m done. You can all see yourself out and fuck off back to LA because I’m not doing this anymore. I let you

treat me like shit my whole life but I won't let it go on any further." She turns and looks at her brother, "You are my best friend and I'm sorry if this drives a wedge in our relationship, but I need to start doing what's best for me because none of this is healthy, Andrew. I don't want this to affect our relationship but I understand if it does." She glances at her father next, "And you're too scared to leave her because you were stupid enough to not have her sign a prenup. You're her bitch because you'd rather keep her happy and quiet than deal with her wrath. Grow the fuck up, Dad." There she is. She's all the way out of that mask now, and the little rockstar I know is back.

They all stare at her wide eyed, Andrew full on smiling. "I've been waiting so long for that," he admits. He looks between Brody and her parents but inevitably walks over to his sister and drapes an arm across her shoulders. I realize then that he's closer to my height, still a few inches shorter, but his frame is about three times bigger than hers. Is that how I look next to her? "Sorry Parents, but Brody and I are adults and we don't have to take your shit anymore."

Robert rubs the spot between his eyes, "You two are being overly dramatic. We came here to bring the family together."

Brody snaps, "Maybe that's why you came here, but she," she points at her mother, "Only came here to make me feel like shit and I'm not gonna let it fly. I've let this go on for too long, pretending to be someone I'm not for you, to please all of you, but I'm not doing it anymore. This is who I am and if you don't like it, we don't have to talk." She hooks a thumb over her shoulder, "The door is right there so kindly see yourselves the fuck out."

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Adriana looks at Robert expectantly for him to somehow solve the problem and tighten Brody's leash and for a second, I feel sympathy for the man. He's clearly overworked and exhausted and would probably love to have a normal family, but this woman makes him and their children so miserable. He has the power to leave, but chooses not to, so do I feel that bad for him? No. Robert clamps his jaw shut and just exits the room. Adriana mutters arguments under her breath but reluctantly follows Robert out, slamming the door behind her.

Brody throws herself onto her bed and sighs, her eyes closing. Andrew and I exchange worried glances. "You okay, big sis?"

"That felt fucking awesome," Brody grins up at the ceiling.

Andrew smirks, relieved, "I didn't know you had that in you. I'm impressed."

Brody sits up, grinning from ear to ear, "I didn't either. I was feeling inspired," she glances at me, meeting my eyes as she blushes. I smile at her, warmth spreading through my chest.

"What should we do for Christmas and Thanksgiving now that we won't be spending it with them?" Andrew inquires.

Brody shrugs, "Who cares? We can do whatever we want! Let's cross that bridge when we get to it."

Andrew chuckles, "True."



“How long are you here for?” Brody changes the subject.

“I’m leaving tomorrow night after your show,” Andrew responds.

Brody’s eyes light up, “You’re staying for the show?”

“Of course. You know I love watching you perform,” he says affectionately.

“I’ll have Selene give you a backstage pass and a VIP ticket,” Brody plans, tapping out a quick message to who I can only assume is Selene on her phone.

He nods, “Sounds good to me,” he yawns. “I’m beat, though. I’m gonna head to bed and have beautiful sweet dreams about Mom’s face when you told her off.”

Brody laughs but gets up to hug her brother. “I’ll see you tomorrow, dumbass.”

He kisses the side of her head and pats me on the shoulder before he sees himself out. Once the door closes, it’s just Brody and I, alone after everything that just went down. She walks over to me slowly, her eyes never leaving mine. “You didn’t have to stand up to her for me.”

A crease forms between my brows. How could she ever think I wouldn’t defend her? I’d protect her against anyone, anything. Why though, Harvey? You’ve never cared this much for anyone before. I ask myself but the answer comes too quickly. Because nobody before her has ever been able to rile me up so quickly, challenge me at every opportunity, and completely flip my entire world as I knew it upside down. Brody Drake alone is a beautiful disaster, the version of herself she chooses to show the world, but when the mask is removed, and her true face is shown, she has the power to send the whole world to her feet. I have never met anyone like her and I never will after her, once we have to say our goodbyes. The reminder of our impending separation has me rubbing an ache out of my chest, right above my heart. “Doesn’t

mean I didn't want to. I will never stand by quietly while someone disrespects you."

Her lips curve into an affectionate smile, "Thank you."

I shake my head, "You never have to thank me for doing what everyone else in your life should've done for you."

Her smile falls and she takes a deep breath in. She closes the distance between us and places her palms on my chest. I place my hands on her waist instinctually and she exhales as she meets my eyes. "I want to do something for you," her face doesn't give away anything she's thinking.

I quirk a brow, "What?"

She smirks and I know immediately that whatever she has in mind isn't PG-13. She fists the collar of my shirt and drags me over to the bed. I follow her the whole time, letting her guide me. I've always, always been in control when it comes to sex and my life in general. I need to be in control, I don't just want to be. I need it like I need air to breathe and the idea of surrendering control to anyone cuts my oxygen supply off. However, for the first time in my life, I'm completely okay with the unknown, with surrendering control to Brody Drake even though my natural instincts are telling me to do the opposite. Besides, she's surrendered herself to me more times than I can count, it seems only fair to let her have it this once, right?

She gently pushes me down so that I sit on the edge of the bed, her movements slow as if she knows not being in control is new territory for me, uncomfortable territory. "Is this okay?" She asks, anxiously chewing her bottom lip.

I snort a laugh, "You didn't even do anything yet."

She grins, dropping to her knees before me on the ground and I know right away

what she's planning to do. "Brody-"

She cuts me off, "I want to do this for you."

I shake my head, "I don't let anyone do that to me, Brody," I say with dismissal in my voice. The idea of a woman sucking my cock makes me uncomfortable solely because it would require me to willingly surrender control.

Brody makes no effort to touch me, not wanting to cross any lines. "Why?"

"Because I don't like not feeling in control," I admit.

She tilts her head at me. "What if I let you control it?"

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“How would you do that?”

“I won’t touch you with anything other than my mouth and you can set the pace,” she offers.

The idea is tempting. If her hands are behind her back and her warm mouth is the only thing touching my cock, I wouldn’t feel so anxious about giving up my control. “Fine,” I decide on a whim before I can change my mind. Brody Drake has gotten so many of my firsts, from going on a date to cuddling, I might as well add another one to the list.

Her eyes widen in surprise and her lips curve into a smile dipped in pleasure. I unbuckle my belt and unzip my slacks, reaching inside my boxers and removing my cock. I stroke myself, my eyes on her the entire time and I’m pleased to find her watching me with anticipation. “Hands behind your back, Little Rockstar,” I command her.

She obeys, sitting back on her heels and forcing her hands behind her back. She looks up at me, waiting for further direction and I appease her by growling, “Now open your mouth.”

She does as I say, her plump lips parting. I tease her bottom lip with my cock and her tongue darts out, licking my tip. I hiss in pleasure. I never imagined it would feel this good and she’s barely even done anything yet. I know deep down the reason it feels so good is because it’s Brody and not just some random woman. I push my cock deeper into her mouth, slowly so as not to choke her. I’m big and she has a small mouth, I’m taking it slow and giving her time to adjust before I push in further.

She moans around my cock and the vibrations have beads of precum forming at my tip. I grab her hair in my fist to keep it out of her face as I start to set a rhythm. I push in and out of her mouth slow enough so that she has a chance to stop me if she's uncomfortable but she doesn't protest. She just looks up at me with her sirenic blue eyes that are watering the more I thrust into her mouth. "Fuck baby, your mouth feels so good."

I pull out, giving her a chance to catch her breath and when she looks back up at me expectantly, I slam back into her mouth. She sucks me so good, tears rolling down her cheeks, and I realize how truly good this feels. I know right away it wouldn't feel this good with anyone else. No, it only feels this good because it's Brody Drake sucking my cock, the woman I love to hate and hate to...

I explode into her mouth, moaning as ropes of come shoot from my tip and down her small throat. I blame the approaching orgasm for my almost confession just a few seconds ago. The idea is completely absurd. I've never been in love and I never will be. Besides, even if I were, it would never work. We're on borrowed time and soon it'll run out completely.

She catches her breath, licking her lips. "So how was it?"

I wipe the tears from her cheeks with my thumbs and bring her up to stand. I look down at her and kiss her, "So fucking good."

## Chapter 21

### Brody

We're in the middleof bumblefuck, Tennessee now. No hate against the state, it just isn't for me. It's more Ivory's forte than mine, considering the girl loves cowboy hats and cowboy boots. Me? I'm a city girl through and through. I wear sneakers with

nearly every outfit and crop tank tops with baggy jeans.

I won't lie though, the nightlife in Nashville is fun. We used to get wild here before we had to get sober. I miss the fun we had, but not the drugs or alcohol we had to consume to have it. No, I'm completely content where I am right now, in the studio Selene rented for us to work on the album. When we left Michigan three days ago and came to Nashville, we had six songs that we still needed to finish. Now, we only have four left. We've consumed an ungodly amount of energy drinks, staying awake all throughout the night working. Selene extended our time in Nashville, hoping we would get more done in the studio between shows and it wasn't a bad idea on her part. Aria, Ivory, and I are communicating so well and putting our heads together to form good ideas. If one of us doesn't like an idea another presents, we address it like adults and offer a solution or a tweak to the idea that everyone likes.

I'm falling in love with music all over again and I never fell out of love with it. I think being on good terms with the girls definitely helps. I find myself worrying less and less with each passing day about being kicked out and replaced. The only thing that truly bothers me is the hate we seem to be getting since we got sober. Selene demands we don't look at social media and that the hate comments are good because the legal team can use them to prove we've improved our behavior and found reason. That doesn't mean it doesn't still bother me.

"Oh, I like that," Aria compliments Ivory's riff on her bass. I love it too.

I glance at Harvey over my shoulder to find him looking exhausted. I frown, feeling guilty for making him stay here with me. I check my phone to find it's two in the morning. How did we lose track of time? We've been here since five in the evening. I look up at the girls, "Are you guys tired?"

Ivory chooses this exact moment to yawn, covering her mouth with the back of her hand. "I'm fucking wiped, B."

“Same,” Aria adds.

Ivory sets her bass down and grins at us both, “We made two whole songs today, guys. All we have to do is record them and then we just have four more to worry about. We’ve got this,” she encourages us.

The admission that I have a song I’ve been working on myself is on the tip of my tongue and every time I open my mouth to share it with them, the words never come out. I’ve made more progress on my song’s lyrics, not so much the instrumentals since I haven’t had much time alone in the studio. I have nearly the whole thing written, I think I’m just missing a verse or two. “We’ll have four more done by the last show. Tomorrow, we’ll record these ones and have them done and sent to the label.”

Ivory and Aria walk closer to the door, ready to leave. When I don’t move, they quirk their heads at me in confusion. “Didn’t you want to wrap things up?” Aria asks, confused.

I nod, “Yeah, I just want to do one more thing before I go but you guys don’t have to stay. I’ll catch up with you tomorrow morning.”

They shrug, too tired to argue or ask questions before they wave their goodbyes at Harvey and exit the studio. Once the door closes behind them, Harvey sits up straighter in his seat, “What is it you need to do?”

I look between my drum set, the piano, and Harvey, biting my lip. I want to stay a little longer and work on my song. I haven’t had any time to myself to work on it since I’ve been wrapped up in both the deal with the label and spending time with Harvey. I shake my head when I make my decision. I do want to work on my song, but it isn’t fair to keep him here when he’s exhausted. He’s been here with me for hours, and he deserves to rest. “Nothing, we can go.”

He raises a palm in a “stop” gesture. “No, no. You have something you want to do and leaving isn’t it. What is it?”

I cross my arms over my chest, “I wanted to work on something but it can wait. You’re tired and you’ve been here all day.”

He relaxes on the couch, getting comfortable, “Go ahead. I’ll wait.”

“Harvey-”



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I start but he cuts me off, “Brody, I know you much better than you think which means I know you well enough to know that there is a song at your fingertips that needs to be played, needs to be heard and if it doesn’t, you won’t sleep. So I have no problem sacrificing some more of mine if that means your peace of mind will be ensured and besides, I like watching you play.”

I melt at his words. Why does he have to make it so impossible to not catch feelings for him? Ugh. Stupid ass babysitter, worming his way into my heart with his perfect face and perfect words. “But you’re exhausted.”

“I’m a big boy, I can handle staying up late.”

I smirk, “Are you sure? Pretty sure I heard a nurse from the assisted living facility down the street calling for you. You know, since you old people need to be in bed by eight? I’m sure they’ve formed a whole search party by now to find you,” I tease him.

He full on laughs at my joke, “Always so damn witty.”

I preen, “That’s what I do.”

He rolls his eyes at me, still fighting off the remains of laughter, “Go play your instruments and leave this old man alone.”

I chuckle as I turn on my heel and drop into the seat of my set. I pick up my sticks, twirling them around between my fingers as I let the creativity flow through me. I listen to the lyrics in my head, the piano interlude, all of it, humming the melody until the sounds of the drums start to play with them. I look over my shoulder to find

Harvey's eyes on me so intensely, analyzing my every movement, every sound. Usually, I don't like having anyone but Aria and Ivory around when I'm creating, finding it too distracting. But Harvey doesn't distract me, his presence only seems to spark my creative genius. I turn back to the set, rapping on the cymbals and then the bass drums.

I lose myself in the beat, my body taking over as I hit the toms, the snare, all of them in a beautiful melody of chaos and destruction. The song has a consistent beat to it, only picking up in parts I know Aria and Ivory would have guitar riffs. Between verses, I form a transition of hitting the cymbals and before I know it, I have the blueprint for the entire drum part. I hear the piano in my head and leap out of my seat, my legs taking me to the piano bench before I can think better of it. I play the interlude I started in my home studio, the night Harvey finger fucked me on the bench, but this time, I add to it. I add a dark note, making the song sound almost gothic and evil. It pairs well with the light hearted melody I have and then I play it again two more times to perfect it and commit it to memory. I feel Harvey's eyes on me the whole time and it only fuels my fire, the light inside me not wanting to be put out.

I turn to look at him over my shoulder and his eyes are wide awake. He looks like he just drank a cup of dark roast and is just starting his morning. Did my music wake him up? "Am I being too loud?" I can't read the expression on his face, it's too neutral. He has that familiar crease between his brows but I can't tell if he's pleased by the music or if he hates it. The possibility of the latter makes my stomach drop. I think I'd rather my fans all hate my music than Harvey. His opinion is important to me and I'm practically hanging off the edge of my seat as I wait for his response.

"No," he says, his voice low and husky.

I feel my palms starting to grow clammy. Why isn't he saying much? "Did it sound bad?" I ask, my voice sounding squeaky and unconfident.

The corner of his lips curve into a faint smile, “No, quite the opposite. I’ve never heard anything like that before.”

Oh? “And?” I press him for his opinion.

“And it sounds good. Really good, Brody. Have you played that for the girls?” He asks.

I deflate, shaking my head. “No.”

“Why?” He looks almost disappointed.

I sigh, “Because I’ve never written a song completely on my own before and I don’t know if it really sounds good or if you’re just saying it does to make me feel good.”

He shakes his head as he rises from his seat on the couch and walks over to me in a few strides. He sits on the bench beside me, his warmth seeping into my side. His thigh presses against mine and I instantly want to rip all of my clothes off and let him have his way with me, but I remember how anxious I am over his opinions on my music and stay where I am, fully clothed. “I didn’t hear the whole song but from what I heard, you just completely came up with a new concept that Satan’s Angels have never done. I don’t think any other bands have ever done what you just did,” he nods his chin at the piano as he speaks, “Brody, you’re easily the most creative and talented person I’ve ever met. The way you play the drums amazes me and so does the way you play piano. You play the instruments like they’re a part of you and not many artists can do that. Hell, a lot of artists don’t even write their own music, but you can do it all because you truly love what you do and I love to watch you lose yourself in it. On top of being the best damn drummer and the best pianist I’ve ever seen, your voice is out of this world,” he tucks a stray strand of hair behind my ear as he continues, “Your voice is sirenic, when you sing, you captivate everyone with just your voice because it’s so beautiful and God only knows when you’re gonna lure me

to my death,” he jokes and I breathe a laugh.

My eyes practically glisten as I look at him, as I listen to his words. Nobody has ever said anything like this to me before. I never imagined someone saying these words would feel so good but it does. My heart swells with emotions for him and he only prods it more as he adds, “So back to your concern about me just saying nice things about your song to make you feel good, no. I didn’t lie to you to make you feel good. I told you the truth so that you would see yourself the way I see you.”

“And how do you see me?” I ask, curious.

He leans in closer to my face and whispers, “Unmasked and fucking perfect,” before I can respond he closes the distance between our lips and kisses me. This feels different than all of our other kisses. Those kisses were wrapped in hunger and lust. This kiss is sweet and pure, intimate in a way that Harvey and I haven’t yet been together even though we’ve had sex many times. No, this feels completely different, like it means something different for us both, but whether it’s the start or the end, I’m not sure. I know I don’t want us to end but the ticking clock that is the end of the tour looms over us like a dark cloud. Besides, even if it was possible for us to continue past our time, Harvey is set on us going our separate ways when the time comes.

He pulls away after a few minutes of us getting lost in each other and gives me a small smile. He looks forward and raises his fingers, bringing them down slowly to press a few keys on the piano. The sound comes out so out of tune, I’d rather chew on the sole of my fucking shoe than hear it again, but I can’t help the fit of giggles that overtakes me. “Okay, don’t ever do that again,” I laugh.

“Why?” He raises a playful, challenging brow.

“Because it sounded horrible. If you want to learn a few notes, I can teach you,” I offer, wiggling my brows.

He rolls his eyes, “I just pressed them to hear the sound they would make, that’s all. I have no interest in listening to any music aside from yours, nor do I have interest in playing music.”

I give him a thumbs down, “Booo.”

He gives me a look of feigned annoyance and I smile at him, knowing his stiff expression won’t hold well against my dimpled smile. As expected, it falters. “Do you want to hear real piano playing?” I ask.

He nods, “Of course.”

“Give me a song you like,” I demand.

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“I don’t listen to music, remember?”

I give him a look that says you’re full of shit. “I mean before you didn’t listen to music. When you were fun to be around. Maybe when you were a kid or an angry teen.”

Harvey scoffs, his eyes lowering to the keys and my fingers where they rest on them. He pauses to think for a few seconds and I let him. I don’t know much about his past but I get the vibe he doesn’t like to talk about it or think about it. Maybe asking him a question like that wasn’t the best idea.

He inhales, “‘Mad World’ by Michael Andrews,” his expression closes off and his body tenses as he makes the admission.

I frown. “That song is sad,” is all I say. Why was Harvey listening to sad music when he was a kid? Why was that the first thing his mind goes to when he thinks of his childhood? That song came out in 2001 and Harvey would’ve been six. I feel an invisible hand reach into my chest and squeeze my heart. I open my mouth to...what? Comfort him? Reassure him? Judging by the hard set of his jaw, that’s the last thing he wants from me right now so instead, I do the only thing I know how to do, play the piano.

I play the song, my fingers moving slowly from key to key. After the first few notes, I start to sing the lyrics to him. I keep my voice low, hoping it comes out soothing but judging from the pained expression on his face when I look at him and find him staring at the keys like they just kicked his dog, I stop playing. “Don’t stop,” he whispers.

I hesitantly start playing again. I'm not sure when the energy between us became jaded or so dark, and I wholeheartedly don't like it. I play as requested and when I finish the song, I fold my hands in my lap, removing them from the keys. I wait for him to speak and the silence between us feels louder than any concert I've ever performed at. I don't dare speak, not sure how he'd react. I've never seen him this way. He seems like he went somewhere else and the last thing I want to do is say anything that could throw him over the edge.

He finally breaks the silence by blurting, "My mother used to play that on a loop when my father left."

My eyebrows rise so high they practically shoot off my face in surprise. Is he...opening up to me and willingly sharing information he usually keeps so guarded? I jump on the opportunity to learn more about the man before me, more about the boy he was and how he ended up the way he is. What made Harvey Taylor so cold and dedicated to his job? "How old were you when he left?" I ask.

He still refuses to meet my eyes. "Six. It was right before this song came out," he smiles in a far-off way, almost detached. "I remember the night he left. They got into a huge fight, one of many they had at the time, but surely the worst. It was over money. He packed up all his shit and left that night and I waited by the window every day for months, hoping he would come back and he never did. I never saw him again."

I feel my heart tearing in two for him. "I'm so sorry," I whisper, reaching out hesitantly to grab his hand. He lets me, squeezing my hand gently. "I can't imagine what that must've felt like," I say, compassionately.

"I didn't miss him. I missed having a father. I didn't want to be alone with my mother. It was just me and her after that, struggling to manage to get food on the table." He takes a deep breath. "My mom isn't a bad person, she's just misguided and too

dependent on men. When my father left, in a way she started to depend on me for everything. Of course, I wasn't making any money because I was a kid, but she relied on me to take care of her and when she started bringing home new boyfriends every week, she and I grew apart. She needed them more than she needed me," he finally looks up to meet my eyes.

"You never wanted to find your father? To reconnect?" I ask, hoping I don't come across like I'm sticking my nose where it doesn't belong.

He shakes his head, a crease forming between his brows. "Never. He was a deadbeat and the only thing he ever did for me was upset my mother and leave me to clean up the mess he left behind when he had outbursts and broke things in the house."

I rest my head on his shoulder, "I'm sorry," is all I can manage.

"The day I realized he was never coming back was the day I realized I would have to be better than he ever was and I would have to leave behind more than he could've ever imagined," he explains. He rests his head against mine, "I pushed myself to do so well in school, to be the best in the class, the best on my sports teams, the best at everything. Lucy was born when I was fifteen. My mom got knocked up by one of her boyfriends and just like everyone before him, he split, leaving my pregnant mother alone to fend for herself," he caresses the back of my hand with his thumb as he continues, "I started working to help her pay the bills and by the time Lucy was born, all it took was one look at her and I knew I was gone. I had closed myself off so much already at that point that when I saw my baby sister, the ice around my heart melted. I knew immediately I would give anything for her, be anything for her, and do anything for her. I also knew my mom would make Lucy my responsibility in only a matter of time so she could get back out and find a new temporary boyfriend and I was right. I practically raised her on my own."

I reassure him, "You did an amazing job with her. She's an amazing kid."



He sighs, “Thank you.”

I look up at him, gripping his jaw in my hands, his short beard scratching against my palms. “I mean it, Harvey. She knows how much you love her, I can see it in her eyes when she looks at you and I can also see how much she loves you. You are the center of her entire world.”

He smiles weakly and it looks pained in a way. “For a long time, I didn’t think she would ever forgive me. I thought she hated me for leaving her with our mother.”

I tilt my head, “You left her?”

He squeezes his eyes shut as if the memory causes emotional turmoil, “When I turned eighteen I enlisted in the army. I wanted to be independent, free of my mother. We just weren’t getting along at the time at all and I made an impulsive decision to sign the contract and I remember the day I left, my mother couldn’t even be bothered to say goodbye to me. Lucy was absolutely devastated. She was only three at the time but I thought the older she got, the more she would grow to resent me.”

“You were wrong, Harvey. She loves you,” I reassure him again, hoping the repetition will stick.

He gives me a look of exhaustion. “She didn’t for a while. I was away for years and she was stuck with my mom. It worked for me, I liked being alone, living my own life for me. But every day, I felt the guilt grow for leaving her alone.”

“It wasn’t your responsibility to raise Lucy. It was your mother’s. You shouldn’t have felt guilty for living your own life,” I say emotionally.

He shakes his head, “I know that now. I felt guilt at the time,” he throws his head back in a gesture of being mentally tired. “I left the army when I was twenty-three. I

missed Lucy too much and I knew I would later regret not being in her life, in watching her grow. She was eight when I came back and it took her months to forgive me. It was a lot of work, a lot of bribing her with her favorite toys and candy, but eventually she did. When she did, I was onto the next thing, making money. I started up my security company and from there it took off. I was a military guy through and through and it showed in my work ethic and business ethics. My company got so big and then one day I decided to take a step back. I was already a multi-millionaire at the time and I was only working to grow more funds. I sold the company for a ridiculously large amount of money so that I could do what I'm doing now."

I bat my eyelashes at him in an attempt to lighten the mood, "Babysit little old me?"

He breathes a laugh, "Yes, you and all the other mentally deranged celebrities whose managers call me as a cry for help."

I swat his arm playfully, "Hey! I'm not mentally deranged. I'm just...eccentric."

He kisses my head and laughs, "You're definitely something. I've never met anyone like you and I never will again."

“I’m one of a kind,” I preen.

“That you are.”

I want to learn every facet of information about this man. “So what’s your long term plan? After you get sick of babysitting mentally deranged people like me, of course.”

He grins as he shakes his head, “I have no clue,” he shrugs.

I raise a surprised brow. “Wow. Harvey Taylor with no plan, no organization. Are you feeling unwell?” I tease, pressing the back of my palm against his forehead in a show of checking his temperature.

Harvey nudges my shoulder with his, “I’m feeling just fine, thank you.”

I shift my tone, my energy becoming serious, “Harvey,” I give him a warning that whatever I’m about to say is going to be deep with just my tone. He gives me his full attention. “I’m really sorry your father left you. You didn’t deserve that and you also didn’t deserve your mother placing so much responsibility on you. You’re worthy of so much and deserving of so much because as much as you try to hide it, I know there’s a big heart inside that ice cold chest of yours and you love so deeply and fiercely. I don’t know if anyone has ever said this to you before, but I’m proud of you and how far you’ve come even though we haven’t known each other long,” I convey as much conviction and emotion into my words as I can, hoping it’ll help heal his bleeding heart even if it’s only by a small amount.

He just stares at me with eyes full of surprise. He opens his mouth to speak but closes

it a second later, the words not quite finding a way out of him. He grabs my jaw before I can anticipate his movement and kisses me fiercely. I kiss him back with just as much fire and we melt into each other completely.

In a matter of moments, we're a mess of wandering hands, awkward positions, and gasps of breath. He lifts me off the bench and lays me on top of the piano, stripping my clothes off my body. My heel lands on the keys, an off key melody echoing through the studio walls. He bares my body to him completely, my breasts on display with my nipples taugth with need. I already feel warmth spreading at my center and I'm about to beg him for some kind of release when he beats me to it, taking his already hard cock out of his slacks and pressing the tip at my entrance. He slams into me in one thrust and my back arches off the piano at the familiar feeling of being full of him.

He pulls my hips closer to him, my ass hanging off the piano and I move my hands, desperate for something to cling on to, but my clammy palms just slide around the piano lid. I moan as he pounds in to me, "Fuck, Harvey!"

His head lowers and he sucks a nipple into his mouth, one hand lowering to stimulate my clit. I feel overwhelmed with the sensations, so much so that he wrings an orgasm out of me in minutes. I tighten around him and he groans, "You're so fucking perfect, baby."

This sex between us feels so much more intimate than anytime before. All the other times we've fucked it was just that, fucking. This time feels different, it almost feels like we're making love to each other and the thought scares me. I already know where my emotions are heading towards him but he's made it so clear he has no intention of sticking around after the contract ends. I'd do well to remember that because I'm falling for a man I can't have in another three weeks.

He plays my body like an instrument, another orgasm washing through me,

consuming me as heat spreads through my veins like wildfire. His movements stop as my walls tighten around him again and his cock twitches inside me, his orgasm finding him too.

We both gasp for air, recovering from the aftershocks of our orgasms and he slowly pulls out of me. "Fuck," he mutters almost sounding annoyed when he's no longer inside.

I sit up, "What's wrong?" I ask, confused. Did I do something wrong? Why does he seem annoyed? He's staring at my pussy with worry etched into his features like charcoal on paper. My eyes widen when I realize what's got him twisted up. We were so caught up in each other that we both didn't realize he never put a condom on. His release seeps out of me, dripping down my thighs and onto the lid of the piano.

"I'm so sorry," he apologizes, cupping my jaw in both hands. "I should've realized. I'm clean though, I promise."

I give him a gentle smile to reassure him that I'm not upset. "It's okay, I'm clean too and I'm on the pill."

He exhales, the tension leaving his body. "Thank God," he mutters.

I don't know why his relief almost disappoints me.

"I'll get tissues, don't move," he commands me and I watch as he tucks himself back into his slacks and turns, walking away on a quest to find tissues.

One month. That's all we have together and then I'm never gonna see him again. The idea leaves a Harvey sized hole in my chest and the thought causes my heart to sink. I'm falling for someone for the first time since before I got famous and I have to say goodbye in three weeks.

## Chapter 22

### Harvey

Our night in the studio was revolutionary for me. I've never been so open about myself or my past with anyone before and it felt...strange but also freeing in a way. I trust her with everything, my past, my present, but not my future. I've grown so used to being in her life and having her in mine and it's hard to remember that we only have two and a half weeks left together and then we move back to our home states and return to our regularly scheduled lives, hers a life of debauchery and mine a life of order and routine.

It worries me how easy it is to forget we have a clock looming over us, how open I've been with her, how much I crave her. She occupies my every thought and the scent of her lingers in my nose. I'm full of her in so many ways and I still hunger for more of her. It's a sickening thought, truly. Now I understand an addict's tribulation because mine is the same but the substances are swapped out with the little rockstar who challenged me at every opportunity she got and went above and beyond to make my blood pressure rise. I know that when the inevitable comes and it's time to say goodbye, that I'll miss her witty mouth, her full lips, the wicked smirk she gives me when she's up to no good or has a deliciously sexual need that requires fulfilling, the way she loses herself in song, but overall, I'll miss her. I'll miss what we have now and that scares me. It scares me because I'm vulnerable for the first time in my life since my father left.

She makes me vulnerable and she makes me feel and I have to remind myself it isn't going anywhere because it can't. At the end of the day, we live two completely different lives and it would never work out. Besides, I've never been in love and I'm not looking to be. My phone vibrates inside my pocket and it shifts my focus from my deep thoughts to the room I'm in and the name on my screen. I look up, debating whether or not I should answer and when I find Brody and the girls completely

focused on the new song they're working on, I hit the green answer button and step out of the room. "Hey, Luce," I greet my baby sister. We talk everyday, whether through text or through calls. She must've just gotten home from school if she's calling me at this time in the afternoon.

"Hi," Lucy greets from the other end, energy present in her voice.

I smile at the sound of her small voice, "What are you doing?"

I can practically hear her shrug, "I just got off the bus and I'm gonna do my math homework. What about you? Where are you now?"

I lean against the wall outside the studio, "We're in Florida now."

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“Cool,” she geeks out on the other end. “How is Brody?”

I laugh at her question, “Why do I get the feeling you only called me to ask me about Brody and not to talk to me?”

She giggles on the other end, “Because I did.”

I shake my head even though she can’t see me, “You’re really something else.”

“Yeah, I know. How is she though? I saw on TikTok that she was attacked,” my sister’s voice is coated with worry. “Is it true?”

I clench my jaw at the reminder of what I walked into that night. Of him strangling her and her eyes rolling to the back of her head. “You should get off that app, Lucy. It’s all nonsense on there,” I change the subject. I’m not talking about Brody’s private business with anyone, not even Lucy.

“But did it actually happen?” She presses.

“I can’t talk about it, Luce. Just let it go, okay?”

She huffs, “Fine.”

“How was school?” I take a whole new route of conversation.

“Boring.”



“How’s Mom?”

She pauses before whispering into the phone, “She’s going out on a date tonight with some new guy.”

I roll my eyes, “Is she making you dinner before she goes out?”

“I dunno.”

I sigh, “You have my credit card so get yourself some food and use my card to pay, okay? And what about that class trip you’re supposed to go on? Did Mom give you the money for the ticket?”

“Not yet.”

If my mother didn’t give her money yet, she likely won’t ever be giving her any. I take a deep breath to force the anger at bay. I can get angry at my mother when I hang up but not while I’m still on the phone with Lucy. When I made my first million, I bought my mom and Lucy a huge house, put Lucy in the best private school the state had, and continued to buy them groceries and whatever it is my mom decided to put on my credit card for years. She’s never been motivated to get a job and provide for herself, happy to be living off me and my hard work. Lucy on the other hand, I have no problem supporting or taking care of. My mom has access to a large sum of money, all mine, and she still hasn’t given Lucy what she needs to go on her fucking class trip. “I’ll send some cash over to the house and you can use some for your ticket, okay?”

“Okay, thank you.”

I want to hug her so bad right now. I miss her smiling face and the warmth that spreads through my chest when she’s near. I’ve only ever felt that way with Brody

but with her it's different. Is this what it feels like to be a parent? God, I'm a parent to a kid that isn't even mine. "Do you need anything else?"

"No," her voice sounds grim on the other end. "When are you coming home? I miss you."

A drop of dread plants itself in my stomach and sprouts leaves. "Soon, Luce. I'll be back in Nevada in two and a half weeks and then you and I can go do something together okay?"

"Okay."

"I love you," I say, rubbing the ache out of my chest with the heel of my palm.

"I love you, too," she replies before hanging up.

I sigh, bumping my head against the wall behind me. I feel like I'm being pulled in two different directions. One way is Lucy and my home, tugging me strong and the other is Brody and the chaos she leaves in her wake, tugging me just as fiercely.

My phone rings again and thinking it could be Lucy again, I answer without reading the name on the screen. "Hey," I greet her gently.

The voice on the other end isn't the voice of my squeaky, energetic, thirteen-year-old sister. It's the voice of Dallas Carter, my friend from the military. "Long time, no talk, Taylor. I was starting to think you'd forgotten me." Dallas and I work in similar fields, or at least we did when I owned my security company, before I sold it to him. I was very protective over my company, but I knew Dallas was the best person to sell it to. The guy is an evil genius in a suit. He grew the company and expanded it to create a private investigating unit. We talk from time to time since he lives in California and I live in Nevada, but if he's calling me now, it must be because there's something

wrong or because he needs something.

“You’re impossible to forget, Carter. Trust me, I’ve tried, you just keep calling and texting when you need something,” I retort.

We’re actually good friends and I like him a lot. I’m just beingsnappy because I want to get back inside the studio. The feeling of being away from Brody for this long is starting to cause little rockstar withdrawals. “Very funny. Your impatience wouldn’t have anything to do with the blond bombshell I’ve seen you with in the press, would it?” He sounds amused. “I heard you signed a contract to babysit her. Not a bad job, huh? Especially not when your client is that hot.”

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My eye twitches in irritation. “What do you want?” I won’t hint to him that Brody means something more to me than just a client. I don’t want him to have that kind of information.

He laughs, “Do you think I’m a fool, Taylor? I’m watching you right now on the security footage from that recording studio you’re in in Boca Raton. You look really irritated by my suggestions.”

The bastard. I look up at the corners where the walls meet the ceilings and flip off the first camera I see. “I’m hanging up unless you tell me what you want?”

His tone shifts to one of seriousness, “I have a job I could use you on.”

“No.”

“What do you mean no? I could use your expertise,” he throws in the little compliment to butter me up but it doesn’t work.

“I mean no. I’m going home when this contract ends and spending time with Lucy. I’ve been away from her for too long and she needs me.”

He sighs, irritated. “Harvey, the job is big,” he uses my first name instead of my last.

I shake my head, “I don’t care. My sister comes first.”

He grunts, “What if I told you it was in LA and you would be closer to the rockstar? Brody, isn’t it? No point in pretending I don’t know every detail. You know me and

you know I do my research and keep tabs on the people in my circle. I know you have feelings for her even if you don't want to admit it so I'm giving you the chance to act on them by being in the same state as her."

This piques my interest. "How long is the job?" I instantly regret asking because he thinks he's won.

I can hear his grin on the other end, "A year, but it could be longer. It's long term is all I know right now."

"And when it ends?" I ask, looking for a reason to convince myself not to consider the job. I feel guilty for even going this far.

He offers, "I'm looking for a partner to help me run the company. It's gotten too big for me to handle on my own and after this job, if you want to stick around in California, I want you to partner with me, get back into business. I don't trust anyone but you to do this with me."

I sigh, squeezing my eyes shut. Fuck that would be perfect, a dream come true. I quickly remind myself that I have Lucy to take care of and that I can't move to another state. I also remind myself that I can't uproot my whole life for a woman I would never be able to build a real future with. Brody's life is too out of control for me, we're like two differently shaped puzzle pieces that don't fit together. "I can't do it, Carter. I have Lucy."

He goes silent on the other end. "How about this, I'll give you a month to think about it and then you let me know if that's still your answer?"

I shake my head, "My answer will be the same."

"We'll see," he protests. "One month."

“Whatever, I’m hanging up now.”

Dallas promises, “One month,” he speaks right before I press the end call button, “Oh, and Harvey?”

“What?” I ask, annoyed.

“The mere fact that you didn’t care to discuss financial compensation or contracts for either of the two propositions I gave you shows me you’re considering it more than you lead on. Talk soon,” he declares before hanging up.

I stuff my phone back into my pocket and walk back into the studio, rubbing the spot between my eyes. Fucking Dallas giving me something so heavy to consider. I can’t just abandon Lucy and especially not to be with Brody. I can’t be with her, end of story. But what if?...My mind wanders and I force the intrusive thought at bay. The more time I spend with Brody, the more my priorities seem to shift and mold around her.

As if sensing she’s the bane to my thoughts, she meets my eye from where she sits on her knees on the floor and smiles at me warmly. I feel all of my self control leaving me and get irritated with my weakness. I can’t let thoughts of her or anything involving her throw me off track. I need to remember what’s important isn’t that. Lucy comes first and she always will. I need to make sure that nothing stops me from being able to walk away from Brody when the time comes. The sour taste in my mouth that comes when I think about leaving her is telling enough that I care about her more than I let on with myself. I need to put an end to it before it gets deeper, irreversible.

Brody

THREE SHOWS LEFT. THAT’S all. It’s bittersweet because I want this tour to

fucking end, but at the same time, I don't want it to because when the tour ends, my time with Harvey ends. How fucked up is that?

Since our night in the studio, I've almost completely wrapped up my song and I know what you're thinking and no, I still didn't tell the girls about my song. I'm just not ready and I don't think I ever will be. I don't know. I'm focused on the album and so are the girls. I have no time to stress over a song that I'm not sure will ever be heard by anyone aside from Harvey and myself.

We're almost finished working on a new song, leaving three unfinished. We're making impressive progress and it's amazing how once the creativity starts flowing, it doesn't stop. We're in Boca Raton, Florida, now working in a new studio. Our Florida show is tonight and for the first time in a long time, I don't feel anxious over it. I feel calm when I think about getting up on the stage, the fear and stress over the various opinions of my fans and thoughts on me and what I went through foreign to me now. I blame Harvey for the change in my self image. He peeled the corner of the mask I wear up and left me to remove the rest myself and for that, I'll forever be grateful to him.

Almost on instinct, my eyes find him in the studio. He's watching me from where he sits on the couch, his arms crossed over his broad chest. He forces a smile when he looks at me and I frown. His eyes look darker than usual, haunted in a way. He seemed fine before he stepped out to take that phone call, did something happen after? I mouth "Everything okay?" to him silently and he just nods, avoiding my eyes before he pulls his phone out of his pocket and starts typing.

My face must look surprised and confused because Aria nudges my shoulder and whispers, "Trouble in paradise?" She wiggles her brows as she looks between Harvey and I.

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I brush her off, muttering, “No.”

“How’s the sex been?” She whispers back, low enough so that only her and I hear.

My eyes widen. I never told her about Harvey and I hooking up. I never told anyone and neither did he. Is it that obvious that there’s something going on between us or did someone see something they shouldn’t have seen?

She rolls her eyes and smirks, “You think I’m stupid? Anyone with eyes can see the way the two of you look at each other and it’s not by any means professional. If that weren’t enough, the sexual tension in the room when both of you are in it is enough to melt my panties, that’s how hot it is.”

My jaw drops.

Ivory plops down next to me and joins our huddle, “What are we whispering about?”

Aria cups her mouth as she whispers back, feigning gossiping, “Brody’s sleeping with the babysitter.”

Ivory throws her head back and groans. “Fuck,” she huffs before she reaches into the back pocket of her pink, acid-wash jeans and produces two-hundred dollars. She slams the cash into Aria’s awaiting palm and Aria grins like the Cheshire cat as she folds the money up and tucks it in her bra.

“Pleasure doing business with you,” Aria says arrogantly.



Did they place a bet on me? “Were you two bitches betting on me sleeping with him?”

Ivory gives me a look like she’s a parent talking to a child, “Duh. We knew from the first time you interacted with him it was inevitable. Aria just called the bet first and placed dibs on you guys fucking before I could. Totally corrupt, by the way,” she points at Aria with a scolding finger.

Aria shrugs, “I don’t know what to tell you. I saw a business opportunity and I took it.”

“You guys suck,” I complain as I let my eyes rove over a new sheet of lyrics. I’m doing it to have something to look at because my eyes are rolling over the words but not reading anything. I’m too distracted.

Ivory grins, “But you love us anyway.”

“Unfortunately,” I grumble.

Aria changes the subject, “How is it though? The sex?” She looks at Harvey over my shoulder and then back at us, fanning herself, “I bet he knows what he’s doing. He’s fucking hot.”

My cheeks turn bright red and I look down. I don’t want to talk about this with them when he’s sitting right behind me. “Guys, totally not a good time to talk about this.”

“If not now, when? Because whenever we ask you to hangout with us, you say no and end up in your room but now we know what you’re doing in the room,” Ivory protests knowingly.

I whisper, “Another time. I promise. We’ll hang out soon and it’ll be like old times,

gossiping, and laughing, just with significantly less drugs and alcohol.” I realize as I utter the words that I don’t crave the substances like I once used to. I used them as a lifeline, as my mask to cover who I was so that the fans and the entire world would find me worthy. Now? I truthfully don’t give a fuck what they think about me or if I’m worthy by their standards. I’m worthy by my own fucking standards and I don’t care what anyone or their mother has to say about it. The only person whose opinion matters to me is Harvey’s and his opinion of me has always been better than my opinion of myself. I’m starting to see myself the way he sees me and there’s no greater gift that he could’ve ever given me.

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WE ROCKED THE FUCKout of that audience tonight and I gave them everything I had in me. When the show ends, I hurry to my dressing room, looking for Harvey but he isn’t there. I stop in my tracks, my brows knitting together. Healwayswaits for me in my dressing room. I remember the invisible wall that seemed to be between us at the studio earlier and wonder if it has anything to do with him not being here but I quickly push that thought down. I’m way overthinking this, there’s probably a reasonable explanation for everything.

About ten minutes later, when I’m changed out of my stage clothes and into a comfortable pair of leggings and a matching t-shirt, my dressing room door opens and Harvey enters. His face looks exhausted, mature in a way I’ve never seen it. “Hey,” I say awkwardly.

He raises his chin, “Hi,” before closing the door behind himself.

“Everything okay?” I ask.

He nods, “Fine.”

I feel anxiousness swirling around in my stomach. I wrap my arms around myself uncomfortably. “Are you hungry? I’m starving and I could use the company if you want to come with,” I offer, hoping to melt the ice around him.

He shakes his head, “I’m not hungry.”

“Oh...Okay,” I respond. My body stiffens in discomfort. Why does it feel like there’s a huge brick wall between us? I want to ask but I’m worried that it may trigger him if he’s angry.

He sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. “We need to talk.”

My heart cracks and my chest deflates. I know where this is going and it isn’t somewhere good. “About?”

“Us.”

There it is. There's my heart getting ripped clean out of my chest. I exhale, “Did I do something?”

He shakes his head, running his fingers through his hair in a show of anxiousness, something I've never seen him do before. Whatever he has to say must be serious if it's got him this twisted up. He drops his hands a moment later and looks at me, his eyes narrowing as he frowns, “Brody, I'm terminating our contract and going back home to Nevada.”

I suck in a surprised breath and cover my mouth with my hand. My face leeches of all color as my eyes widen. “What?” I ask, my voice shaky.

He gives me a pained expression, “What we're doing is wrong. We both should've put a stop to our personal relationship a long time ago before it got to the point that your feelings were involved. It was my job as a professional to make sure that you stayed clean, sober, and out of trouble and I succeeded in that job. You don't need me anymore which is why I'm leaving.”

Your feelings. His words replay in my head. He said my feelings and not his meaning he doesn't have any for me. I feel betrayed by his words, by the distance he placed between us. I thought I meant something to him the same way he means something to me but I was so wrong. My eyes water with treacherous tears and I'm so overwhelmed with a combination of anger and sadness in this moment that I don't notice when a tear rolls down my cheek. “My feelings? What about yours because I know this wasn't one sided, Harvey.”

He shakes his head at me, “I don’t have feelings for you.”

My heart cracks and tears in two at his words. Fresh tears pour down my cheeks. “So what was all this to you, then? A fucking game?” The betrayal in my tone is clear.

He gives me a stony expression, “You knew from the beginning that it was just physical, Brody. We both went into this knowing that. I’m sorry you got hurt, it was never my intention to hurt you. We both knew there was a clock ticking from the beginning and that when the contract ended, we’d go back to our separate lives in separate states and worlds.”

I look down to avoid his eyes. I can’t even look at him right now. The whole time, this was just sex to him and nothing else, but for me? It wasn’t just sex to me. It was falling in love with someone I never would’ve imagined I’d fall in love with. It was feeling safe, cared for, and protected by someone for the first time in a long time and it felt like coming home after being on a ten-year tour. I fell for him, heart and soul and all I was to him was a fuck and a paycheck. “Forgive me for thinking I meant something to you when you meant everything to me,” my voice cracks on tears at the back of my throat.

He squeezes his eyes shut and looks down so that he doesn’t have to look at me. “I’m sorry.”

“Sorry for what? For making me fall for you or for leaving?” I demand.

“For both,” he says, his voice coming out low, wretched.

I shake my head, “When are you leaving?” I change the subject.

He gives me a hard look, “This was my goodbye. I have my suitcase waiting in the car.”

A sob escapes my throat and I try to muffle it by covering my mouth with my hand but it's too late. He sees the mess I am and he hears the sob escape me. I cover my face with my hands in a weak attempt at hiding myself. I hear his footsteps getting closer to me and they stop as he reaches out and cups my face in his rough palms, palms that once comforted me and made me feel safe. Now they just remind me of what I'm about to lose when he leaves this dressing room. He wipes my tears away with his thumbs and I let him, why do I let him? He lowers his voice, leaning in close, "I'm so fucking proud of you, Brody. You've come so far in such a short amount of time and that isn't my doing, it was entirely yours. You wanted to get better and you did and I just guided you while you did all the work. I want you to stay this way because you're the best version of yourself that you can be when you're clean and sober and you know it. You're capable of accomplishing anything you set your sights on and you have the ability to captivate millions of people with the sound of your voice and that brilliantly creative mind of yours."

More sobs wrack my chest at his words. He's giving me whiplash with how he pushes me away only to pull me back in. "Promise me one thing before I leave?"

"What?" I croak.

"Keep the mask off, Brody. Show them who you are. Prove them wrong," he says before he leans in and kisses my forehead. He takes a step back a second later, forcing distance between us. We exchange one long, hard look before he turns on his heel and walks away from me like it's nothing. Meanwhile, I'm here trying to keep the shattered pieces of myself together so they don't fall and scatter all over the floor.

He opens the door and takes a step out, looking at me one last time over his shoulder. "Goodbye, Little Rockstar." Are the last words Harvey Taylor says to me before he closes my dressing room door behind himself, leaving me alone with a broken heart and ocean of tears.

## Chapter 23

### Harvey

I thought life after Brody Drake would be easy, a walk in the park, but oh how I was wrong. From the moment I boarded the plane back to Nevada, I felt numb. I continued to feel numb when I landed, the whole ride back to my house, and after stepping foot in my house. Though I knew it was impossible, part of me wished I would step inside and Brody would be there waiting for me. Part of me hoped she'd forgive me and that the house would look identical to her Japanese inspired home.

Imagine my disappointment when I forced myself to be rational and logical. I walked away from her, I did this, and now I have to deal with the consequences of my actions. The consequences in question? I can't sleep, I can barely remember to eat, and that precious routine I once had? I have absolutely no desire to get back into it. I walk around my minimalist house from room to room like a ghost, miserable, and chest empty because I left my beating heart in Florida with Brody.

I walked away because that's what I've always done when things got too hard. I went to the military when I had too much responsibility on my shoulders when I was eighteen. I sold my company when it got too big to manage and now I left the only woman I've ever had feelings for because it was too hard to admit to her and myself that I loved her and look where that got me. Alone in a huge house, feeling numb from head to toe.

It was two days before I saw Lucy, I didn't want to be a downer when she came over but being alone became too much and I needed her more than anything. I needed the light she brings by just entering the room and when she came over, it took one look at my face and the light inside her dimmed. Mom was okay with Lucy staying here for a while as expected, and I thought having her here would make me feel less numb, less empty, but it hasn't, which worries me more.

It's been a week since I left the woman I love behind, broken and aggrieved. By now she should be in New Jersey on her second to last show. I wonder if the girls ended up finishing the album. I wouldn't know because every time I text Selene for updates on Brody, she won't give me any. She just says, If you care so much, why did you leave? And I never have a response. I wonder what Brody is doing right now, if she's playing the drums or singing lyrics Aria and Ivory wrote. I miss her voice, her scent, her smile, everything about her. "Hello?" A small voice calls from behind me, grabbing my attention from where I got lost inside my head making breakfast.

I turn to find Lucy frowning at me from where she sits at the island. I force a smile for her, "What's up?"

"I've been calling you for like two minutes," Lucy complains.

I plate her breakfast and slide it over to her, remembering how I used to make Brody breakfast before the tour started. I wish I could go back to those days and savor the time we wasted hating each other. I wish I could've had more time. "Sorry, I zoned out for a second."



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Lucy tilts her head at me, “You’ve been zoning out a lot lately,” she mutters.

I nod at her breakfast, changing the subject, “Eat your breakfast before it gets cold.”

Lucy stabs at the eggs I made her with her fork but makes no move to put the food in her mouth. I watch her silently and after a few minutes, she drops her fork and folds her elbows on the table. She gives me an annoyed look and sighs, “I just don’t get it.”

“Don’t get what?” I ask, little to no energy in my voice.

She shakes her head at me. “Why you left her if you obviously love her.”

I drop my chin to my chest and exhale. “We aren’t having this conversation,” I turn my back on her and start washing the dishes.

She snaps, “Harvey, you’re my big brother and I love you, but you have to stop treating me like a baby. I’m thirteen, not seven and I’m a big girl. You’ve tried sheltering me for years but I’m smart and I see things, okay?”

I turn around, completely at a loss. Lucy’s never taken up this kind of attitude or tone with me. “Lucy-”

She cuts me off by slamming her fists down on the granite countertop, “Don’t ‘Lucy’ me. You know I’m right. Why did you leave Brody if you love her?”

I grow impatient and I lose control, my temper getting the best of me. “You have no idea what you’re talking about so mind your own business and eat your breakfast.”

Hearing Brody's name on someone else's lips sets me off, especially when my feelings for her are called into question.

She pushes her chair out from the table and steps off the barstool, "Fuck your breakfast," she spits.

My eyes widen in shock. I've never heard her curse before, or take up this kind of demeanor with me. "Luce, watch your mouth," I scold her, shock clear in my voice. For a second she reminded me of Brody and the thought almost makes me smile, but my shock overrules it.

She crosses her arms, rolling her eyes. "Why do you always treat me like a baby?"

"Because you're my baby sister."

"I was when I was a baby. I'm a teenager now," she argues.

"Don't remind me," I groan.

She scoffs, "Harvey, you were always my hero. You've done everything for me since I was little that Mom was supposed to do but never did. You always put me before yourself and I love you for doing it all, for being my mother and my father while being my big brother. But when are you going to put yourself first? I never saw you as happy as you were when we were with Brody and I saw the way you looked at her and the way she looked at you. You love each other so I don't get why you came home."

"I came home for you!" I snap.

Her eyes widen. "You left Brody because of me?"

I sigh, rubbing my eyes with the heels of my palms. “No,” I don’t want to put this weight on her so instead of being truthful with her, I decide to lie.

“Tell me the truth,” she demands, her silvery voice raising.

I lean against the counter with my hip as I watch her. I scratch my beard to occupy my hands. Lucy’s right, I’ve sheltered her throughout her entire life. I still treat her like a baby that can’t make her own decisions and it isn’t fair to her. Lying to her right now would just make things worse. I need to start treating her like an adult because pretty soon, she’ll be one and if I shelter her through her teen years, what kind of an adult would I be shaping? I want her to be a strong woman who is independent and won’t take anything from anyone and if I want that for her, I have to treat her like it. I drop my hand from my beard and straighten my posture. “Remember Dallas?”

She nods, “Yes, of course. He’s your best friend.”

“I wouldn’t say ‘best friend,’ More like my only friend,” I correct her and then get to the point. “He called me after you and I spoke on the phone last week. He offered me a chance to stay in Los Angeles with Brody. I’d go back to the security company and branch out as his business partner,” I explain.

She interrupts, “How long would you have to live there?”

I shrug, “There was no limit. He gave me a chance to live there as long as I want and be with her.”

She deflates, her lips curving into a frown. “And I’d never see you?”

I shake my head, “I turned it down.”

“Because of me,” she states, no question in her voice.

I nod. “I don’t want to live far away from you. You need me, you need someone to guide you and we both know Mom isn’t gonna do it.”

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Her eyes glaze over and a tear streams down her cheek, “I could’ve gone with you.”

I never considered the possibility of that. I never considered uprooting her and Mom but Mom has never been tied to one place. She could find one of her boyfriends anywhere. Lucy? I never considered her moving. She’s young and in school, it wouldn’t have been fair to make her start all over again. “I would never make you move because of me.”

She cracks, more tears pouring down her cheeks. “Harvey, I hate it here.”

My brows furrow, this grabs my attention. I never thought she didn’t like it here. She’s never given me a reason to think she wasn’t happy. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, you travel a lot for work and I get stuck alone with Mom. I don’t fit in at school and I’m not happy here,” she cries.

I stride over to her with hurried steps and wrap my arms around her, her face pressing against my abdomen with our height difference. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because you pay so much money for me to go to that school. You’ve made so many sacrifices for me,” she sobs and I rub gentle circles on her back.

I feel my own eyes glazing over. How could I have been so blind? How could I not tell she was unhappy? “I’m so sorry. I should’ve known.”

She shakes her head, “Not without me telling you. I’m sorry,” she apologizes.

I drop to my knees so that we're on eye level. "You never have to apologize to me. Not ever."

She breaks out of my arms and places her small hands on my shoulders, "Do you love her?" She doesn't have to say Brody's name for me to know she's talking about her. My feelings for Brody are that obvious.

I close my eyes, nodding as my head lowers. I was so afraid of admitting the truth because I was afraid of being vulnerable, of not having control. But the truth is, nothing within the world of Brody Drake is capable of withholding any semblance of control. The girl is a whirlwind of chaos and I hated it at first but I fell in love with it and couldn't picture my life without it in just three months. I've never had anything I loved aside from Lucy and then when I did, I crushed it in my fist and left its ashes at my feet in Florida of all places. "I love her so much." A single tear, the only tear I've shed since I was a baby rolls down my cheek with my confession.

Lucy gasps but grabs my face in her hands. She smiles as she looks into my eyes, her face so similar to mine. "Then you need to go back to wherever she is now."

I shake my head, "I can't. It's too late. I broke her heart and lied to her."

She frowns, "So make it right. Fix it and move to Los Angeles to be with her if you really love her. Mom and I will move with you and if you take the job there, I'll be able to see you more since you won't be traveling anymore."

What she's giving me is a chance to finally live my life for me. Could I actually take this chance? There's no guarantee Brody would forgive me. There's no confirmation that she'd even want me to move to LA to be with her. I could've ruined everything when I left but not trying to fix things is even worse. If I don't take a chance on us, on love, I'll never see her again and that idea sits even worse with me than the idea of her never forgiving me. I'd drop to my knees and beg for her forgiveness, tell her I love

her a million times, or whatever else it takes to get her to forgive me. I'm willing to do whatever it takes for Brody Drake's love and my sister just gave me her blessing to do so. I smile wide at my sister, a genuine smile. "Lucy, grab your bag. I'm bringing you back to Mom's and then I'm getting on the next plane to New York."

"Will you make it in time for her show?" Lucy asks, worry in her voice.

I look at the clock and then back at my sister. "I'll find a way."

Lucy gives me a toothy smile and sprints upstairs, grabbing her overnight bag. I hurry to my own room, grabbing basic necessities and throwing them in a bag before packing Lucy and I into my car and bringing her to Mom's. She jumps out of the car and nods, "Good luck. Don't mess it up again."

"Are you sure you want me to be happy or is all this because you want your favorite celebrity to be your sister?" I raise a brow, teasing her. I'm sure her idol being with her brother is part of what made her so quick to grant me her blessing, but my happiness weighed more heavily in the decision.

She rolls her eyes, "You caught me," she raises her hands in mock surrender. A second later, she pushes the amusement away and points a scolding finger at me, "Now go, hurry up before you miss the show." She goes to shut my car door and hesitates, "Love you."

"Love you, too," I say before she closes the door and I'm pulling out of the driveway. I speed down the street, pulling my phone out of the cupholder.

I click on Selene's contact and press the call button. She answers on the fourth ring, just when I think she's going to ignore my call. "If you're calling to ask me for updates on Brody, you're out of luck because I'm not going to tell you anything."

I smile to myself. Selene's unwavering loyalty to Brody runs so deep and it relieves me to know that she has someone on her side always. Especially in Hollywood where celebrities are exploited by their managers and publicists everyday just for paychecks. No, that's not Selene Stone. Selene has been Brody's best friend since they were kids and that'll never change. "That wasn't why I was calling, but your loyalty is admirable."

She sighs into the phone, annoyed. "What do you want? I have a show to organize and huge problems to deal with," her voice sounds exhausted.

I frown, my brows knotting together, "What kind of problems?"

"Thanks to you leaving, Brody's been MIA and doesn't want to work so they never finished the album. They were one song short and now the label wants to drop them and sue them for everything they're worth. And guess who has to deal with it?" Her voice holds so much resentment.

No. Come on, Brody. "Selene, I need a VIP ticket to the show, that's why I'm calling," I demand, changing the subject with urgency in my voice.

She scoffs, "And why the fuck would you need that?"

I take a deep breath, "Because I'm coming to New York and I'm telling Brody I love her. Then I'm gonna fix this fucking mess and if I have to fight the label in her honor, I will do that because I'm never walking away from her again."



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Selene goes silent on the other end and for a second I think she's gonna tell me to fuck off or hang up but then she laughs, "Finally, you'll admit your feelings."

My eyes go wide. I expected her to be angry about my admission. "You're not mad?"

"Why would I be mad?" She asks, doubt in her voice.

"Because I had a contract and I participated in inappropriate conduct with my client behind your back," I admit. There's no point in keeping secrets anymore.

She laughs a throaty laugh, "You seriously thought I didn't know?"

"Brody told you?"

Her laughter dies out. "Of course not. How you seriously think anyone can keep anything from me is baffling. I'm Selene fucking Stone, I know everything."

My face twists into a confused knot, "You knew this whole time and you didn't fire me?"

She sighs into the phone, "Why would I do that when Brody was thriving with you? She was clean, sober, and happy. Heavy emphasis on the past tense there because I haven't been able to get her out of her room for the show."

I'll be there soon, baby. I silently send off to Brody. "I'm getting on the next plane to New York. Does this mean I can have that VIP ticket?"

She hesitates, “I’ll give you whatever you want if you can make her as happy as she was before you left. I’ve never seen her that way before and I want to see her like that again.”

A gentle smile rises on my lips, “Deal.”

Selene’s tone shifts, the dutiful business woman returning, “Great. Now get your ass here, now because the show is in eight hours.”

“I’ll be there,” I say before hanging up and speeding down the highway.

## Chapter 24

Brody

Rock, meet motherfucking bottom, I think to myself as I tug the hotel sheets over my head. Someone’s been knocking on my door for about five minutes and my ignoring them hasn’t caused them to give up yet which only pisses me off more. Seriously, who the fuck does that?

I love New York, but I’m a little preoccupied mentally. The memory of Harvey leaving me, telling me all I ever was to him was sex, just plays on a loop. It’s like my own personal groundhogs day, neverending, and just as pitiful everytime. To make matters worse, I’m solely responsible for the fact that the label wants to drop us. We were one single song short and we had a week to finish it, but I failed to show up to the studio. The girls are livid with me right now because I’m the reason we’re getting sued and will most likely be blackballed from ever signing with another record label again. I know I royally fucked up and that my actions affected the people I care about, but I just couldn’t bring myself to care when I was skipping studio time in favor of wallowing in my unfamiliar hotel sheets, in the unfamiliar bed, and with these stiff ass pillows that feel like cinderblocks.

Even if I did show up, I wouldn't have been very useful. My creativity seems to have left me along with my heart. The idea of making music makes me want to throw up the food I forced down my throat earlier. I don't want to be one of those girls that sulks and gets depressed when the guy she falls for breaks her heart, but it feels nearly impossible to muster strength to get upright now.

The incessant knocking on my door continues and I groan. It's probably the girls, coming to flip out on me for standing them up at the studio today. I let it continue until the person on the other side yells, "I know you're in there, Brody. Open the door before I break it down. I was gonna surprise you if you opened up but you ruined the surprise."

My head shoots up. I know that voice. I leap out of the bed, in complete shock and disbelief. I twist the knob and pull it open and gasp when I see her. Ivy Villin, one of my closest friends. Even though I feel empty inside, I smile from ear to ear when I see her. She raises a playful brow, "Surprise."

I wrap my arms around her in a tight hug and she laughs as she returns it. It's been so long since I've seen her what with her being busy running two companies and a mafia family alongside her fiance and his brothers and all. I nearly forgot how small she was. I'm an average size but she's slim and petite in my arms. I pull away to look at her, taking in her perfectly styled platinum hair and her ice blue eyes. She wears a bold, dark red lip, the color of blood and it all pairs perfectly with the navy pantsuit she wears, a white teddy underneath, revealing her cleavage. Her outfit is so killer, it reminds me of Selene. No wonder Selene is so fond of Ivy. "What are you doing here?"

She pushes her hip out as she crosses her arms over her chest and accuses, "You're in my hometown, babe. Did you forget? You knew you were coming here and you never reached out. I'm insulted, honestly," she complains as she enters my hotel room, walking right past me. I close the door behind her and watch her circle the suite. She

has a confused look on her face as if she's searching for something and can't find it. "Where's the bourbon? Or whiskey, I'll take whatever."

I give her a weak smile, "I don't have any. I'm clean and sober now."

She raises a brow, "Completely?"

I nod.

She inhales sharply, "Wow. I'm impressed," she saunters around the couch, her heels clicking on the tiled floor. She seats herself and lounges comfortably, making herself right at home. Ivy's ability to always be the biggest person in the room when in fact, she's always the smallest is admirable. She just has this way about her that radiates danger and intimidation to anyone who gets too close. Seriously, I don't know how Jason handles it, her confidence and strength are enough to send a normal guy running.

"Where's Jason?" I ask. Usually they don't go anywhere without each other. Their relationship is cute, but given my current situation, I want to gag at the thought of them being lovey dovey.

She softens when her fiance's name is brought up, "He's in a meeting. When Selene called me this morning to let me know you were here, I had my assistant block me off so I could come see you. Now, why don't you tell me what's going on because I'm no fool. I know you and I know something is wrong. You don't sulk," she takes in my appearance, my baggy sweats and my ratty hair along with the bare face and dark circles under my eyes. She grimaces at the sight of me, "Nor do you ever look like...that."

Oh, Ivy and her brutal honesty. "Thanks," I say bitterly.

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She rolls her eyes. “You know what I mean. Now, tell me.”

I take a deep breath and feel the tears coming. “I fell in love with someone and I thought there was a chance he could’ve felt the same way but instead, he left me and told me I was just sex to him.” I give her the cliff notes. If I tell her the whole story, I’ll be a sobbing mess and then I won’t make it to the show tonight.

She frowns, “How could someone not fall in love with you?”

I give her a dark look as a treacherous tear rolls down my cheek. I quickly wipe it away with the sleeve of my crew neck.

She gives me a pitiful look, scooching in so that she’s closer to me. “I know what a broken heart feels like. I know it isn’t a good feeling. With time, it does get better though. It’s like there’s a box in our heads labeled ‘storage’ and as time passes, you move your memories of him into the box and the pain never goes away completely but you can put it in the storage box.”

My face conveys pure doubt. “That’s easy for you to say when you’re engaged to the guy you had a broken heart over.”

She sighs, “Brody, I’m trying to be comforting.”

I throw my head back on the back of the couch and complain. “Alice is a therapist. Where is she when you need her?” I ask, bringing Ivy’s half sister up. The two are inseparable and I’ve never seen a relationship as strong as theirs. They’d give anything for each other no matter the consequences or circumstances. I mean, Ivy

quite literally sold her soul to the Devil for Alice. Well, not literally but...kind of.

Ivy laughs, "She's busy being a therapist. She has a bunch of patients today. Doesn't matter though, you'll see her tonight."

This catches my attention. I look up at her and raise a questioning brow, "You guys are all coming to the show?"

Ivy nods, "Jason, Mason, Alice, and I will be there."

"No Sebastian and Scar?"

Ivy grins, "They're off in Australia having wild sex on every surface of that hotel room."

I scoff, "Must be nice."

Ivy laughs, "We'll be there with you tonight though. I'm excited to watch you perform." My face must show her the anxiety inside me because she places a hand on mine, "Look, I know it's hard because the wounds are fresh, but you have millions of people who love you, literally. On the inside, you have Aria and Ivory, Selene, me, Alice, and your brother. You have an amazing support system and it's totally okay to not be okay. Let us help you and comfort you, that's what we're here for."

I nod, "Thank you. It means a lot to me that you're here right now. That you're coming later. I feel like shit and I've let it affect the people close to me. I feel so awful," I frown, sighing in exhaustion as I rub my eyes.

"It's never too late to fix things. Trust me, I learned the hard way," Ivy admits.

"You're right."

She preens, “I always am.”

I roll my eyes but her tone shifts, becoming more serious. “You’re a better person than me, B. I know you and I know you’ll find a way to fix things between you and the girls.” She flares her nostrils, a vengeful expression on her face, “And when it comes to this guy, if you want me to kill him, just let me know. I can make it look like an accident,” she offers and I get goosebumps on my arms. The scary part about that was that she’s serious. Dead fucking serious.

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THIS IS IT, THElast show. Most likely my last show ever. I sit backstage, the hair and makeup team going to work on my face and hair. As I sit in the chair with strangers shoving brushes around my eyes, my mind wanders. It goes to that place Harvey occupies and reminds me of all that I’ve lost. After my talk with Ivy earlier, my mind wanders to that place with all that I’ve gained too. Sure, my heart feels like it was ripped out of my chest and squeezed in his palm. Yes, it hurt like hell but the best moments were so worth it. All that I’ve become these last few months makes feeling empty on the inside worth it.

At the beginning of my time with Harvey, I was addicted to cocaine, addicted to alcohol, wreckless, and out of control all because that’s who I thought the world wanted me to be. I was so afraid of no longer being relevant, of losing my fame and then my fans, of losing my friends, my dreams, all of it. I was so scared I would lose it all and end up a washed up rockstar, stuck with only my miserable parents and my awesome little brother. I lost myself in my fear so much that I became someone I wasn’t. It took an intervention in the form of a live-in babysitter to make me realize that.

Harvey may have broken my heart but he also set it free. He made me realize my faults and peeled the edge of my mask up, leaving the rest of the work for me. Now?

It's fully removed. This could be my last show ever and I refuse to spend it pretending to be someone I'm not. The entire world will see the woman I've become, emotional scars and all.

The makeup artist takes a step away, allowing me to take in the sight of myself. My jaw nearly drops when I see my reflection in the mirror. My makeup has never looked better. I have my usual smoky shadow but she added silver glitter on the outer edges of my eyelids. The glitter stops on the tops of my cheekbones but what I love most about it is the fact that every piece of glitter is a star, all different sizes, but stars all the same. I love it so much I could cry. The hairstylist steps away next, leaving the completed look for me to take in. My hair ties in perfectly with my makeup, silver stars woven into the chains that decorate my sunshine strands. I look ethereal, like a goddess of the night sky.

I thank them before they leave and my stylist enters, quickly helping me into my outfit. She helps me into a pair of granny panties and a bra that match my skin tone perfectly, almost making me look naked. She then adds a skirt and matching cropped top above and my eyes sparkle when they land on the pieces. They aren't clothing at all, they're silver stars, cut out in different sizes and strung together to form a top and skirt. The skin beneath is revealed which is why she put the nude bra and panties on me, but the look is so perfect, I feel a tug in my chest. I guess I'll be going out in style after all.

She slips a pair of silver ankle boots on my feet and leaves the room right after, most likely heading into Aria or Ivory's dressing rooms. I wish I could spend the last show with the girls not hating me but I understand why they're so hurt. We had so many ups and downs these last few months. From fist fighting, to arguing, to hugging and crying, all of it, we did it and we did it together. We were so close to finishing that album only to fall one song short.

I sit on the couch in my dressing room and sigh. One measly song ruined it all and



will most likely be the reason the girls never forgive me. Just when I was starting to feel seen by them truly for the first time, I had to go and ruin it all.

My dressing room door opens and I look up to see who it is. I smile weakly when I see Selene. She gives me her signature, confident smile, “How are you feeling?”

I give her a look of defeat, “Like I ruined everything.”

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Her exterior falls and she walks over to the couch, dropping beside me and sighing. “You didn’t ruin everything.”

I give her the most unconvinced look possible. “I did. We’re getting sued and dropped because I didn’t show up to the studio to finish one song.”

She takes a deep breath, “Yeah, you did do that. You’re a dick for that, by the way.”

“Tell me something I don’t know,” I huff sarcastically.

She pauses for a second and then looks at me with a small smile on her lips, “I missed you.”

My brows pull together, “What?”

She shifts so that her whole body is positioned facing me. “I missed you, Brody. We’ve been best friends since we were kids and when you became famous a couple years ago and got big, you changed. Not in a way that made me resent or dislike you, but in a way that made me pity you. You were a shell of the person you used to be, the fire in you seemed to be put out by this constant worry and fear of what other people were thinking. It felt like I lost that confident, carefree girl I loved so much and in her place I got someone who turned to drugs and alcohol because she was so insecure.”

Tears threaten to rise and I try to force them away in fear of ruining my makeup. My face falls and my voice cracks, “Why didn’t you say anything to me?”

She tilts her head, “You and I both know you wouldn’t have listened. You would’ve gotten defensive. I’m just glad that the version of you I love and remember is back.”

“You really think so?”

She nods, “I haven’t seen you this way in so long. It makes me so happy to have you back.”

I feel free in a way, because of her words. It was the confirmation I needed that I’m doing the right thing in taking the mask off. I don’t care who sees me for who I really am nor do I give a fuck what they think. There’s only one person whose opinion matters to me and he isn’t here to share it. “It fucking sucks it took me this long to get it together. Only took losing everything we’ve ever had to make me see reason,” I shake my head, annoyance in my tone at my own actions.

Selene laughs, “We had quite the wild ride though. A lot of good times, a lot of bad times, but it was all worth it in the end. I’m glad we got to experience it all together.”

I reach for her hand, “Thank you for putting up with me for so long.”

She squeezes my hand gently, “You’re my best friend, Brody. I’d do anything for you even though you made me want to rip my hair out on many occasions.”

I smirk, “Sorry you had to bail me out of jail so many times. And that we stressed you out with all those legal problems. Oh and while I’m being honest, I’m really sorry for crashing into your Mercedes.”

Her eyes widen and her brows basically fly off her forehead. “I fucking knew it was you! You bitch!”

I chuckle, “That was totally my bad.”

She snorts a laugh, “I thought my neighbor crashed into my car and lied. I accused him of it and threatened him with a lawsuit. God, you sneaky little bitch. I knew you were acting suspicious around that time. That must’ve been what? Two years ago?”

I nod, “Yeah probably two.”

She looks amused, “You did so much crazy shit.”

I can’t help but smile in nostalgia, “That I did.”

“I guess it’s a good thing it’s all ending on a high note.” She pulls me into a hug and I hug her back. I have a flash of memories from our rise to fame, how much fun we had. I suddenly feel like I got hit by a truck of emotions but the most prominent is the love I have for my friends.

I guess it’s a good thing it’s all ending on a high note. I repeat her sentence in my head. My body stiffens and my mind goes blank for a second and a minute later, when I’ve gotten myself together, I pull away and grip her by the shoulders. “What if it doesn’t have to end at all?” I ask, excitement in my tone.

“What are you talking about?” Her voice is confused.

I leap off the couch and to the door, “I have to find Ivory and Aria,” I twist the knob and turn to face her, “Call the label and tell them we have the last song. Ask them if we can record it tomorrow but tell them we’re performing it tonight.”

Her eyes go wide and she places a palm on her chest, “You have the last song?”

I nod energetically, “Yes. I’ve had it this whole time, I just didn’t think about using it until now. I’m gonna fix all of this, Selene. We’re not gonna get sued and we’re not getting dropped. Call them!” I demand before I open the door.

“Brody!” Selene calls and I stop in my tracks, looking at her over my shoulder.

I give her a questioning look and she just gives me a gentle smile, “Don’t think I don’t know you were sleeping with Harvey Taylor for months.”

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Her subject change is giving me whiplash. My jaw drops and she gives me a cocky smirk. “How did you...?” I trail off.

She rises from where she sits and raises her chin, “I’m Selene Stone, I know everything.”

That line sounds so recycled but I don’t comment on it. I’m too caught up on the fact that she knew. “You knew and never said anything?”

She walks over to the mini refrigerator in the room and swipes a bottle of water. She untwists the cap and lifts the bottle to her lips taking a large sip. “Of course I didn’t say anything. You know everything I do is motivated, Brody. I had a master plan from the start.”

“A master plan?” I’m still not catching on to what she’s getting at.

Selene announces, “When I was going through potential babysitters for you, I picked Harvey specifically because I knew he was your opposite in every single way possible. When I saw you two together for the first time, and I saw firsthand the tension between the two of you, I knew I picked the perfect match. You two hated each other so much but I knew you were attracted to each other. I watched the attraction grow and manifest into love and I knew when you were MIA on the shows and he was conveniently missing too that you were sleeping together. You see, Harvey Taylor is perfect for you and you him. Neither of you knew it or maybe neither wanted to admit it, but it was my plan from the very start for you two to fall in love and you did,” she shakes her head, looking at the ceiling, “I just wish things would’ve ended differently, preferably with him admitting he loves you instead of

running away like a dog with its tail between its legs.”

My jaw is practically on the floor. Selene Stone is an evil mastermind and she puts Lex Luthor to shame. She plotted this out months ago and nobody was ever suspicious, not that they ever would be. She knew before I did that Harvey was nothing I wanted but everything I needed. “Well played,” I compliment, still baffled.

She dips her chin at me, “Thank you.” She slips back into her professionalism and my manager comes back, my friend on the backburner, “Now go save our careers and our bank accounts before it’s too late. I’m calling the label now.”

I nod, sprinting out of my dressing room and to Aria’s. We have about fifteen minutes before we’re supposed to go on and face a million fans, our friends and family in the front row. I open her door and find her and Ivory seated at her couch looking so defeated. They look utterly gorgeous though, Aria wearing a light blue boy shorts and bralette set with rhinestone stars on the fabric and thigh high, silver boots, while Ivory wears a pink, chainmail bralette with dangling stars on the bare skin of her stomach and a white leather skirt to match.

They look up at me and their faces instantly twist into disgust and anger, “What do you want?” Ivory spits at me.

“I know how to fix everything,” I say breathlessly.

Aria pushes off the couch and strides over to me, her heeled boots clicking on the floor. “Oh really? Do you suggest we stand up the audience the way you stood us up all week?” She hisses through clenched teeth.

I look up at her and sigh, “I’m sorry I didn’t show up when we had a deadline and I’m sorry that my decision caused consequences that would hurt you both but I have a way to fix it.”

Ivory grumbles, “Why don’t you start by telling us what was so important that you had to fuck us over?”

I look between them and make an impulsive decision. I take a deep breath and tell them everything. I tell them how Harvey and I started, how good it was, how he helped me become a better version of myself, and lastly, how he crushed me and left me behind after telling me I meant nothing to him.

Their faces soften by the time I finish. Ivory falters, “I’m sorry, Brody.”

I nod, “Thank you.”

“Me too,” Aria sympathizes.

I give them both a tight smile, “I’m really sorry I wasn’t there when you guys needed me. We were on a deadline and I didn’t care about anyone but myself. I never wanted us to get dropped and sued, I’m so sorry,” I apologize. My face hardens a few seconds later, “But I have a way to fix everything now.”

“What is it?” Ivory asks, curiosity in her tone.

“I wrote a song of my own. We can play it tonight and tell the album that was our last song, that we met the deadline,” I offer.

Aria’s jaw is practically on the floor. “You wrote a song?”

I nod, “I did.”

Ivory nudges my shoulder, “Holy shit, B. That’s awesome.”

I beam at her, “Thank you.”



“Wait, won’t they argue that since it wasn’t recorded, we never met the deadline?”  
Aria ponders.

I shake my head, “Selene is on the phone with them now, negotiating. Technically speaking we needed to have twelve finished songs, they never specified whether or not they had to be recorded.”

Their faces twist into excitement. “You’re a fucking genius,” Ivory asserts as she grabs my face and kisses me on the cheek with a dramatic sound.

I laugh, “So does this mean you’ll play the song? You haven’t heard it yet.”

They nod, “We don’t have to hear the whole thing to know it’s good. We trust you. Just tell us what our parts are and we’ll play them.”

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We spend the next ten minutes going over every note, every detail. We talk to the stage crew about a few logistics, all of which we work out perfectly. It almost feels like this song was meant to be played. I was so worried everyone would hate it, that I didn't create something good, but now I don't care what anyone thinks. The world will hear my song and the world will see Brody Drake with her mask off. They'll see me for who I am and if they don't love me, fuck em' all.

### Chapter 25

#### Harvey

Selene texted me thirtyminutes ago that the show was starting. I got off the plane and into an Uber in record timing, having the Uber take me straight to the concert venue. I'm cutting it close on time but as long as I can make it there, as long as I can see her and tell her everything I need to tell her, the rest will work out on its own.

The Uber parks outside the back of the venue, security having gotten the "okay" from Selene to let me through. I enter through the back, rushing down the long hallways connecting to the stage. I hear music blaring, Brody's voice singing and I have goosebumps on my skin from being in the same building as her. Hearing her voice but not yet seeing her is setting my chest alight and I need to set my eyes on her before my whole body bursts aflame.

I push past the stage crew, rushing to the VIP section. A hand grabs my arm and stops me and I turn to find Selene Stone with a suspicious look on her face. She drops her hand and raises her chin, "So you made it after all. With thirty minutes left in the show."

That's all that's left? I take a step closer to the stage, "I have to see her."

She nods and I turn completely, sprinting towards the VIP section. She yells to my back, "You should be proud of her. She just saved all of our careers." I don't respond, I only continue to run but a smile curves my lips upward. I knew Brody was capable of so much. I never doubted her.

I make it to the VIP section and look up at the stage. My eyes hone in on Brody at her drumset, singing with her eyes closed as she plays a song. I freeze when I take her in. She looks ethereal, like a goddess sent from the heavens of the night. Her hair is styled to perfection, her usual messy curls brushed out with chains and stars woven into the gold and black strands. Her makeup is done beautifully, her eyes lined in a sultry black shadow with stars of all different sizes on her eyelids and cheekbones. Her clothing, if you can even call it that, makes her look naked almost, covered only by stars of various sizes. She looks perfect and my heart tugs in my chest, desperate to be close to her.

A small figure appears before me, a daring expression on her face. She brushes strands of platinum hair behind her ear and radiates confidence. So much so that this girl who can't be taller than five feet almost seems taller than me. "You must be Harvey Taylor."

I give her a confused look, "Yes. Who are you?"

"A friend of Brody's. I hear you broke her heart," she leans in close to me, shouting over the sound of the music. "I'm very protective of the people I love. You hurt my friend which means you hurt me, but you showed up after leaving her behind so I'll give you one shot to fix it or I'll show you why they call me Viper on the streets."

A man about my height, but more lean appears at her back and gives me a threatening glare. "Everything okay, over here?" He asks the woman but stares only at me.

She pats his chest and softens at the sound of his voice, “Everything’s fine.”

Another man who looks strikingly like the one who stands at her back appears at her side. He looks older than the first, more mature in a way. “What’s going on?” He asks.

“Nothing. This is just the guy that broke Brody’s heart. I was giving him a warning,” the blond explains.

A brunette appears next and I sigh to myself. I’m here for Brody and I can’t even watch her because these people are acting like a pack of wild dogs. The only thing stopping me from going berserk on them is the fact that they care about her and are obviously protecting her. “Threatening people again, Ivy?” The brunette shakes her head, a smile on her face.

The blond, Ivy, shrugs, “You know it’s what I’m good at.”

“Look, I’m here to fix things. I made a mistake and it took hurting us both to realize I’m willing to give everything up to be with her,” I look at Ivy but she doesn’t look sold yet. “I love her,” I admit, my face cracking with the raw emotions in my chest.

Ivy’s eyes narrow and she pauses before nodding. “Good,” she steps aside, allowing me to enter completely into the VIP section. I walk closer to the stage, to Brody, and Ivy yells behind me, “Remember what I said. You have one chance to fix it.”

I ignore her, too focused on Brody. The girls play their hit songs, the ones they’re known for and the whole time, Brody doesn’t notice me. She focuses on her fans, on her music, on her friends. I’m glad she doesn’t see me just yet. I don’t want to ruin her show or upset her by catching her off guard. I’m keen on watching her lose herself in her music the way she always does.

They finish another song and the stage goes black. The audience cheers and that's it. The show is over. I start walking toward the exit to get back to her dressing room but her voice stops me. Brody speaks into the microphone, "Thank you all for being here tonight. It means so much to us that you've loved and supported us through our many faults and many run-ins with the law."

Laughs ensue from all over the venue and I can't help but smile at her playful tone. She continues, "The truth is, we got ourselves into a boatload of shit." The stage lights flip on, revealing her as she stands close to the edge of the stage, looking out at the audience. The lights encase her in a blanket of blue and pink lights. There's a red light over her drum set. Aria and Ivory are behind her, drinking straight from a bottle of whiskey, though they don't appear to be drunk. "And most of it was my fault," Brody laughs to herself. "A couple of months ago I started working on something and I had no intention of sharing it with anyone else. It was only for my ears and the ears of one other person." I know without her having to say anything that the person she's talking about is me.

"I realized while I was working on it, my song, that I was keeping so much from all my fans, from my friends." She looks over her shoulder at Ivory and Aria. She turns back to the audience, a stiff smile on her face, "I was pretending to be someone I wasn't for so long, I forgot who I really was." She turns around, the mic still wrapped in her hand as she saunters over to her drum set. She props the mic back into place and sits, "It took a very special person for me to realize it and then the song slowly started to get easier and easier to write. So, we're gonna play the song for you and you'll be the first ears to hear it." The fans cheer so loud, Brody and the girls grin from ear to ear.

"This is a song I call, 'The Masks We Wear,'" Brody shouts before Aria starts playing a chord on her guitar. It goes on for about ten seconds, repeating itself until Brody changes it by hitting the drums.

The two play their melodies in sync with each other and I know just from Brody's part that this is the song I heard. That the person she was talking about, the special person, is me. Ivory hits a bass note that adds to Brody and Aria's rhythms. And the three play the ominous, yet playful beat. The audience goes crazy for it and they haven't even hit the first verse yet. Ivory changes up her chord, changing the beat and Brody makes a darker, more dramatic sound. Then she raises her chin and sings her first verse;

The red and blue lights shine right in my eyes

Aria plays the darkest, guitar riff of all time. The audience screams and my jaw drops.

She stops and demands I say my goodbyes

Aria repeats the riff.

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*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:17 am*

Anger arises as I learn I'll never be coming back

The Devil sends temptation as a form of attack

They told you I'm the serpent in disguise

But you know you're not in danger when you look in my eyes

Brody loses herself in her song, her friends getting lost with her. She hits the drums with her whole body, and sings the words she wrote with everything in her. She then sings the chorus;

The masks we wear

The masks we wear

The masks we wear

She has the audience completely wrapped around her finger, myself included. Everyone's jaws are wide open with shock, with anticipation. They repeat the same melodies, riffs, all of it while Brody sings the second verse and the chorus.

Another curtain closes and the drugs funnel in

The darkness is our only sign it's time to begin

I see him, temptation of his own watching me, is he real?

Just one look from him and I know I've lost

The masks we wear

The masks we wear

The masks we wear

The melodies slow, the sound of Brody's drums fading out as she stops playing completely. The stage goes black and everyone goes silent. A chill runs up my spine in anticipation of what she'll do next. A second later, Aria starts playing a gentle chord on her guitar. A dim, red light appears on the stage, revealing Brody standing there with her mic in hand. Fog wraps around the entire stage, hiding Aria and Ivory from sight along with Brody's drum set. A piano is pushed onto the stage before Brody, all while Aria still plays her same chord.

Ivory's hand reaches out to Brody through the fog with a bottle of whiskey. My stomach drops as she grabs it in acceptance. Is she going to drink it? Did she start drinking again? Brody grins as she marches over to the piano. She pours the bottle of whiskey out in a circle around the piano, dumping the last of the amber liquid on the piano's lid. Aria's guitar chord grows darker, the sound heavier, building up to whatever it is Brody's about to do. Ivory reaches out another hand, something small in it and Brody grabs it, smiling. A second later, a spark appears at the tips of her fingers and I know Ivory gave her a match book.

Brody steps into the circle of whiskey she made and drops the lit match right on the liquid, setting the piano and the whole stage ablaze. I worry for a second that she may burn herself but based on the devilish smile on her face, I know she planned to keep the liquid and the flames far enough away from her from the start so that she wouldn't get burned. I grin as I watch the flames grow. It wasn't just a special effect to get the fans going, while it did get them excited. No, it was a message. It was



Brody's way of telling the world she doesn't need alcohol to be a good musician, to be herself.

She seats herself at the bench as Aria's chord dies. Brody places her fingers on the piano keys and starts playing a melancholy tune, the one she played in the studio the night she and I were alone in Nashville. She plays the repetitive notes a few times before she brings her other hand into it, hitting all the deeper keys, making the sound dangerous and threatening. It pairs nicely with the lighthearted notes she's making.

While Brody plays her notes, Ivory hits a note on her guitar, and suddenly she plays a guitar solo of her own as Brody's piano keys fade. Brody rises, still lightly pressing the keys as the audience falls captive to Ivory's playing. Brody removes herself from the piano, stepping through the flames, highlighting her features in golden light just as the stage crew quietly puts the fire out and removes the piano. The blue light shines on Aria who plays a low melody while Ivory loses herself in her solo. Ivory is swathed completely in pink light and Brody walks to her drum set as the guitar sound speeds up, hitting its crescendo.

Brody sits in her stool, picking up her sticks. She grins wickedly as she twirls the sticks in her hands before slamming them down on the cymbals. The three lose themselves in the song, Aria playing a guitar solo of her own before the entire song seems to start all over again. It's what I imagine Alice must've felt like when she fell down the rabbit hole and found herself in Wonderland. The audience goes crazy for it, loving the song as much as I knew they would.

Brody sings the third verse and then the chorus;

The mask is removed, leaving me bare to your eyes

You've seen all that I am and I don't want to say goodbyes

Just one last kiss to remember you this way

No sounds come when I open my mouth to beg you to stay

You're the only one who's seen me without the mask my love, my darling

I mean it when I tell you, in love, I am with you

The masks we wear

The masks we wear

The masks we wear

My eyes zero in on her and her only. Her words, her song, the emotion in her voice as she sings her heart out. My heart beats rapidly in my chest as I know her words are for me. She just told me she loved me in front of thousands of people and she doesn't even know I'm here, that I came back for her and I'm never leaving again.

I heard her play the instrumental parts of the song but never the lyrics. The song is our story from start to finish and she just shared it with the world. The song ends on a broken chord by Aria and just before the lights go out, signaling the show's end, Brody's eyes flick down to mine and her jaw drops. I mouth to her I love you, but she doesn't see it because the lights cut out, cutting off our connection.

Chapter 26

Brody

Harvey is here. I saw him, looked into his black eyes just as the lights cut out and the show ended. He opened his mouth to say something or mouth something to me but I couldn't see. He's here, but why? Why did he come back after everything that happened between us?

"B, we gotta go," Ivory whispers into my ear and I realize then that I was frozen in my spot, seated on the stool to the drumset. I was so caught off guard by Harvey's appearance that I forgot where I was and what I'm supposed to be doing. I nod,

getting off the stool and walking off stage with the girls.

When we make it off stage, they wrap their arms around me and I hug them tightly. “That was fucking amazing,” Aria beams.

“I’m so proud of you, B,” Ivory says affectionately.

I relax into their embrace, “Thank you.” I pull back and look at them both in the eyes. “I was so scared that if I showed you two who I really was on the inside, that you wouldn’t want to be friends with me anymore. I was scared you’d kick me out of the band and replace me.”

Aria shakes her head, “Brody, we love you. You’re irreplaceable.”

Ivory nods her agreement, “We all became people we weren’t because of the drugs and the alcohol. We got lost chasing a high that we could only have once when the only high we really needed was the high of having each other. We’re family, Brody. You’re always safe to be yourself with us.”

My eyes glisten with tears at her sincerity. “I love you guys. I’m sorry for being such a fuck up, but I hope I fixed it.”

Aria laughs, “You fixed it, don’t worry.”

Ivory leans in closer to us, “Let’s make a deal. From now on, we’re all completely honest with each other, and completely ourselves with each other.”

I nod immediately, “Deal.”

Aria grins, “Deal.”

I take a step back from my friends, knowing there's one more thing I have to do before we have any celebrations of any kind. "I have to go do something."

"Would it have anything to do with the babysitter that appeared in the VIP section?" Ivory teases.

I nod, "Yes, it has everything to do with him." I smile at them before I turn around and hurry toward my dressing room. I know he's in there without having to ask. He's in there waiting for me the way he always has after my shows.

I stop in front of my door taking a deep breath before twisting the knob and pushing it open. I step inside and find him, as expected, seated at my couch the way he always is when I enter my dressing rooms after a show. My heart sinks when my eyes land on him. I lean against the door for support, tears lining my eyes. I'm overwhelmed by emotion. I never thought I'd see him again. I remember what happened between us in my dressing room months ago, when we came together for the first time. My cheeks warm at the memory of how good his hands felt on my body, his skin on mine. But then I remember what happened the last time we were in my dressing room alone together. How he told me all I ever was to him was sex and left me behind like I never meant anything to him at all, at least not in the way he meant to me. My face falls at the pain, at the emptiness I've felt inside me since he left me a little over a week ago.

He leans forward, his elbows resting on his knees. "Hi."

I scoff, "Hi? That's all you have to say to me?"

He shakes his head, rising from where he sits to stand before me. I notice right away that he doesn't wear his signature white button down with black slacks. He wears a black button down with jeans, something I've never seen him wear before. I would question it if I didn't want to scratch his eyes out right now. He walks around the

glass coffee table and closer to me but I put a hand out, signaling for him to stop. I don't trust myself to be this close to him. I worry I might let the part of me that misses him overrule the part of me that's angry at him. He stops immediately and allows emotion to show on his face, something else I'm not quite used to with him. "I have a million things to say to you, I just don't know how to say them."

I roll my eyes, "I don't know why you're here then."

He takes a deep breath before releasing it, "I've been going over dozens of ways to say what I have to say to you and none of them feel truly right. They don't erase what I did."

I cross my arms over my chest, "Nothing is gonna erase what you did or what you said." I force my tears back down, refusing to shed any more for him.

He softens, "Brody-"

"Don't. Why are you here? You made it clear I didn't mean anything to you and that you wanted nothing to do with me. So why are you here now?" I snap, cutting him off.

## Page 66

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:17 am*

He shakes his head, “That isn’t true. I said things I didn’t mean and I came here to fix things. Please, all I’m asking is just for you to listen. I’m not asking you to forgive me, I just want you to listen to me.”

I consider his request, wanting so badly to be able to say no, to be strong enough to not get hurt again, but I inevitably crumble. “Fine, talk,” I force as much attitude into my voice as possible, hoping to make up for my faltering strength with aggressiveness.

Harvey gives me an appreciative smile before he speaks, his voice earnest, “My entire life, I’ve been running away from things when they get too hard or too serious. I went to the military when I realized I was going to be responsible for Lucy, I sold my security company when I realized it was getting bigger than I could handle, and I ran away from you when I realized I love you because I was afraid of being vulnerable. But I’m not running anymore. I came back because I love you and I know I hurt you and broke your heart but I haven’t had mine with me since I left because I left my heart with you.”

My hard expression crumbles at his admission and a betraying tear rolls down my cheek. I quickly wipe it away but it’s no use, he already saw it. He continues, “I lied to you, Brody. I lied when I said this was just physical between us because it never was. I knew the minute I met you in your kitchen, the night you were rummaging around for alcohol in the refrigerator, that you were mine. I’ve always gone with what was safe in my life, but you made me realize life isn’t worth living if you live it playing it safe. You were never a safe option to me, yet I wanted you like I’ve never wanted anything else before. You’re stubborn, quick witted, and dedicated to what you do. You like to wake up at ten in the morning and watch mob movies that you’ve

already seen hundreds of times. You hate Kiss and you hate Eric Singer even more, for reasons you have yet to divulge with me, and most importantly Brody, you're everything I'm not. You made me realize that there's more to life than the safe options and that means everything to me. You mean everything to me."

Tears free fall down my cheeks. "What made you change your mind?"

He takes a step closer to me, slow enough so that I could stop him if I want to but I make no move to stop him. "Being away from you, being without you for a week has been torture. I feel empty inside and every time I closed my eyes I saw your face after I told you I was terminating the contract. I knew immediately when I walked out that door that I was making a mistake and that I was leaving part of my soul behind. You've woven yourself into the very fabric of my being and not being with you has made me feel a pain I would never wish on anyone else."

My voice cracks, "Imagine how I felt to get told I was just sex to you and then to get left behind."

He looks at the floor. "I can't imagine how I made you feel and I don't expect to make it go away with just an apology. I hurt you. I broke your heart and I don't deserve your forgiveness, but I'm willing to do whatever it takes to earn it back."

I shake my head, rubbing the tears away from my cheeks. "We wouldn't work, Harvey."

"Why the hell not?" He raises an angry brow.

"Because we live in different states and you can't leave because of Lucy. I can't leave LA because of work," I remind him. His brows soften and he smiles. "What's amusing about that?" I ask, tears in my voice.



He laughs, “Brody, I’m moving to LA to be with you.”

My eyes widen and I gasp, “What?”

“I know you haven’t forgiven me yet and that’s okay. I’m gonna earn it back over time and we have time now that I’ll be in LA with you,” he promises.

I can’t stop the sob that wracks through my chest. “What about Lucy? Your mom?”

He hesitates to walk closer to me, worried I may tell him to stop, but I don’t. I let him get closer and closer until he cups my cheeks and presses his forehead against mine. He looks into my eyes with his dark, onyx colored eyes and announces, “They’re moving to LA too. Lucy isn’t happy at her school and my mom will go wherever I go, considering she depends on me for money. Being in LA would be good for Lucy anyway. She feels lonely because of my travel for work and she misses me. This new work opportunity will allow me to stay in LA. I won’t have to travel and I can spend more time with Lucy and you if you’ll let me.”

“You’re moving to LA for me?” I ask even though he already just explained everything.

He nods and kisses the tip of my nose. “I’d move to Hell to be with you, Little Rockstar.”

“What’s the work opportunity?”

He smirks, “Remember my security company?” I nod and he continues. “I sold it to a friend of mine but it turns out it’s getting too big for him too. He wants me to partner with him and run the company, something I should’ve done years ago. He’s branching out the business and has one job he wants me to take care of for the next year or two. After that, I’m back in CEO mode.”

“What’s the job?”

“He didn’t give me the details yet.”

I laugh through my tears, “You accepted a job without getting the details? That’s very unlike you.”

He laughs, his lips only an inch from mine, “Being in love with you has made me do a million things that are very unlike me, and I regret none of them.”

I glance between his eyes and his lips and taking that as opportunity enough, he closes the distance between our mouths and captures my lips in a searing kiss. I wrap my arms around his neck and his hands lower to my waist, pulling me so that the distance between our bodies closes.

His tongue runs along the seam of my lips, seeking entrance and I allow it, tasting the saltiness of my tears on his lips. Our tongues find each other and I moan into his mouth, savoring every moment of him. I’ve missed him so much it hurt. From his scent to his smile, the crease that forms between his brows whenever I say something questionable or whenever he’s lost in thought. I’ve missed it all so much. I won’t forget the pain, how bad it hurt when he left me, but I know he won’t stop until he’s proven to me he’s truly sorry.

“I love you,” he breathes into my mouth.

I smile against his lips, “I love you, too.”

He smiles back at me, kissing me chastely before promising, “I’m never leaving again. You’re stuck with me now, Little Rockstar.”

I laugh, “I guess there are worse things to get stuck with.”

## Page 67

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:17 am*

He shakes his head, “Always challenging me.”

“Well, I can’t make things too easy for you. I still have to make you earn my forgiveness,” I insist.

He looks between the couch and my eyes and smirks, “How about I start by recreating our first time together? I believe it was in a dressing room that looked just like this one.”

I give him a wicked little smile in response and he kisses me, lifting me off the ground so that my legs wrap around his waist as he locks the dressing room door and walks us over to the couch.

### Epilogue

Brody, five months later

“You want this in our room?” Harvey asks, planting a kiss on my cheek. I turn to find him holding the bonsai tree he bought me in Japan in his hands. I smile as I glance between the tree in his palms and his face.

I nod, “Yes, thank you. Maybe on the dresser?”

He grins, “I think that’s a perfect spot.” He walks up the stairs of our home, careful with the tree in his palms.

I take in the sight of our house, well, the house I lived in alone until Selene forced

Harvey Taylor's presence on me. When we were talking about moving in together, he offered to have a house built for us or to buy me whatever house I wanted but it just didn't feel right. This house was where our story started and it only seems fair that this is where it continues to be written. I'll admit though, it almost feels foreign to be back here after such a long time away. We just flew home from Japan this morning after being away on vacation together for a month. We spent days exploring Japan and I think Harvey fell in love with the culture the way that I love it. He was all too eager to buy a plethora of decor items for our home, some of which he's already put up in the house.

I walk into the kitchen and stop when I take in the island. I remember the breakfasts he used to make for me and when I glance at the refrigerator, I remember the night we met, the night he disposed of all my liquor and set my life completely upside down. His footsteps bring me back to the present and he kisses my lips before tilting his head at me, "You okay?"

I dip my chin, beaming, "Yeah, I was just remembering the night we met."

He pulls me into his body and kisses my forehead. "I'll never forget my first impression. I knew you were gonna be chaos on legs and I was right. You gave me a run for my money with that smart mouth of yours."

"You love my smart mouth," I wiggle my brows, reminding him of the blow job I gave him on the plane ride home.

He laughs and we're both brought back to the present by the front door closing. Lucy enters a moment later with her overnight bag. She props a hand up on her hip and frowns at her big brother, "You know, when you told me you were taking the job in LA, I thought that meant no more traveling, but then you go off to Japan for a whole month!" She complains.

I smirk at her sass. Lucy stays with us sometimes for the weekend, wanting to spend time with her brother. I try to give them as much space as possible but she always drags me into their one-on-one time, claiming she wants to spend time with her new sister just as much as she wants to spend time with her brother. I like the idea of being Lucy's sister, of us all being a family. We haven't talked about it yet, but I look forward to the day Harvey and I get married so that Lucy can be my official sister-in-law. I love her so much already. She reminds me of myself in a way, just a lot less chaotic.

She rushes into Harvey's arms and he hugs her tightly. "Well, I'm back now and I'm not going anywhere."

She pulls out of his arms and hugs me. I hug her back tightly, having missed her so much. "We brought something back for you. Why don't you go to your room and check it out and then we can all go grab lunch?" She practically jolts out of my arms and runs upstairs to uncover the small cherry blossom tree we brought back for her.

For a fourteen-year-old, she acts like a child when it comes to gifts. The girl just loves surprises. I grin as she charges up the stairs and disappears from sight. Since moving to LA, Harvey and Lucy have grown so much closer. He and his mother's relationship hasn't changed much and I hope that in the future he tries talking to her or gaining some kind of closure for the amount of responsibility she placed on him when he was just a young boy. Regardless, I'll support him in whatever decision he makes.

My relationship with my family has improved only slightly. I talk to my father frequently, though my mother still chooses to blame me for our lack of relationship. I don't talk to her at all and neither does Andrew, but we both get dinner with Dad once a week and try talking him into a divorce. Every week we seem to get closer and closer and hopefully, sometime soon, he'll actually do it.

Ivory and Aria are the same as they were before Harvey and I left for Japan. The only thing that's changed is our closeness. We hangout multiple times a week, sometimes in the studio, others going out. They drink in moderation, I don't, but none of us do drugs anymore. We're all clean and we've never gotten along better. The pure relationship we had before all the reconciled legal troubles has returned and I'm grateful for it. Every area of my life is perfect and I wouldn't ask for it any other way.

Selene and I have improved our relationship as well. We spend quality time together alone and it always feels like we're kids again, our wholesome relationship rising back up from the mess I made of it when I decided to pretend to be someone I wasn't.

The label didn't drop us after all. We recorded my song and when the album came out, my song, "The Masks We Wear" hit number one on charts all over the world. It was a proud moment for me, Harvey too. He tells me everyday how proud he is of me and how far I've come.

Harvey started working with his friend Dallas, whom I met, and I like the guy, there's just something about him I can't quite place that makes me think he has a few secrets. He bought back into his company and feels fulfilled for the first time in a long time by his work.

"I love you, Little Rockstar," Harvey whispers against my lips as he kisses me.

I kiss him back, "I love you, too."

"Thank you for loving Lucy, too," he says passionately.

I tilt my head at him, "You never have to thank me for loving her. She's important to me the same way she is to you and I wouldn't trade her for anything."

"You have no idea how much that means to me," he grins.

I lace my fingers with his, “You’ll find a way to show me.”

## Page 68

*Source Creation Date: July 19, 2025, 1:17 am*

Lucy's phone rings from upstairs and I remember I discarded mine somewhere in the entryway when we were unloading our luggage back into the house. "Shit," I mutter.

"What's wrong?" He asks, confused.

"I forgot my phone in the foyer. I promised I'd call Selene when we landed and I didn't, she's probably blown up my phone with worried texts," I unlace our fingers, kissing him on the cheek before hurrying to the foyer to retrieve my phone. I find it on the entryway table, just as I remembered and grab it, walking back to the kitchen as I press the home button to turn it on.

I have a billion notifications. News apps are going crazy, social media notifications are going crazy, my emails are blown up, and my messages and calls, astronomical. I freeze in my tracks, stopping in the entrance to the kitchen as my face falls. I read through some of the notifications and stop breathing. "Oh my God," I whisper to myself.

Seeing the worry and distress on my face, Harvey rushes over to me, "What's wrong?"

"Aria is all over the fucking news," I panic as I read through my texts. The group chat between Aria, Selene, Ivory, and I has two-hundred notifications alone. I open a news app and read the latest tabloid, highlighting Aria's biggest and worst scandal she's ever had in her career.

Harvey relaxes only slightly at the fact that I'm not in trouble or the subject of my own distress, "For what?"



I flip my phone so he can read my screen. The headline of the article reads, Satan's Angels Guitarist Sex Tape Leaked and right below the title is a picture of Aria and some guy whose face I can't make out, completely naked, save for the censor bars covering their naughty bits. It's clearly Aria, though.

"Shit," Harvey reads the title and falters.

Lucy chooses the worst time to reappear, "I just went on TikTok and saw Aria kissing some guy but it looked like they were naked," she sounds amused, confused, and in disbelief.

I look over my shoulder at Lucy and then back at Harvey, panic clear on my face. "Fuck," I worry, distressed.

Harvey talks to me but I don't hear him, too busy rereading the headline in my head.

Aria just got caught making a sex tape and whether it was voluntary or not is something I have yet to figure out but right now, my mind is roving over every possible way we can fix this. Problem is, I'm coming up dry because it's already all over the news and the video itself is circulating around the internet. "Aria is so fucked."

The End