



Midnight Rhythm (The Road to Rocktoberfest 2024)

Author: *Lynn Michaels*

Category: LGBT+

Description: Midnight Hunt is back baby!

They're touring, they're killing it at Rocktoberfest, and they're finding renewed success. So why does it all feel superficial to drummer, Ziggy? And why can't he stop thinking about their promoter, Coleman?

Coleman was instrumental in getting Midnight Hunt back together. And now he's being pushed aside, not only by the band, but by Ziggy. He's gone out of his way to do the drummers bidding. Anything to show how much he wanted them to be something more, but Ziggy only played with his heart. And now Coleman has to walk away to save his heart.

Was their relationship doomed to fall off the charts, or could they find their rhythm?

Midnight Riff is a follow-up to Midnight Reunion, The Road to Rocktoberfest 2022, and Midnight Riff, Road to Rocktoberfest 2023, that account the reunion of the heavy metal band Midnight Hunt and their relationships. Can be read in any order, but best enjoyed in sequence. Enjoy and Rock on!

Total Pages (Source): 19

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:49 pm

one

Two years ago

It was Rocktoberfest. To say I was totally stoked was an understatement. We went from being a broken-up band who never even spoke to each other, has-been nothings, to walking across a major stage in about a month's time. All thanks to Coleman Hicks, one of the legendary producers in the business. Everything he touched turned to gold, and now he had his hands on us and me, literally.

We were going on soon, but we were behind the bus making out. At first, it was friendly chatter. How are you, are you ready to play, and other some shit. And my bold inquiry into why he was doing this for us. He laughed and said I was stupid. Before I could walk away, he grabbed my waist and tugged me closer with his fingers inside the edge of my pants. "I didn't mean it like that. But you and the rest of Hunt don't know your worth. Especially with Jinx. He's still in the public eye and no one forgot the rest of the band. There's been a ton of online questions about where you all are with no answers. Until now."

"This is going to make you a ton of money, isn't it?"

He shrugged. "Maybe. Probably." He smiled, and I swear it rivaled the bright Nevada sun. "It's more about reputation for me at this point. I have more money than I could ever need. What I want is...less tangible. Maybe." He leaned forward and kissed me softly on the lips. No one had ever treated me like that.

If someone wanted me, they usually fell to their knees. And I had plenty. Even now.

I'd never stopped playing, and even though the bands I played with weren't popular or famous and mostly played dives, there were always fans, rock wannabes and eager holes. But Coleman? He was completely different, and I was completely out of my depth with him.

His hands wandered over my body seductively while his lips lingered on my throat. I thrust my hips forward, letting my desire be known. "You're fantastic, Zig."

"Well..." I had no words. I couldn't believe he was interested in me. What could he want with my sorry, has-been ass? I didn't know but he wanted something.

"I've been watching you. I see you. I think you'll find I'm quite resourceful." He was asking me for more than a fuck. That chilled me down to my bones despite the heat of the desert. He hummed in my veins, and I felt him in my chest competing with the rumbling of the bus generator. "Whatever you want."

"Game on." I leaned in and kissed him. Hard. With tongue and teeth and desire. I grabbed his ass, so sexy beneath the fancy jeans he wore. Where that would lead, I had no idea, but I wanted to find out. And fast. "Just so you know, I'm a freak in bed. I don't know if you'll be able to handle me."

Coleman's eyes roamed up and down my body as he inspected me. "What do you mean by freak? Like swinging off the chandelier, freak? Or like marathon fucking? OR what?"

"We could make that happen."

"Which one?"

"Yeah, man." My cock was rock hard thinking of all of those things and more. What we could get up to! And seeing this classy man naked was at the top of my list of

things to do. Hell, right now, he was the list.

But it would have to wait. Miami shouted for us to come on. “We’re on soon. We have to get to the stage.” Fucking worry-wart mother hen buzz-kill motherfucker.

With a huge sigh, I straightened and dared to look into Coleman’s amber and sage eyes.

“Don’t worry, Zig. We’re only getting started.”

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:49 pm

two

On Tour Two years later

Looking out at my bandmates over the stage, a sense of anxiety and anticipation rolled over me. What the fuck was I doing? Why and how had I ended up with these guys? None of them were paying any attention to me. They chatted with their roadies and techs. It was only our second show, and we were still working things out—tweaking the setups.

All the guys in the band were all happily paired up. Even Miami and Jinx, who had been so combustible before, were now in a golden twilight. And me?

Unbuttoning my pants, I shimmied out of my jeans. I'd gone commando because, yeah, these jeans were fucking tight.

I hadn't made up with Coleman, and now we were on tour—officially. Great. Jacksonville fans would storm in later tonight. But Coleman? He hadn't called. I told myself he was busy, but that was bullshit, but to be fair, I hadn't called him either.

Griffin, the salesman from whom we bought all of our equipment, looked over at me from behind my kit. He quirked an eyebrow. He'd become a friend of sorts with the band and had a cool little dude for a son and a hot snowboarder for a man. They'd both be at the show later, but they weren't here now. My tech, Simon, glanced up to see what Griffin was staring at and smirked at me. Neither said anything as I continued undressing. The buttons on my shirt were tricky, but I managed them. A sleeveless in soft blue to bring out my eyes and show off my guns. The tails covered

my junk, barely.

A lot of shit swirled around in my brain, and I needed to silence the voices. The soft cotton-poly material slid over my shoulders, leaving me in nothing but my Nike sneakers. I took off across the stage before the shirt hit the floor. I threw my hands in the air and hooted loudly. On the other side, I wanted to jump over the barriers and get out into the seats, but as soon as I got my foot up on the glass barrier, someone grabbed me from behind. I kicked my legs in the air and yelled again.

Even though someone, probably security, had me reined in, I felt free. For so long, it had only been me. Before Midnight Hunt had ever hit it big, before I even knew Miami, Jinx, and Wolf, before I became Ziggy, and back when I was only Jack Braswell, there had been no one. Through the years, I fucked ‘em and forgot ‘em. Roadies, fans, or groupies, guys I picked up at the bar. Didn’t matter. I didn’t care. I was Jack-don’t-give-a-fuck Braswell, and later, I was a rockstar, living up to that rockstar persona, Ziggy. I was wild and crazy and gave not one single mother-fucking fuck.

Then Coleman.

Well, fuck Coleman. Fuck relationships. Fuck everything.

I laughed maniacally until the security guy sat me down on my feet next to the pile of clothing I’d discarded. “Whew!” The endorphins fired me up. “What a rush.”

Jinx’s face got right into mine. “Are you high?”

“No. Maybe later.” There was always time to smoke a joint later.

Jinx scoffed. “You’ve lost your mind? That it?”

“Also no.”

“Fine.” Jinx turned and stomped back across the stage to where Bobby, his tech, had his Fender strapped on, working on tuning. But Miami was still there, staring at me.

“What?”

“Anything you want to tell us, Zig?” The self-proclaimed leader of the band waited. He was sucking on a lozenge, which was part of this pre-show ritual. He didn’t have a tech waiting on him. He worked closely with our sound and lights guy, Pete, but he took care of his own microphones. Because he was an egotistical asshole. Not that I gave a fuck.

“No.”

He slurped a bit. I could see his mouth working as he tucked the lozenge in his cheek. “Then get some fucking clothes on and count us in. Time’s wasting, dude.”

I refrained from flipping him off, but it was a close thing. Instead, I stuck my tongue out at them. It had been hard enough getting my jeans off over my sneakers. They weren’t going back the same way, so I kicked them off. After a few minutes of wiggling and jumping around on the stage, I had them over my ass but left them unbuttoned. I left the shirt and shoes right the fuck where they were and padded barefoot over to my kit.

Simon handed me a pair of sticks. “Thanks, man.”

“Thanks for the show.” He smacked my ass and walked away, but not without throwing a wink over his shoulder. He was playing. He flirted with everyone, including Wolf’s tech, Ross, who was super close with Bobby. I thought they had something going. Super drama among techs. I didn’t give a fuck.

Everyone seemed to be ready, the techs moving off the stage. Griffin leaned closer. “You’re good to go, man. Knock ‘em dead.”

I tipped a salute with one of my sticks. The guys were looking at me, Wolf and Jinx, with their axes strapped over their shoulders. Miami bounced on his toes. There was nothing left to do for soundcheck except play. I counted off our first song and banged my toms, cymbals, snare, bass. This was my world. I tipped the hi-hat.

Miami started screaming into the mic.

It happens more than I like

It's a whirlwind of spitfire

Fucking hell it's another fight

We had decided the lineup before we’d played the Miami show, and we were starting with our classic, The One About Fighting . Everyone loved it. Classic Midnight Hunt. And I had a fucking killer drum solo that I’d updated from when we originally recorded it.

I pounded my feet on the double bass. Left-right, right, right-left. And banged it out over the toms.

My mind wandered.

To Coleman. I could imagine his sexy smirk and perfectly styled hair...

Maybe it was because the song was old, and I knew it to my bones. I could and did play by rote. Until I fucked it up.

I stopped playing and everyone turned to look at me.

God damned Coleman. Why couldn't he at least shoot me a text?

Fuck this. Hadn't I made my own personal declaration to forget his sorry ass right before we started playing? I tossed my sticks over my kit, not caring where they landed.

Wolf yelled, "Hey, fucker! Watch it."

I stood up and flipped them all off, double-fisted, before heading backstage. Fuck this. Fuck them. Fuck playing. Fuck Coleman.

No one stopped me, and when I made it to my dressing room, I dug through my duffle until I found the fifth of Crown in its little purple pouch. I pulled it out, opened it, and drank right from the bottle. That first sip was warm and comfortable, always giving me a deep sigh of relaxation.

I heard the band kick off again. Took another swig of whisky, enjoying the sweetness. Most likely, Simon was behind the kit. Couldn't hurt to take another sip. I sat on the couch that took up most of the space in the small room. Part of the reason we hired Simon was he knew all of our songs. He was good. I listened. I sipped. He could play them almost as well as I could. Fucking traitor.

I threw what was left of the bottle across the room, and it shattered against the back of the door.

If I walked over to clean it up, I'd surely cut my feet. So fuck the Crown, too. I'd get another bottle. I scrunched down and stretched out on the couch.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:49 pm

three

Alone in Denver

According to my watch and the time zone differences, Midnight Hunt was on stage at Daily's Place at the stadium in Jacksonville. A nice venue.

And why the fuck was Ziggy being such a brat? And why did my life revolve around that thought?

The second question was easier to answer. I wanted more out of him, and Ziggy wasn't likely to be able to commit to that. He was a free spirit, and I loved that about him as much as I hated it. He was sweet whiskey and loud motorcycles. Concert T-shirts and tight jeans made up his wardrobe. And he was unapologetically everything I never was but always wished I could be. Not hard to see why I was so enamored of him. But that wasn't reality.

Could I change that? I tapped his number on my phone, and of course, it went to voice mail. He was on stage right now. When it picked up, I spoke. "Uh...it's Coleman, Zig. I...wanted to say...hope the show goes well tonight." I tapped off. **Lame !** What the fuck was wrong with me?

Brandy—that's what I needed. I got off my comfy couch and went through the kitchen with its cherrywood cabinets and into my game room. That used to be my favorite part of this house. It had a wet bar, which I made a beeline for to pour me a snifter of golden bliss, but it also had two game tables, pool and air hockey. On the other side of the tables was a seating area facing a big screen over the fireplace.

Nearly every room in the house had a fireplace, including the main bathroom ensuite. It felt like a luxury when I bought the place but now, I hardly used any of them. In fact, I hardly used most of the house. It was almost heartbreaking how I thought this place would be full of people, both clients and friends, but it never was. No, the business had changed too much.

Glass in hand, I climbed up to the top of the pool table and sat cross-legged. I sure would like to fuck Ziggy on this table, or vice versa, I didn't care. But he had never been here either. The majority of our relationship had been me chasing him, and here I was again, leaving him a voicemail. Caving first. Fuck! I threw my phone into the kitchen and watched it slide across the floor and under the fridge. What the fuck was wrong with me? And how often was I going to have to ask the question before getting my shit together?

I sipped my brandy. I was lonely. All alone in this big ass fucking house. It had seemed like the perfect idea at the beginning of my career. Back then, I was crisscrossing the country, booking tours, signing bands, networking, and schmoozing. Now though, I had a team, and everything could be done on the phone for the most part. And the parties and entertainment I had imagined would happen here, never did. No, instead, I was left sitting in this big and fancy empty house in the middle of the country. All-fucking-alone.

Alone.

And Ziggy would never come here. When he wasn't touring, he was in Miami recording. I had no future with him, no matter how much I wanted it.

There was only one thing to do. I threw the snifter toward the kitchen and watched it shatter like my love life against the cabinets. Great. I wasn't going over to clean that up since I was barefoot. And I hadn't even drank the whole glass. But what I did drink was still warm in my throat and belly.

Stretching out, I lay on my back on top of the hard table. I'd tried not to care, but I did. And deeply. I was pathetic. A successful, good-looking, not yet middle-aged—but getting close—man still in his prime—very much in his prime, thank you—fighting back tears on top of a God-damned pool table in a fancy house in an expensive neighborhood in the suburbs of Denver.

Alone.

The next morning, I woke to the sounds of cleaning and the refrigerator being moved. And a stiff back. I groaned as I got off the fucking table and bent over to stretch.

“Mr. Hicks, sir.” Victoria came over and handed me my phone.

“Thank you. I'll be sure to tip well for all this...” I waved the phone toward the brandy mess. “Sorry.”

“Don't worry about it. We've got this, Mr. Hicks.”

Victoria had been my cleaner for years, and she would never call me Coleman, no matter how many times I asked. I gave up. Sometimes, the battles weren't worth fighting.

“I think you might have a voicemail. I heard it ringing when I came in.”

“Thanks, Victoria,” I muttered, peering down at my lock screen. It was after ten in the morning. The sun hadn't woken me because the dark curtains were almost always pulled over the windows to keep the pool table from bleaching out.

I swiped the screen and waited for it to recognize my face. A few seconds later, it popped up a notification. I did have a voicemail. I clicked over to see it was from Ziggy. Well. Part of me didn't want to listen to it. He was probably telling me to fuck

right off. But the bigger part had to hear it. But not in front of the cleaning team. “Is the glass cleaned up?”

“Oh, yes, sir, Mr. Hicks. It’s safe to walk through here.”

“Thank you, again.”

“No problem.”

I gingerly tip-toed through, just in case. I knew she’d vacuum and double-check later to make sure she got it all. She was thorough and kept my place in tip-top shape. I really needed to sell this behemoth.

Upstairs, I debated on going into my office or my bedroom. The latter won out since I needed a shower, desperately.

The room was large with a huge king bed built for two, but had only ever had one in it. Like everything else in this house. I chose to skip the bed and sit on the chaise lounge by the fireplace. Leaning back, I opened my phone again and tapped the message.

Ziggy’s rough voice came through. “Coleman. Uh, thanks for the message. The show was fine. But...I’ll be honest with you. I don’t think I am. Ugh!” I could picture him rubbing his handsome face. “I shouldn’t say that. I didn’t mean to. I’m struggling. I miss you. That’s all. I’ll be fine. Thanks for calling.”

That was all.

He was not fine. I heard that clearly enough. But nearly anything I could do would only make it worse. I sent a text message to Jinx. When you have a minute call me. Need to talk about Zig .

I knew he would call when he could. He was the leader, the caretaker, of the band. Jinx was the glue keeping it together. Just don't tell Miami that. But Jinx cared deeply about every one of his bandmates.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:49 pm

four

Pissed off in Atlanta

“Y ou what?”

Jinx rolled his eyes and crossed his arms over his chest. “I talked to Coleman. Now calm the fuck down.”

“About me?”

“Yes, about you. He’s worried, and after soundcheck yesterday, so am I.”

“Figures,” I huffed. I was referring to Coleman calling Jinx instead of me, not Jinx being worried. I’d given them something to worry about. A little. “I’m fine.” I held up my hands. “I’m not going to tell you that this shit with Coleman doesn’t have me upset. If he’s worried about me, he should call me, not drag you into our mess.”

“He seems to think you’re not a couple anymore and the breakup was hard on you.”

I laughed, but it was a cover. I didn’t want Jinx poking around in my pain. “Breakup? We were never a couple to begin with.” Jinx glared at me so hard I actually felt it. “Seriously, okay? We were fucking around. That’s it.”

“Then why are you streaking across the stage and getting blind-ass passed out drunk before the show?”

“Because I’m Ziggy. That’s what I do.” I also escaped these conversations, but that was impossible to do in the back of a tour bus with him blocking the way. I could probably take him, but I’d have Miami and security on top of me. So no. I held my hands up, making light of the situation that felt anything but.

“Ziggy. I don’t want to get in the middle of things with—”

“Don’t. Okay?”

“But I do worry about you. I can’t sit back and watch you self-destruct. That’s not what we do anymore. Remember?”

We had all banded together to pull Miami out of a dark place. We re-established our group dynamics and agreed that we were family above all else. Brothers. I nodded, remembering. But I still didn’t want them wandering around in my dark quagmire.

“So, no, Zig. I’m not going to ignore it when Coleman calls me worried. If you don’t want to get real with me right now, that’s fine. But if you need to talk. Or if you need anything at all. I expect you to come to me. Don’t think I’m not going to understand, brother.” The seriousness of his golden-brown eyes hit me hard.

“I get it. I understand. But I’m fine. He called me and left a message asking about the show. I called him back, but it was late, and I was tired. He took it the wrong way. I’m fine.” I needed a joint like nobody’s business. Thankfully, I had friends in Atlanta who would hook me up, and I’d already arranged backstage passes for them. Although, labeling them friends was probably stretching it. I licked my lips. That’s all I needed to set things right, a good strong doobie so I could chill. But Jinx wasn’t moving out of my face. “Jinx. If I do need to talk or whatever, you’re first on my list. Okay?” That would never happen, but I needed out of this conversation.

“Fine. Get some rest. We’ll be in Atlanta in about forty-five minutes to an hour,

depending on traffic.” We had two shows there and would be getting hotel rooms. I was more than ready for that.

“Cool beans.”

Finally, he moved on, and I slid into my bunk. Tapping out a beat on my knees, I closed my eyes. What I needed to do was concentrate on moving forward. I needed to get through this show, this tour. Maybe I could figure out the rest of my fucking life after that.

The bus drove by the Mercedes-Benz Stadium with its huge silver falcon right in front of the modern geometric building. It was all angles and glass, looking more like a museum than a stadium to me, but inside would be more traditional. After circling around a lot of concrete parking lots and roadways, we could see a patch of green for about three seconds before we were inside the parking garage next to the World Congress Center. There was a Hilton there, and we’d be entering through the back as usual. I doubted we would get to see much of it besides elevators and hallways before hitting our rooms.

In fact, Marci got off the bus first and went inside with one of the security guards in tow. No doubt she would get all the key cards and direct us where we needed to go. Checking in ourselves at the desk would be too high of a security risk, and if word got out, fans could swamp the lobby pretty quickly. With social media so instantaneous, it’s not hard to get a ton of people to descend on a location pretty fast. Although, I’d seen that more in places where major bands like Social Sinners lived. West Coast hype and all that. But we were getting bigger. Hell, we were playing huge stadiums again. We were fucking back!

And I was pretty sure I was going to fuck it all up.

When Marci came back to the buses, she stopped on ours first. Miami and Jinx shared

this one with me. Wolf had one with his man and brother-in-law and Kay from our opening act, Bramble Punk. Still an odd name to me, but better than the last name, Lazer-fuckers or some shit. But Kay was odd, so it fit. The rest of his band was on the third bus. Roadies and Techs were on the fourth one, which was super full, with nothing but bunks. I was happy I didn't have to ride there. The final bus had a couple of security guys, Marci, and the new creative director, Kai. I didn't know much about him yet, but he was redesigning our logo, our websites, taking over our social media, and, oh, he designed the stage. Yeah. Coleman had hooked us up with him. Great. Each bus had a security guy as well. Ours was Drake. The equipment rode in two semi-trucks and parked inside the stadium fences to unload later.

Marci handed Drake a folder and said some shit to him, but all I heard was, "Get moving."

That was all the cue I needed to grab my duffle and sling it over my shoulder. At the last second, I reached into my bunk and grabbed my beat-up old cowboy hat and a pair of dark shades. Incognito and all that mess. Which was stupid, because it probably made me look more like a rock star with my cropped T-shirt and ripped jeans than not. Whatever. It was Drake's job to keep me safe, and I trusted him to do it.

We followed him through the Employees Only door and to the service elevator. Damn, we wouldn't even be using the first-class guest elevators. No. Service all the way. All stainless steel. Boring. On the third floor, the doors opened, and we were escorted down the hall and to the guest elevators. Yay ! And these were nice, more like you'd expect from a swanky place like this.

We stopped at our floor, though I wasn't sure what floor that was. I didn't think I'd need to know, anyway. We were always accompanied by security. They needed to know, and apparently, they did. Drake handed Miami a card and pointed to a door. "This is you and Jinx, sir."

“Thanks, man.” Miami keyed the card, but Drake held up a finger and went in. I assume he made sure no one was lurking in the closet before he came back and let them in.

The next door was my room, and he handed me the card. I swiped it and pushed the door open. Drake barreled past me and into the room, but I didn’t wait for him to finish his inspection before following. He’d gone into the bedroom area while I checked out the main room, which was set up like a living room with a sleek couch in front of the huge window facing a TV that hung on the wall. Beyond that was a small table and chairs and a wet bar. Now that had my attention. The mini-fridge was hidden behind a sleek panel the same as the rest of the cabinetry, but inside were tiny bottles of exactly what I was looking for. I pulled out a tiny bottle of Crown. It probably had one shot in it. That wouldn’t be enough, but I’d rectify that. I tossed my hat on the couch and dumped the entire contents of the bottle down my throat and grabbed another.

The warmth immediately spread through me, calming my nerves. I unwrapped a glass and poured my second bottle into that. Let’s be classy here .

“All clear.” Drake glared at me. Of course he did. “You’re supposed to wait outside.”

“What if I’m attacked out there...” I pointed to the front door, which was still wide open. “While you’re in here.” I raised my glass and winked.

Drake shook his head. “We should really assign an extra guard for you.”

I laughed maniacally as Drake shut the door behind him.

I took out my phone and texted my man, Marcos, making sure he knew where to go and when to show up. I so needed a hit before the concert tonight. With that done, I ordered room service. Steak and potatoes. Plus two Crown and Sevens. Doubles. If

that didn't do it, I'd order more. I'd rather go down to the bar. A quick Google showed a sophisticated meeting spot to drink and socialize, but that was off-limits. It would cause too many problems, and we'd only just started this tour. I was sure the guys would like at least one night of calm before my chaos exploded all over the fucking place.

I opened the front door, and predictably, Drake was leaning against the wall opposite the room where Jinx and Miami were. "I ordered room service."

Drake nodded.

I went back inside. Maybe a quick shower would slow me down a little, but I doubted it. I hardly ever slowed down. My internal clock was set to overdrive and had been for as long as I could remember. As a kid, I ran circles around everyone on the playground. I'd gotten into the school band and picked up drums to channel some of that energy. It wasn't long before I had a starter kit at home as well. I loved music. All kinds, but especially rock and punk. The harder and edgier the sound, the better. Before long, that's all I was ever doing. Drumming. I beat that first kit to death, though I'm sure it sounded like shit.

The rest of the afternoon and evening was pretty boring. Shower. Eat. Drink. Lay on the bed, wishing I could actually take a nap. Some song lyrics filtered through my head. I was not the star writer in this band. They gave me songs, and I whipped out some notation for it. But occasionally, I would get words. Most of the time, I didn't bother writing them down. But if they stuck with me longer than a minute, maybe I would. This time, I didn't. I fell asleep and napped until Drake pounded on the bedroom door. Time to rock.

Playing at a stadium was like no other thing in the world. We had a great soundcheck, loving how we rocked the place without fans in the seats and imagining how hyped the show would be with them. That was the best part of what we did. Being a part of

this band was a lifestyle of travel and music and the fans that made it possible for us to live it.

When we finished the check, we headed to the dressing areas, which were set up in the football players' locker rooms with a lot less privacy than we were used to, but it was also cool as shit. Atlanta Falcons memorabilia covered the walls. The players' names were on the cubbies they used for lockers. They didn't have their gear in them, which would have been neat, but I could understand it not being out where anyone could walk off with it. But each cubby had a cushioned bench where we could sit in front of them. Everything was red, gray, and black, and the Falcon logo was placed aesthetically around, including the giant one in the middle of the floor as you walked in the door. If I were a bigger football fan, I would have been super-stoked.

We had about thirty minutes until the meet and greet at the Overlook, a room they reserved and set up for us. There would be signing and chatting and pictures. I actually loved doing this kind of stuff, probably more than the others. I think it started feeling like a chore for them, something you had to do. But for me, it was something I was allowed to do. I was allowed time to hang out with cool fans who wanted to meet me and party to my beats. These people didn't have to be here, they wanted to. These were the people who made Midnight Hunt a possibility, and for our comeback, it was even more glorious. We had fans who remembered us from way back when and new fans checking us out for the first time. They created an electric atmosphere where I was privileged to live for a brief moment.

I hurried to pull a shirt over my head without even looking at what it was. I wasn't changing my pants. Before we took the stage, I would slip on one of my sleeveless shirts or a jacket, but for now, it was come as you are. Messy hair and holey jeans, be damned.

Drake and a few of the others on the security team ushered us up to the meeting space. We had a brief chat with reporters, but Miami and Jinx did most of the talking,

which was fine with me. I wasn't here for the media.

The Overlook was basically a big open space where people could mingle. We had tables set up to sell our shit, and all of it had the new logo and marketing. Kai was hovering there, inspecting everything. He was an interesting character, slight as a reed, with black hair that had dark red streaks, and it stuck up everywhere, but fashionably so. I imagined it took him hours to get it all exactly as he wanted it, with him fussing over every single strand.

Drake nudged me over to the tables. We had Sharpies set out that we could use to sign stuff, and in between each table, there were those banners that popped up out of a case that we could take selfies in front of. All appropriately branded. I wondered what we'd spent on that shit when we could have done plenty in front of the open area that let you look down into the stadium instead for free. There were always places to get pics. But whatever. I wasn't in it for the money, and if the fans liked it, that was fine with me.

As soon as I was settled, the doors opened and fans poured in. There was a rush to the table, and most of them headed for Jinx. He brought new fans in for sure since he had a successful solo career before we got back together. None of the rest of us had much success on our own. Well, Wolf had, but it had been behind the scenes, producing for others and playing studio gigs. He actually had massive credits on other artists' work, but he was super humble about it.

Me? Fuck. I fucked around, played with several bands, but without the Hunt, I wasn't much more than a hard-rocking drummer. With the Hunt though, we were spectacular.

I greeted fans making their way down the line. Signed T-shirts, posters, arms, and whatever else they stuck in front of me. We took pictures, mostly in front of the banners Kai had ordered, but once it cleared out and started getting late, I did a few in

front of the spot overlooking the stadium with a couple of dudes who were nearly as old as me. We took a few, making faces and throwing fingers, and a few serious ones too. I shook their hands with a slap and a fist bump, and they wished me a good show. They were what I thought of as original fans . They'd followed us from the beginning and talked about seeing us play at the Georgia Dome when it was still around. One of them wore our original concert shirt. These were the fans I loved most. Loyal to the core.

We wrapped up and headed back to the locker room to chill, which is when Drake touched his earpiece and asked me if I was expecting guests. All the security guards had the earpieces to chat with each other. I'd probably use the things to prank-talk everyone. Oh the funny lines I could come up with. Like Houston, we have a hard-on . And that's probably why I didn't get one.

"Yeah, Marcos," I answered instead. "I put him on the backstage list and asked him to come before the show."

"Got a last name?"

"Uh...no. Not really. Just Marcos. Got a phone number."

Drake huffed. He actually huffed. Well, to be fair, he hadn't been on tour with us before. He'd learn. I had people in most cities we were touring in. Not in Richmond, which was our next show, but the two after were Jersey and Boston. Yep, had people there. The East Coast was home for me, and I could get a hook-up nearly anywhere. At least in the major cities.

I sat on a bench and waited. Soon enough, Marcos came strutting in. He had some other dude with him. "Hey. Thanks for the passes, man." He slapped my hand and fist-bumped me. "This is Zade. Good friend of mine, loves your music."

“Hey, cool. Nice to meet you.” Zade’s smile was odd, or maybe awkward. I couldn’t tell if he was going for seductive, casual-friendly, or creepy. But maybe he was simply out of his element and feeling uncomfortable. He wore baggy jeans with a chain hanging on the side from belt loop to back pocket and a Midnight Hunt T-shirt that was two sizes too big and faded, but not enough that I couldn’t tell what it was—our old logo—but enough to be super comfortable and soft.

“Yeah, Zade. Thanks for coming, man.”

His face flushed, and I thought he was going to say something else, but he didn’t.

Marcos did. “Yeah. So, got a minute, Zig?” He nodded to the side like he wanted privacy to talk, but it was more like he wanted to make our transaction, and so did I.

“Yeah, come on. Zade, make yourself at home.” Zade nodded and Marcos followed me into the shower room. We weren’t technically supposed to be in there, but no one stopped us, either. “Got something for me?”

“Yeah, good stuff. Two bags. Purple is the sativa. Before shows, right. Give you a good buzz. And this one with silver tape leans more to indica. Before bed. Put you out.”

“Quality?”

“You know it’s there. I don’t let you down. Ever.” He shook his head and handed me the bags.

We’d already agreed on price over text, so I handed him more than he’d asked for out of my wallet. “Dude...” he said, still shaking his head and acting like he was giving some of it back, but it was an act. We both knew it.

“Nah. You always come through, dude. Keep it.”

“Cool, man.” We did the hand slap—fist bump. I stuffed the bags under my shirt until we got back to the main dressing area.

I dumped the bags into my duffel, but not before I pinched some out of the purple bag and rolled it up. But I couldn’t light up in here since I had security tailing after me. Well, they worked for us, so I wasn’t going to sweat it. In fact, I was going to make Drake complicit. Marcos and Zade trailed after me as I went and found him. It wasn’t too hard. He was like a head and shoulder taller than everyone else in the room.

“Dude, Drake! I need your help, dude.”

“What can I do for you?” The words felt like it pained him to say them.

“We...” I gestured to Marcos and Zade. “We need to go outside. Like a back door or something.”

“I don’t think—”

“It’s a pre-show requirement for me, dude. It’s going to make this show go a hell of a lot smoother. And there’s no threats. It’s still early.”

“Fine. Give me a minute.” Drake stormed off, tapping that earpiece.

“That’s new.” Marcos bumped his shoulder into mine. We’d known each other since Midnight Hunt had been playing dives. “Ya’ll sure have come a loooong way, dude.”

“No lie. We’ve been lucky. Twice.”

Zade scoffed. “Lucky my ass. You’re talented. All ya’ll.” He motioned around, and I

had to assume he was indicating the band.

“Thanks, man. It’s a group thing, for sure. We’re all better together. Except maybe Jinx.”

“Nah...” Zade rolled his eyes. “His solo stuff wasn’t near as good as the Hunt.”

I gave him a cheeky smile. I couldn’t deny I liked hearing that.

Drake walked back over, motioning for us to follow him. He led us through a few back hallways in what looked like a service area and out to a loading dock. We found a more secluded space, and I lit that bad boy up. It wasn’t a big one, but we passed it around until it was only a roach.

All things in my head settled. I bounced on my toes. “This is what I’m talking about. Yeah.”

Marcos said, “For real.”

Zade added, “This is so cool.”

We grinned at each other like a troop of monkeys. “Let’s get back in. The show’s gonna start. Ya’ll staying to watch?”

Marcos nodded subtly, but Zade grinned ear to ear. “Wouldn’t miss it for anything, man.”

Showtime !

When I took the stage, I was on fire. I felt ready. And I wasn’t thinking about Coleman at all. Nope. Not at all. I didn’t give a fuck what he was doing as I jogged

across the stage with my sticks over my head. And I wasn't going to. Nope. I was getting into the zone. I was stoked.

I counted off The One About Fighting and we were rolling.

Wolf's bass thrummed out the beat along with me while Jinx hit the licks like his fingers were lit. His ax screeched. And Miami. Whatever you wanted to say about him, egotistical prima donna, whatever, he had the vocal chops of a Viking god. And he let loose, stoking up the crowd.

We went through our lineup and our solos, the bulk of our show, and moved to one of our new songs. Wolf kicked it off with a killer backbeat for a few bars before I joined with a pounding drum intro. When Jinx slid his bar over his strings to make them hiss and scream, we were rocking it out. Miami's signature scream had the crowd screaming even louder.

Whisky Gone

Dropped the bottle

In the trash

Another bottle of whisky gone

There's an itch

Like a rash

Never be the same

Now you're gone

Drinking again

Thinking again

Wondering where you are

Who you doing?

Where's the ruing?

Seize my day

Not begging you to stay

I listened to the words as I stomped on the bass drum. I could have written that damn song. Lyrics didn't normally ring true with me, or at least not on that level. I pushed those thoughts away, concentrating on the music. Fuck feelings.

When the song ended, I stood, raising my sticks over my head. Miami and Jinks dashed off the stage and handed their guitars to their roadies to store for tomorrow's show. I circled around my kit to the front of the stage and motioned for the crowd to get riled up. This wasn't what I normally did, but I felt like I needed to spice some shit up after Whiskey Gone and it's too close to home lyrics. So, I stopped at Miami's mic. "What are you doing, Atlanta?"

As expected, the crowd went nuts. Concertgoers usually liked to see unexpected things, and this was it for tonight. "We're happy to see you here..." I paused, waiting for them to settle some, feeling what it was like for Miami, at least a little bit. "The guys are leaving." I pointed to the side stage, and as expected, the stadium erupted. I chuckled into the mic, and when the noise died a little, very little but I'd take it, I held my sticks up over my head. "You gotta be louder than that if you want them back."

The crowd surged forward a little, and for a second, I worried. Horrible accidents had happened with crowds losing control and stampeding. But these were our fans. I wasn't letting that shit happen. "Hey, now. No rushing forward. Don't get that crazy." I pointed out to the audience.

I glanced over to the guys. Wolf was drinking out of a water bottle. Miami was looking at me like What the fuck, dude? And Jinx simply shook his head. He knew. Good ol' Ziggy was gonna do whatever I was gonna do.

"Okay, Atlanta. Here's the deal. I'm going to slip off and grab some water. And if you want the Hunt to play some more, you have to yell. Don't rush the stage. You know how this works. Just scream until you're horse..." I laughed manically, loving the reaction I was pulling from them. "Midnight Hunt fans rule!" I screamed into the mic.

I jogged off stage as they did exactly what I asked. I shouldered past Miami, ignoring the shit he was spouting and grabbed a bottle of cold water. I poured some of it over my head and swigged the rest. My shirt was soaked, and I unbuttoned the last three that I had still done up, so it hung loose.

Miami stretched his arms over his head and groaned. "Whatever..."

"Hey, they loved it." I shrugged off his criticism and jogged back out ahead of the others. Before heading to my kit, I pulled my shirt off and tossed it into the crowd.

Jinx strapped on his guitar, getting ready for the encore, and so did Wolf. Miami waited to join us, bouncing on his feet. I slid behind the kit and started pounding out what I'd worked up for the pre-intro to the song. Something to get the crowd going again.

We were going to play Dip and Grind , our most popular song from this album we

were promoting. Everyone knew it, so this interlude was simply a tease.

When Wolf was ready, he gave me a nod, and I slipped into the real intro for the song. This one had a different edge to it than our other stuff. It was a little funky and fun. And perfect to end the night. Wolf joined in on his spot, and Jinx joined right after him. And that was Miami's cue. He jogged out, motioning upward like a bird, getting the crowd going yet again. Those fuckers wouldn't be able to talk in the morning.

Miami screamed out the first line...

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

My friend Pierce actually sang the lyrics on the album because it wasn't Miami's style at all, but he couldn't tour with us. We struck a deal with him to play his lyrics from a recording when we played live. That took a lot of work to get to. Lawyers were involved. The original agreement had us not playing it, but it was such a fan favorite we couldn't get away with that. We also had a video of Pierce singing, and it played on the three giant-ass screens around us. One behind and the others on either side.

Miami sang with him as if he were here. And Pierce was fine with it because he got paid every time we did the song. What was surprising was the crowd singing along with him.

Pierce's voice rang out over the speakers.

Running like the wind as fast as

your feet will take you

Screaming wild with the wind

until I stop chasing

You back track lee and tack anything to get away

no matter how hard I beg you to stay

Feels like a race but one I can't win

Then you're close, spinning around,

so we can do it again

Miami's voice broke into the chorus even as Pierce was still holding the last note.

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

every time I get close

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

Duck and turn where I can't follow

If you don't stop

We're gonna break

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

We're gonna rock it

We're gonna shake

Everything is coming down

Grinding to a halt

Stop

On that last word, we all stopped. I loved that part and couldn't hold in my chuckle as we started playing again. The crowd went right along with us. And if they were disappointed that Pierce didn't come out, they didn't show it. When the song was over, as required, Miami thanked Pierce and indicated that other obligations didn't allow him to tour with us.

There was talk on the side that he might do the song with us when we played Rocktoberfest this year. That would be killer, and I'd enjoy seeing my friend again. Even if he was kind of a prick.

We walked to the front of the stage and lined up, taking a bow after Dip and Grind ended.

Show was over.

When we walked off the stage again, we weren't going back. We high-fived each other in the hallway, and I bumped my hip into Miami. "Great show, man."

"I couldn't be happier. Hope the rest of the tour goes this well."

"Fuck yeah!" Wolf hollered and wrapped his arms around my shoulders. "Damn, you're sweaty, you shirtless beast."

We all laughed, bursting into the locker room again like a flock of loons. I headed to my area and grabbed a towel to wipe down. I'd take a shower when I got back to the hotel, but I needed a shirt. After running the towel over my shoulders, neck, and under the back of my hair, I tossed it on the bench. Grabbing a fresh concert shirt with our new logo on it, I joined the others in the center of the massive room, where chairs were placed around a round table. There were a couple areas like this for us to hang out, and we'd be here a little while. Backstage pass holders would stream in shortly, expecting to chat us up. Back in the day, groupies would be included in this, male and female alike, ready to party, fuck, or both. But not now. Just fans. There was a difference.

I grabbed a beer out of the cooler, not caring who was responsible for delivering it. Coleman was always great about arranging refreshments and things we'd need. I vaguely recalled contracts were involved, but I didn't care. I actually trusted Coleman. Fucking Coleman. I didn't need the reminder. Hell, cold and wet was all I cared about as I popped the bottle open. I sat back in one of the caramel-colored leather chairs after taking a big swig. It was oversized, probably more suitable for football players, but super comfortable. "This is nice."

Fans started coming in and shaking hands with us, getting things signed. I nodded and smiled. I enjoyed interacting with fans, but I was tired and had a long day ahead of me tomorrow. I perked up when Marcos and his friend showed up. Couldn't remember his name. I nodded when he greeted me. "You like the show?"

Marcos gave a thumbs up. "Ya'll rocked. Right, Zade." Ah... Zade was the friend.

"You killed it, man. The part at the end where you talked to the audience. That was epic." He was practically jumping up and down, and while I appreciated his excitement, his energy was wearing me down. I'd been up too long, and I did all the interactions and played the show. I needed a hot shower, a strong doobie, and a soft bed. Stat.

“Glad you liked it. It was fun.”

“Liked it? Fuck, I loved it, man. And how can I get a shirt like that? I only have the old one.”

“I like the old one.”

Zade’s eyes widened. “Want to trade?”

I didn’t really. I’d end up throwing it away, so I figured I could just get him a new one. “Nah...you keep it, but I’ll get you one. Hey, Kai, hey.”

When Kai saw me waving at him, he walked over. He glanced at Marcos and Zade. “What’s up, Zig?”

I pulled at the bottom of my shirt. “Hey, can we get one of these for my friend, Zade, here?”

“Sure, I can get one for both of them. What sizes?” He looked Zade up and down. “Large? It’ll be big, but if it shrinks up, it’ll still fit. That work?”

“Oh, yeah, sure.”

Marcos shook his head and blushed a little. “I don’t need one.”

“Nonsense. I’ll get you a medium.” Marcos was a smaller guy. Kai jogged off before anyone could change their minds.

A few minutes later, he came back with a couple of shirts in hand. “Here you go. And you. And...” He pulled a marker out of his back pocket and handed it to me. “In case you want to sign these?”

Marcos didn't seem interested in any of it, though I'd always known him to be super laid back, so I wouldn't expect him to be fan-boying all over me. We'd known each other a long time, after all. Zade, on the other hand, was a different story altogether. He jumped up and down and extended the shirt to me. "Yes, yes. Would you please?"

Kai had the foresight to design the logo in a way that gave us a nice white spot to sign them. Being an abstract logo on a black shirt would have been impossible otherwise. "Sure, man." I uncapped the marker and signed on that spot, leaving room for the others if he wanted to collect them. "I'm sure these guys would be happy to add to that."

Zade clutched the shirt to his chest. "No. Just you." It seemed a little weird, but fans could be like that. I'd seen a few others who picked a favorite and ignored the rest of the band, so I let it go.

After chilling a little while, security started clearing out the fans. We didn't want to linger too long. We had to remember what it was like to get through a long tour. It was never simply performing on stage with all the meet and greets, interviews, socializing, and partying. It took a lot out of us.

"I have an early interview tomorrow. You can catch it on 96 Rock tomorrow." I gestured toward the door since Zade didn't seem to want to leave.

"That's cool, dude. Come on, Zade, let's bounce."

"Fine. Nice meeting you, Zig." He turned abruptly and hugged me before practically running to the exit.

I shot Marcos a questioning look. He shrugged and rolled his eyes like he didn't know what the fuck that was about either. "Later, man." He fist-bumped me and sauntered out after his friend.

“That was an interesting couple,” Wolf commented.

I didn’t actually think they were a couple or that Wolf meant it that way. But I chuckled anyway as I said, “I never knew Marcos swung that way.”

“I remember him from that show we did last time. It wasn’t here, but Fox Theatre.” He pointed with one finger on the same hand that held his beer bottle.

“Much smaller show.” The Fox held around four thousand, but we had about an eighty-thousand crowd tonight. A world of difference.

“Right. Good show though. So I take it Marcos is a friend of yours. Were you hoping to hook up?”

I practically spit my beer. “Friend. Only friend, dude.” Thinking about Marcos that way made me want to puke. “More like a brother.”

“Ahh...plus you have Coleman. Where is he, anyway?”

That was the million-dollar question. He had been with us for almost all of our last tour. And when we recorded. Fuck, we had been practically inseparable since the band got back together at Rocktoberfest two years ago. Now he was a fucking ghost.

Finally, back in the hotel room. I stripped down and showered with my eyes closed. Didn’t even have enough energy to jack off. I needed sleep. I hadn’t been kidding about that early interview. We didn’t have to do a soundcheck or anything the next day since we kept the same settings, which were dead on. So Kai filled the time with interviews and another major meet and greet.

I face-planted on the bed after my shower with nothing on but the towel around my waist. I expected to be out in a matter of seconds. But that wasn’t what happened. My

body was down for that game plan, but my brain was not.

It decided to kick around those words in my head again. I did an extremely difficult pushup and grabbed a notebook out of my duffle. We all carried them around because inspiration hit when it hit. So I jotted down what was in my head, hoping to get them out enough to calm that brain down so I could sleep.

You threw my heart in a pine box

My love went deep, six feet -- repeat

Can't even claw my way back—nowhere left to dance

With me you buried another chance or no second chance

There's no second chance

I could hear Miami really screaming the last line of that. I tapped the notebook with my pen. I was shit at putting notes to the words. I was never great at reading music. But drum notation, I could do. I picked up drums for the more physical aspects of it, but I never regretted it. Drum notation always felt like a personal love language written just for me. I learned it quickly and writing it felt like a breeze. I added some beats to words but kept it simple. I'd let the guys play with it before I really laid down the rhythm, but I could practically hear it all in my head, so I knew it was one we could work on. I jotted down a little more...

You came to me with offerings

A life and more

Flowers and verve

But you bring only death in a carriage of black

Leaving my heart a fatality

That part wasn't as good. It felt forced, and it didn't flow. But I knew better than to scratch it out. Instead, I drew brackets around it and wrote work on this in the margins. The guys would see what I was going for and play with it until it felt right. Wolf and Jinx were super good at that. They generally wrote most of our songs, though hits came from different places. From life, from our hearts and souls, but often they were from fun things.

It was pretty clear that this one had Coleman's fingerprints all over it. Sharing that with the guys would be hard. I did not like to be vulnerable, even in front of them. But a song was a song, and if they said something mushy, I could tell them to fuck right off.

With that out of my system, I rolled back over on the bed and was out like the old proverbial light.

The next morning, I woke up early and looked out the window at the sunrise over the skyline. It was incredible, so I grabbed my phone and snapped a few pics. We would be going to a lot of places, and I knew from having done this once before I needed to appreciate all I could.

I got on the floor and did my yoga. I needed to stretch and help strengthen my back. I wasn't getting any fucking younger, and I'd learned long ago that backs for drummers could be an issue. Repetitive Stress Injury was real. So was Carpal Tunnel and a host of other things. That list made yoga vital.

I slowly went through my practice, ending flat on my back with my eyes closed and arms out to my sides, palms pressed to the floor. I could lie like that all day.

But my cell rang. It was Coleman's ringtone.

five

The Need To Go To VA

“Coleman...” Ziggy’s rough voice went straight to my dick, even after all this time.

“Did you finish yoga? I didn’t interrupt, did I?” I knew his routine. I couldn’t count the mornings he’d be up way before me and the first thing he did was his stretches. I admired his commitment, even when I would have rather been snuggling him in bed.

“Yeah, done. Need to grab coffee. Oh, room service is here? I don’t remember—”

“I did it. I wanted to make sure you had a good breakfast.” Which was another reason why I called him. Despite our issues, I couldn’t stop caring for him, and he would skip breakfast or only grab something small.

“Hang on.” I listened to him opening the door and saying something, most likely to Drake. The door closed. “Thanks. This looks fantastic. Incredibly thoughtful, and you really did not have to do this.”

“I know. But. I care about you. That doesn’t just turn off.”

Ziggy hummed. He didn’t open up a lot, and most of the things I knew about him were gleaned from our interactions, not from anything he said. “’s good.”

“Nice. So... I miss you, Zig.” I didn’t expect him to respond. Miss you and love you were words he didn’t do. “I know I sound like I’m backtracking, but I want to see

you.”

“Now who’s jerking who around?”

“You’re the one who said it’s too late, but I don’t think it is. I never did.”

“Coleman. You demand things from me that I don’t know if I can give.”

“I’ve thought about that.” I scrunched down on the sofa, plopping my socked feet on the coffee table. It was a sturdy one that could take on the worst of my feet. I’d even sat on it, and I wondered if I could fuck Ziggy on it. It didn’t matter. We might not ever have sex again. But I had to try. “I told you I know you. So maybe...I can see how you feel by your actions, not your words. That’s kind of what I was trying to get to before. But your actions have been twisting me up. You pull me close, then push me away—”

“We’ve been over this.”

“I only want to know for sure that we have something.”

“I told you I don’t know. It’s not that I don’t feel for you, Cole...I feel. And it’s not like I’m screwing around. I’m not. Even out here on tour alone, you’re the only one I want for that.”

“So what is it? What’s holding you back here?”

“Long term, I... Fuck, this is hard.” I waited while Ziggy gathered his thoughts, giving him the space he needed. Finally, he huffed, “I’m a rocker. A drummer. I tour. Even when I wasn’t with the Hunt. I joined bands and toured. It’s what I do. It’s what I know, and I don’t know if I can give that up. I don’t know if I can be someone you need.”

“I know all of that, and I’m not asking you to stop. Goddamn, I followed you all over the fucking country. And I’m working on setting up European dates for you this winter. I know I can go with you. I’m at a place in my life where I can do whatever the fuck I want. And I fucking choose you. What don’t you get about that?”

“I didn’t ask you to choose me...”

“You did.”

Silence.

I stood and made my way over to the wet bar. I had juice in the mini-fridge there. I poured some OJ, thinking that would be refreshing, but immediately topped it off with vodka. It was going to be that kind of morning. I took a long drink. Breathed. Still nothing from Ziggy. “Babe. I’m not asking you for all that much. I just don’t want to be your lackey. I want to be your partner. I want to take care of you but not be commanded to run your errands.” I was referring to the tasks he kept giving me early on in our relationship...like transporting his new motorcycle here and there. At first, I did it all, used to rock stars making strange requests, but it hadn’t been because I was working for him. Our contract didn’t include any of that kind of bullshit. I did it because I wanted in his pants. At first. And later, because I wanted in his heart. But I should have put my foot down and said no long before I did.

“I don’t know what you want. I don’t have any answers.”

“Can we start over?” I finished my drink and set the empty glass on the counter.

“Start over how?”

How indeed. How did you go back to go without stopping at every square on the board? We’d already gone around once, and I failed to collect my two hundred

dollars. Fuck me . “I don’t know.” I ran my hands through my hair. “How about I join you and we see what happens?”

The silence was killing me, but my heart leapt when he uttered, “Okay.”

“Brilliant. So, can I join you in Richmond?”

“Yeah. That sounds good. I gotta go now. I want to finish this lovely breakfast someone ordered for me, before I have to jet out to a radio interview.” That wasn’t anything I’d set up. I was too removed now to know what was going on, but I wasn’t surprised either.

“Okay, babe. Richmond it is.”

“Bye.”

Fuck. I had to get a flight to Virginia.

I’d only jacked off three times since Ziggy agreed to see me again. I didn’t want to come off like I only wanted the sex. Sure, it had been a ton of fun, and I did want more of it. But I wanted to show him that I was interested in him for more than that. And with a little luck, he’d accept that. I felt like maybe he’d been used too many times. Or seen too many things... Fucked too many groupies.

I didn’t know and sure as hell didn’t want my imagination running wild on that. Focusing on a future was better. And what would that look like? Maybe I’d sell my place in Denver. I didn’t need it. But I didn’t want to live out of a suitcase forever either. With Ziggy’s home base in Miami, though, it made sense to get a place there. So, I scrolled through Zillow while waiting for my flight.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:49 pm

six

On the Way to VA

S even fucking hours on a bus. Alone with Miami and Jinx. They retired to the back, probably to fuck. So fuck them. I was bored and horny. I slept some but spent more time tossing and turning in my bunk.

When I got a text from Coleman that he was at the airport, it made my dick super hard. Fuck me again. I seriously needed to rub one out, and there was no privacy in this tin can. Sure, for the dynamic duo in the back with the door shut, but I didn't have a door, only a curtain. I needed to change some shit. Why did I agree to this crap? Oh, yeah. Because Coleman was fucking off. Well, he'd finally pulled his head out of his ass and was meeting us in Richmond. I pictured some serious hotel fucking. But then—

The picture came to a screeching halt. We weren't staying the night in Richmond. The show was some outdoor festival, and we'd be loading back on the bus to head to New Jersey. We would have a couple days there, but not Richmond. And Coleman should already know that. I sent him a text: No hotels in Richmond. I'm soo not fucking on the bus.

I might have in the past. Hell, I had two twink's bunked in with me at one time. That was fun. But not what I did anymore. That was a long time ago.

Coleman texted back: Gonna get a room. We'll fly to Jersey. I have your schedule. It's doable.

It might be doable, but I didn't want to be the one to tell Marci. She would skin me alive—metaphorically. Still. I texted: You tell Marci .

He sent a thumbs up. Well, thank fuck for that. Coleman could organize anything, but I still had to get there. I looked out the window. I saw a sign for Port of Richmond and figured we were getting close, but not close enough. I shoved my dick, wishing it would chill the fuck out. It didn't help.

I stuck my hand down my pants and grabbed it. Fucking monster. I wasn't small by any means. The head was super sensitive as I rubbed my finger over my slit. If I was trying to stave this shit off, I was failing miserably.

There was only one thing to do. I stuck my head out from behind the curtain. In the front of the bus, Drake had his legs stretched out, and I could hear him softly snoring. The driver had music playing. In the back, the door was still shut. So fuck it. I ducked back in and gave my dick a tug. I was ready to explode. This was going to be fast and dirty. I reached into my duffle for yesterday's shirt. I'd need to do laundry when we got to New Jersey. For now, it would do.

With that ready, I got busy stroking my cock, thinking about Coleman going down on me. Fuck, I was happy we could find some alone time. I missed him so fucking much. More than I liked to admit, even to myself. I hated feeling like that, so I shut that shit down and thought about his sexy ass and long legs.

It didn't take long before I was grunting with each stroke, chasing that orgasm all around.

The curtain flew open.

“Fucking God!” I grabbed the shirt and covered my dick. “What the hell?”

Miami had a shit-eating grin on his face. “Whatcha doin’ in here, Ziggy?”

“Fuck right off, Sandro.” Using his real name would show how pissed I was. But he didn’t seem to care.

He cackled. Mother-fucking-cackled.

I grabbed the curtain, yanking it out of his hand. “Go back to your man, you nosey fucker.”

Jinx had to get in on everything too, of course. “What’s going on?”

Fuck them both. “Nothing. Leave me alone.”

“Miami, come on, babe. Leave Zig alone.” He sounded on my side, but he was smothering his laughter, so no, I didn’t trust that.

“Not living this one down, Zig.”

“You better shut your face, Miami.” I felt like punching him. Why the fuck would he torture me?

“Sorry, Zig. Ignore him.” At least Jinx had the decency to sound more sincere. They disappeared from the hall, and I had to assume Jinx had pulled the asshole back to their room. I wanted to yell out something about Miami being whipped, but I didn’t. I let it go. I could take his harassment. It was meant in fun. I knew that. These guys were family. And like any family, we had our tiffs and teasing, but we dealt with it all. But fuck...I wanted my man.

And to get the fuck off this bus.

At least I wasn't hard anymore.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:49 pm

seven

Stopping in Richmond

Where the fuck are you?

I glanced at the text from Ziggy as I jogged through the crowd, jostling people along the way, but I couldn't get to the stage fast enough. They were about to go on. I'd missed soundcheck and them getting ready. This was an outdoor fest, so no dressing rooms. They had to get ready on the bus, but I hired golf carts to drive them to the stage. The thought was to elevate them from the other acts. Midnight Hunt wasn't the headlining band, but they were the last band playing before F-Holes hit the stage. And that band was incredible, with not one but two cellists. So I wanted our guys to stand out. Give them the royal treatment as much as possible.

Even though I came up through the performers' entrance and the back side of the stage, there were still a lot of people lingering. Security, other bands and their entourage, roadies. Our crew had a lot of people too, so I got it, but I needed them all to get the fuck out of my way. It had been too long, and I needed to lay eyes on Ziggy. Like now!

"Excuse me. Heading to the stage. Please, move."

A big guy turned around, and for a second, I thought he was going to crush me, but I recognized him as one of our security staff, thankfully. "Mr. Coleman." He smiled politely.

“Hallelujah! Get me to the stage.” I grabbed his arms, desperately.

“You got it. Come on.” He turned toward the stage and stomped through the people like a machine. “Make way. Move. Clear out.” No pleases or thank yous. But the people moved and finally, I was at the edge of the stage and walking up the side steps.

Ziggy was pounding out the beat, shaking his head, sweat flying. Fucking glorious. Seeing him in the zone like that when he played was probably the first thing that seized my heart and had me falling for him in the first place. He was fucking spectacular. They were cranking through Tattoo You , so I put that about halfway through the lineup for this one, but it was a guess. They were professional and could rearrange what they were going to play in a heartbeat. Miami read the crowd and if he turned and gave them a sign to change it up, they did.

Miami screamed out the last line, “Standing on the brink...Tattoo you.” His voice echoed through the crowd. That was what I had been after when I first called him up. That voice, Jinx shredding on guitar, and their chemistry together had dollar signs written all over it. But when Ziggy slammed out the last few beats, hitting the toms hard, I knew that’s why I stayed. I didn’t have to, and it had nothing to do with money, but these guys were amazing, and Ziggy was...

He turned his head, zoning in on me as if he could hear my thoughts. And smiled, lighting up not only his face but his whole fucking body. He stood like he wanted to come over but remembering where he was, changed plans. He flung a stick hard, and it sailed out into the audience, making the crowd scream and scramble for the prize. He winked at me, grabbed another set of sticks, dropping his single, and counted off their next song, Still A Person . I was expecting More Like A Ballad , but with this crowd and shorter time to perform, perhaps they dropped that one.

Still A Person was shorter and was fantastic for them, though. Donovan Seibert,

brother of Wolf's partner, stepped up next to me and threw his arm over my shoulder, shaking me. "I love this one. Yeah!"

I didn't know what to say. "Right." I didn't know the kid well, but I probably shouldn't call him kid. He was now a full partner in Harrison's legal practice. Entertainment lawyers. Harrison was also Jinx's ex, which was how he met Wolf in the first place. What a triangle there. Donovan actually took over the Midnight Hunt account because Harrison was too close. I respected that. They were the best in the business, and both traveled with the band.

"Great seeing you, Coleman. Glad you're here. If anyone asks, I'm going to hang out with the Bramble Punk guys. Okay?" He patted my shoulder as he shouted in my ear and left when I nodded. I thought something was up with our opening band's lead singer, Kay, and Donovan. There was no huge announcement, and if it was true, they were keeping it on the down low. But there were signs, including leaving the side stage for Midnight Hunt to go hang with our opening act. Bramble Punk was good. Jinx and Wolf had helped put them together, rallying around Kay, whose prior band was not good, but Kay had potential. And loyalty. They were still no Midnight Hunt. Not yet, anyway. They weren't playing at this festival. There hadn't been enough time or space on the docket. But I figured they probably would need a break at this point in the tour when I'd scheduled it, so I wouldn't be surprised if they were hanging out at the bus.

When the song was done, they kicked right into Whiskey Gone , one of the newer ones. I sang along. Well, I mouthed the words while Miami sang and screamed in turn. I checked the time on my watch, noting they were probably on the last song, which meant they were either going long or they weren't going to do Dip and Grind . I didn't know which.

When Whisky Gone was over, they acted like they were leaving the stage for sure. Jinx flicked his guitar pick out into the crowd. Miami pulled his shirt off and slung it

over the heads of the first few rows, causing the people behind them to scramble for it. I never understood why people would want a stinky, sweaty shirt, no matter who had worn it. But my fandom for this group had begun to center around Ziggy. And he held his sticks over his head, circled out from behind the kit, and then threw them one at a time out into the audience. He clapped his hands over his head and followed the others off the stage. I lost track of Wolf, who was behind him, because I only had eyes for my drummer boy.

He rushed over to me and jumped up and down like he was twelve. “Ohmygawd. You made it. I’m pissed at you for taking so fucking long. Fuck! I broke a mic during soundcheck, got busted jacking off in the bus and fucking hell, I didn’t think you’d ever fucking get here. Can we go to the hotel? Oh shit. We have to do one more song. Listen.” He’d run most of that all in one sentence without pausing for air.

“Breathe, Zig.”

“No. Listen. Guys. Miami,” he yelled over the crowd, which was getting increasingly louder. They were chanting something.

I leaned in so Zig could hear me. “What are they saying?”

He mouthed along with them, “Dip. And. Grind. Dip. And. Grind.”

Miami walked past us, strutting straight out to the stage, where he started goading the fans, playing with them in a way only Miami could. He did a little squat thrust along with the chanting. And unbelievably, they got louder. He chuckled into the mic. “I know you want that.” The surge forward made me suddenly concerned, but Miami had that shit. “Easy now.” He patted the air down in front of him and they quieted, settling a little. “We are out of time, but since you asked so nicely...I don’t know how we can say no. Guys? What do you think?”

Ziggy didn't so much answer as jog back out on the stage. He practically bowled Miami over to get to the mic. "Hell yeah!" He wasn't even to the mic yet, but it picked him up. The response of the fans was incredible. Miami shoved Ziggy off of him, pushing him toward the drums at the back of the stage. Ziggy turned and flipped him off with both hands before returning to his drums and grabbing another set of sticks. Miami kicked the air as if miming that he was kicking Ziggy. They played like that a lot, and the crowd loved it. The others had strapped in while they were fooling around. The problem here was that they didn't have a big screen to show the video, and I didn't know if they'd even queued up the recording. But the guys seemed to have other ideas.

Miami grabbed the mic still in the stand and pulled it to him. "Guys. We don't have what we need for this one ready, so we're gonna wing it. Jinx is going to do Pierce's part. Are you okay with that?" The crowd roared. But they didn't know how much trouble the guys were going to get into for this. They had a contract, and doing the song without the recording broke that. I shook my head and waved my arms, but Miami ignored me, and so did the rest of the band. Ziggy pounded off the funky beat, and Wolf joined in on the bass.

They went through with Miami screaming out the first chorus with Jinx picking up the verse.

Running like the wind as fast as

your feet will take you

Screaming wild with the wind

until I stop chasing

You back track lee and tack anything to get away

no matter how hard I beg you to stay

Feels like a race but one I can't win

Then you're close, spinning around, so we can do it again

It wasn't Pierce, but Jinx was good. Since he brought his own fandom to the Hunt, they were probably loving the hell out of this. Jinx sang his own songs but did not front Midnight Hunt. But he was pretty good and probably should sing a little more. The two of them had incredible chemistry and showed it on stage, playing against each other, but this song took it to another level.

Harrison came up behind me and bumped my shoulder. "Did you know about this?"

I shook my head again and leaned in so he could hear—that seemed like the standard when you stood next to the band—and gestured to the stage. "Tried to tell them no."

"They don't listen." Harrison looked pissed. His firm represented the band, and this was going to give them more work. I was sure Harrison was thinking about how to get ahead of this fuck up. He glanced around, probably looking for his brother. "Have you seen Don?"

Now, I nodded. "He's with Kay's band."

"Fuck." I saw him mouth the word more than heard him, but I sure as hell understood.

They went through the song and finished up. It was fantastic and the fans loved it. But what was this going to cost them? Pierce had already shown he could be kind of an asshole.

The next thing I knew, I had my arms full of Ziggy and couldn't think about anything else. Fine with me! "Let's go back to the bus and grab my bag."

Ziggy jumped on the bus to get his stuff, and I waited outside. As he came down the steps, Wolf and Harrison stormed by and into their own vehicle, and they were whisper-fighting the entire way. They didn't even notice us. Ziggy thumbed over his shoulder in their direction. "We're probably going to be in trouble."

"The song. I was surprised you did it without the recording."

Ziggy shrugged. "Jinx was good though. Right?"

As if he conjured the man by saying his name, Jinx and Miami rode up in a golf cart. They hopped off. "What's going on?" Miami asked while Jinx waved at us.

"Talking about Dip and Grind ." Ziggy had a shit-eating grin aimed at Miami as if trying to stir shit up. That was my Ziggy, though.

"Eh...we'll throw some money at Pierce, and he'll get over it."

Ziggy's eyebrows jumped. "You think? Because I know Pierce, and he's kind of a prima donna."

"He was a pain in the ass over it during negotiations, if I remember right." I had to add my thoughts. This could be bigger than Miami thought.

"I don't know. We'll work it out. We have great lawyers, you know." Miami nodded to the other bus where Wolf and Harrison had disappeared.

Jinx scoffed. "We can't keep relying on them to get us out of trouble. We need to think about these things ahead of time."

“I didn’t see you saying no when we started playing on stage.” Miami shrugged as if he were innocent.

Before they could get started with the argument, though, one of the security guards walked up. “Excuse me, Ziggy. Your guest is at the gate. You forgot to put his name on the list, and we need an okay.”

“Guest?” Ziggy asked.

“Zade Watley. Drake said he remembered him from Atlanta.”

“Oh, yeah. Didn’t realize...that’s okay, let him back.” He blushed a little, barely pink on his cheeks, but I noticed if no one else did. I noticed everything about him. “Sorry, Cole. We’re going to have to wait a bit. Fans, you know.” Ziggy wiped his forehead again, the humidity was killing him.

“No problem.” I wanted to kiss the side of his head and pull him to me, but it felt too private for this open, public setting.

“Okay, then...” Miami moved to open the bottom compartment on the bus. “Let’s get some chairs out. We have some time to kill anyway.” They often stored chairs in there so they could hang out when needed. It was particularly useful at festivals, and at the upcoming Rocktoberfest, it would be a necessity. Jinx got on the bus and came back with towels for the three of them to wipe down and helped with chairs. We all sat in a semi-circle with two empty seats, and I assumed Ziggy’s friend would take up at least one of them.

I’d never met any of his friends, so I was intrigued. Finally, Drake walked up with the guy, Zade. He was wearing one of the new Midnight Hunt shirts, and it looked like it had been signed. Drake hovered in the back, alert as if he didn’t totally trust the guy.

“Hey, Zade.” Ziggy stood and reached his hand out for Zade to shake. “This is Miami and Jinx, you know, of course. And this is Coleman.”

I stood to shake his hand and noticed Zade’s eyes narrow a little, but he shook anyway. “Yeah, hey.”

Ziggy shuffled one of the chairs to the side. “You can join us if you want. I don’t know how long we’ll be staying. The busses have to get going soon.”

“Yeah, New Jersey is next, right?” he asked. “Loved seeing y’all in Atlanta, and we had such a great time backstage, I thought, why not, right?” He gave Ziggy a look that read more like they’d gotten up to something, but I knew better. First, Zade wasn’t Ziggy’s type at all. He was younger—too young. And he was scrawny, and Ziggy was likely to break him had they messed around. He was certainly nothing like me, and maybe that was the ultimate thing. I wanted to be Ziggy’s type. And...I recognized the green-eyed monster lurking there, even if it didn’t make sense logically.

“Yeah...uh. Atlanta was cool.” Ziggy sounded awkward as if he wasn’t entirely sure what Zade was talking about. That eased my monster some. “Anyway, kind of a long drive for you from there.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t have anything going on anyway.”

“Cool. Cool.” Ziggy didn’t have much else to say, and I wondered how well they actually knew each other.

“So, you guys met in Atlanta?” I threw the question out there to get things started, and dig a little, maybe. Miami and Jinx weren’t helping. They were looking at us, back and forth, like a tennis match.

“Uh...yeah. My friend knew Ziggy and I’m like a big fan, right.”

“Sure...” I glared at Miami, who only smirked, obviously enjoying this.

“But I’m more than that now, right, Ziggy?”

Ziggy screwed up his face. “What do you mean?”

“Like we’re friends now, right? We know each other. Look...” He stood and held out the bottom of his shirt. I could clearly see that Ziggy was the only one to sign it. But neither Miami nor Jinxs offered up adding to it.

“Yeah, sure.” Ziggy glanced at me and reached over to grab my hand. Maybe he was looking for some security in this situation, or maybe he was dissuading his new little friend from anything more.

Zade sat back down and cleared his throat while staring blatantly at our linked fingers. “So, who are you? I mean, you don’t have the look, right. You look like a businessman, not a groupie.”

“I’m their promoter. I organized all this. And I’m Ziggy’s boyfriend. So...”

“Nah...” Zade laughed like I was making a joke. “Ziggy doesn’t go for a stuffed shirt. No way. I don’t believe it.”

I sent my most menacing stare. I was hardly a stuffed shirt. My hair was cut short, and I wore a polo with khaki shorts, sure...but that wasn’t stuffy. It was appropriate since I’d been traveling. “You don’t know Ziggy.”

“I think I do. Better than you, right. He’s a fucking rock star, dude. He’s going for hot young dudes.”

Miami cleared his throat and scowled at the dude. “Not all rock stars are into that, man.”

Zade’s eyes widened. “Oh. Yeah, I didn’t mean anything. Of course, y’all are perfect for each other. I only meant, you know, Ziggy is a little wild, right.”

“Not that wild. Maybe when I was younger.” Ziggy chuckled like his reputation was a joke, but I knew he didn’t give any fucks about any of that. He wasn’t so much wild as he did what he wanted, when he wanted, no matter what.

“You know what I mean. I just can’t see you with this dude, that’s all.” Zade stuck his thumb out toward me.

Ziggy held our hands up. “Well, it’s true. We’ve been together for about two years now, give or take, with some off and on in the beginning.”

The kid scoffed again. “Won’t last,” he muttered.

The driver came around the front of the bus and indicated it was time to roll out.

Finally, Miami spoke up. “Sorry, Zade, but we have to head out, man.”

“Right.” Zade stood.

Ziggy fist-bumped him. “Catch you in Atlanta next time, dude.”

“Yeah. Atlanta, right.” He nodded and walked away. He looked a little down, but if he was a fan, as he said he was, he’d remember he got to hang out with Ziggy, Miami, and Jinx for a little while. But he didn’t take any selfies or ask for them. I thought that was odd.

When he was far enough away and Miami and Jinx had loaded the chairs back in the bus, I grabbed Ziggy's shoulders. "That was a little weird."

"Right..." he teased. "And those mother fuckers sure didn't help."

Miami turned and flipped him off.

"That was entertaining." Jinx laughed maniacally. "But we do have to roll. Don't be late." He pointed at both of us.

"Everything's arranged," I reassured them, but it wasn't necessary. I was the goddamned promoter. I knew how to schedule shit.

"Right." Miami exaggerated the word, winked at Ziggy, and gave him a fist bump. "See ya in Jersey, man."

The hotel wasn't far away, and we had an early wake-up call, so I was glad of that. We had Drake with us as a precaution, though I didn't think it would be needed. "When do you sleep, dude?" Ziggy asked as we entered the suite.

Drake gave him a brief head nod. "When you do."

"Whatever."

"He has the connecting room, Ziggy." We stood together as Drake made his rounds, stalking around the room. When he all cleared it, he gave us a salute and left. "Now..."

Ziggy jumped me, wrapping his legs around my waist and his arms around my neck. I grabbed his ass to hold him up, thankful I worked out. He wasn't a small dude.

He kissed all over my face as I turned toward the bedroom. “Missed you...missed you,” he chanted between pecks.

“Mm...missed you too. And I want more than some splashes on my face.”

Ziggy growled, and I eased him down to the bed before taking his face in my hands. I leaned forward and kissed him how I had wanted to all day. In fact, I had wanted to kiss him like this for more than a day...more like months. I led with my lips, followed by my tongue, delving deep into his mouth. He kissed me back with passion and wrapped his tongue with mine.

He ran his hands up my back, under my shirt, and hummed when he hit skin. “Need...”

“Me too, babe.” I pulled my shirt off and grabbed his before leaning over him and pushing him to his back, laying on top of him, chest to chest. Our cocks, still trapped in our clothes, bumped nearly painfully. I hadn’t been this hard since...well, since the last time we were together. That had to mean something. “I can’t let you go. I can’t.”

His legs wrapped around mine, with his feet digging into my calves. “I don’t want you to. I’m sorry I—”

“No. We’re together. Moving forward.”

“Ha! Let’s move forward with less clothes.” He bucked up into me, and I wanted his thrusts, but he was right. I rolled to the side and unbuttoned my shorts to shove them off. My briefs went with them.

Ziggy stood to wiggle out of his tight jeans, and of course, he went commando. He stopped to take off his boots, or he’d never get the denim off. He nearly fell over doing it, but I didn’t laugh. Much.

“Fuck! Come here.” When he was finally naked, I grabbed the back of his legs, pulling him in front of me, and licked the head of his cock.

“Ugh! More...”

Sucking him down was a pleasure. I’d done it in numerous places over the last couple of years, from dressing rooms, busses, and even to supply closets, but alone in a hotel room without a chance of getting caught was better. I took care of him slowly, how he needed to be loved. A lick, a suck, a gentle squeeze on his balls. I licked them after, and he squirmed, so I continued lower to his taint. When he moaned loudly, I shoved his legs up and attacked his hole. I needed him to remember what it felt like. What I felt like.

I licked his rim and darted my tongue in. If I’d thought his moan before was loud, I’d been wrong. I wanted him to let the whole fucking floor hear him. I tongue fucked him until he was begging me for more.

I’d had my bags sent up here before going to the concert, so I looked around for them. Pulling out my toiletry bag where I’d stashed lube and condoms, I dug around for the necessities. “You ready?”

“No, but I’m sure you’re about to take care of that.”

“You know it.” I climbed back on the bed with a smirk I couldn’t help. I prepped him, turning it into more with teasing and twisting and fucking into him until he thrust into my hand and begged with inarticulate words. I wasn’t even sure what he was saying, but I knew what they meant. Fuck me now . So, I backed off and rolled the condom on. “Why are we still using these?”

“Worry about it later...Cole...”

“You got it...” I couldn’t hold back any longer. I needed to be inside him, and everything else in the world would wait. I lined up, lifting his legs and pushing in slowly.

“Fuck!” Ziggy thrashed back and forth, and I waited for him. “Move...” And that was my cue.

I pulled out and in, slowly building speed until we were fucking like our lives were on the line. It was loud and messy, with slapping bodies, moans, and shouts.

And it was building up. Higher and higher. I could barely breathe. Until Ziggy started jacking his dick. His mouth was open, and his noises were sexy as fuck. I wanted to see that every fucking day of my life. And when he came with a shout, squirting out on his stomach, I knew I’d die trying for that goal.

And it didn’t take much more for me to join him. Ziggy reached up and rubbed along my abdomen, fingers tickling toward my groin. That was the only thing needed to push me into fireworks land. I froze up and came with a grunt and a private light show.

“Now that was a welcome home fuck!” Ziggy put his hands behind his head, elbows sticking out. He yawned, mouth wide.

“Let me get us cleaned up and we can crash. We’ll shower in the morning.”

“Mmhmm...” His eyes were closed, and he looked like a fucking angel. Not a cute cherub, no. He looked like Michael the warrior, ready in a heartbeat to bring down righteous death and destruction and coming off as totally pure while he did it. With a chuckle, I kissed his lips and went to get the washcloth.

eight

After the Richmond Show

I woke up and stared at Coleman. He was the most handsome man I've ever known. I ran my hand over his muscled chest. His hazel eyes were closed now, but when they were open, they had flecks of gold in them, and when he became excited, a dark green rim appeared around the outside. His dark hair was cut short, but when it got a little long around his ears, it started curling. He liked being clean-shaven, but he had scruff around his chin now. I bet he'd shave before we headed to the airport.

Everything about him spoke to me, and not simply the way he looked. He was Mr. GQ. Most of the time, he was fashionable and stylish. I rarely saw him in jeans or, God forbid, a T-shirt. Unless he was at a concert or working out. Of course, he preferred a tank top for that. It had to be an opposites attract kind of thing with us for sure.

Except he was also the sweetest man I'd ever known. He'd go the extra mile for those he cared about. And he seemed so lonely, though I had no idea why. He was fun, intelligent, and I enjoyed his company.

And I really needed to get my shit together before I ran him off. Because I really wanted him to stick around. At least I did in quiet moments like this when I wasn't too much in my head.

I crawled out of bed, reluctantly, and headed to the main room of the suite. I needed to get my yoga in. The tour was going to be long, and I was already feeling it.

By the time I finished, Coleman was up with his coffee. “Good morning. Want to get more of a workout? The hotel has a decent gym, I think.”

“Sure. I have a little bit more to do. Meet you down there?”

He walked over to where I still sat cross-legged on the floor and kissed the top of my head. “Sure.”

I watched him leave, and when the door was shut, I got up and dashed into the room, grabbing my duffle. I pulled out sweatpants, but I’d left my sneakers on the bus. I only had my shit kickers, so I put on a clean pair of socks, figuring that would be enough. I grabbed my stash and quickly rolled up a doobie.

I made my way downstairs and out the back service entrance. I wasn’t sure where Drake was, but figured I was safe enough at the hotel. No one else in the world knew where we were. I found an inconspicuous spot. I was good at that. I settled in, leaning against a concrete wall, and lit up, quietly enjoying the morning. It was cooler out since the sun was barely up, but still already hot out. A few tokes, and I put it out, stashing the other half, so I could head up to the gym.

The thought of seeing Colman’s bare chest all wet and sticky with sweat made me hurry. When I used my key to open the door, I found Drake. “Where you been, dude?”

Drake grumbled something but kept on with his workout. I laughed. Okay, it was more like an evil chuckle.

When I spotted Coleman, I made my way over and got on the lat pulldown machine across from where he was using the leg press. And damn, that man had sexy legs with just the right amount of hair. I smiled wickedly and pulled the bar down in front of my chest.

“Well, hey. Where you been?” he asked.

I winked. “Doesn’t matter. I wouldn’t miss this. Aren’t you hot?”

Coleman’s tank was wet with sweat in front, making a V between his pecks. “Yeah. Well, I’m working out. I’m supposed to be hot.”

“You can take your shirt off.” I wiggled my eyebrows at him.

He huffed and rolled his eyes, but he took off his shirt. And threw it at me. I caught it and dropped it on the floor. He flexed his arms, showing off his guns like a beach-bound muscle head.

“Better.” I did another pulldown.

“Are you going to really exercise here or fake it while you ogle me?”

“Yeah, probably that second one.”

“I’m done. Seriously.” He tried to keep a straight face, but he was cracking. And I wanted to see him lose it.

The machine I was on had a long bench in front of it. I suspected it was so someone working out could do them on their back if they wanted. But I was facing Coleman instead of the machine, so the bench stretched in front of me. I lifted my legs on top of it and crossed my ankles. I still held the pulldown bars, but I wasn’t working it. I wiggled my socked toes at him.

And it worked. He busted out laughing and let the weights down. He was on his back in the machine, and I considered straddling him, but I wasn’t sure it would hold both of us, but it didn’t matter because he got up. “Come on, Zig. Let’s go shower.”

“Oh yeah! You don’t have to tell me twice.” I scrambled after him, and he toweled off on the way up the elevator to our room. Our ghost followed behind, shadowing us quietly and without comment. Drake was paid handsomely to protect us, keep us safe, not to butt his nose in our business. And he didn’t. I liked him because he was quiet, inconspicuous, and didn’t give me lectures any time I wanted to do something stupid. Which was probably a lot.

At our room, Drake leaned against the wall in the hallway while we went in and headed straight for the shower. We dropped our clothes on the floor along the way. We could pick them up later. Now, we were both in a hurry to get wet and naked.

The bathroom was spa-like and had a glass door that pretty much made the entire thing a wet room. There was only a skinny glass partition on the tub-shower combo, leaving the rest open. It didn’t matter if the water splashed out over the tile since there was a small drain along the back of the tub. There were three shower heads, and I immediately thought about renovating my place to add more. A standard one came out of the wall, high enough that tall guys could still use it—thankfully. There was also a rainfall showerhead coming from the ceiling. I wasn’t sure how much I liked that one until Coleman got in and turned it on. The third was a handheld, hanging on a hook beside the standard head. But Coleman under the rainfall was a sight.

I bit my lip and joined him, stepping over the side of the tub. I ran my finger down the center of his chest.

“You like?” he asked.

“You know it...”

“Good. Get over here and kiss me.”

My cock sure liked it when he got all commanding on me. It stood even straighter

than it already was as I did as he asked and got under with him. We kissed, warm water gently cascading over us. And I officially changed my mind about the rainfall showerhead. I was totally getting one of these installed the second we got off this fucking tour.

Coleman broke our kiss first. “You ready for this?”

“I’m ready for everything any time. Don’t you know that by now?”

“Oh, I know it, Zig. I know it.” He dropped to his knees but promptly sat in the tub, instead. I couldn’t blame him. Porcelain was hard on the knees. It didn’t matter. His torso was tall enough to line up when I spread my legs and bent a little. And he had no problem sucking my dick into his mouth as he grabbed my hips.

I slammed my hand against the marble slab on the wall and thrust forward. “God, yes, Cole...”

He hummed around my cock. This was going to be fast. After the night before, I would have hoped I could last longer, but this man turned me on like no one and nothing else. He squeezed my butt with one hand, his grip spreading my cheek a little. And oh shit! I came hard. And my man took every bit of it.

Coleman took his time washing me up, not letting me return the favor, but I was a determined mother fucker. I got out, and he wrapped me in a towel, but I dropped it on the way to the bed. And shook my ass, peering over my shoulder. Yeah, it was cutesy, but hey...for a taste of Coleman, I’d do nearly anything.

He came up behind me and slapped my ass. “You getting in that bed or playing around all day?”

I growled at him but bounced my ass up on the bed. “Come on, baby.” I wasn’t fully

hard yet, but it was getting there. My refractory period wasn't what it used to be, but Coleman didn't complain. And his cock was pointing at me like a divining rod. "Give me that beast!"

"You want this?" He grabbed his cock at the base.

"Fuck yeah."

Coleman crawled up on the mattress and got on his knees. "Show me."

I lay down flat in front of him. "Feed me..." I opened my mouth and stuck out my flattened tongue. Coleman moaned a little and stroked his cock—twice—before he finally crawled over me and fed me that monster, inch by inch. My man was packing. A fact I'd happily learned long ago. But I could take it.

I loosened my throat and let him fuck my face as much as he wanted. He put his hands on the wall above the bed and thrust in and out until he was reciting, "Yes, yes, God, yes, Zig..." Finally, he pulled out, again gripping the base of his cock. "I want to fuck you."

"Thought you'd never ask..." I loved sex with Coleman. It was sexy and fun, and I could actually laugh without offending him. So I did just that as I flipped over and stuck my ass up. By that time, I was seriously hard again.

Coleman didn't waste time. He grabbed the lube and used his finger to get it in my hole. He didn't do a lot of stretching, but I didn't need it. As soon as he had the condom on, grumping about using them, he stuck his cock in. He slapped my ass again and started fucking me the way I liked it.

This position let him hit my prostate more often and harder than the old missionary, but I also didn't get to see him. I loved his cum-face, but I couldn't complain the way

he nailed my spot, and I shook as I came without even touching my dick. That rarely happened, but between my lack of sex when we were apart and maybe how relaxed the pot from earlier made me, it didn't take much.

Coleman made a weird noise that meant he was trying not to orgasm. That would not do. I tightened my ass and laughed maniacally. "No holding back, sexy."

He grunted, came, and leaned over me. I felt his face press against my back, between my shoulder blades. "Jack, I love you."

"Fuck, Cole. You play dirty."

He slid off of me, and I flopped on my back. Of course he leaned over me, looking into my face. "That's your name, right?"

I gave him a quick nod and squinched my eyes shut. "Nobody calls me that. I mean, other than you, the last people to call me by my real name were my biological family. And they're all shithheads."

"What do you mean?"

I did not want to talk about this. My family? Those people who go by Braswell were fucking crazy. "My parents did the whole kick me out cuz gay thing. But when Hunt hit it big, suddenly they want me back? Imagine that."

"Woah. I did not know that." I didn't see pity in his eyes. Only understanding and concern.

The only other person in the world I felt I could be open with was Miami, and I'd never told him this. Only that I didn't get along with them. Miami Hunt was my family, and when we were broken up, I drowned myself in dope and alcohol. But

maybe that could change. “My sister, Livia or Liv. She was cool, you know, and she wanted to get to know me. For me. But she’s crazy fucked up too. She’s in an arranged marriage, for crying out loud, and her husband, the pastor, wanted nothing to do with me and my devil music.”

“Are you fucking kidding me? Arranged marriage?”

I nodded. “I told you. They’re all crazy. I mean. I’m crazy, right, but not crazy like that.”

Coleman flopped on his back with a huff. “You’re not crazy. Just fun-loving.”

“No. Not really. I think I’m bat-shit crazy. I just hide it better.” Not to mention all the self-medicating. But I didn’t want to bring that up, either.

“Zig...” Thankfully, he was back to the nickname. When Miami had originally thought of all of us going by the nicknames, I thought it was fucking brilliant. “I want to make this better for you, but I don’t know how.”

“I don’t think you can.” I had noodled over that for a long time in my past and eventually came up with the only solution. “I don’t have anything to do with them. And they don’t bug me. I think they call it compartmentalizing. Yeah. Whatever. It works.”

“I don’t know what to say. I don’t know if that’s healthy, but I get it.”

“What’s your family like?”

“Normal. Well, for Californian people. My folks are hippy throwbacks, but I had a good childhood, and I still talk to them. I don’t see them much.”

“Why not?” Now, I sat up and leaned over him. “I think if I had folks that were cool, I’d be there all the fucking time, man.” His gold-specked eyes flickered. “What are you thinking?”

“They live in California, and I live...” He laughed, but it was forced, and not happy at all. “I live everywhere. But when I’m not traveling around, I have a house in Colorado.”

“Yeah, I knew you lived in Denver, but you’re always with me. I kind of assumed you had a place in Miami, too.” I’d never been to either. When we were in Florida, he always came to mine.

He shook his head. “No. I did a short-term rental on a condo when you were recording.” He looked sad, but before I could ask him what was up with that. He jumped up. “Oh shit. We have to get to the airport.”

“Didn’t you book a private jet? They’ll wait for us.”

“Yes, but you still have obligations and a soundcheck to get to.”

I was one hundred percent not worried about that. “Eh. If I don’t get there, I totally trust Simon to get it set up.”

“That’s not the point.”

Whether it was or not, under Coleman’s command, we picked up clothes, packed them, got dressed, and rushed out. Coleman called for the car on the way down the elevator.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:49 pm

nine

We're Late to New Jersey

We finally arrived during the middle of the soundcheck. Ziggy jogged over to the stage and up the steps, and I followed him up. While he beelined toward his kit, I found an out-of-the-way place to watch. I was getting good at that, and most of the time, I didn't think they remembered I was there.

But as Ziggy got over to Simon, who was sitting behind his kit, tapping the drums randomly, everything else going on stopped. Miami strutted over to face the kit. "What the fuck, Zig?"

"What?" he asked, as if we weren't late.

"We're almost done here. Did you forget you had a gig tonight?" Miami scowled, but I suspected he wasn't really upset. From what everyone said, he had chilled out a lot since the first time around, and that had everything to do with Jinx, who unstrapped his guitar and handed it to Bobby, his tech.

Jinx joined Miami in front of the kit and in the teasing. "So what? You're late again because you were too busy fooling around with your boyfriend?"

"Yeah, didn't you two have a jet? Or are you now officially part of the mile-high club?" Miami leered at Ziggy.

But Ziggy kept his cool and simply flicked them both off. "Fuck you both. And we

were already in that club if it's any of your business. Oh. By the way. It's not."

That was when Miami finally burst out laughing and everyone else joined in, particularly Jinx and Wolf. "Man. You know we love you."

Ziggy flipped another bird at Jinx and turned back to his kit.

Wolf snorted. "I would have been surprised if he wasn't late." He thumbed over his shoulder.

"Fuck you too, Wolfman."

There was more teasing, but overall, these guys acted like brothers, so it was to be expected. If Ziggy couldn't take the teasing, he would have been out of the band a long time ago. Well, probably. But I felt like it was hard not to make allowances for Ziggy. Hell, I'd sure done it. He was fun and lovable, and...as he started to prove, could pound the fuck out of those drums like nearly no one else. And he did just that for a minute straight. Then he stopped. "Hey, can we get the sound guys over here?"

"What's wrong?" Simon asked, looking crushed. He'd only started working for us on this tour and probably hadn't gotten used to the guys. But he was good and generally got what Ziggy needed.

"Last show, I busted this mic. We need to move it. No big, but if we don't want to keep going through mics..." The sound tech showed up pretty quickly after that and worked to get it positioned better. Everyone on this tour was professional, including Ziggy, even if it didn't always seem like it. But when it came to the music and playing, he stepped up every time.

After the mic was set, they played a few songs until Miami called time. As they turned over their equipment to the techs, Ziggy called over to me. "Hey, go on back

with the guys. I'm gonna help Dave and the guys get his kit set up." The drums for Bramble Punk got set up in front of Ziggy's kit before the show, and moved out of the way when they were done playing. It was the best way to do it.

"Okay." I met him in the middle of the stage and gave him a peck on the lips, and he smiled sweetly.

"I like that."

"I like it too. Maybe more of this and less arguing about shit this time."

He kissed me again. "I like that idea." With a wink, he strode off to help, and I headed backstage. I thought it was nice of him and maybe made up for us being late.

Everyone had their own dressing rooms at this venue, and I'd had our luggage dumped in Ziggy's. But there was a large common area between them set up for socializing, partying, or whatever, and that's where the guys were hanging out. Everyone greeted me as I came in.

"Oh, hey, Colman." Wolf's long blond hair was falling around his face and shoulders. He looked every bit the rocker he was, even if I knew he could play anything, including classical, with the best of them.

I dropped into an open single chair. "Hey, back. What's up?"

"We got word this morning that the plane will be ready and waiting in Boston."

"Excellent. I was hoping that would work." We had all gone in together and purchased a jet. It was a Gulfstream g550, and we'd decked it out with two couches along with a bunch of comfy chairs that would fully recline so we could sleep there if necessary or simply stretch out. In addition to the band chipping in, Harrison and I

forked up a lot of money. We felt like it would be a good addition and would let the guys get more comfortable between some gigs. Though we were chartering a bigger jet to fly the guys from Bramble Punk, all our roadies and techs and equipment for both bands, as well as our other personnel like Marci and Kai, we owned the Gulfstream outright. After the concert in Denver, we'd fly out to Salt Lake City, and the buses would be there by then to haul everyone out for one show in Reno before heading to Black Rock City for Rocktoberfest. The buses were a necessity for that, but we could use the planes for the last five shows. Fly in, crash in hotels, play the gigs, and fly out to the next city.

"Check this out." Wolf jumped over Miami's legs and squatted next to me, sticking out his phone. "I got pics." The plane had been wrapped in our new Miami Hunt logo, and he had a few images of it all done and looking sleek as hell.

"Oh yeah, that looks badass for sure." I had started to sound more and more like them the longer I hung out with them. I didn't give a damn, either. "Fuck yeah."

Wolf chuckled at my exuberance, while swiping over to show me the interior. The leather seats were caramel in color and looked soft. In fact, everything looked expensive. And I knew that it had been expensive to customize it, but hopefully, worth every penny. "And the couches..." There were two oversized couches with an aisle between them. They could easily pass for beds. Sweet .

"Ziggy's gonna love that."

"For real. Damn, they're taking a long time," Miami chimed in, and I had to agree. But soon enough, the entire Bramble entourage came pouring through the doors. But Ziggy wasn't with them.

"Kay? Where's Zig, man?" My forehead tightened with worry.

Kay shrugged as if he didn't know or care. "He was with the security dude. Said he'd be right up."

I stormed over to the closest guard in the room. "Radio Drake and find out where they are."

Everyone seemed nonchalant, and I probably should have been too. I mean, it was Ziggy, and he pulled shit all the time. Was never where he was supposed to be and never on time. But something about this had the hair on the back of my neck standing up. The guard hit his radio. "Drake. Check in. What's your twenty?"

He was wearing a fancy earpiece, so I couldn't hear Drake's answer. But I glared at him as if Drake were giving him the worst news.

"Eh. They're on their way up. Relax." When I didn't move, he added. "Drake's the best. He's got this."

I knew Drake shadowed Ziggy everywhere, and so far, he'd been on top of things. And they were inside the secure stadium. I had no reason to worry. I exhaled loudly.

"Dude..." Wolf put his arm around my shoulders. I hadn't even noticed him come up to me. "It's Ziggy. He probably stopped to smoke a joint. He does that shit all the time."

That was true, but I hadn't seen him do it or seen any evidence of him smoking anything since he'd come off the stage in Richmond. Maybe that was it. "I know. I don't know why I'm concerned."

"Cause you have feelings for him. That's obvious."

"That is true." I couldn't lie.

Ziggy bounced into the room with Drake on his heels. “Yo! Who is ready to paar-tay?” A few people hooted, but mostly the Bramble Punk group. Miami and Jinx blew him off, and Wolf gave him the bird. Ziggy strutted across the room and over to us and pulled me away from Wolf, who laughed. “Mine.” He kissed me, sloppy and playful.

“Hey. You worried me.”

His demeanor instantly changed, his face dropping into a frown. “What? Why? I was with Drake.”

“I know, but I expected you to be with the Bramble guys and you weren’t. Something about that had me, I don’t know, worried.”

He gave me a quick kiss and smiled. “No worries. I’m fine. Let’s get a drink.” He headed to the side of the room where there was a complete assortment of alcohol as well as cold beer. Most people were only drinking water, saving the real party for after the show, but Ziggy poured a healthy shot of Crown.

“Hey!” Miami called, and most of the room turned to look at him. “We have an interview panel in like ten minutes.”

Ziggy held the glass up. “One shot, dude. Relax.” He mumbled something about his mother under his breath and sipped the whiskey. “Ahh...Good stuff.”

He was feisty and geared up for the show ahead. I’d seen this before. I didn’t know why it was bothering me now. Maybe because I’d finally allowed myself to think we could have more, but some of my issues with Ziggy were now being thrown right in my face. I had decided to accept him as he was. All of him. I sighed and sank back into a chair. That included his wild side.

Marci and Kai came in before Ziggy even finished his drink. She clapped. “Okay, guys. We need to move. Down to the interview panel and a short meet and greet after. You know the routine.”

The guys all got up, not only Midnight Hunt but Bramble Punk as well. They would start the meet and greet while the Hunt guys did the interview. It wasn’t a typical sit and sign, more like a casual party with contest winners and a few special guests as well as members of the press. We took the elevators in four loads, and Ziggy pulled me back to get in the last one. “I’m not in a hurry to answer a bunch of stupid questions. Think I can get away with skipping the dog and pony show and going straight to the meet-greet?”

“Sadly, no. You’re a part of Midnight Hunt.”

“Pfhist...”

“What’s that mean?”

“Nothing. I’m tired already. Maybe I’d forgotten how hard these tours are, or I’m getting old.”

I pinched his ass. “You’re not old. Now get on the elevator.” It dinged and the doors opened as we spoke. And we got in, followed by Drake.

We pushed to the back of the box and leaned against the wall. Ziggy tapped out a tune with his fingers on the wall beside him. That wasn’t nerves. Ziggy tapped on everything all the time. But his tight smile told me he wasn’t comfortable with doing the press thing. “Zig?”

“Yeah?”

“You don’t have to answer anything that’s not specifically directed at you. I’m betting you might spend most of the time sitting there looking pretty.”

“You think I’m pretty?” He did a weird dance, ending up in front of me.

“Damn straight, pretty man.” I said it so seriously that it got him to burst out laughing. Exactly what I intended.

He kissed me quickly, then put his forehead against mine. “Thanks. You know, for everything. For being here.”

That was when I smelled the pot on him. That was exactly what he’d been doing. Well, I knew. I wasn’t going to change him. “You’re welcome.”

ten

Where are we now?

The Philly stadium was nice, though I could have been in any town anywhere. And it already was starting to feel like it was. At least I wasn't late this time. Restless, yes, but everyone was where they were supposed to be. Miami and Jinx had gone by themselves to do a radio show and were meeting us at the venue for the meet and greet. And after that, we had soundcheck.

I signed a few posters and shirts before Drake was at my side. "Zade is here again."

"Well, shit. That's one determined dude." He hadn't been in Jersey that I knew, anyway. But following us to Philly was a bit much.

"I think he has a crush on you or something. What do you want to do?"

"Got an idea. I don't think we should keep letting him back. And for fuck's sake, last time was awkward as hell." I got up and motioned for Coleman. "Hey, can you run up and get a pair of sticks from Mick?" He was in charge of the equipment between shows.

"Yeah, sure, what's up?"

"Got an overly zealous fan, and we're not letting him backstage."

"You think giving him sticks will help?" Drake asked. "You don't think that would

just encourage him to keep this up?”

“It’s to soften the blow. But not being allowed back anymore should give him the message. Plus, you know, he’s from Atlanta. This is pretty far for him, and Boston has to be worse. But after that, we’re on the other side of the country.” Hell, jumping from Jacksonville to Atlanta to Richmond and then New Jersey and Philly before finally moving on to Boston for our East Coast leg was a lot for the band and we had support. Surely, Zade would not continue following us. “He’s just seriously fan-boying, and I’ve never had that.”

“That you know of.” Drake glared at me as if I’d done something wrong.

“What the fuck ever.”

It only took about ten minutes for Coleman to get the sticks. I signed them . Zade! Stay cool, dude. Adding my name to that one and only signed my name on the other. Drake tucked them under his arm. “Oh hey. Give him tickets to the show. Just don’t let him backstage.”

“What reason should I give?”

“I don’t give a fuck.”

Coleman put an arm around me. “Settle down. Tell him there’s no capacity.”

“Gotcha.”

“I need a drink. This is nuts.” I signed a few more things and shook hands. Selfies were taken. Eventually, it was time to get backstage to psych up for the show. I loved my fans, so this should have been more enjoyable. It wasn’t, and that had to mean I was getting tired. I was looking forward to the downtime that was coming.

My back was killing me, and I kept missing the beat. I was dragging, and it was very unlike me, and I was pretty damn sure everyone noticed. Especially when Miami held his hand up and made the cutting motion. “Zig?”

“I know.” I twirled a stick out to the side. “You want to take it from the top or move on or what?”

Jinx tilted his head to the side. “What do you want to do?”

“I want to fuck off right about now.” I dropped the stick, letting it fall wherever the fuck it went. I needed something stronger for my back, and I didn’t care to tell the whole world my problems. So I pulled my usual shit and stormed off, heading for the dressing rooms. I at least could smoke the rest of the blunt I had in there and maybe ease up on the pain a bit. The yoga helped, but I could no longer escape the fact that I needed a brace, and that was a very hard pill to swallow. I did not want to admit it. And maybe a doctor to look at my old damn bones would help. I’d been doing this too long. Even when Midnight Hunt wasn’t together, I was still playing. Not on big stadium tours like this, but playing, nonetheless.

I dug the blunt out of my bag and headed toward the service entrance, Drake shadowing me as usual. I kind of expected Coleman to follow me as well, but he hadn’t. Fine. I knew he had other things to do. Promotor things. He did have a company to run.

I lit up and held the first toke, letting it settle in. Hoping for a little relief.

“Yo. Zig. There you are.” Not Coleman, but Jinx.

I rolled my hand, gesturing for him to go on since I sure as shit wasn’t letting the smoke out too soon.

“What’s up. That wasn’t like you?”

Turning to the side, I exhaled long and slow. “What part?”

“You know what part, man. You never mess up like that. Walking away. Running out here to get high. Yeah, those are normal, but never have you put in a bad performance.”

“Relax, dude. It was soundcheck.” I took another drag.

“Yeah, I know. And missing it altogether is your M.O. too. But seriously, what’s going on?”

“Everybody has an off day every once in a while. Chill the fuck out.”

He left me there to finish my joint in peace, but he didn’t look happy. Well, I wouldn’t blow the show, so I wasn’t worried about it. I needed to stretch out, so I headed back to the dressing room, ignoring the looks Drake kept cutting me. It wasn’t his job to do more than babysit.

The show wasn’t the best. I didn’t screw up royally, but it wasn’t up to my normal standards. I shrugged it off and told Jinx I was tired. There was a break coming up, so they could relax and stay off my back.

We went to the common area where more fans were hanging out. It was a true after-party. Some had backstage passes from contests and things, plus some Kai arranged for. It wasn’t the groupies like the old days, but I enjoyed it. I wasn’t fucking anybody but Coleman, either, but hanging out was fun. Took my mind off the shitty show.

Sometime during the night, someone gave me pills, and I slipped them into my

pocket for later. I wasn't entirely sure what they were, but maybe they'd knock me out and let my back muscles rest. Let me rest. Because everything was starting to feel like the whirlwind touring used to be. The first time around, before Midnight Hunt broke up, the tours had us going city to city, back-to-back without a break until I couldn't remember by own fucking name, let alone what damned city we were in. Hell, someone had to tell Miami where we were before we went on so he wouldn't call out the wrong place to open the show. And the partying after the show was simply mind-numbing. Drugs. Groupies. Sex. It all blurred together back in the day. I didn't want a repeat of that, but things had started slipping out of control.

Before I knew it, we were back at the hotel. I checked the pills. Turns out it was X, so I took them, and jumped in the shower. By the time I finished, they were kicking in hard, and I wanted Coleman in the worst way. "Babe. I'm so fucking horny right now."

He was on the bed, propped up against pillows and flipping through his phone. He looked up, eyes going wide as he took in my damp form and my dick sticking straight up, tall and proud. "I see that."

I didn't know what he did with the phone or his clothes, for that matter. I crawled up on top of him, feeling his skin on me as we writhed together. It was heavenly. Everything about him was delicious. I licked his throat and nibbled at his collarbone. I flicked one of his nipples and bit it too. Coleman thrust up into me, his hard cock pressed into my abdomen, making me want to touch him. I slid to his side and grabbed him. "Turn over so we can share."

"What?" He turned, though, and when I took both our cocks in hand, pressing them together, he got it. We frothed together with rough sliding until it wasn't enough.

"Moremoremore." I wiggled around and spread my legs. "Fill me."

Coleman moved quickly, taking only a minute to stretch me before he was rolling on a condom. He started out slow, but I was so worked up, I urged him on, until he was fucking me hard and fast while I called out, “Like that, yes, babe, right there.”

I couldn’t wait much longer. It felt like my brain would explode if I didn’t come right that second. I don’t know if I said that out loud or if Coleman could read me well, but he grabbed my cock, jacking it in time with his hard thrusts until the orgasm rolled right over me. The relief was so sweet, I passed the fuck out.

We had plenty of time before we had to get to the plane to Boston. And check-in and security were a lot faster when you were leaving from a smaller airport on a private plane. Commercial flights were impossible. But booking a private jet seemed to work for us so far.

I made sure to take my time doing yoga and stretching after the issue with my back. It was feeling better, and I did not want a relapse. When I was done, I took the last of my pot and rolled up a joint. I would use the same slip-out-the-back routine before meeting Coleman in the room afterward.

Coleman beat me back to the room. “How was the workout?” I asked, closing the door behind me.

“Pretty good. Did you get stretched?” He leaned in to kiss me, and before I could answer him, he wrinkled his nose. “You reek of pot.”

“Yeah. Sorry. Needed to relax a bit. I’ll grab a shower, and hey, let’s stop and eat on the way. We have time, right?” It wasn’t a usual thing to do, but Philly had great food, and it wasn’t like my face was as noticed as Jinx’s was. I could still run around for the most part where he and Miami could not.

“Yes. Shower.” He waved me off. I didn’t know what he thought about the pot. I tried

not to stick it in his face or anything, but I also wasn't going to stop. But he didn't say anything else so neither did I, but I was going to need a hookup in Boston.

Once we were ready, Coleman called for the car and Drake escorted us down. We stopped at a Big Nick's Steak Shack restaurant not far from the hotel. I was jonesing for a Philly cheesesteak. Hell, we were in Philly! And the place seemed small-ish. It was well after lunch, so it wasn't crowded, either. Perfect. Drake walked through the store and settled us in a booth. "Stay put. I'm checking the restrooms."

Coleman handed me a menu. "What are you thinking about getting?"

Before I could even look at the menu, a familiar and unwelcome face showed up. Zade put his hands flat on the table in front of us. "Ziggy. I told you. This man is not for you. He's no good for you." He straightened and lifted his shirt, purposely exposing a gun tucked in his pants. "I don't want to see you waste your time with this... guy. Whatever. He doesn't know you. He doesn't get you like I do. It's the music man. And he doesn't fit. So this is what's going to happen. We are leaving. Come on."

"Easy, Zade. I don't want you to hurt anyone." My heart was pounding in my ears.

"Then get up." He put his hand on the butt of the gun.

I stood and held my hands up. "You're right. Totally."

Zade jerked his head toward the door. And the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life was walk away and leave Coleman sitting there. But I was confident he would be calling for Drake the second Zade turned and followed me out.

"Damn, Ziggy. It was him, wasn't it? That guy wouldn't let me back to see you last night. I know it. Well, that ends now. I'll travel with you. That way, I'll be sure to be

next to you.” He gestured to an old beat-up junker.

“That sounds like a plan, Zade. Where we going now?” My heart was pounding overtime, faster than I could ever play.

“You’ll see. Get in.”

I circled the car to get in, like Zade told me, moving slowly and steadily. I didn’t want to upset him and have him shoot me or anyone else. I pulled the door handle and saw Drake out of the corner of my eye. He motioned for me to get down. I trusted the man, so I dropped to the ground without question.

A gunshot blasted close by—so close. I wrapped my arms over my head. Another blast. I was shaking. What happened? I couldn’t see anything but fuck if I was getting back up. Hell to the no.

Before I could register what was going on around me, Coleman was there holding me. “It’s okay, baby. Police are on the way.” I let him pull me into his arms and hold me. I never felt so loved. So comforted as he rocked me.

Drake spoke with the officers as they loaded Zade into an ambulance. He was hurt but not dead. No one else was shot. Apparently, Zade had shot first. And missed. Drake did not. He hit Zade in the shoulder. But it was enough for Zade to drop the gun, so Drake could tackle him.

I tucked my face against Coleman’s neck. “Need a drink. And a joint. And you. Like now. And not necessarily in that order.”

eleven

Concerned from Boston to Denver

A meeting was called at the Xfinity Center where the guys were playing in Boston about what happened and heightening our security. Ziggy was okay but still a bit freaked out. I was hoping this meeting might ease his concerns. And mine.

We walked into the room that had been set up for a press conference that was going to happen right after our meeting. They were going to ask about the incident. No way around it.

“Yo! For once, you’re not late.” Miami pulled Ziggy into a tight hug.

“You know what they say. The show must go on.”

Jinx patted his back. “What do you need help with, man? Counseling or some shit?”

Ziggy flipped him off. “You were living in California too long. East coasters deal with their issues like badasses.”

“That’s not healthy, dude.” Jinx’s concern was touching. Miami and Wolf looked worried too.

“Seriously, I’m fine. Zade is getting the help he needs. We’re moving on.” That was true. In lieu of pressing charges, Ziggy insisted Zade be kept at the hospital for psych evaluations. They would also notify us if and when he was released. The officials at

the hospital seemed to think he'd be there a while based on the shooting and the reasons behind it. Zade was obviously delusional.

"So, what do we tell the press?" Wolf asked, sitting in his spot behind the table.

Marci walked in at that exact moment with the answer. "That there was an incident, and no one was hurt. Security measures are being taken. That's it." She pointed at each of the guys. "I mean it. Ziggy."

"What?" He held his hands up in protest.

"Nothing. Else." Marci was a hard ass sometimes, but she was exactly who these guys needed managing this tour.

Miami winked at her. "We've got it. Right, man?"

Ziggy dropped into the chair beside Wolf and immediately started tapping his fingers on the table. "You got it. Nothing else."

There were extra guards in the room around us. And we'd have two with us everywhere now. I knew Ziggy wasn't going to like that, especially with the way he liked to sneak off and smoke pot. I didn't know if he thought he was hiding it or keeping it down low, but he wasn't fooling anyone. I was worried that he was smoking more than normal, though. Especially after the crappy show in Philly.

Ziggy insisted he was tired, so I had a remedy for that. "Okay. We have time before the show in Denver, so I'm inviting the band to stay at my house. It'll be fun. You can hang out and chill, but there are other things you can do, too."

"That sounds good." Miami fist-bumped me.

I was excited to have everyone coming—finally, a houseful. It was going to be fun. Everyone started talking about it while we waited for the press to come in. Jinx and Miami wanted to try skiing. Harrison said he could teach them. But Ziggy and Wolf weren't into it. "We can, like, hike or something instead," Wolf suggested.

"That sounds good." Ziggy high-fived him.

The rest of the day went smoothly. Soundcheck, a short meet and greet. Bramble Punk took the stage and rocked the fuck out of it. They were improving, but Kay wasn't happy when he came off stage.

Harrison's brother went with them to the dressing room, supposedly to talk to Kay. They were definitely a thing now. But I didn't worry about it. They could take care of their own shit. I was there for Ziggy, and he took the stage first as soon as the roadies moved the Punk's drums off stage, wearing his trademark sleeveless button-up shirt and twirling a drumstick over his head. He was in a better mood and had said his back wasn't bothering him, so I expected him to kick ass. He threw the sticks out into the audience and riled them up before climbing behind the kit. He was sexy as hell. The epitome of a rockstar, even after all these years. And he was all mine.

The new plane was great. Comfortable. Miami and Jinx bee-lined for the couches in the back like a couple of horny kids. Everyone else was more mature—even Ziggy. Wolf wasn't bouncing on the furniture like those two, but he was touching everything and saying, "Nice. Mmhmm. Nice." While my man was doing the opposite of his bandmates. He was acting uber-cool about it, as if he took a private jet every day or had three parked in his garage. But I knew better than to believe his act. He was impressed.

Hell, I was impressed. "This really turned out nice."

I had also hired the crew, and one of them stepped into the main cabin. "Is this

everyone?”

“Yes, thanks, Bill.”

“Sure. If you all need anything during the flight please let me know, but for now, please take a seat and buckle your seat belts for takeoff. Once we’re at cruising height, I’ll let you know, and you can move around at your leisure. Okay, guys?”

Everyone played nice and buckled up. Ziggy sat next to me near the front and held my hand. He did that through every takeoff, and I wasn’t sure if he liked the comfort or thought it was a good excuse. Either way, it was fine with me. I wanted to comfort him. Help him. Or even simply be there for him if that was what was needed.

By the time we got to my place, it was late, but everyone was too keyed up to go to bed. I had four guestrooms, but we were only using two. Ziggy was staying in the main suite with me. Wolf and Harrison shared a room and so did Miami and Jinx.

After everyone settled in, we met up in the game room and had a few drinks. Miami and Jinx played air hockey, while Harrison and Wolf took advantage of the pool table. Ziggy was standing by the wet bar, tapping out a rhythm on the counter. This was how I expected my house to be used. I had always wanted people over, though it had never worked out before. Now that the band was here, hanging out and being themselves, I couldn’t regret one penny I’d put into it. It felt right.

I put my arm around Ziggy’s waist and kissed his shoulder. “Thanks for coming. I’m happy to have you here.”

He pulled me into his arms. “I love your place, Cole.” He kissed me.

“Aww...fuck get a room.” Wolf threw a cue chalk at us.

Ziggy flipped him off.

Completely expected behavior. I wouldn't have it any other way.

Eventually, everyone paired off and retired, and I led Ziggy to my room. I loved having him in my space. I dropped his hand to open the slider to the balcony. "If you need to smoke, you can go right here. No need to hunt down the service entrance."

"Hmm... do you even have a service entrance?"

"I'll service your entrance, smarty pants."

"Oh, I'm hoping for it." Ziggy wiggled his eyebrows and plastered a cheesy grin across his face. "Or..."

"Or? Or what?"

Ziggy laughed maniacally and grabbed me, tossing me on the bed. "I could service yours."

We hadn't gone that way in a bit, but I was up for it. "Let's go then. There's lube in that drawer."

He opened it and pulled out the bottle but looked at what else was in there. "Ooh, la la. What do we have here? You've been holding out on me, sir."

"What?"

Ziggy pulled out the big dildo. I had a smaller one in there that I used on occasion, but I didn't really use the bigger one. Of course, that's the one he pulled out. It was purple. "Mr. Giant Purple People Fucker right here." He flopped onto his stomach,

holding the beast—yes, it was that—in front of him. “Can you actually take this behemoth?”

“Uh, well, not without a lot of lube and stretching. Maybe we can play with that some other time.”

He waved it around. “Oh, we will. I want to see the Purple People Fucker in action, Cole.” He licked his lips. “But I don’t think I have the patience tonight.”

“Me either. I’m tired.”

“Do you still want to get fucked? We can do something else. I mean, I know it’s been a while for you.”

“Yeah, guess it has.” It had probably been three or four months since he fucked me, maybe more. “I want it though. Miss it.”

“Well, alright. Let’s get naked.” He sat up and yanked his shirt over his head, exposing that broad chest. His pecks, shoulders, and arms were outstanding. Not overly muscular, but firm and fit. He dropped the shirt and tugged at mine when I was too busy staring at him to get undressed. “You are tired, huh? How about I suck you off and we can fuck in the morning?”

“How about fuck me now?”

“Well. I’m not giving you another out. Let’s go.” He helped me take off my pants and his jeans. The ones he had on weren’t overly tight, though they hugged his ass nicely, so they were easier to get off than normal. And yes, my rockstar went commando again. I reached out and tugged him closer so I could get my lips around his cock. “Fuck...you do that well.”

“I have condoms in the bathroom.” He turned to go into the ensuite, and I smacked his ass, making him jump and laugh. I absolutely loved how fun he could be. Sex didn’t always have to be a serious affair. If it was, he’d probably get bored.

He came back with the box I had in there and dropped it on the bed beside the lube. “Okay, I know we’ve been joking around, but I don’t want to hurt you, so I’m going to take this slow and easy. Spread ‘em, babe.”

I laughed and flipped over on my stomach, shoving a pillow under my hips. “How’s this?”

“Mmm....yeah, better.” He nibbled on my ass and teased my balls before opening the lube with a snick. He trickled the cold gel down my crack and started fingering it in my hole. He slowly stretched me, taking his time as promised. And as he worked me open, he hit my prostate regularly, making the process that much easier.

“Zig? I want you now. I’m ready.”

“Agreed. But turn over. I want to see you.”

I did as he asked and let him put my legs over his shoulders. He had me wrapped up by the time he entered me, and it didn’t take long before he was thrusting in and out in a fast-paced rhythm worthy of the drummer that he was. I liked seeing his beautiful blue eyes staring down at me intensely. It made me feel wanted and loved.

We came almost at the same time and with Ziggy leaning in to kiss me sweetly.

The next morning, I joined the guys for breakfast in the kitchen. Harrison and Wolf were cooking scrambled eggs with onions, bell peppers, and mushrooms while Miami and Jinx made toast. I wasn’t sure why it took both of them, but they were getting the job done, so I didn’t say anything. Instead, I pulled out a pitcher of orange juice and

another of water and put them on the big bar where plates had already been set out.

“Where’s Ziggy?” Miami asked.

“Finishing up his morning rituals. He’ll be down in a minute.” Of course, I meant his stretching routine, but the rest of the guys took it to mean getting high, and they snickered and snorted. But they probably weren’t far off since he was no doubt doing that as soon as he finished his exercises.

“Hope it’s okay. We helped ourselves here.” Harrison set a big bowl of scrambled eggs on the bar.

“Not at all. Everyone should feel free to make yourselves at home while you’re here.” I dished eggs out on the plates and handed them around. “Feel free to help yourselves for sure.” Ziggy showed up while we were eating, fixed a plate, and sat beside me.

“Heard you were doing your morning routine .” Wolf used air quotes.

“Fuck right off, Wolfy.”

“Awww...he’s just mad you didn’t invite him to partake.” Miami winked, teasing both Ziggy and Wolf.

“I only have enough for medicinal purposes right now. You’ll get over it.” Ziggy snagged another piece of toast.

“Hey, now. Just because you have the munchies doesn’t mean you can hog all the food,” Jinx added playfully, which earned him the bird from Ziggy.

But that was a mistake because Jinx tossed a piece of toast at him. “You little fucker.” Ziggy tossed it back, followed by a mushroom he picked out of the eggs. Of course,

he missed, hitting Miami's hand instead.

It only took a few more tosses before eggs and toast were being thrown everywhere. When Harrison shot a piece of pepper at me, I had to join in for retaliation purposes.

"I swear you guys can't go anywhere without a food fight." I laughed, though.

"Shit, man." Jinx shook off some egg. "Did not mean to disrespect your home or this good food."

"That's all right. I consider it an honor that you feel that comfortable here. Besides, I'll just double the cleaners' pay to get it picked up."

Somehow or another, some eggs weren't desecrated, so we split them, and everyone ate. I called Victoria to bring her team out to clean up as the guys got ready and headed out to do their own things.

Everyone except Ziggy.

Once the house was empty, I took Ziggy's hand. "Are you really okay?"

"Yes."

"I'm not going to push, Zig. But remember, this thing between us is a relationship now. You can be honest with me. About anything and everything. I don't want you saying yes because you don't want me to worry. I want you to tell me how you really are."

"That was a lot of words." He squeezed my hand. "But I admit, maybe I'm not. The thing with Zade has me bugged out, and I'm normally the first one out the door ready to do shit, but I don't want to go anywhere."

“We don’t have to. And whatever you’re feeling is fine. You know?”

“While we’re talking about this. I’ve been having more issues with my back than normal. You know? You heard how I played in Philly. I think getting overly tired is not a good thing for it.”

“Even with the yoga?”

“That only does so much. I mean, yeah, it helps, but it’s not a cure.”

“That’s unacceptable. I wish you’d talked to me sooner. We can get a doctor to look at you.”

“I don’t think that’s necessary. Not yet. I feel like it’s because I’m tired, and I would really like to just rest during this time off. See where we are with it after.”

I didn’t like the idea of Ziggy being in pain. I knew that was a thing with drummers sometimes, but I also knew some things could help, besides yoga and pot. “Okay. We rest, but if you’re not doing better after the Denver show, we’ll get a doctor. We can get one to meet us along the way. Maybe Reno.”

“Deal. Let’s seal it with a kiss.”

“Happy to.”

We spent our time resting, fucking, and even getting in the hot tub while the guys skied, hiked, and shopped. And when they were back, we hung out together at my house, and everyone seemed to enjoy it.

The last night before the show, Ziggy even commented that I seemed relaxed and in my element, and I told him how much it meant to me to have everyone there, but

especially him. And we even played with the Giant Purple People Fucker, as Ziggy called it. Though, we didn't get very far before he tossed it aside and fucked me himself.

But soon it was time to do the show. We got up early and headed out to the Empower Field at Mile High Stadium, where we were playing. I'd hired a Hummer limo and we all crawled in.

The show went well, and Ziggy kicked ass, playing like he did at the beginning of the tour. I thought maybe he was right and had only needed rest. I made it my mission to be sure to spread their show dates out a little more in the future. I knew they wanted to do a healthy tour, but they had to be healthy to do it.

After the last encore, I walked with Ziggy back to the dressing rooms. "Zig, maybe we should skip the party and head on to the hotel."

"No fucking way. These are the fans, the reason we do it."

I did admire his love and appreciation for his fans, but he had also been through a lot lately. "Agreed, but if you can't play, there won't be any of this."

"Fuck. You're right, I know. Let's compromise. We go but leave early."

"Deal."

I watched Ziggy work the crowd. He smiled, took selfies, shook hands. But I would swear Ziggy picked up drugs from three different people. Maybe four. I could have been mistaken. But I didn't think so. That worried me. I knew Ziggy partied. I knew he smoked pot. A lot of pot. And I knew he occasionally did other illegal drugs. But this seemed like more than that. It was different. He wasn't casually using with friends—he was collecting a pharmacy.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:49 pm

twelve

Next Stop is Utah

We had two more shows before Rocktoberfest. That was always a killer festival, and I was stoked for it this year. Masterson Management took over running it and extended it to four days, and we were going to stay there all. Four. Days. I felt like a kid with the promise of spending all day in the candy store.

It would be like fucking camping. We had the buses, but Coleman said he was thinking of getting a tent to pop up for us next to or behind the bus instead of cramming into my small bunk. Haha, cramming into a small tent with a blow-up mattress instead. Either way was going to be a riot.

But first, we had to get through Salt Lake City and Reno. We flew into Salt Lake City and the buses were there to meet us right on time, so we all piled our jet-lagged asses aboard. We were also tired from the fun we had on our off days. Well, the rest of the mother fuckers were. I didn't do much, which was actually pure bliss for once in my life.

The buses pulled up to the back gates at the Utah First Credit Union Amphitheatre. It was one of the smaller venues on this tour but still held twenty-five thousand, so nothing to sneeze at. We were still able to bring in our giant screens, which would be super great for the people out on the lawn behind the seating. We parked, and our roadies got busy setting up the stage. Kai and Marci went to make sure things were getting set up right in the merch stations. The rest of us headed into the backstage area, which in this venue was a building attached directly to the back of the stage. It

was actually set up nicely when we walked around to check it out. We could slip in and out of the VIP area, which was to the side of the stage, where we'd have our contest winners and a few of the DJs from the local rock station hanging out. And we were planning on having the after-party there as well.

"Soundcheck in twenty guys," Marci called as she buzzed down the hall.

"I'm heading there now." I grabbed Coleman's hand and pulled him toward the stage. "If they're not finished, I'll help out." I'd been told that wasn't my job, but I knew what I was doing and loved working with the equipment. The only thing I didn't mess with was the mics. Those needed to be precise. I worked with our techs, but they placed everything.

When we got to the stage, they were finishing up and pretty much ready for soundcheck. Bramble punk had their equipment to the side, ready to be loaded. I gave their drummer, Randy, a fist bump. "Fuck yeah! You guys fucking killed it the last show. Good to see you, man."

"Yeah. Sucks we aren't flying on your fancy plane, but we got here all the same." He turned and did a quick rim shot on his drums, which were already set up in front of mine.

"Haha, funny, man." I pointed at him with my index finger for a change.

"Seriously, though, Ziggy. It's been killer being on tour with you and the Hunt. I think we're starting to gel as a band." It was no secret that we'd built the band around Kay after Miami befriended the guy. The others had been studio musicians or working gigs with other bands. People who knew people. And after a few days of phone work and networking, Jinx and Harrison had pulled a decent group of guys together. They practiced and we came up with a few original songs and a couple of covers for them to perform at the shows. And every time they played, they got a little

better. “In fact, Joe and Kay have started writing a few more songs. Not for this go-round, but maybe for recording. Who knows.” Kay was the front man and played guitar, but Joe was the lead guitarist in the band. They also had Matty on another rhythm guitar to fill out their sound, along with Dave on bass.

“Yeah, it seems to be working for you. Maybe we can arrange studio time at ours down in Miami.”

“That would kick ass.” I had no clue where they all lived. Kay was from California, but the rest were from other places. But I’d learned long ago if you were serious as a musician, you went where you needed to go. End of story.

The rest of the Hunt showed up after that, and we worked with our techs to dial in the sound. When we were ready, I counted us into The One About Fighting to make sure we were golden.

“Fuck me.” Jinx flicked his guitar pick when we finished the song. “I think that was the easiest soundcheck we’ve ever fucking had.”

Wolf thumped out a cadence on the bass. “No lie.”

Marci clapped her hands three times. “Brilliant. You’re fan-fucking-tastic. Now get off the stage so Bramble Punk can run through theirs.” She shooed us backstage. She was a hard ass, but she was fucking good at her job. Corralling a bunch of assholes like us could not be easy, but she made it look like it.

My back was starting to twinge. I promised Coleman I’d tell him when I had issues, but this sucked ass. I was going to end up getting fitted for a fucking brace or something. I knew other drummers who wore them, and it wouldn’t be the end of the world, but there’d be an adjustment period, and I would prefer to have that happen after the tour.

Coleman was getting to know me entirely too well. He put an arm around my shoulders and led me into a private room backstage. “Are you okay? What’s going on?”

“I need something for my back. It’s twinging and I feel the shit coming on.”

“That’s not good.”

“No. I got shit back on the bus, but we aren’t supposed to go back until after the show.”

“I’ll go. Where is it and what do you want?”

“Just bring my duffle. I knew I should have brought it with me.”

He kissed the top of my head. “I’ll get it. I don’t recommend this as a long-term plan, though. You know that, right?”

“I do. Maybe I can see the doc after Rocktoberfest?” I honestly didn’t know when else I could do it. We had a two-week break after the festival, and that would have to work. In the meantime, I’d keep a low-level buzz going when I needed to play. It didn’t sound like a great answer to me, either. And maybe more than low-level was called for.

I maybe got carried away. I’d scored a cornucopia in Boston, so I started with a tramadol. In the past, I’d taken that, and it did a good job at pain relief without a lot of side effects. But I wasn’t sure it was strong enough. I also had a couple edibles, which were supposed to be nothing as far as potency goes, but I think that was my mistake. I ate them both and smoked a joint afterward. I was fucking tripping during the meet and greet. And I didn’t remember much of it later. I felt pretty good. Maybe too good.

When Bramble Punk went on stage, I wanted to see them play. After chatting up Randy earlier, I thought I'd give them a listen, so I went to the side stage. Harrison's little brother was there watching as well, and I gave him a hug. And promptly lost my fucking marbles.

I walked onto the stage during their cover of Starset's Monster. It was a complicated song, musically, and Bramble Punk did it with a harder, more punkish, scaled-down version. It sounded fantastic, especially the drums. "Fuck yeah. This rocks!" I yelled. And I was too close to Kay's mic. I could tell the band was surprised, but they carried on like they weren't.

Kay screamed a couple lines, "I am the darkness. I'm a monster..."

And I started singing the chorus with them. "You're the pulse in my veins..."

But things went fuzzy at that point. It was like a heat wave engulfed me. I ripped off my shirt and tossed it into the audience. Of course, they went nuts, and I thought it would be a great time to go crowd-surfing.

What the fuck, right? But it was not a venue to do that easily. There was sound equipment, lighting, and video in front of the stage and behind that, security. The actual people were significantly farther away. But thankfully, I realized that before I jumped and sat on the front of the stage, waving my arms back and forth over my head instead. The crowd copied me. I think. It was a little blurry. And dizzy. So I laid back and stretched out a bit. I could feel the vibrations of the music through my bones, especially the drums. Pounding and zipping.

The universe was aligning and separating.

I heard a sweet voice in my ear, calling me back to Earth. "Come on, baby. I've got you." It was my Coleman. I loved my Coleman. I let him wrap me up in his arms and

lead me off. I didn't know or care where we were going. It didn't matter as long as Coleman had his strong arms around me.

thirteen

Taking Control in Salt Lake City

I led Ziggy off to the dressing room, and by the time I got him laid down on the couch with a cushion under his head, he was out cold.

Miami and Jinx followed me into the room. Miami pulled one of Ziggy's eyelids up. "He's down for the count. What the hell? Should we call someone?"

Jinx held his phone up. "I did. There is a first responder on duty at these shows, just in case of emergencies or whatever. He's coming back now."

"This isn't his normal get a little stoned before a show routine. What the fuck?" Miami looked at me.

"He's been having problems with his back. He wanted something a little stronger, but I didn't see what he took." I grabbed his duffle and started going through it. After pulling out jeans and T-shirts, I got a glimpse of everything in there. "Holy shit."

"What?" Miami looked over my shoulder. "Where the fuck did he even get this stuff?"

"He collected it from people in Boston. Mostly. I think." I dropped the bag.

Jinx shook his head like he couldn't believe it. It didn't matter though, because I was done with this. "I'm going to get a doctor to meet us in Reno."

“Doctor?” Miami asked. “For the drugs?”

“No. For the back. This is...” I waved my hand over the bag of drugs. “Self-medicating. We need to get him on a real program with real medication, maybe a back brace, but overseen by a doctor. This shit is going down the toilet.” I took the duffle to the bathroom and flushed it all one by one.

When I came back into the room, the responder was checking him out, shining light in his eyes, checking his blood pressure. “He’s out cold, for sure. But I don’t think it’s serious. His vitals are fine. Do we have any idea what he took?”

“No, but there was also half a bottle of Crown Royal, so he may have drunk that to take whatever it was. But none of it was in bottles with prescription labels or anything. Though it looked like prescription pills. I can’t be sure. But he smoked a joint with it. I know that.”

“Well, sedatives, like Ambien, Lunesta, or anti-anxiety medications, can have terrible interactions with marijuana. And if he was taking this for pain relief. He could have taken something like that.”

“He had a little bit of everything. I think he would have taken something more specifically for pain.”

“Hmm...With that, they can amplify each other. The effects increase.” I had already been guessing that. “I’d say to keep an eye on him. Check his pulse. If anything changes, call an ambulance. But I’m betting he’s going to sleep this off. If it was going to get worse, it probably already would have, based on how long ago he took everything. Unless he took something else since. Like since he left the stage.”

“No, nothing. I had him.”

“That’s it then. Call me if you need anything else.”

As he left, Marci barged in and took in the room. “What the hell?”

“Ziggy has more issues than we thought.” Miami stuffed his clothes back in the duffle and kicked it under the couch. “He’s not playing tonight. Simon will have to fill in. I’ll say he’s sick and had a reaction to his medication. I’ll get the crowd’s sympathy, and we’ll move on. No big.”

“I’ll stay with him, obviously.” I tossed a couple of cushions on the floor by his head and sat next to him. I ran my fingers through his silky hair. It was long and unruly most of the time, but he took care of it with expensive shampoo and conditioner.

“He’ll be all right.” Miami cupped my shoulder. “But I think there’s more going on here than the back pain. He has our support, you know. We love him like a brother. Let’s work on getting him to stop shutting us out.”

“Agreed.” Jinx leaned in and hugged me. “We are here for you. Don’t do this alone.”

“Thank you. I barely got him to talk to me about his back pain. He keeps his emotions close, not letting anyone in. You are all closer to him than anyone...”

“Miami is closer to him than the rest of us. Always been that way, but even so, you’re not wrong. He wants to be the big bad rockstar. Strong. And anything that shows vulnerability is shoved down and hidden.”

Miami crossed his arms. “It’s probably his upbringing. He never got along with his parents.”

I scowled. Did they not know? “They kicked him out when he was a teen because he was gay. And forced his sister into an arranged marriage. I’d say it went beyond not

getting along.”

Miami’s eyes practically popped out of his head. “What the fuck?”

“Oh my God. He never said anything.” Jinx crossed his arms over his chest. “He’s had a harder life than I even imagined. We need to help him.”

“My thoughts exactly. He needs a counselor too.” I pulled my phone out of my pocket. “I’m going to try and arrange the back doctor first, though.”

Marci sat in the chair opposite the couch where Ziggy was blissfully snoozing. She huffed. “I imagine an intervention is going to be difficult. I know I’m newer to this family, but even I know he’s going to fight you.”

“You’re not wrong.” Miami paced across the room behind the couch. “I say, get the back doctor in place for Reno and see if he can help us get this under control, but we wait until after Rocktoberfest to address the rest of it. He won’t feel as threatened. And we have a break, so time to deal with it. And see where we are.”

“You may want to think about canceling the last leg of the tour. I mean, Simon is great, but the fans are paying to see Ziggy.” Marci flipped her hand out toward the man on the couch. “He doesn’t act like it, I know, but he’s a huge part of the fan experience. Like unexpectedly the fan favorite. Not the one that always wins the race, but the one the crowd loves to death, no matter what.”

That described his place in the band for sure. He was the unspoken backbone. Jinx had been the unofficial leader, and this morphed into him and Miami together. Although Miami was the front man, and thought he was the leader, the guys always deferred to Jinx. And Wolf was the humble bassist, happy to go along and quietly, as unassuming as possible, while secretly being the musical genius behind their songs. Not that he wrote them all, but he added his expertise to each one like seasoning. That

was Midnight Hunt. That was the combination and connections that made them work.

But Ziggy was broken. That meant the band was broken.

We would all have to work together to fix it. And I sincerely wanted to fix it—fix my Ziggy. “Let’s take it one step at a time. You all may be right. He needs more help, and it will be a fight. No matter what we do, he won’t like it. He won’t want to not play the rest of the tour. He’s goddamned nearly obsessed with pleasing the fans.” I leaned over and kissed the side of his head. “Which is why they love him so much.”

Jinx squatted next to me. “Your relationship with him has changed. This isn’t a fling. You’re not trying to get in his pants. This is serious, huh?”

I nodded.

“You love him.”

Again, a nod. I didn’t think I could speak without sobbing.

Jinx patted my back. “I think he loves you too. But that’s also part of the problem. You need to address that. I know you’ve been working on it, but maybe he doesn’t know how to do that love relationship thing. I mean, this is me thinking just now, but if he was kicked out young by hateful parents, maybe he never had the examples of what love is supposed to look like.”

I hugged him. I hurt for my Ziggy. I was terrified to lose him. We had to figure this shit out. “There’s a lot to unpack. And you’re right. One step at a time. Doc in Reno, and we’ll go from there. Deal?”

“Yes...”

The guys left us. They still had a show to do. And it was Simon's turn to step up. I would have liked to see that. Simon was a good kid and a talented drummer. Eventually, he'd leave us and join his own band. Maybe.

Right now, I could only worry about Ziggy. I rubbed his hair and spoke softly to him, checking his pulse every so often, but it was strong. We would get it all worked out in time.

fourteen

Facing the Facts in Reno

Being a rockstar had its advantages. The first being a family that loves you. Midnight Hunt played music with me, but they were also the best friends I had ever had in my life. And Coleman? Well, his caring, and not judging me had me falling harder and harder for him.

The other advantage was that you could get the best fucking back doctor for drummers in the fucking world to come to you. He brought all his equipment, including a portable X-ray machine. I met with him in the hotel room at the Grand Sierra Resort, where we would be playing the next day after having run through all of the testing in one of the hotel's conference rooms.

Doctor Harter sat on the chair adjacent to the couch, where I held on extremely tightly to Coleman's hand. He didn't say a thing about it—simply supported me. "Well?" I asked.

He shook my free hand and turned to shake Coleman's as well. "There are no injuries or major issues on your X-rays."

"What's wrong?" There had to be something wrong. The pain was bad and getting worse.

"That's actually the good news, Mr. Ziggy."

I waved my hand. “No mister bull shit. Just Ziggy, thanks.”

“Fine, Ziggy. As I was saying, that’s the good news. And honestly, from what you told me about your yoga and stretching, I’m pretty sure that’s why. It’s kept you going this long, and it’s an extremely important aspect of your back health. So keep that up.”

“But it doesn’t seem to be helping him if he’s in this much pain.” Bless my Coleman for voicing exactly what I was thinking.

“It’s helping more than you realize. However.” He cocked his head to the side. “There are other things you need to address.”

“Like what?”

“Posture and position during drumming is crucial. You need adjustments. And understand it may take practice to get it all right, but even from the start, it will help. But first, you need a brace. This is only a posture correction to keep your back straight with your shoulders above your hips. It’s all about alignment. But it’s not so rigid that you can’t move freely. I know as a drummer, you need to move.” The doctor mimed drumming wildly, and he was pretty fucking accurate. “But the spine likes to be aligned and when you repeatedly do this...” He mimed his drumming again. “Without the spine aligned...” He ran his hands up and down along the sides of his body. “It’s like carpal tunnel. You’ve heard of that, right?”

“Yes, so like carpal tunnel for the back?” I was a little confused, but he was making sense as far as positioning the body.

He tilted his head back and forth. “Not exactly like that. But it helps as a description. Basically, your spine is not aligned correctly, and your muscles are spasming. It’s at the point now where every time you play, it triggers that muscle memory. It’s your

body trying to protect the spine.”

“Okay. Got it. So the brace will take care of that?” Coleman asked.

“Not by itself. It’s a tool, but you need more tools. For instance, you need to look at the seat height on the kit and adjust it to the right level. You may have been sitting too low. And you need to be aligned in front of it correctly.” He held his hands out with his elbows tucked at his sides. “I’ll go with you to your kit and help you get the best position and show you how to repeat it every time. We’ll put a block of wood under the back legs to get the seat angle a little higher as well.”

“That’s not a lot. I was afraid this would be too much.”

“It’s not a lot, no. But it’s important. If you don’t pay attention and do this right, you’ll end up never playing again.”

“Oh fuck no.” I stood. That was not ever fucking happening. Playing the drums—playing with Midnight Hunt—was my life.

“Relax…” the doctor motioned for me to sit back down. “You’ll do this stuff and get better. It’ll be hard at first but stick with it. We’ll add a few other exercises to your strength routine as well. Other things like acupuncture or massage can also help. But even just relaxing in a hot tub after a show will help get those muscles to calm down.”

Coleman squeezed my hand. “That doesn’t sound so bad.”

“No, I guess not.”

“That doesn’t sound bad, no,” the doctor said. “But I’m not finished.”

I rolled my hand in the air, gesturing for him to continue.

“What you put in your body is also a problem. When you consume all the wrong things, your body doesn’t function correctly. Junk food, drugs, and alcohol. It’s all like adding poison to your nervous system. Confusing your body into not knowing what’s good or bad. Your muscles are protecting your spine, but they’re not going to realize you’re aligned correctly now if they can’t sense that through all the shit you’ve been dampening them with.”

“Uh...” I didn’t even know what to say. I mean, my diet wasn’t that bad. But I consumed entirely too many drugs and too much alcohol and had for a long time.

“I know. You’ve been numbing yourself. Don’t do that anymore. You want your body to be able to function properly. Eat a diet of lean meats and a lot of fruits and vegetables. Don’t cut out carbs, but rather eat better carbs. Cut out the processed crap. Not just processed bread and flour products but processed meat and dairy like crappy quality cheese and salami or pepperoni. If you get pizza, just get all the vegetables and chicken if they have it. It’s still pizza. You get me?”

“Yes. I can do that.”

“And I’m not going to say no alcohol because I’m not stupid. But let’s say no alcohol for the next few weeks until your body has a chance to adjust. After that, only one or two drinks a week. Save it for the important times. And no drugs. No marijuana. No. I am going to prescribe an anti-inflammatory. But I only want you to use it for two weeks regularly. Afterward, only as needed. And let’s switch out the pot for meditation. I’m going to leave you information on two of the best methods.”

“Meditation?” Was he kidding? Meditation was not the equivalent of smoking a joint.

“Look, Ziggy. It’s up to you. You can keep using it but you’re not helping yourself. If

you do everything I say but keep smoking pot, you will end up with, I don't know, one or two more tours. You'll still have pain, but it'll be tolerable. Until it's not. But will it be too late? I don't know. Maybe you'll compress your spine and need surgery. I don't know for sure, no. Likely, though."

"Fuck me."

Coleman pulled me into a hug. I wasn't sure if that was necessary. If it came down to playing drums or smoking pot, the pot lost. But it wasn't going to be easy.

The doctor agreed to meet me at the stage for soundcheck the next day, and Coleman made arrangements for us to have extra time to do it and for me to practice with the new alignment and the brace. The doctor left.

And Coleman stared at me like my head was about to explode.

"I'm okay, Cole."

"Are you though?"

I shook my head and bit my bottom lip. "I don't know."

He held me tightly. "You know, we're here for you. Not just me but the band and their significant others. Marci and Kai, the whole team."

"So like everybody knows I'm a drug addict and can't take care of myself." A tear formed in the corner of my eye. My parents were right all along. I was worthless.

Coleman grabbed my shoulders and shook me. "Stop that. No one thinks you're an addict. You've had issues. And you're getting help. That makes you strong. All I'm saying is that we all love you."

My chest felt heavy. This was new, and it made my head spin. “I want to lay down.”

“Okay. Come on.”

The next morning, I went through the same routine with my yoga, and I added the extra exercises the doctor left for me like a good boy. I did one set of each. It would take time to build up to doing more. I’d try to add a second set the next day. Afterward, as usual, Coleman was down in the gym working out. I got dressed and searched for my pot. And there wasn’t any. I was jonesing fucking hard.

I flipped through my phone until I found my Reno contact, and I texted her. She could come up to the hotel. But I couldn’t have her come up to the room because I didn’t want Coleman involved. I needed to meet her downstairs. She said she’d be there in twenty, and I could meet her at the valet parking.

With a plan in place, I needed to get the fuck out of the room. I grabbed the key card and my wallet and headed out the door. Drake fell in line behind me. “Where’s uh, Calvin?” The other security guard, now assigned to us, was nowhere in sight.

“It’s Clark. And he went with Coleman.”

“Oh. Well. I’m going down to find some food.” Yeah, I could have ordered room service, but I wanted to stretch my legs. Drake followed. I knew he would. And after what had happened with Zade, I didn’t mind one bit.

After getting a salad at one of the restaurants—look at me being healthy—I ate about half of it and dumped the rest. It was time to head out to Valet Parking anyway. When I got to the exit, Drake stepped up his pace, walking beside me instead of behind. “Where are you going? We need extra security to leave the hotel.”

“I’m just going right here. My friend is coming. When she gets here, we’ll go back

inside. Is that okay?" I hoped so because I didn't want a bunch of security guards surrounding me for this.

"As long as you don't leave the front. But I'm not sure I like that much." Drake glued himself to my side. He wasn't going to have a repeat of the Zade incident. No one was getting close without permission. And since it was my life at stake, I didn't argue.

A minute or two later, a cherry red Mustang pulled up, and my friend Pam got out. "Yo! Zig, what's shaking. Long time, no see." She dropped keys in the valet's hands and hugged me tight. I waited for her to get her receipt to claim her car, and then we went in the hotel with Drake on our tail. "That's new." She thumbed over her shoulder.

"Yeah, I'm like super famous now. Didn't you hear about the guy who tried to get me to run off with him?"

"Oh, yeah, I thought that was a publicity stunt, or like Ziggy being Ziggy and bringing more drama than was really there."

I laughed. Pam was always a straight shooter. She didn't bullshit around for sure. "No, actually, this time it was a real threat."

She slapped my shoulder. "Well, fuck you, Mr. Big Shot."

"Ah...what-the-fuck-ever. Come on." I looped my arm in hers. "I don't know where we're going, actually."

Pam laughed hard. "You never do. I've been here before. Come on." She headed toward the pool, and we went over to an area with a fire pit. It wasn't totally secluded, but it was off to the side and no one else was there. It was fucking hot out

and everyone around was too busy splashing in the pool or getting drinks at the bar. We sat on the cushions in front of the unlit rocks. Drake walked back and forth behind us, but he wasn't watching us. He was focused on the environment and people around us.

"Perfect."

"Yep." We made a discreet transaction that I didn't think anyone would notice.

"I'll get you tickets to the show as well."

"Sure. How about a drink now?"

"I'm not going to the bar, but...go get whatever you want. Charge it to room Twenty-five twelve."

"Mmm... sounds perfect. Be right back." She did a little tap on my shoulder as she walked away.

When she went to the bar, Drake came a little closer. "Do you really want to be making these choices?" He had never questioned me. Ever.

"They pay you for security, Drake, not like literally babysitting. You know?"

"I care about you. I know you're a client, but I do like you. You know, sort of..."

I snorted a laugh. "That's seriously the most you've ever said to me."

"Still."

"Let's keep the same arrangement we had. You make sure no one hurts me or shoots

me, and I'll do my thing."

Drake rolled his eyes. This big-bad motherfucker, with probably an eight-pack set of abs and biceps like boulders, rolled his eyes like a teenager. "Whatever."

I couldn't help but chuckle at the situation, but I also hoped he wouldn't say anything to Coleman. I wasn't going to tell him not to though. Pam returned with two big pink drinks. "These are called Desert Danger..." She handed me one. "I think they have four kinds of alcohol in them... I don't know. It's good though."

She sat with her drink, and I took a sip. It was a little fruity and a bit strong. "What'd you do? Tell them to make it a triple?"

"Yep." She sipped her drink while looking at me, until she burst out laughing. "No, duh, but your face right now is hilarious. Ah, fuck, Zig-man. I sure missed you." She reached out and tweaked my nose, but it didn't bother me.

"It's been a while, huh?"

"Yeah. But life is good. You know? Brock and the boys keep me fucking busy."

"You ever marry that asshole?"

"Nah...whatever, we'll be all like I'm Goldie Hawn, and he's my Kurt Russel. What we have works. So..." She took another drink. "Besides, he's still a roadie and gone all the time, which actually helps. You know absence makes the heart grow horny and all that."

I chuckled. Pam always made me laugh. "I don't think that's how it goes."

She shrugged. "Whatever."

“Who’s he working with now?”

“Blacksmith Sugar. They’re on the East Coast right now.”

“Are they playing Rocktoberfest? I’d love to see them and say hello to Brock.”

“Yeah, they’re on the first night, though.”

“Fuck yeah! We’ll be there for the whole festival. Are you going to be there?”

Pam shook her head. “No, the kids. I can’t be gone like that. But I get to see you now, bud.”

Pam and Brock were a connection I’d made very shortly after Midnight Hunt broke up the first time. We’d toured together with shitty bands in shitty joints and become great friends. “It’s great to see you, Pammy.”

“I know. And I look pretty fucking great for having popped out two brats, huh! Hey, can you get three tickets for tonight? I’d like to bring my oldest and his boyfriend.”

“Yeah, sure. How old are they?”

“He’s almost thirteen. Do you believe that?” She’d gotten pregnant while we were touring dives around the Midwest. It ended her coming with us.

“Damn, it’s been a long time.” I didn’t even want to do the math.

“It has, but I was fucking glad to see y’all get back together. You were way too fucking good to be playing those shitholes with those shitty bands.”

“Thanks. I’d like to think that.” Catching up with her had been great, but I really

wanted to go hide out and smoke this joint. I didn't want to ditch my friend, but I had other things to do. "Hey, I have to run. You should hang out. Charge whatever you want to our room."

"Oh, yeah. I bet you have a lot of shit to do before the show. And I actually do too, but it's been so fucking good seeing you." We stood and hugged and walked down together, hugging again before she went out the front doors to retrieve her car while I went toward the back of the hotel. To find a spot where I could roll up a joint in peace.

After I got high, I went back to my room and took a shower. I put on fresh jeans and a T-shirt that was so old, it was nearly worn through, and I had no idea what was originally on the front of it. Now it was pieces of what it had been and looked a little like abstract art. But it was super comfortable.

I had an hour before I had to be down at the stage, which was onsite at the hotel, and I wasn't sure where Coleman was, but I had words filtering in my head. Probably because it had been an emotional few days. I grabbed my notebook and opened it up. The words on the page were kind of gelling with the new ones I had, so I figured I'd work on meshing them together.

You threw my heart in a pine box

My love went deep, six feet

Can't claw my way back—nowhere left to dance

No drums to beat

With me you buried another chance

There's no second chance

There's no second chance

I've been running on fumes

Running for my life

Banging out other peoples' tunes

Looking for my way back to you

but in the end you don't care

End the end you never dared

You threw my heart in a pine box

My love went deep, six feet

Can't claw by way back—nowhere left to dance

No drums to beat

With me you buried another chance

There's no second chance

There's no second chance

This hole is dark can't climb out

No matter how hard I bang and shout

Once you gave me a lifeline and a song

Now you're giving me nothing but gone

After that, I was only staring at the words with a blank head and a heavy soul. I wasn't sure what this song was. At first, it had been about me and Coleman, but now it felt like it was about my whole life. Drums had saved my life, but now they were slowly being taken away, and that was due to the drumming. Well, and maybe the drugs a little, but it was all fucking wrapped up together like a giant knot that wouldn't let go no matter what end I tugged.

"Hey, Ziggy." Coleman sat next to me on the couch. "What? What's wrong?"

I sniffled and wiped my face. "Hard couple of days. No big deal." I closed the notebook, but Coleman stared at it. "It's not ready."

"Okay. When you are." He pulled me into his arms and hugged me. "I'm here."

He felt warm and comforting, like home. Like a home I'd never known. I turned to the side and smooshed my nose into his neck. Maybe I could get through this as long as I had Coleman. I'd never been one to look for this, but in his arms, I felt like snuggling in.

He kissed the side of my head, which he had started doing more of lately. I kind of liked it too. "You have a show to do. Are you up for it? We can have Simon play again."

"Oh fuck no. Don't give that kid a bigger head than he already has." Coleman knew I was kidding. Simon didn't have that kind of disposition at all. "Seriously, though. I'm

good. Just enjoying this for a minute.” I hugged him tighter.

“Mm...well, okay. I like this a lot.”

“Me too.”

When someone pounded on the door, I heard Marci yelling up and down the hall. “Let’s go if you’re going to do it. Soundcheck as soon as you get your ass on stage.”

“Har-har. That’s when all soundchecks should be. No more bullshit about me being late. They start whenever the fuck I get there.”

The doctor met us there as promised. He adjusted everything, which turned out wasn’t a lot, but he said that little bit would make a huge difference. I’d have to trust him on that. He also brought a couple of braces with him and sized me for the best fit. “You only need to wear this when you play. However, since you have a show tonight and it’s new, you may want to wear it for a little while before the show. Maybe an hour or so.”

“Okay. Thanks, doc.” I shook his hand and climbed back behind the kit. We had gone over the changes with Simon and my roadie, Mick, so they knew exactly how to line everything up. We threw in a brace for Simon for the few times he played. He might not need it so much now, but he was a great drummer and would eventually be in his own band.

Randy from Bramble Punk came over and talked to the doc while I took advantage of the extra time we arranged and practiced with the new setup and brace, getting used to the feel.

After a while, I finished up and handed my sticks to Mick. “That feels good.” I looked around but the doctor was gone.

Coleman smiled at me and made his way over. “You like the changes?”

“Yes. I think I already feel better.”

“Good. Randy got a brace and some adjustments, too. You’re doing a great job, leading by example.”

I shrugged off his comment. I was no fucking leader of anything. I just wanted to be able to play without the pain.

Marci held her hand up. “Yo! Meet and greet happening now. Come on.”

Coleman helped me take off the brace, and we gave it to Mick until show time. I jogged down the hall to the conference room set up with fans ready to get merch signed. I was in a much better mood and able to enjoy this more than normal. I even remembered to give Coleman Pam’s name for tickets. She’d skin me alive if I forgot.

I was looking forward to playing the show and realized it was the first time in a long time that I truly was.

When it was finally showtime, we all ran out on the stage. But I had to put the fucking brace on. So, I figured I would do it in Ziggy style. I grabbed it and stomped up to the front of the stage.

Miami stared at me for a minute, not sure what I was going to do. Well, I didn’t fucking know either. So I shrugged and pulled my T-shirt off and tossed it hard into the audience. I leaned into Miami’s mic. “Hey, Reno!” I had to wait for the noise to die down before going on, as usual. “We’re going to get started in a minute, but I need to get this brace on first.” I held it up over my head. I moved away from the mic and spoke to Miami. “Help me get this bitch on.”

We finagled it in place and adjusted it. When it felt right, I grabbed the mic again. “Thank you for your patience, Reno!” And pause for the screaming to stop—a little. “This is new.” I tapped the front of the brace. “But it’s going to let me keep playing for you a long, long time!” I yelled louder with each word, and the crowd responded. I motioned for them to get louder, and they didn’t let me down.

Miami mimed kicking me back to my kit, and I played it up a little before heading there. Of course, the crowd loved that. Miami had the mic now. “Our fabulous and infamous drummer...the Zig-meister!”

I ran through a complicated riff before easing it back into our first song, The One About Fighting .

Miami came in at the right time, “It happens more than I like, it’s a whirlwind of spitfire...”

And we were off on our own whirlwind, and we put out a fucking kick-ass show.

fifteen

Rocktoberfest Day One

I 'd been to Rocktoberfest before. I knew what it would be like, but for some reason, this year was...well, it was more.

We arrived by bus early Thursday morning, having traveled through the night. The whole band elected to ride together. And as the sun rose, turning the sky above the festival grounds pink, everyone had noses pressed to the window like kids peeking in on Santa on Christmas Eve.

“The Mastersons are running this thing now. Think that means Social Sinners will already be here?” Miami tried to squeeze in between Jinx and Wolf, who were so close to each other that they were sharing the same space in the window.

Jinx shoved him. “Look out of your own window. What are you, four?”

“Fuck off. I want to see what’s on this side.”

“Same fucking thing as that side.”

“Desert and buses and RVs.” Wolf looked back only long enough for Miami to flip him off. He retaliated by sticking his tongue out before turning back to the window.

Ziggy was as bad. Hopping around from window to window, and any time he was still for more than a minute, his fingers tapped against any and every hard surface.

“My friend’s band Blacksmith Sugar is playing tonight. They should totally be a Saturday band. They rock.”

“Oh, I know them.” Wolf turned fully around and sat on the couch. “Who do you know?”

“Actually, I know one of the roadies. Brock Preston.”

“But you’re not wrong about the band. Anton Sweet started them. Thus, the sugar part of the name. He’s the guitarist. Super good.” Wolf knew a lot of musicians and listened to a variety of music. He was classically trained and could play anything with strings. He also had a cool demeanor, so he was easy to admire.

I was curious about this band and Ziggy’s friend. “What’s the Blacksmith part of the name?”

“Beats me.” Wolf folded his hands in his lap. “But they are good. Why the hell are they on Thursday?”

“It was a last-minute add. They weren’t supposed to be here at all. They were on the East Coast touring, but their manager got them squeezed in.” Ziggy knew a lot about this. “I think someone else dropped out.”

“And who is this roadie you know?” I could not keep from asking, though I wanted to shoot myself the second the words came out of my mouth. I was sure my eyes were leaning more toward green at that moment.

Ziggy plopped down in my lap. “An old friend from way back when. I ran into his wife in Reno. You remember the ones I got tickets for at the resort?” He leaned forward and kissed me.

“Right.” My jealous monster settled back down. No need to worry about past lovers. But I did wrap my arms around him a little tighter.

We spent what felt like the next hour, but was only like twenty minutes or so, talking about bands and who everyone wanted to see. Finally, the bus was parked in the right spot where we’d camp out. I should have followed through on my tent idea, but no, we were going to cram into the bunk, but we would live through it. I didn’t mind being closer to Ziggy at all. And I thought the bunk would be better on his back than an air mattress.

The bus door opened, and everyone headed to the front. Drake and Clark handed each of us lanyards as we got off the bus. “Do not leave the grounds. And make sure you check in at your own bus to pick up Dale before heading off.” He pointed at Wolf. Dale was his guard for this gig, while Drake was with us and Clark with Miami and Jinx.

Ziggy grabbed my arm. “Let’s see if they have breakfast set up. I’m starving.” We made our way to the food areas and there were obviously a lot of people working, but no food was out and ready. There were trucks again as well, but none of them were open either. “Fuck no. I’m hungry. Let’s see if we can finagle a Sammy or something.”

“We have snacks on the bus.”

“Fuck that.” He stepped over the roped-off area and leaned his head into the back of the concessions area. “Hey. Anyone here?”

After a bit of clanging, which sounded a lot like pots and pans, a man stepped out. Not just a man, though. This guy was stunning. Petite with a touch of makeup that made his eyelashes seem like they were a foot long. His hair was pulled up under a net but looked long and platinum. I could imagine it flowing around his shoulders.

“Can I help you?”

“I’m like starving, dude. I know it’s early, but can we get something to eat? Anything?” Ziggy bounced on his toes.

The guy put a hand on his hip and for a second, he seemed like he was going to go off, but he relaxed instead. “I do have a Sausage, Peppers, & Arugula Ricotta Linguine that is far enough along to serve. How’s that?”

“Sounds fantastic...” I thought my man was going to explode, he was so hyped up. Was he drooling?

“Okay...” Before the guy turned around, I noticed his lanyard.

“Ely? Do I know you?” He suddenly looked familiar.

“Yeah.” Ziggy screwed up his face. “You do look familiar. Ely?”

Ely glared, but not in a totally unfriendly way. “Well, I do run the food services here. If you’ve been here in prior years, you’ve seen me. I’m sure.”

“Maybe, but...”

The guy sighed. “ETF.”

“ET what?” I wasn’t sure what he was talking about, but Ziggy clued in fast.

“Oh. You’re with ETF, Rhone, right?”

Ely nodded but I still didn’t know who he was talking about.

“Dude.” Ziggy smacked my arm. “The band. ETF. Embrace the Fear. Rhone is their drummer. Ely is with him. Sorry, I don’t know if you’re dating or engaged, married, or what, but they’ve been together a while now. I saw you hanging with them last year.”

“Yes. That’s me. So food?”

“Please, please, please.” Ziggy dropped to his knees and held his hands in front of him like he was praying.

“Rockstars, I swear.” Ely rolled his eyes. “Wait here.”

I smacked the back of Ziggy’s head. “Get up, you goof.”

He cackled like a fiend, but he stood. “I’m super stoked for this festival, and I’m starving.”

Before he finished his sentence, I copied his words with, “You’re starving. I know.”

Thankfully, Ely quickly brought us to trays loaded with the pasta dish he’d described. “Enjoy.”

“Thank you so much.” I never forgot my manners. “Hopefully, we’ll see you later.”

“I’ll be here, cooking and making sure there is plenty of food all weekend long.” He spread his arms out dramatically.

Ziggy bowed and took his tray, dashing to the closest seat to dig in. Ely had even supplied forks, thank God, or Ziggy probably would have eaten with his hands.

“Bye, Ely.” I turned and followed my man. The food was delicious.

We spent the rest of the day walking around, chatting with other bands who had arrived, and watching a few newer bands. There was a kick-ass group that even I loved on a smaller stage. They were called One Way Street, and I made a note to check them out later and see who represented them.

Butler Collins was headlining Thursday night, but the band we were really after was Blacksmith Sugar, Ziggy's friend's band. They were on two bands before Butler Collins. His friend Brock was one of the roadies, so we were going to wait around for him to finish up and say hello.

Brock was probably on the stage setting up when we got there, but Ziggy managed to get us to the side of the stage. He pointed out Brock who was setting up the drums. "He helped me out back in the dark days when the Hunt wasn't together." I should have guessed he was the drum roadie. Everything with Ziggy was drums. Sometimes, I didn't think he even realized there were other people in the bands we were watching.

Brock finished up and jogged over. "Zig-man!" He gave Ziggy a bro hug.

"Brock, this is my boyfriend, Coleman. He's a promoter."

"Coleman Hicks? Shut the front door." He shook my hand. I was always surprised when people knew who I was since I was totally a behind the scenes guy, but I had made a name in the rock world for putting together some of the best shows.

"Nice to meet you. I don't get to meet Ziggy's friends much."

"Friends? He told you we were friends? Oh, I don't think so." He shook his head and took a step back.

And Ziggy attacked him, smacking his arms. "You mother fucker."

They both burst out laughing and hugged again, and I had the feeling they'd done that routine before. Brock put his arm around Ziggy's shoulders. "You're going to have to tell me how a low-life second-rate drummer like you landed the best promoter in the business. He's cool." He jabbed his thumb toward me. "You're not." He poked Ziggy in the chest.

"Mother fucker. I sure don't have a chance of getting an inflated ego around you."

Brock laughed, throwing his head back. He was big, bigger than Ziggy, and boisterous. "After the show, we'll catch up. The guys are about to go on."

The band passed us as they took the stage, and we turned to watch them play. Blacksmith Sugar was not bad at all. In fact, their music grabbed me quickly. Surprisingly, the bass player was a woman. She was totally rocking out, too. I didn't think she was as good as Wolf, but not many were. I'd learned earlier that the guitarist was Anton Sweet, but I didn't know anything about the others.

Brock leaned into me and whisper-shouted as he pointed to each one. "Guitar is Anton Sweet. Lix Ward is the singer. The bassist is Piper Lee Morris, but uses they and them for pronouns. And the badass motherfucking drummer is Carl Amsel." Said drummer pounded out a killer rhythm. Piper slammed their head back and forth, hair flying as they played. And the singer, Lix, was wailing. Holding long notes and showing vocal dynamics that I've rarely seen in rock bands. "They're good, right?"

I nodded. "Yeah. I want to meet them after."

"You got it." He did a gun-finger thing at me, before he squatted down and eyed the drums. I didn't know what he was doing, and I didn't ask.

After the set, the band ran off the stage, did some high-fives, and settled down. They drank water and poured it over their heads. But they were going back up for one more

song, so no one moved to grab the equipment. They formed a circle and chanted. “Blacksmith fuckyeah Sugar kick ass!” On ass they got super loud and raised their hands over their heads. Many bands had matras like that before going on, so it wasn’t unusual. Normally, I’d seen it before the show, not at the end, but I wasn’t judging.

They stomped back up on the stage, threw hands and horns, and got the crowd riled up. “Hey-hey, Black Rock! We love to rock you!” Lix yelled into the mic. “On bass. Piper Lee Morris.” They pounded out a killer riff on the bass while shuffling their hips back and forth in a showmanship tease. “Our baddest of badass drummers...CarlAmsel.” He made the name one word. And the drummer pounded out a killer solo. When he was done, he kept up the rhythm and Piper added her part.

“And you all know our founder, the sweetest guitarist on the planet. Anton Sweet.” Anton started plucking out some notes that weren’t incredibly dynamic.

Brock bumped his shoulder with mine. “Watch this shit.”

And I did indeed watch as what Anton was playing slowly grew in complexity, building riff on riff, until he dropped to his knees and leaned back, positively shredding. He was good enough to go up against the big boys in the shred competition they’d done in prior years. That was something I’d like to see, though I didn’t know if it would happen. And when he was done. He stopped playing and leaned forward over his guitar. After a beat, he stood and picked up the opening of their song like he’d only been strolling around the stage instead of shredding a killer solo.

“I am Lix and this is Blacksmith Sugar.” He started screaming the words to their song. I couldn’t tell what they all were but something about blasphemy and death and winding up walking the streets of hell. Not my favorite theme, but the crowd seemed to go crazy over it.

“That was their last release. Topped the charts.” I could barely hear what Brock was saying, but I got the gist of it. These guys were too good, with a solid following. I would have been surprised at the early billing had I not heard about the last-minute changes. But I totally wanted to book these guys on a tour. I needed to meet their manager.

After their final song, they left the stage. “That’s my cue. Catch you after, Zig-man?”

“You bet.”

“Hey, dude.” The drummer, Carl Amsel, came up. “You’re from Midnight Hunt, right?”

“Yeah, I’m Ziggy.” They did a fist bump thing. “You fucking killed it out there.”

“Thanks. You’re friends with Brock, right? I thought he said he was friends with you, but I didn’t believe him. He’s such a fucking show off.” But the guy laughed. It was just the way they teased each other. “Come to our bus and hang while you wait. Brock will be by when he’s done. Seriously, he’s a good guy.”

“Sure. Sounds good.” Ziggy turned to me and grabbed my hand. “This is my boyfriend, Coleman.”

“Rad.” I got a fist bump from Carl.

The guitarist, on the other hand, came up behind him. “Coleman? As in Coleman Hicks, the promoter?”

“One and the same,” Ziggy answered for me, crossing his arms over his chest and looking incredibly smug. I took his expression as being proud of me.

“Yes.” I reached out and shook his hand. “After hearing your band, I’m incredibly interested in meeting your manager and maybe setting something up for you all in the future.”

“Cool, man. He’s, uh...” He looked around. “Hmm...probably back at the busses. Come on.”

We walked through the festival grounds as Anton introduced me and Ziggy to the rest of the band, and we ended up next to a tour bus with their logo wrapped on it. Yes, they were doing well. But I could still probably help them. Maybe cut them a better deal.

Anton held up a finger. “Wait here.” He got on the bus.

The rest of the band pulled folding chairs out of the bottom storage compartments and set them up in a semi-circle. “Hey, have a seat dudes.” Piper gestured to the chairs at the end.

Ziggy and I sat to wait while Lix popped up, having been in the bus, and held up a joint. “Who has a light.” The group cheered and Piper handed over a lighter.

Anton returned with a bottle of Jack that he held out to Carl. “This will get us started. Our manager will be here in a minute. He was scoping out some other bands.”

“Sounds great.” I took the offered bottle and downed a swig. Jack Daniels wasn’t my favorite, but I could drink it.

The rest of the group passed the joint around, and Ziggy did not refuse. I knew he wouldn’t. After he released his long toke, I handed him the Jack. He took a very short sip and passed it on. He wasn’t a huge drinker unless he was trying to get fucked up, and I knew he preferred Crown Royal. At least most of the time.

After a few more passes of both bottle and joint, the manager came up. “Hey, all. Heard the show was great.”

The band all made appreciative noises and such, but Anton stood. “Hey, this is Coleman Hicks. Coleman, this is our manager, Jackson Spivey.”

I stood and shook his hand. “I’ve heard your name around.”

“And I’ve heard yours for sure. You’re interested in talking business?”

“Yes, but let’s exchange numbers and do it later. This is a fucking party, right?” When I said that, the band hooted and someone else pulled out a bottle of vodka and someone else held up a bottle of champagne.

I thought that was a hell of a party until the roadie crew showed up. It was crazy after that.

At some point, Jackson handed me a business card with a wink.

When I sat back down, Ziggy slid into my lap to make room for some of the others.

There was a lot of teasing and bullshitting going on. Stories of past tours and some of the high jinx Ziggy and Brock had gotten up to. It was relaxing and fun. At one point, Ziggy said, “Be right back.” He kissed my cheek and headed off with Brock. I imagined he was scoring pot. We would need to chat about it later. I wasn’t going to be his babysitter or his daddy, but he needed to think about his actions.

Friday morning, we all got breakfast and discussed what was happening that day. The guys had an interview with a radio guy mid-afternoon, but they also wanted to catch some other bands.

“Surf Son’s are scheduled to play at one of the smaller stages today,” Ziggy announced. “We have to go see them.” He looked around at everyone, but no one said a word. “Come on. Dip and Grind has been fantastic for us.” Pierce was the singer of that song, and they had to play the video of him along with the audio of his voice singing when they performed. The one time they didn’t, it cost them. A lot. Pierce hadn’t always been the easiest to deal with. “You know he’s going to want to do it with us.”

“Fine.” Miami put his fork down a little forcefully. “But after that, I’m going to find the Social Sinners bus. Those guys are way cooler.”

We left breakfast and headed for Surf Son’s bus, rolling up in force, before the day really got started. As expected, Tad went straight for Ziggy. They had history, and I didn’t like it. Ziggy hugged him and slung his arm around his shoulder. “Where’s Pierce?” They also had history. Ziggy had tried to use Pierce to make me jealous and that ended up in the fan-favorite song that they couldn’t get away from.

Tad banged on the door of the bus. “We’re all just getting up. Got in late last night.”

“Fuck. Off.” Came from the bus. I didn’t know whose voice it was, but it wasn’t Pierce. The guy with the crazy blue eyes and platinum blond hair, sticking up everywhere, came out of the bus. “What the fuck? Oh, hey.” And his demeanor changed instantly, taking in the whole of Midnight Hunt. “Good to see you guys.” He turned to Tad and pointed. “Not you.”

“Fuck off, Aus. Where’s Pierce?” Tad flipped him off.

The guy, who I remembered now was named Aussie, stuck his head back in the bus and yelled, “Pierce.” He came all the way off the bus. “I need coffee.”

“Not a morning person?” Miami asked.

“Hell no.”

“We can go get coffee and food in a minute. They want to chat with Pierce.” Tad glared at Aussie, and it felt like there was serious tension going on there.

Pierce and the last member of the band joined us. “Hey, hey, hey, if it isn’t the Hunt? I was wondering when you assholes would show up.” He clapped hands with Ziggy and pulled him into a hug, glaring at me the whole time. “Coleman.”

“Hi, Pierce. Yes, still with Ziggy.” I felt like I better stake my claim and quick, between the way Pierce shot eye-daggers at me and Tad wouldn’t let go of my man.

The last guy rolled his eyes and stuck his hand out for Jinx, who was closest, to shake. “I’m Scotty. You might not remember me.”

“I got you, dude.” Jinx smiled. I think we all liked Scotty better than the rest of the band, and I wondered what the fuck he was still doing with them.

Of course, that’s when they all started fighting, and Pierce was going to be a total dick. “So fuck these clowns. Am I playing the song with you or what?” He held his hands out wide. “Saturday night, right? I was expecting to see a top billing this year, but you haven’t made it yet, huh?”

“Well, considering the Mastersons are running this thing now.” Miami was never one to take being put down. “They needed plenty of time on Saturday night for their bands. You know? ETF, Social Sinners. Maiden Voyage. Heard of them, asshole?”

“Whatever.” Pierce looked back at Ziggy. “Hanging out with us before the show, huh?”

Tad finally let go of Ziggy and looked at me. “Hey, can we talk a second?”

“Sure.” I did not know what Tad had to say, but I hoped it wasn’t something I was going to have to kick his ass over.

We stepped away from the others, who continued to bicker. “I just wanted to say about me and Zig. That was like a long time ago, and it was nothing. We’re only friends now. And nothing is going to change that.”

“Thanks. But you didn’t have to say that.” I knew my man was loyal.

“I know, but I’ve been...” He made a face. “Reevaluating my life choices. And I haven’t always been so nice about things. So if I gave you any other impression, I apologize.”

“You’re fine.”

“Okay.” Miami clapped his hands. “We want to check out other bands. I think Warrior Black is about to take the big stage. And F-Holes play later.” They’d been at the Richmond festival, and I definitely wanted to check them out again. I thought Legendary from the other fest was also going to be here, but I didn’t know when they would be on. “So go eat and get coffee and we’ll catch up later.” We said our goodbyes and walked away. As soon as we were a few steps away, Miami scoffed. “Social Sinners are better to hang with than these losers.”

Jinx bumped into him. “Knock it off. We need to play nice with Pierce.”

Wolf added, “Scotty is cool. Someone needs to tell him to find a better gig, though.”

But I worried that this was all a bit too much for Ziggy, who was now uncharacteristically quiet.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:49 pm

sixteen

Rocktoberfest Saturday

I was barely high. Barely. Did I stress barely?

I would have liked to have had more pot. I scored some from Brock, but it was little more than a pinch. It made two joints. Two.

Of course, I was trying not to partake. I knew I had to get off of it, but I hadn't even begun to explore meditation, and this festival was a lot. It was fun and we saw a lot of kick-ass bands. And we hung out with Social Sinners a little bit. I swear if Miami fanboyed over them a little harder, he'd be wearing their shirt on stage. That would be a hypocritical riot, and Jinx might kill him over it.

Coleman was incredibly cool. Way too cool, if you asked me. Even when we were hanging out with Surf Sons. At one point, Tad took him to the side and, according to Coleman, confessed that he did not have a thing for me at all. Yay. Well, we fucked around a little back in the day, but it was never anything. And I couldn't even remember most of it. I had totally been high all the time. As opposed to fucking now. Huh .

Miami banged on the side of the bus. "Come on, princess. Time to go."

We had done our soundcheck and double-checked our set-ups earlier in the day. We were now headed to the actual show. I was ready for it. I needed to let this pounding energy out the best way I knew how.

As a homeless teenager living at the local lgbtq shelter when I was a kid, I'd been reacquainted with the power of the drums. I had started playing before I'd been kicked out of the house, but it was only banging around. At the shelter a guy volunteered to teach us once a week, and I practiced a lot. Eventually, he said I was better than him, and he gave me a guy's name who was putting together a new band. I was grateful for the shelter. Things could have been a lot worse, but when I joined Cloven Dogs, I left the shelter to live out of the band van as we toured all over the southeast coast from Daytona to Myrtle Beach, playing any shit hole bar that would take us. Those were the fucking days. I was young and dumb, but I learned fast. And my outlet for my frustrations quickly became my livelihood.

Until one day when we were playing in a little beach bar outside of Fort Lauderdale. Everyone complained about going so far away for a gig, but the lead singer, Joe, swore it would be the best thing ever for us. That a lot of bands were discovered there, and he'd heard a record exec was going to be there. Well, there was no record exec in attendance, but there were three new musicians on the scene who were looking for a drummer. They'd all been at some music school, so I felt they might outclass me or not play the type of hard metal I thrived on.

But when they talked to me after the show, Midnight Hunt was born. I left Cloven Dogs and never looked back.

All these years later, the drums were still my outlet and my livelihood, and I was incredibly grateful for another round with my Midnight Hunt brothers. But I was also about to explode out of my fucking head with all my personal bullshit. And I didn't even know what it all was. I had a plan for my back. Coleman and I were in a solid place. The first solid relationship I had ever had. And Midnight Hunt was dominating again.

But something was wrong. I couldn't put my finger on it.

As we walked up to the stage and the security guard checked our credentials and lanyards, my collar felt too tight around my neck. It was just an old T-shirt. Sleeveless, but not the normal button-up I tended to wear for performances.

I pulled at it, grumbling under my breath.

“Hey. What’s up, my man? You okay?” Miami slung his arm over my shoulders.

“Where’s Coleman?” I couldn’t tell him that I felt like ants were crawling up my back. Or that I needed another hit of pot like I needed to breathe. “Where’s my fucking brace?”

“Uh...not sure. Are you two okay? Fighting?”

“No. I just want him here.”

The roadies were finishing up on stage, and we were almost ready to go on. But I could not fucking do this. I dropped to the stage floor and put my head against my knees.

“Fucking hell. Get Coleman. Someone get Coleman now.” I knew it was Miami bossing everyone around as usual, but that was only on the surface. Below that, I felt like I was sinking.

Drake’s deep voice thrummed beside me, but I couldn’t make out the words. Someone put my brace in my hands, but I didn’t even look up.

Warm arms were around me. Familiar ones that felt like home. “Zig, babe?”

“Coleman.” I gasped and stuck my nose against his throat. I felt like a teenager again. Being kicked out on the street. “This is crazy.”

“Babe. I think you’re having a panic attack.”

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

Coleman kissed the side of my head. “I’ve got you.”

“I love it when you do that.”

“Do what?”

“Kiss my head.”

Coleman grabbed my face and planted little kisses all over it. “I love you to death, Zig.”

I took a deep breath. “Okay. I’ve got this.” I exhaled a little easier. “Maybe.”

“Take your time, Zig.”

I took a few more deep breaths. The world started coming back into focus. Coleman’s arms around me helped ground me or center me or whatever the fuck you want to call it. I felt better. “I’m going to go bang the fuck out of my drums now. I don’t know what’s after that, but this I’ve got. Right now.”

“You sure?”

I nodded, and Coleman helped me to my feet and getting my brace on under my shirt. It felt tight and constricting, but it was supposed to feel that way. And maybe it felt a little bit like it was helping to hold me together, too. I shook out my arms and looked around at the concerned faces of my brothers. Miami, Jinx, and Wolf. I stuck my hand out to do our mantra. The guys stuck theirs on top of mine and Miami counted

off the one, two, three, and we yelled, “Fuck yeah!”

The guys made their way out, and Mick slapped a set of sticks in my hand. “Thanks, man.”

“You got it, boss.”

I twirled one stick above my head and headed to the drums. When everyone was in position, I whooped and started counting out our lead song. I was fine, sliding into the zone.

We played it like it was a dream. We moved straight into the next song on the line-up, More like a Ballad. The third was Tattoo You . By the time Miami screamed out the last, “Standing on the brink, Tattoo you,” I was hot and sweating.

I stood and grabbed a towel, but my shirt was soaked. I set the rhythm for this show. They followed me like ducklings. That’s how it went. So, if I needed a second, I got it. I looked around, making sure everyone was okay. They all took the time to get a drink while I walked out to center stage.

Miami chuckled into the mic. “This is becoming a habit, Ziggy.”

“Fuck yeah!” I yelled, and it was picked up by Wolf’s mic. The crowd screamed as I tugged my shirt over my head. Of course, I tossed it into the crowd, followed by one of my sticks that I still had in one hand. The crowd always loved shit like that.

Jinx flipped a guitar pick out. And Miami laughed again. “Well, hello, Black Rock.”

The crowd screamed.

I gave them a salute before heading back to the kit. I wasn’t going to take up too

much time, and I felt cooler now.

“As a big hello to all you Rocktoberfest lovers, let’s go ahead and pull out one of the big guns. This one is called Whiskey Gone .”

Dropped the bottle

In the trash

Another bottle of whiskey gone

There's an itch

Like a rash

Never be the same

Now you're gone

I kept the beat up, but the words to the song hit me harder than ever. But the you that was gone in the song was not a person for me. It was an intangible thing.

Drinking again

Thinking again

Wondering where you are

Who you doing?

Where's the ruing?

Seize my day

Not begging you to stay

Need another drink

Where's the bar

Whiskey's in the trash

Another bottle gone

I can't stop the scratch

Whisky gone

If I could name that thing, maybe I could figure it out. I wasn't asking where's the bar, but where the fuck was my joint? It was drugs. But it was more than that. The drugs were more. They kept me cool, calm. They made me feel like I was the rockstar I wanted to be. It represented something that I wasn't sure I was ready to let go of. Or I was making this shit up in my head. It was an excuse.

You're never the same

Drinking till I don't...

Know my own name

Feels like you're gone

You've been gone for so long

Dropped the bottle

In the trash

Another bottle of whiskey gone

There's an itch

Like a rash

Never be the same

Now you're gone

Fuck the rest of this shit. I concentrated on the beats and my marks for accent. I changed up the downbeat at the exact right spot. I couldn't get in my head. I had a fucking show to do.

After playing a few more songs, Miami addressed the crowd again. "You have been kicking ass with us out here! I have a surprise. But I bet you saw this coming. I have someone to introduce you to."

It was time for Dip and Grind , and I looked to the side stage to see Pierce standing there with Coleman and Harrison.

"He's going to come out here and help us knock out this next song. We got a mic for him?" The sound guys brought out the second mic that was already prepared. "Okay. Let's get to rocking. Black Rock, I give you Pierce Lawrence." He held his hand out toward the side stage.

Pierce strutted out onto the stage like...I don't even know what. The only thing that

came to my head was a giant cock. That led to thinking about the Giant Purple People Fucker that Coleman had in his dresser at home. I burst out laughing. I couldn't help it. Pierce turned and glared at me, but the audience was still going nuts, so they didn't seem to notice. I gestured for him to go on.

“Hello again, Black Rock. Thank you. Thank you. You were amazing for me and Surf Sons earlier. And I heard you all the way back at the busses for Midnight Hunt.” Of course, that made them scream again. And the only thing worse than a front man of a rock band was two front mans—or men. What-the-fuck-ever. I was tired of Pierce's voice already, so I started tapping out the beat, cutting him off.

“Well, all right.” Miami took over. “Ziggy says he's ready to go. Let's get this Dip and Grind going.” He made a lewd hip thrust that had the audience going nuts again.

Pierce had never sounded better, but I kind of hoped this would be the last fucking time we ever played this song. It was worse than 21 st Century Fuck Up .

After the song, Pierce and Miami hammed it up before Pierce left with Miami pretending to kick him off the stage. We played one more song before leaving the stage for the break before the finale. We planned on performing two songs for our encore. But one of them was supposed to be Whiskey Gone , which Miami moved to the front of the show, so I had no clue what he wanted to do.

I wasn't the only one. Wolf took a long drink of water and asked, “What are we doing?”

Jinx started with, “We could throw Twenty-first —”

“Hell no,” Miami interrupted and the rest of us echoed that. It wasn't so much we hated the song, but we hated hearing Miami incessantly bitch about it. “Besides, we haven't played that in so long.”

“We’re ending on With This Song , so maybe Still A Person would work? It’s super simple,” Jinx suggested. “And we can do all our solos leading into it, morph straight into With This Song . Sound good?”

We had played Still A Person a few times during the tour. So it worked. We all agreed. And as we jogged back out onto the stage, we all did stupid shit to rev the crowd back up. They were chanting Hunt. Hunt. Hunt. Before I got back to my kit.

“Miss us?” Miami shouted into the mic. He paused when he had to, and this was one of those times. The crowd was insane, and I wondered exactly how many people were out there. It looked like a sea stretching out as far as I could see. “Well, I know you know who we are...” He turned and laughed. “But I’m going to introduce you all the same. Starting with...” He put his arm around Jinx and kissed him, but he shook his head and walked off. The first time we toured, I didn’t think kissing Jinx like that would go over well, but everyone knew they were together. It was old news. And it didn’t hurt our popularity at all. Miami pointed at Wolf. The crowd was going nuts again.

Wolf started thumping out some of the most intricate bass work I had ever heard. He was capable of shredding as well as Jinx on guitar, if not better, but he loved the bass. And what he played was amazing. When he was done, he raised his hand over his head. “Wolf!” Miami yelled.

We had agreed we would do this between the songs, but as usual, Miami felt the vibe of the crowd and changed it up. We could adjust on the fly, though. So, not surprisingly, once the crowd died down, Miami gestured behind him, and I started in with a rudiment that included a drag. I repeated it a few times as Miami did his thing. “One of the craziest mother fuckers around. He beats the skins with the best of them. He keeps our rhythm, and I’m proud to call him brother. The one. The only. The fucking best drummer here. Ziggy!”

I kicked into my solo, which was long and intricate and fun. I hit every tom, every cymbal, and high hat I had. At one point or another within the solo, I touched every single thing in my kit while keeping that bass pounding double time with both feet. And going back to what we said we would do, I blended the end of it right into our song. Wolf jumped right in with me. He could always pick up right where he needed to be.

“We are Midnight Hunt,” Miami shouted.

And with a single riff from Jinx, Still A Person was on.

I'm still a person and I burn

You think I'm plastic and reactive

But I bleed like any other

And I need...

Like every other

I'm still a person and I learn

You think I stopped and maybe dropped

But I think like any other

And I need...

Like every other

It turned out to be a better than good show. One of our best.

We ended on With this song, but before we started that up, Jinx did an incredible solo to open it. The song was all about the love between Jinx and Miami. They wrote it together, if I remembered correctly. The words were so fucking sweet, but we played it as hard as any of our other songs. It was no fucking ballad.

With this song

I want to tell you I love you

With this song

I want to show you how I go on

With this song

I need to give my freedom

I need to share my life

Na na nah, butta Bum

My own butta-bum, rim shot followed. We paused a beat before jumping back in with perfect timing.

Old times, they're long gone

You see a new sight

With eyes that want what's beyond

And there's no light

Showing the way

And I give you what this song will say

There were three more timed-out rim shots, and we hit every single fucking one perfectly. The song rocked so fucking hard, but the words made me think. I was doing entirely too much of that lately, but this time, I thought that I had never told Coleman that I loved him. And I needed to change that.

We finished and took our bows. And as we walked off, I remembered when Coleman and I met. He had been hitting on me subtly, and I was anything but. So I went up to him and got right in his face. We had a funny conversation about being freaky and swinging from chandeliers. Ha! I was so full of myself.

Well, we never swung from any chandeliers, but we had a great time. All the time. I was a lot harder on him from the start than I ever had to be. I wasn't sure why he stuck it out, but I didn't scare him off the first time we talked, and he was still there waiting at the sidestage for me.

I launched myself into his arms. He took me in, sweaty as I was, and everything broke loose like a fucking damn. I bawled. And he held me still while chaos moved around us.

Eventually, someone came and asked us to move off stage for the next band, and we went back to the bus. But not for long because some of the best performances were about to start. Masterson's bands. Embrace The Fear, Social Sinners, and Maiden Voyage. I washed my face in the sink and changed, putting on extra deodorant. And we headed out.

Embrace The Fear was about to go on when we got there. And the guys from the other bands were hanging around. Joey and Stoli waved us over and gave us bro hugs. “Hey,” Joey said. “I want to talk to you, Ziggy. But this obviously isn’t the time. But let’s get together for a few before you take off tomorrow.”

“Uh, yeah, sure.” I was surprised, but not entirely. Miami and Jinx were good friends with Joey and Stoli. “No problem. We’re going around front. Kick ass tonight.” I fist-bumped both of them and all of our band moved around so we could watch the performance and not be in the way. It could get crowded around the back and side stages.

There were still bands playing on Sunday, and Wolf, in particular, was interested in checking them out. They leaned more toward the alternative or unusual, not the normal things you see in a metal band. Griffin Marsh and Chaser Lost, in particular. Marsh was more of a solo artist, but Chaser Lost was backing him for this performance, and it could be an interesting combo. So we decided to wait until after the last show to leave.

Which meant I was still around when Joey and Stoli from Social Sinners came by. Joey took my arm with a stern expression that I could tell wasn’t going to let me argue about it. “Let’s walk.”

“Okay...”

“Listen. I’m going to jump right in here. There was a time when I drowned myself in a bottle. Drowned the emotions and drowned my potential.”

“I’ve heard something about that.”

“Good. So you know that when I tell you I see myself in you that I’m not talking out of my ass.”

“What uh, what do you see? Exactly...”

“You have a very similar issue that is long overdue from being addressed. I’ve seen you at the festival this weekend, but I’ve known you for a while now, and I can tell it’s only getting worse.”

“I’ve been having issues with my back. I saw a doctor for it so—”

“Let me guess, you’re self-medicating. Or you have been.”

“Yeah. Something like that.”

“Mmm...” Joey led us over to a few empty tables in the back of the food tent. “You’re going to lose everything if you don’t get help. I did. You need to. You understand that? Because it’s not only medicating your back pain. You’re medicating your life.” He held up his hands when I started to protest. “First, it’s just this, later it’s just that. Eventually, it all gets mixed up together, but really it’s just a bunch of lame-ass excuses, dude.”

“I’m not...”

“Not what? Smoking pot? Drinking? Doing whatever else you can get your hands on? Oh, it’s the rock and roll lifestyle? You can’t pull up an excuse that I haven’t used.”

“Why are you here?”

“I’d like to think we’re friends, Ziggy. At least on some level. We’re totally friends with Miami and Jinx. We’ve known Jinx for a while. And you’re family with them. So you’re important. But also, part of recovery is giving back. Maybe that’s what I’m doing here. What I’m not doing is picking on you. Poor Ziggy. Fuck that. It’s time for you to man up, dude. You think Coleman is going to stick around if you don’t get

your shit together?”

I exhaled long and slow. How could I argue with that? If the shoe was on the other foot... “He’s been really cool.”

“I know. I can see how much he loves you by how he looks at you, dude. It’s how I look at Stoli.”

“I haven’t even told him I love him.”

“How can you tell? I don’t mean to be a dick here, but you’re so fucked up and high all the time, there’s no way you feel anything.”

“Oh, I feel.”

“Do you?”

“Too much. Maybe that’s the problem. I don’t know.” We sat in silence for a few minutes. I think he was giving me space to think. I tapped a beat on the table. It helped me get shit straight in my head a little. If it was even possible. “I’ve never had a relationship like this before. I don’t want to fuck it up again. But... Yeah, you’re not wrong, Joey. It started as the lifestyle. Feeling like a rockstar. Becoming part of who I am. And numbing me from feeling the failure when Midnight Hunt broke up.”

“The breakup wasn’t your failure.”

“No, but Jinx succeeded alone. Wolf did, though more behind the scenes. I didn’t.”

“Fth...” What the fuck kind of sound was that? “You kept playing. Touring. And you were ready when Midnight Hunt came back. But you’re about to be the failure that breaks them up for a second time.”

I put my forehead against the table. “You think that?”

“Don’t you?”

He really unloaded a bunch of shit on me. And I couldn’t logically argue with any of it. “What the fuck am I gonna do?” I was asking myself and maybe the universe, but Joey had an answer.

“Go to rehab. Get clean. Address these issues that are holding you back.”

It felt like an epiphany. A moment of clarity I’d never had before.

All these issues holding me back. Keeping me from loving Coleman like he deserved. Keeping me from being the brother and performer my band needed. Issues I never dealt with. Being abandoned. Having to fight for everything. Never understanding what love—true love—actually looked and felt like. I hadn’t felt anything but pain or numbness in a long fucking time. And honestly, sobriety, on the other side, seemed like a dark hole.

“I don’t know if I can do this.”

Joey patted my back. “What other choice do you have?”

I hadn’t hit rock bottom. Some said you had to hit that to really get clean. But maybe... Maybe I could be smarter. Learn from others. I didn’t want to hit bottom. Wouldn’t it be easier to climb back up before I fell that far down? “No. I could choose to ignore you. And that would be worse.”

“True.”

“But I won’t.”

seventeen

Falling Apart at Black Rock

Ziggy had been gone awhile. I knew he was okay because he was with Joey Hayes and Drake was trailing them a good distance away along with Joey's security detail as well. But I didn't know what they were talking about or why. It made me nervous, but it wasn't like I could put Ziggy in a glass jar to keep him safe. He was an adult, strong and capable, and I needed to have more faith in him. All I could do was be here for him and hope he would confide in me.

Wolf and Harrison left to go check out some of the other performances while Jinx and Miami were still on the bus. I suspected they were after alone time more than sleeping. So, I cleaned up quickly and pulled up a chair in front of the bus to wait. While I did that, I phoned my office and gave them Jackson Spivey's information and asked them to set up a meeting for us. I wanted to help them and was in a good position to do it.

Finally, Ziggy came walking up alone. Well, never completely alone. Drake was a few feet back, hovering like he was supposed to. I sure as fuck wouldn't want that job—guarding rockstars. “Hey, Zig.”

He pulled up a chair next to me with a huff. “We have to talk.”

“Everything okay?”

“No, not really. I, uh, fuck this is hard.” He covered his face with his long, nimble

fingers.

I suspected it was going to be about the drugs. His back doctor had told him to stop, and he hadn't listened. "What does Joey have to do with this? Maybe start there."

"Do you know his story? He almost died. And that's what it took for him to figure his shit out."

"I heard about the accident, but what do you mean by figure his shit out?"

"He was, he's in recovery."

"Oh." I didn't know what else to say. I didn't know if it was appropriate for Ziggy to share that with me. "You know I didn't put him up to talking to you. I haven't talked to him or anyone."

Ziggy rubbed my arm, taking my hand. "I know." We sat there like that for a few minutes. I wasn't going to push him. But when we started hearing movement in the bus behind us, he started up again. "So, I'm, I, uh, I think I'm an addict. It's not just self-medicating. It's not just enjoying the lifestyle. Maybe it started out that way, but it's a whole fucking lot more than that now."

I wanted to pull him in my arms and maybe stuff him under that glass. He was so vulnerable and open. I squeezed his hand. "It's okay."

"It's not. But it will be. I hate to do this, but I can't finish the tour. I need to go to rehab. Like now." He squeezed my hand back. "Look at me." I turned and gazed into his beautiful, deep blue eyes as if for the first time. "I love you."

My heart fucking stopped. It was the first time he'd said it. Really said it. With meaning and feeling.

“And I want to feel that. I want everything with you. But if I have this issue hanging over me, I can’t. I’ve been numbing myself from everything. I don’t want to keep doing that. I want to enjoy being a rockstar. And their brother.” He jerked his head toward the buses. “And most importantly, I want to enjoy being your lover. Your partner. And I don’t really know how.” A tear beaded up in his eye and spilled down his cheek.

“Come here.” I stood and pulled him up to me. I needed to hold my rockstar tight. “I’ll cancel the rest of the shows. I’ll talk to the band. You need this, and it is way more important than any fucking show.”

Ziggy chuckled with his nose pressed into my throat. “You’ve been hanging out with us too fucking long, Cole.”

The band met up before going to watch Griffin Marsh and Chaser Lost. Everyone was there, including Marci and Kai and all the roadies, techs, and sound and light staff. I told them we were canceling the rest of their shows, but Ziggy stepped up to tell them why. I had never been prouder of him or anyone in my life.

He stood, bit his bottom lip and fidgeted with the edge of his shirt. “Uh, it’s my fault. And I hope none of you hate me or whatever, but I have to go to rehab. It’s not my back, well, not just my back that’s an issue. Fuck, you all know I have a drug problem. It’s not just ahh...Ziggy getting high again. It’s a problem. And I’m getting help before I fuck everything up.” He sat in one of the chairs and stared at the dusty ground.

Miami stood and went over to him. He pulled him up and into a hug. “You’re my brother in everything but blood, and probably that too by now.” Everyone chuckled at that. They’d been friends a long time. “And family sticks together. I love you, bro.”

The rest of the band joined in a group hug while the staff cheered. Other people

passing by looked over at us, probably wondering what was going on, but no one felt like they had to explain, and we didn't.

Jinx pulled out of the hug first. "I don't think we need to reschedule those shows. It's too hard. I mean, who knows when that would be even."

"Yeah." Wolf looked over at me. "This has been a rough tour on all of us. We should break until Ziggy gets out and meet up in Miami."

"I actually have an interesting idea about that." I held my hand up as if I was in school until I had everyone's attention. "I scheduled a meeting with Jackson Spivey who manages Blacksmith Sugar. If we can work things out with them, I'd like to have them headline the rest of the tour with Bramble Punk still opening. That way, we can honor the original tickets sold to anyone who wants to go to that show. If they don't, we give them a deadline to get a refund so we can resell the tickets to anyone who might want to go see Blacksmith who didn't originally buy tickets for Hunt."

"So..." One of the roadies for Bramble Punk stepped closer. "Some of us will still be able to work on those dates. The Bramble guys, anyway. Right?"

I nodded. "I think that's the best I can do."

"Well, it's not a total wash," the guy said. And if any of our own guys were upset, they didn't voice it. "And still good for Bramble Punk." The actual Bramble Punk band wasn't in attendance at the meeting though.

"I'll be letting them know, but this is contingent on working out a deal with Blacksmith Sugar."

So, it seemed everything would work out. Except I didn't want to go back to Denver alone. I didn't know what to do about that or even how to voice my worry. But it

turned out I didn't have to.

Miami stood next to me and leaned into my side. "Dude. I think you should come with us to Florida. I have a guest room, so does my mom."

"Oh!" Wolf jumped up. "You could stay with me. I have a guest room too."

I was choked up by the outpouring. They wanted me there. Considered me family already. "This is why you're my favorite band."

"What the fuck?" Ziggy jumped up, looking outraged. "I thought I was the reason we were your favorite band."

"That too." I pulled Ziggy to me and hugged him. "Of course you are." I kissed the side of his head. "I'm so proud of you, Zig, and I'm here for you. I will be with your family in Miami when you get back. But I'm not staying with you losers. I'll get my own place. Fuck you very much."

The guys cracked up, taking it for the teasing that it was. Wolf scoffed. "You're ruining your vocabulary hanging out with us." But they didn't rib me too much. And it felt like family.

Now, I needed to make the arrangements.

eighteen

What's After After Rehab

Being back from rehab was an almost surreal experience. Landing in Coleman's arms that first day was amazing. He kissed me like he needed my mouth to breathe. And I'm pretty sure I needed his. It brought new meaning to mouth-to-mouth but was every bit as lifesaving. He took me to a nice hotel after that. Swanky, for sure. It was near the airport, where we would be flying out the next day. I wanted to get home because it was almost Christmas, and I wanted to spend the holiday with Coleman and the guys from Midnight Hunt. They were my family, after all.

Malibu Bluff Rehab was a five-star center. It was a super nice facility that felt more like a luxury home but still had all the counseling needed. And the first few days were not nice. Actually, it was sheer agony, and the décor of the facility did nothing to help that. Afterward, though, it was a catering and kind environment. I got to meet a few celebrities and the heir to the Melton dynasty. Of course, I hadn't even heard of that, but Sheffield Melton informed me that their family was extremely wealthy and owned some of the country's biggest companies in banking, gas, steel, and other industries. But Sheff was pretty down to earth despite that. I figured getting over a heroine addiction would do that to you. It made me feel my issues were so much smaller than his. But I learned not to compare.

We were flying out of Van Nuys. They guys all agreed to let us have the Midnight Hunt jet, which I thought was incredibly supportive. We got a hotel close by, so it was a fifteen-minute drive from the rehab facility. Once we got there, I tossed myself on the soft bed, starfishing across the king mattress. "Where you going to sleep,

Cole?”

He didn't miss a beat. Coleman dropped the luggage and climbed on top of me. “Here.”

I wrapped my arms and legs around him. “Perfect.”

“I've missed you. You seem good, yeah?”

“I'll be better if you kiss my neck...yeah, right there.” Coleman nibbled along my throat, biting down on the spot that made me crazy. He stuck his tongue under the collar of my T-shirt. “Yeah, Cole. Let's get naked.”

“Yes. Right now.”

The flurry of clothes was like a tornado of material, until our naked bodies rubbed against each other. I needed to feel as much of his skin as possible. I climbed on top of him and held his always well-manicured hands over his head. Staring into his eyes was a different experience. This time, when I looked into those dark, intelligent hazel eyes, I saw the future—our future. Together. And it didn't terrify me. “You thrill me, Cole. I don't want to take you for granted.”

“So don't.”

“Mmm...I won't. I love you, and I'm going to fucking show you.” I squeezed his hands for a moment before sliding down his body, dragging my hands along all that bare skin of his chest and sides. I rubbed his hairy legs before leaning over and lapping at the crown of his dick, ready to get right to the heart of the showing part.

“Zig...”

“Yeah. Just enjoy this.” I sucked his cock like a strawberry lemonade popsicle. Up and down, using my tongue, hollowing my cheeks. Lots of slurping noise echoing through the room. I paused only long enough to lap his balls. I massaged them with my fingers while I worshipped his beautiful, hard cock with my mouth. Coleman added the sounds of his moans to the music of the blow job. An erotic sympathy that I loved. I hoped the encore would be slapping skin as I fucked him senseless.

My cock was so fucking hard, after thinking about fucking him, I had to have it. I pulled away and jumped off the bed.

“Hey! Where you going?” Coleman propped himself up on one elbow to watch me.

“Getting lube. I need to be inside you. Like now.”

“Okay. I can get behind that.”

“No, I’m getting behind that.” I pointed to him, then opened his suitcase and pulled out his toiletry bag. “You better have lube in here. Oh, and no more fucking condoms. You know I tested going in and coming out of rehab.”

“I tested while you were in there.”

He didn’t need to say anything else. We’d thought about this, and neither of us had been with any other partners in the two-plus years that we’d been messing around with this thing. This thing . It was a relationship. And one that I wanted. I’d done a lot of thinking about that over the past month or so. “I’m ready.” I meant so much in those two words. But I grabbed the lube and stalked across the room.

“Me too.” Coleman lay back on the bed and spread his legs.

“This is going to be so good.”

I worked him open, taking my time, rubbing lube on up my cock, and lined him up. This time when I pushed into Coleman's hole, it was so much more than fucking. I was completely sober. Completely sound. And completely in love.

Once I was fully seated, I leaned down and took his mouth. He tasted sweet, like the soda he'd drank in the car on the way here. But behind that was something warm, like spiced honey. It was something I recognized was how he always tasted. Maybe it was his toothpaste, but why hadn't I realized it before? I didn't know or care. I only wanted more of it. I wanted to taste his flavor every day for the rest of my fucking life.

I didn't know how to say that to him, but I could fucking show him...by fucking him like he'd never been fucked before. With love. I snickered at that thought.

"What?" Coleman dug a hand into my hair.

"I'm getting sappy."

He winked at me. "I like a sappy Ziggy."

"Do you, now? How do you like this?" I flexed my hips, pulling out, slamming back in.

Coleman closed his eyes and moaned. "More. I'd like more of that."

"You got it, babe."

I played with my rhythm between fast and slow and something in between, and Coleman danced to the beat. He wiggled and thrust, moving his body in time with mine. It was a song I wanted to play over and over again. Making love with Coleman was a work of art.

He reached up and tweaked one of my nipples. His other hand was gripping his cock between us. I wanted to see him come apart but feared I was going first. When he pinched it again, I knew it. I felt it in my dick and balls and up my spine. I exploded into his warm heat that gripped me better than any hand. “Feels so good, gah...” Oh yeah, I saw the entire universe of stars.

But Coleman’s grunting brought me back to earth, and I peered down at him in time to see his face scrunch up and cum eased out over the grip of his knuckles.

“Love your cum-face, Cole.”

He laughed. “Yeah? Well, feeling you like this made me come hard and fast.”

“So you like no condoms?”

He shook his head. “No. Love it.”

I swooped down for a quick kiss. “Me too.”

The week after Christmas, we were in our studio in Miami. I felt so much better. But I was still nowhere near ready to record. Instead, we’d invited Bramble Punk to come in and maybe lay down some new tracks since they’d finished the rest of our tour with Blacksmith Sugar. And guess who showed up with them?

Pierce.

“What are you doing here?” Miami asked, not totally rude but it was close. It was no secret that he didn’t care for the other singer much. Mostly because he’d jerked us around a lot on the collaboration. Fun while we were actually recording Dip and Grind , not so much when the business end of it came up. “I don’t think we’re up for any more partnerships here.”

Pierce smirked. “Come on, guys. That song did a lot for you and me. Who wouldn’t want more?” He held his hands up as if he was innocent.

I put my fist over my mouth and fake-coughed. “Bullshit.” Pierce glared at me and flipped me the bird, but all that got him was my wide smile.

Kay sipped on a bottle of water and sat on the couch in our common room, where we were all hanging out, before heading to the sound rooms. “I don’t know. Maybe Bramble Punk could do something with him.” He looked around, wide-eyed. “Hey. I want to play more guitar. I mean, I like being the front man, but I miss laying down some killer licks. And Pierce is all front man with that voice.” He gestured, open-handed, to Pierce.

Joe, the lead guitarist, scowled hard enough to break his face. “What about me?”

But I was liking the idea a lot. “I mean, like fucking Scorpions had two guitarists.” Back in the eighties, a lot of hard rock bands had multiple guitarists. If that sound was what you were going for, it could be a hard-punching track.

Everyone argued about it.

But it came down to Kay. “Hey, I don’t give a fuck what anyone else does or thinks. I play well with these two guys, so let’s just do it. Two leads, off and on, playing against each other, and a rhythm guitar providing depth. It could be cool as hell as long as we don’t get too muddy with it. Come on. Can we try it out and see what it sounds like?”

Jinx got that sly look on his face, which meant he had a plan. I knew it was a done deal because once Jinx pulled out that expression, he wasn’t backing down. “I agree, Kay. Let’s see if we can find something that would kick ass.” They were sold.

Jinx seemed to have a knack with them anyway. Maybe if he could keep Pierce's big head reeled in, this could be something good. Jinx had put them together in the first place. He should probably manage them, too. The band all went into the sound booth, and I grabbed Jinx's arm. "Hey, wait up."

"What's up?"

"You know, you should totally be Bramble's manager. You have a lot of sway with them. Could be good to cut your teeth on that. I mean, let's be real. Hunt isn't going to last forever." That was another thing I had to deal with in Rehab. It had been a big black worry that I could never voice in the back of my head. My back proved this wasn't going to be forever. I had to deal with it, and before rehab, I couldn't even face it.

Jinx kind of shrugged it off. "We have a few more years, yeah?"

But Miami came up behind us, the nosey fucker. "You should talk to the band about it. They don't have a manager, and they're not at the level Hunt is. I mean, we don't have a manager. We have a Marci. But they need a manager. And a producer." They started playing, and we heard Kay and Joe shredding against each other, circling around, and returning to the main rhythm. "They sound fucking good. Let's get Cat in here." He dashed off, presumably to call Cat.

Jinx stared at me hard.

"I'm thinking long-term, Jinx. I want to be prepared, and I want all of us to be prepared. When Hunt does end. Not now, in the future, who knows how long. Five years? Less?" I shrugged. "I want it to be on our terms." I pointed to each of us, one by one. "Not in a fit of passion, no offense, but we do it right this time. And let's not sit here and pretend that day will never come. You know it will."

Wolf threw his arm over my shoulder. “Bro, you’ve gotten stoic.”

“I’ve gotten practical.”

“Okay.” Jinx gave me a nod. “Now, I’m going to take that call with Cat before Miami fucks it up. We’ll see when she can get here for these guys. Let’s find a song for them.”

It was my turn for the sly smile. “I think I have something.” I grabbed my folder off the coffee table. “Look at this.” It was time to share the song I’d been working on. At that moment, I couldn’t help but think Pierce would sound good singing it. It wasn’t a Midnight Hunt song, but it could work for this new version of Bramble Punk.

“Hmm...” Miami snagged the notebook since Jinx had taken the phone from him. “Yeah, not our style.”

Wolf took it from Miami. “No, but it could work for them. Let’s get in there and help them work it up.”

We showed Pierce and Bramble Punk the lyrics, and we all pitched in to get the music down. Cat couldn’t come until the next day, but we wanted something recorded before we left for the day, so Wolf got behind the consul. He’d produced others before. I wasn’t sure we needed Cat if Wolf could do it, but maybe they could collaborate on it as well.

“Okay, guys. From the top.” Wolf’s voice sounded husky coming from the speakers. The Midnight Hunt crew stood behind him, looking in on the sound room where Randy tapped out the intro to Pine Box .

Pierce sang my words, “You threw my heart in a pine box...My love went deep, six feet. Can’t claw my way back—nowhere left to dance...”

It was a little surreal hearing my thoughts come out of his mouth, but I also recognized it was good. We were seeing something come together. History being made. With Pierce taking the mic, they might have a hit. I wasn't sure how that would go over with his band, Surf Sons, but I had a feeling he'd already left them. The last time we saw them together, it was nothing but fighting.

We laid down Pine Box , and it wasn't bad. After that, we messed with a rework of one of their most popular songs they played on the tour. After a few hours, we were done, and I drove home. Well, home to Coleman's place.

Coleman bought the house while I was in rehab. It felt more like home than my place did, for sure. I didn't want to go back to mine at all. I felt like it was more about Coleman than anything, though. He was now home. Wherever he was.

I walked into the foyer and into the living room. "Coleman?" He wasn't there or in the kitchen. The floor plan was open, so I could see all the main living areas. "Where are you?" I went to the sliders that spanned the dining room to the side of the kitchen. It led out to a monster patio with an outdoor kitchen. I wondered if Coleman even knew how to cook. I looked out, but he wasn't there or in the pool beyond.

I huffed and headed down the short hall to the main bedroom and pushed the door open. Coleman was on the bed, curled up asleep. It wasn't that late, but if he was tired, fine. He wore shorts made out of sweats material and one of my old Midnight Hunt T-shirts. I kicked off my sneakers and crawled up on the bed behind him, making the big spoon. I nuzzled his short, dark hair. It was always so perfect, but I loved messing it up. I ruffled it before pulling him closer. "You okay, babe?"

"Yeah. Just thinking about things."

"Oh? What kind of things?"

“Well...I know you’re not supposed to start new things so soon after rehab, but I feel like we’ve been together a long time.”

“We’re not new, Cole.”

“No, but I don’t want you to go to your place. Maybe you can sell it and move in with me. Officially.”

“Permanently?”

“Yes.”

I flipped him over on his back and hovered over him. I kissed him gently. “I want that too.”

“Yeah?”

“Fuck yeah.”

He pounced on me, shoving me to the other side of the bed and attacking my mouth like he had a mission. I let him, loving a forceful and aggressive Coleman.

“Need you, babe.”

“You got me. Anytime. I love you, Coleman.” Since rehab, those three words came easier and easier.

“I love you too. Now get naked.”

If you liked Ziggy’s story, you should check out the rest of this year’s collection and visit Road to Rocktoberfest 2024 .

And if you want more Midnight Hunt, go back to the beginning with Midnight Reunion , or check out Wolf's story with Midnight Riff .

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:49 pm

nineteen

Songs

Pine Box Lyrics by Ziggy; Music by Midnight Hunt Music by Midnight Hunt;
Performed with Pierce Lawrence

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

every time I get close

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

Duck and turn where I can't follow

If you don't stop

We're gonna break

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

We're gonna rock it

We're gonna shake

Everything is coming down

Grinding to a halt

Stop

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

Running like the wind as fast as

your feet will take you

Screaming wild with the wind

until I stop chasing

You back track lee and tack anything to get away

no matter how hard I beg you to stay

Feels like a race but one I can't win

Then you're close, spinning around,

so we can do it again

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

every time I get close

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

Duck and turn where I can't follow

If you don't stop

We're gonna break

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

We're gonna rock it

We're gonna shake

Everything is coming down

Grinding to a halt

Stop

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

Dip, dip

Bump and grind

How many times

Will you let me fall behind

You dip left then you fake right I try to grab you

but you're out of sight

looking to catch you, looking to rock looking to fuck you

but you never stop

We could be something we could be great

but you never give it's all take, take, take

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

every time I get close

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

We're gonna rock it

We're gonna shake

Everything is coming down

Grinding to a halt

Stop

Dip, dip, shift and dodge

Dip, dip

Bump and grind

How many times

Will you let me fall behind

Dip, dip shift and dodge...

Dip, dip grind and stop.

Still A Person. Music and Lyrics by Midnight Hunt

I'm still a person and I burn

You think I'm plastic and reactive

But I bleed like any other

And I need...

Like every other

I'm still a person and I learn

You think I stopped and maybe dropped

But I think like any other

And I need...

Like every other

With this song Lyrics by Jinx and Miami, Music by Midnight Hunt

With this song

I want to tell you I love you

With this song

I want to show you how I go on

With this song

I need to give my freedom

I need to share my life

Na na nah, butta Bum

Old times, they're long gone

You see a new sight

With eyes that want what's beyond

And there's no light

Showing the way

And I give you what this song will say

With this song

I want to tell you I love you

With this song

I want to show you I care

With this song

I give you a breath of fresh air

I give you what's fair

Na na nah, batta bum

Na na nah

Nothings fair

Reaching forward while looking back

My heart aches with longing

I'd hold your hand

I ache for belonging

Where's your arms

Holding me now

And I give you all I am allowed

With this song

I want to tell you I love you

With this song

I want to show you how I go on

With this song

I need to give my freedom

I need to share my life

Na na nah, butta Bum