Undercover: Book 4

Author not credited

STORYPDF

Complete English text · US Letter reading edition

Contents

Chapter 1 5

Chapter 2 7

Chapter 3 16

Chapter 4 26

Chapter 5 39

Chapter 6 47

Chapter 7 56

Chapter 8 68

Chapter 9 81

Chapter 10 95

Chapter 11 106

Chapter 12 119

Chapter 13 133

Chapter 14 142

Chapter 15 156

Chapter 16 168

Chapter 17 180

Chapter 18 192

Chapter 19 206

Chapter 20 216

Chapter 21 230

Chapter 22 239

Chapter 23 250

Chapter 24 260

Chapter 25 271

Chapter 26 282

Chapter 27 293

Chapter 28: Epilogue 304

About this edition

This StoryPDF reading edition contains the complete English text, with its original paragraph and section order preserved.

Newly typeset with selectable text, a linked contents section and chapter bookmarks. Copyright rules can differ by country. Corrections and rights enquiries: liuxinglianxue@gmail.com.

Read online: StoryPDF / Undercover: Book 4.

Reading edition: 2026-10-28. Typography: Crimson Text (SIL Open Font License).

Chapter 1

Prologue

Sometime in the Future

Claire's Point of View

"Seriously, this is all your fault," Clover whined, trying to move her hands that were tied up behind her back.

"I swear, if you whine one more time I'm going to leave you here to fucking die when I get out," I hissed.

"That's if you can even get out," Riley said, snorting.

I glared at her.

"Well, you're the agent here, so why are we still sitting here behind bars tied up?" I asked, and she glared towards me.

"I have kids at home with my best friend. I don't care if you two die as long as I get out of here alive," Clover said.

If I could have moved, I would have banged my head against a wall after strangling her to death.

"Do you ever shut the hell up?" I asked.

"I see someone's jealous I'm a model and I actually have a family," she muttered.

I wanted to smash her head against the wall now. I blame Caiden for making my thoughts so menacing.

"I can't concentrate with you two bickering," Riley said, glaring at us. Clover only huffed while I rolled my eyes.

"Riley Scott, you don't know how long I've waited to see you tied up like this," a guy standing in front of the bars said. His blonde hair went a little bit over his eyes, and he was wearing a black shirt and black jeans.

"Well if it isn't the one and only James Ward. You know I remember perfectly how you got sent to prison. You went straight through our agency," Riley said.

I didn't say anything since I had no idea who this guy was.

“Yeah, once you’re dead the agency will go down into flames,” he said, causing me to snort.

He was such an idiot. It’s nice to know it took over twenty years for us to finally agree on something.

“Um, James is it? You can’t be that much of an idiot, right? I mean you do realize my best friend is Cole’s son. He would take over if something were to happen to Riley and her fiancé Joseph.”

“And I have hundreds of agents that would take over if something were to happen to him,” Riley said.

“Wow, this is the guy we are seriously fighting against?” Clover asked, looking amused.

“Now I’m actually curious about something. Did the rest of your group make it here?” Riley asked, with a raised eyebrow.

“I’m not here to chat. I’m just here to tell the blonde one she has a visitor.”

We all looked at him blankly since we were all blondes.

“Oh, I mean the model,” he added, smirking before a woman took his place and Clover narrowed her eyes.

“Katy, I should have known you were the one that wanted me killed,” Clover hissed when a brunette appeared.

Katy? Why does that name sound so familiar?

“You little bitch, just wait until I get out of here,” Katy said with a sinister laugh.

“You won’t be getting out of here. I just wanted to pay you a visit so you at least know who paid for your assassination.” The woman waved before leaving and the room turned silent. What the hell did I get myself into? Or better yet, what the hell did Caiden get me into?

Chapter 2

Present Time

Riley's Point of View • (London)

"No, he won't work either," I said for what felt like the millionth time. I sighed, running my hands through my light brown hair. "None of them will work!" I told Joey.

He nodded in agreement while throwing one of the packets of papers on the desk. I picked up the top paper, looking at the biography.

"Chelsea doesn't seem too bad," I said, and Joey shook his head.

"Her partner isn't that great."

Joey searched through the pile and handed me the biography of a guy named Zeke.

"We can just change her partner," I suggested.

He raised an eyebrow.

"You can't do that to her, it wouldn't be fair," Joey said.

I bit my lip, nodding that he was right. A knock sounded through the room and I cleared my throat.

"Come in," I said, and a familiar face appeared through the door looking nervous.

"Yes. Emily?" I asked her.

"There is a huge news report again going on in America," Emily told us.

Joey and I shared a look.

"Let's see it," I said.

Emily pressed play on her laptop and the video started.

"Another dead body was found here in Seattle. Police are still investigating but are having trouble finding any clues. Police have advised everyone to be cautious since this serial killer is still on the loose. This is now the sixth dead body found in three days, and police suggest that anyone under the age of 18 should not be left alone and should be with a parent or guardian at all times."

The woman disappeared off the screen, the video stopped, and the the screen turned black.

"You've got to be kidding me," I said with my hands clenching into fists.

“How much you wanna bet that it’s Jesse Farone,” Joey said, leaning back in his seat. His hand rubbed the small prickles of hair on his chin.

“Why would you think it’s Jesse Farone? We took care of him nine years ago,” Emily said.

“Yes, but Jesse was released from jail a week ago and these killings started two days ago,” I said.

“So that means. . .” Emily asked, trailing off.

“That once he got out of jail he may have gone back to his old ways,” Rachel said.

We all looked up and over to where the now twenty-six-year old was standing.

“Rachel,” I said surprised. I hadn’t seen her much lately.

“Over the years I have kept an eye on Mr. Farone like you wanted me to, but of course not much has happened since he was in jail. But this past week I have kept a close eye on him. For some reason he has left Los Angeles, California, and gone to Seattle, Washington,” Rachel said, taking a seat in one of the chairs.

“Well, doesn’t this feel like old times,” Matt said, joining us.

“It sure does,” Joey said standing up and stretching.

“Are you going to put someone on Jesse’s case?” Emily asked us.

“I can’t find one person in this agency that’s right for this job,” I said, setting the files down on my desk. “No offense to you two, but I would need two more people on this case who are skilled fighters.”

“Well, Cole didn’t put you in charge of this agency for nothing. You already know the solution to your problem,” Matt said.

“What?” I asked confused, and Joey suddenly smirked.

“We’re going undercover!” Joey exclaimed.

“What do you mean?” I asked him. “We can’t exactly go undercover at a high school anymore. We’re twenty nine.”

“Well, he isn’t in high school anymore,” Joey pointed out.

“Yes, but he is starting a gang again,” Rachel pitched in.

I narrowed my eyes.

“What do you mean he is starting a gang again?”

"I think he is. He recently bought quite a few guns of all different types and sizes, and he has associated with different people late at night," she said. "Liam has been following him around but of course he is keeping his distance."

"I want Liam on the phone now," I told her, and she nodded. As she was about to leave the room, I stopped her.

"I also want you to try to find out who Jesse's next victim is because, ladies and gentlemen, I think our drug dealer just turned into an assassin." Rachel nodded once again and left the room.

"So we are going undercover!" Joey said, crossing his arms over his chest.

I raised an eyebrow.

"What exactly would we be going undercover as?" I questioned.

"We are going undercover as drug dealers."

I looked at him amused.

"Oh really? I didn't know the owner of this agency decided that," I said.

Joey smirked.

"Since the owner of this agency is my fiancé, I think she should be okay with it."

"Oh really?" I said, my lips twitching a little as I suppressed a smile.

"Really," Joey said, pressing his lips to mine.

"Oh please enough with the mushy stuff. I wonder if you two actually get anything done in here," Emily said, smiling, as Matt chuckled.

"This is my office," I said, pulling away from him. They rolled their eyes and started heading towards the door murmuring goodbyes.

"Wait!" I said while unconsciously playing with the diamond ring on my ring finger.

"I want you to inform Rachel that you three will be joining us on this mission again. You won't be going undercover or anything but you will be helping out. I will have your files ready shortly," I said before Joey pulled my face back to his.

"Yea whatever. Just make sure you have safe sex," Emily said, and I could only imagine her winking. I chose not to respond and let my hands go to the back of my fiancé's neck and deepened the kiss.

So I guess I should explain now, since a lot has happened over the past nine years. If it wasn't obvious, I did end up getting the agency from Cole, but it wasn't as easy as it seemed. Apparently Cole does have a son named Nathan and he was actually really cool and was about my age. But the company was originally meant for him to take over after his father retired, so it caused a few problems. But those problems were quickly solved when he said he wanted nothing to do with the agency. When I turned twenty-six, Joey finally proposed, but we decided to hold off the wedding for a few years. I am now twenty-nine, and this year we are going to finally start to plan the wedding. Or at least it was. The phone went off making Joey groan and hold on to me tighter. Pulling back, I picked up the phone off my desk and put it to my ear.

"Riley Scott, owner of Europe Agency. How may I help you?"

"Hey Ri, it's Liam." I pushed Joey away from me and grabbed Jesse's file, opening it to recent pictures of him that Liam faxed to us.

"What do you have for me?" I asked, getting straight to the point.

"I don't think this gang of Jesse's is like before," Liam said.

I raised an eyebrow as I picked up the image off the desk of Jesse Farone walking out with at least 60 guns in a bag.

"I think he is trying to start a gang of assassins," Liam said.

I paused for a second.

"What do you mean he is trying to start a gang of assassins?" I demanded. "And I'm guessing Jesse bribed the owners to let him buy that many guns. Because I know for a fact with his record, no one would let him buy that many guns."

"It all adds up, the guns and the random people he's been secretly meeting up with and the deaths around here," he said.

I nodded my head.

"I guess you're right. We'll find out for sure when we go undercover," I said.

"You're going undercover? Who's going to run the agency?"

"I was going to make it a surprise. But yeah, you are, with some help from Lex. So hurry up and take the next flight home," I told him before hanging up, not bothering to wait for a response. Taking a seat in my chair, I moved my laptop so it was in front of me and started typing up the case information.

“It’s nice to have some action again. I won’t lie, it’s been dull for a while. I mean we haven’t been on any missions together in what, five years?” Joey said.

I paused for a second.

“It’s really been that long?” I asked, and he nodded.

“We’ve been busy ever since you got the agency. You sure you can handle this? I mean how old are you? Sixty?” I narrowed my eyes at my fiancé and continued to type.

“You and I both know I’m not even close to sixty. Nice try though. I can still beat your ass,” I said as a smirk crossed my face.

“Oh really? Bring it on Scott,” he taunted.

I got up from my chair and strolled towards him.

“I personally feel this isn’t a fair fight, but you asked for it.” Almost inhumanly fast, I moved my leg so it headed towards his face. He caught it right before it hit him and I used my other foot and put it on his chest as if I was walking up him and did a back flip. He stumbled back a little from the force but quickly recovered and tried to get his foot to connect with the back of my leg. I easily caught it and he responded by trying to elbow me in the stomach but failed. For about twenty minutes we went back and fourth both failing to do any harm. I ended up getting him on the floor with my forearm against his throat.

“Although I can easily get out of this, I like this position we’re in, especially in this dress you’re wearing,” he said, smirking as we were both breathing hard. I removed my arm from his throat while rolling my eyes.

“I’m pretty sure that was proof that I still got it,” I said before pecking his lips and standing up. I pulled my black dress down and held out my hand to help him up.

“If we didn’t have so much work to do right now I wouldn’t even hesitate to take you straight home,” Joey murmured in my ear before taking a seat at his own desk.

“I know you wouldn’t,” I replied before sitting at my own desk and continuing to type up the mission report.

Claire’s Point of View (Seattle)

“Ms. Martez, I would like to know which you prefer, black or white?” my assistant Elena asked me, holding up the two dresses.

I looked at the picture again before grabbing the white dress.

"I want the white dress and I want it to open more down the middle. It's suppose to be sexy yet classy," I told her before handing her the dress back. She nodded quickly and started heading to my office doors.

"Actually Elena, I'm feeling a little spontaneous. Why don't we do both. Black dresses and white dresses? Make the black one be the complete opposite of the white one. I want it to to show less cleavage," I said. She nodded smiling.

"Great idea, just like always," she said, before shutting my brown sliding doors. I walked over to the glass wall that overlooked the whole city. It would be nice to not spend another night at the office. I checked the time to see it read 7:53.

I jumped a little when the phone in my office went off, and I quickly walked over to it and answer, "What?"

"Well, I see you're in a lovely mood like always," Mia said. I sighed.

"Sorry Mia, I'm just a little stressed," I said while straightening out my white shirt that was tucked into my black skirt.

"Let's go out," she suggested. I sighed.

"You know I can't. I have that huge order from London that has to be shipped by tomorrow along with the one from Alaska. These new dresses are selling like crazy," I tell her while flipping through all the order forms for tomorrow.

"I don't give a f*ck. Ever since you got your fashion company to the top you haven't taken a break. I'm sure even Caiden would like to go have a drink and maybe even later have some sex," Mia said.

I shook my head at my best friend.

"I'm pretty sure he is having an affair with some girl while I'm working," I said, and Mia snorted.

"I highly doubt that. You seem to forget you are like the new Beyoncé," she said, "and he can't get anything better than you."

"We've been together for years now and he still hasn't proposed," I said, trying to hide the disappointment in my voice.

"That's because all you do is work woman. I mean he is the f*cking owner of Anderson's manufacturing, and he still isn't as busy as you."

I sighed knowing she had a point.

"I'll be at your house at eight," I mumbled, resting my head against my hand.

"See you then."

Right when the call ended another line beeped. I clicked on it to hear Elena's voice.

"Just a reminder you have your meeting in five minutes with Mr. Franx."

I thanked her before hanging up.

***

"Looking sexy and sweet I see," Mia said, looking over my mid-thigh-length sexy red dress that had an opening at the top showing some cleavage. But then it closed and went up and around my neck.

"Can we just get this night over with? I just want to drink away all my problems," I said.

Mia smiled.

"Well then let's go."

"Um, not without me," Nathan said, scowling at us. I looked around the room confused. "Did you hear something? I mean I know it wasn't my so-called friend Nathan who I haven't heard from in two weeks."

"I've missed you too, Claire-bear," he said, chuckling and pulling me in a hug.

"I thought we got rid of that nickname after college," I whined as we exited their house.

"Nah," he said, putting his arms over Mia's should and mine. "I've definitely missed this," he said.

We all nodded.

"Tonight we are all going to act like we're in college again," Mia said.

I bit my lip.

"I swear if I'm on the front page of a magazine cover tomorrow I will kill you," I told Mia.

She waved me off as we stopped a taxi.

"I told all the paparazzi to focus on that model Clover Thompson for the night," she said.

I nodded as we all slid in and I told the driver the club we were going to.

"She's in town?" I asked. Everyone knew Clover Thompson rarely left Cali since she had kids.

"Yea, she has some fashion show here," she said. I nodded. Mia knew all the latest gossip since she worked at a magazine company. It didn't take long for us to arrive at the club, which I was thankful for.

“Let’s get our party on!” Mia yelled once we were inside fist pumping.

“I didn’t think she was going to take that literally and act like we’re in college,” I said to Nathan quietly. He laughed.

“This is Mia we’re talking about,” he said.

“Good point. Let’s enjoy our night at Club $even,” I said as we all headed straight to the bar.

Clover’s Point of View

“I probably shouldn’t be drinking right now,” I said, taking a sip of my Pina colada as Andrew shrugged.

“You already managed to trick to the paparazzi, so just enjoy your free night. I mean, my mom is watching the kids while we’re out of town. We need to enjoy our freedom. C’mon Clo we’re in the hottest club in town! Some people would die to be in club $even!” Andrew said after drowning another shot.

“I know, I know,” I said, sighing while looking around the club where people were grinding against each other.

“You know what you’re right let’s have fun!” I said, drowning a shot and standing up with my drink. I grabbed Andrew’s hand and pulled him while walking backwards.

“Um Clo watch o-” Andrew tried but it was to late, since my drink already spilled a little bit on the woman’s dress.

“What the f*ck?” the blonde girl hissed looking down at her red dress.

“Oh, I’m so sorry! OMG I didn’t mean to do that!” I apologized, and she narrowed her eyes at me.

“That’s Clover Thomson,” the brunette whispered.

The blonde rolled her eyes.

“I don’t care who the hell she is. She just spilled her drink all over me,” she said, heading towards the bathroom. I gave Andrew my drink before I followed after them, wanting to help.

“OMG I’m seriously so sorry. Do you want me to help?” I asked her, and she narrowed her eyes at me.

“You’ve done enough. I’m one of the worlds top fashion designers. I can get this out easily,” she hissed as I shrugged.

“Thanks anyways. It’s a pleasure to meet you though. I’m Mia and this is Claire,” the brunette said, and I nodded, shaking her hand.

“Claire Martez? I just ordered some new clothes from your catalogue,” I said as I now took in the familiar features. She didn’t respond as she continued to get the drink off her dress.

“I apologize for my bitch of a friend. She’s a little stressed,” Mia said as Claire snorted.

“It’s fine. I hope I didn’t ruin your night,” I said as I looked down at my manicure.

“We’re fine,” Claire said.

I only rolled my eyes at her rudeness.

“Your social manners are becoming about as good as Caiden’s,” Mia hissed quietly to her friend.

I decided to take my leave, not even bothering to say goodbye. I bumped into a man with dirty blonde hair when I walked out of the bathroom.

“Sorry,” the guy said before letting his eyes skim over my body.

“Clover Thompson right?” he asked me, and I nodded my head slowly.

“Sorry you don’t know me yet. The name is Jesse Farone, and I have a feeling we will be meeting again very soon,” he said.

I watched as a dark smirk appeared on his face. I backed up a few steps before quickly turning around in a hurry to find my husband.

“Woah you okay? You look a little freaked out,” Andrew said, grabbing my arm. I sighed in relief, wrapping my arms around him.

“Tonight is just a little too crazy for my liking,” I mumbled to him before I pulled him towards the flashing lights and enjoyed the music in the club. I was going to enjoy the rest of my night.

Chapter 3

Riley's Point of View

"One last check. Does everyone have what they need?" I asked, grabbing all the files. Joey rolled his eyes, taking the files from my hands.

"For the last time Riley, yes," he said, pecking my cheek.

"Well then, to the airport we go," I said.

Matt lifted a few bags on his shoulder along with Joey. We all piled into our cars and headed straight there.

"Where are we staying this time?" Joey asked, glancing at me before focusing on the road.

"I rented a house there in Seattle," I told him as I opened Jesse's file.

"Great. I've always wanted to go there," Joey said, smiling and I nodded.

"I've only been there once before with my parents," I said.

"This will be fun. I mean we've never gone undercover as drug dealers before," Joey said poking my cheek, trying to get me to smile.

"Yeah, it will be cool to see what a lot of our agents face from the inside," I said before biting my lip. If he is starting a gang of assassins, then I knew for a fact we wouldn't be just doing some drug dealing, and that itself scared the hell out of me.

***

I was relieved once we arrived at our temporary house in Seattle. It was a long flight and I was exhausted because of the time change.

"Once you all are done unpacking, I want you to come back down here and we'll start discussing some things. I'm gonna go out and pick up some food. And don't even think about taking the first room on the right. It's mine," I said. Joey groaned.

"Damn. I saw the pictures for this place and I really liked that room," Joey pouted.

"Joey, you're sharing with me. Remember?" I said, letting out a sigh. He gave me a sheepish smile.

"Right, sorry. I sometimes forget I have such a beautiful fiancé I get to sleep with every night," he said.

Rachel sighed.

“Can you guys just be married and have ten little Joey’s and Riley’s running around. Cause you two are seriously goals. Like Joey, please teach my husband this stuff,” Rachel said, making Joey smirk and me roll my eyes.

“Thank you. Now go get settled in,” I ordered before grabbing my keys and heading towards the door.

“Can I come?” Joey asked.

“I guess if you really want to,” I said. He nodded before following me out.

Once we were in the rental car, we made our way to the closest food store. We filled up the car with whatever looked appetizing. We didn’t know how long this case would take since we were dealing with Jesse Farone again.

“Excuse me,” a blonde woman said to Joey. Joeys eyes widened at the sight of her, making mine narrow. She was definitely pretty, but she looked too dressed up for this place. Her hair was perfectly curled and pulled to one side, and she wore a dress that was black on the top and on the bottom had different pretty designs in different colors, like blue and purple, with black heels.

“Sorry,” Joey apologized, moving out of her way so she could grab some yogurt. Joey watched her as she walked away, making me scowl.

“Joseph.”

“Hmm?”

“If you don’t stop looking at her in the next three seconds I will go all agent on your ass,” I hissed. That was probably the first time I’d ever seen him look at another girl like that. When he told me he liked me, I realized he’d always only had eyes for me.

“Riley, I swear it wasn’t that. It’s just she looks so familiar,” he said, letting his eyes snap back to mine, and I shook my head. I still didn’t like the way he looked at her. I’m suppose to be his fiancé.

“Whatever. Just go get paper products,” I told him, and he nodded, walking away.

Claire’s Point of View

“Elena, you told me that was sent out yesterday. What the hell do you mean it never got sent? I want you to call Victoria and explain to her why exactly her shipment of clothes won’t be coming within the next week,” I told my assistant before ending the call. And this is why I can’t leave work early.

You wouldn’t have to if Caiden would do something around the house.

I almost laughed at that thought. Caiden's as busy as me. I'm lucky if he'll even make me dinner every once in a while.

I gasped in surprise when I felt someone bump into me. "I'm so sorry!" The familiar handsome male apologized. I immediately recognized him from a minute ago when I was sliding past him for yogurt.

"You're fine. Don't worry about it," I told him, giving him a sincere smile.

"I'm Joey," he said, holding out his free hand.

I shook it while introducing myself, "I'm Claire."

"Ah so that's why you look familiar. You're Claire Martez. I think I've ordered a few tuxedos from you recently," he said.

I smiled.

"Well thank you for that. I have to get going, but it was a pleasure meeting you," I told him.

"The pleasure was all mine," he said smiling before I turned and headed to the front checkout.

As I walked, someone else ran into me, making me groan. All I wanted was some fruit and yogurt for the house. Is it really that hard to be left alone.

"Watch it," the man hissed as he continued to walk. Did he just? Oh no he didn't.

"Excuse you? You bumped into me," I said, causing him to stop and turn to face me.

"Of course. I should've known by that attitude it was you Claire," the familiar man said, shaking his head with a grimace on his face. I let my eyes carefully skim his face and then it hit me who he was.

"Well, I would have never guess I would see Jesse Farone here. I'm surprised you consume anything besides drugs," I hissed. He sneered at me. Jesse Farone was the one I met in front of my shop not that long ago. We actually became pretty close friends. It wasn't until I introduced him to Caiden that I wished I never met him. Jesse was a criminal.

To this day I still remember the story Caiden told me.

"When the cops brought me back to my parents, their first thought was to celebrate that I was home and bring us on a trip to LA, since apparently they were so overwhelmed they needed a vacation. That's where I met Jesse and your brother. I was walking to the store one night and he and a few other guys were doing some dealing in an alley next door. I lied to you when I told you that I would never do that stuff. I needed to forget everything, so he told me if I was a dealer with him he would give me whatever I wanted for free, so I took his offer. We were only going to be in

LA for three weeks. When those three weeks ended I told him I had to stop, but that wasn't what he wanted to hear."

"What did he do?" I asked Caiden.

"Nothing. I had to leave, but he sent two of his friends to look after me," Caiden said, clenching his fists.

"Who?"

"Jax and Leon."

It suddenly all made sense now. That's why Jax was really in jail, and I understood why Caiden didn't want me to talk to Leon.

"How's Caiden?" Jesse asked, interrupting my thoughts.

"I don't really think that's any of your business," I told him with a glare. Jesse's hand grabbed ahold of my chin. I stood my ground and continued to flare at him.

"Remove your fucking hand before I scream."

"You better watch that tongue of yours or else one day it could get you killed," he said with a smirk before removing his hand. "I only came here to help you out, but you just had to be a little bitch. You and Caiden better start watching your back. I don't show any mercy to anyone these days."

Jesse only let his smirk grow wider before walking away. Once he was completely out of sight, I rubbed my chin. The grip he had was so tight it could've left bruises. I needed to get home. I may seem like a strong woman, but when someone threatens my life, I won't lie and say I'm not scared, because I am.

Riley's Point of View

Once we arrived home and unloaded everything, we all met in the kitchen.

"I think Riley should go undercover at first. Just because it would be too obvious if two of us wanted to join at the same time," Joey said.

Matt shook his head.

"No, that's too dangerous."

"It's too dangerous for them to go in together! If they get caught right from the start, then they are as good as dead," Emily said moving a piece of her blonde hair behind her ear.

"I'm doing it. Joey will join me not long after," I said, leaving no room for argument.

“The only thing I’m worried about is that he’ll recognize her,” Rachel said while biting her lip.

“And that’s why I bought blonde hair dye,” I said, nodding my head to the box on the counter.

“Well then, when do you go undercover?” Matt asked me.

“When’s the sunset?” I asked him.

“At 9:10.”

“I’ll be leaving here at 9:30 then.”

“That only gives you 3 hours Riles,” Joey said.

I simply shrugged.

“That seems like enough time to me. Rachel, I want you to find out where Jesse Farone will be at 9 o’clock tonight. Emily, you will go out and get me an outfit that would make look a little slutty but sexy. Matt, I want you to help Rach,” I ordered.

They all nodded and then left the room to go do their jobs.

“And what about me?” Joey asked with an innocent look.

“You’re going to go with Emily,” I told him. He pouted. “I would hurry up before she leaves.”

He jumped up and ran out of the room.

“Emily! Hey wait up!” I laughed shaking my head. I grabbed the hair dye and headed up to the bathroom. It looked like Riley Scott was going blonde.

***

“There is no way they’re going to say no to that,” Rachel said. Emily agreed.

“Damn. You should dress like this every day,” Joey said, bringing me closer to him. I was wearing a pair of tight, white shorts that barely covered my ass and a light blue tank top that had ruffles and zipped up in the middle, and then a pair of blue sandals.

“Yeah, I’m sure you’d like that,” I said smirking. He nodded, pecking my lips.

“I’m probably the luckiest guy in the world to have a fiancé as beautiful as you,” he whispered in my ear making my cheeks heat up. I pushed him away and got into business mode.

“You’re bringing a gun right?” Matt asked me and I shook my head.

“No, just a knife. That’s all,” I said.

“I really advise that you bring a gun with you too. Just like a pistol or something.”

“Matt, don’t worry, I’ll be fine. Let’s not forget I’m going undercover,” I said.

He frowned.

“Now once I’m in I’ll probably be there for a while. I want you to make you sure to have both cars in the garage. I’m probably going to be followed home so I want no movement in the house after two. You guys should all stay upstairs in the room Matt set up,” I instructed.

“Here, I want you to take this,” Matt said, pulling a small box out of his pocket. He opened it and showed me a set of dangly earrings. “They’re like earrings, but the left earring has a small speaker right here, so you can hear me, and the right one is a mic in case you have to get in touch with me.”

“When did we get these in?” I asked. I’d never seen anything like this before, I thought, as I put them in. I added the belt to my shorts.

“I made these recently,” he said.

“They’re pretty cool.”

“Thank you. Now Joey, you’re dropping her off right?” Matt asked.

“Yup.”

“It’s 9:30,” Emily said after looking at the time.

“Okay, let’s get going,” I said, opening the door.

“Hey Riley, be careful,” Emily yelled. I smirked.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got this,” I said before saluting them.

Joey drove me around the corner from where I needed to be. He stopped the car and looked at me. He placed his lips on mine, giving me a long, sweet kiss. “Be careful,” he whispered after pulling away.

“I always am, “I told him, pecking his lips one more time before stepping out of the car. It was a good thing this mission was in the summer, or else I’d probably freeze to death in clothes like these.

I heard the car pull away, and I started to walk confidently down the sidewalk with my hips swaying a bit. As soon as I was three feet from the store, I smirked. They would be in the alley to the left of it. I kept my head held high as I walked past it.

“Hey Jesse, look who we’ve got here,” an unfamiliar voice said. I continued to walk knowing they would follow.

“Hey babe, where you going?” Jesse yelled, running up next to me. I was hoping he wouldn’t notice me. I mean with blonde hair, more makeup, and tighter clothes, I looked like a completely different person.

“She’ll be going to my crib so we can get to know each other. If you know what I mean,” the obnoxious guy said, winking at me, causing me to roll my eyes. He put his arm on my shoulder, making me mentally cringe.

“Jacob, back off,” Jesse hissed, and the guy immediately dropped his arm.

“Hey girl what’s yo name?” asked another guy who I hasn’t noticed was walking behind us.

“Reese. But people I know pronounce it like the candy Reese cups,” I said in my perfected American accent. By now we had stopped walking and we were on the opposite side of the store where there was barely any lighting.

“Well Reese, how come you’re all alone this late at night?” Jesse asked.

“It’s like nine something. That’s not even late,” I said, raising my eyebrow.

“Well baby face, where you heading?” Jacob asked, causing me to glare at him.

“Call me that again and I will slit your throat.” I hissed and he raised his hands in surrender.

“I’d say she’s a feisty one,” Jacob said chuckling.

“Stop antagonizing the poor girl. But out of curiosity, where were you heading?” Jesse asked me, leaning against the brick wall of the building.

“How about I ask you a question. Why were there three guys standing in a dark alley whispering?” I shot back.

Jesse raised an eyebrow.

“I see someone’s too cocky for her own good. We were dealing drugs,” Jesse said, making my eyes widen. I wasn’t expecting him to come out and say that.

“Jesse, man, what the hell?” the other guy hissed.

“Interesting. How much?” I asked, twirling a piece of my blonde hair around my finger.

“You do drugs?” Jacob asked surprised while Jesse only smirked.

“You can get them for free if you work for us.” Jesse responded causing me to smirk.

“Are you offering me a spot in your gang?” I asked with a raised eyebrow and he chuckled putting his hand on the wall so it was right next to face and leaned in.

“I don’t know, it depends are you agreeing to be in my gang.” He shot back and I shrugged.

“Sure. I mean if you give me what I want we won’t have a problem,” I said before pushing his chest back and moving so I wasn’t so close to him.

“As great as this is I want the coke.” The other

Ignoring him, Jesse continued talking to me. “No, as long as you do what I said you won’t end up dead.”

Jesse pulled out a gun, pointing at the third man with us and let a deadly smirked appear on is face. The sound of the bullet being released from the gun sounded through the streets. I watched as it hit the man in the stomach and he fell to the ground. Jesse reached down and took a couple hundred dollar bills out of the mans pocket.

“Jacob, you know what to do.” Jacob took the bag off his back and opened up taking out some lighter fluid and a match.

“Stop. What are you doing!?” The man yelled out in pain trying to sit up. Jesse put his foot on the mans shoulder and pushed him down. Keeping his foot there he turned to Jacob giving him a look. He poured lighter fluid all over the man's body. When he opened the mans mouth with his hand and started pouring it inside it took every part of me to not turn away. I was undercover. I can’t do anything. Just remember you've seen worse.

“Wanna do the honors?” Jacob asked with a dark smirk on his face. Nothing disgusted me more then seeing the excitement in his eyes. He enjoyed bringing an end to people’s lives. He enjoyed watching them struggle.

“You never said killing was involved,” I said, looking at Jesse and ignoring Jacob.

“I shouldn’t have to. You know it’s a gang. What do you think we do? Give out little candy bracelets with hearts on them? If you can’t handle this, then you’re next,” Jesse sneered.

I raised my perfectly plucked eyebrow.

“Well, I’m here for the drugs. I don’t kill,” I said with no emotion. He just shook his head.

“That’ll change soon enough,” he said.

“Such a bore,” Jacob said before filling the man’s mouth with more lighter fluid and placing duct tape on his mouth. He threw the match, causing the body to go up in flames. We all took a step back watching him as he moved around – his face was filled with terror as he tried to scream. With his eyes he was begging me to take him out of his misery, but I couldn’t.

“Let’s go. Someone could spot us from the store any minute,” Jesse said, already walking away. I followed after them trying to keep the act up. I wanted to arrest him right now, but I couldn’t. There was no proof.

The place where they hid out was about a fifteen minute drive in their car. I wasn’t surprised to see it was an old abounded store. The second you walked in all you could smell was different drugs. Thousands and thousands of guns were aligned on the wall, making my eyes narrow.

“Hey Jess, I got the information you requested for Clover Thompson and Claire Martez,” Taylor said, handing Jesse a folder.

“I don’t care what you do to Clover, but I’ve met that Claire girl before. She’s hot man. I think you should turn her against Caiden,” Taylor suggested.

“Don’t tell me what the fuck to do. Caiden needs to learn he can’t do whatever he wants. Claire is the one thing in this world he cares about more than anything. And I know it will kill him when he sees her dead body,” Jesse said with another dark smirk on his face.

“Well, at least let me have some fun with her first.”

“You can do whatever you please with her. I won’t kill her right away. I need Caiden to suffer.” I was hoping Joey and the others were hearing this. We need to find these two girls. I can’t let them be murdered.

“Who’s this?” Taylor asked, looking at me with narrowed eyes.

“Her name is Reese. Don’t even think about it. She’s mine,” Jacob said, putting his arm on my shoulder again.

“Don’t act like you own me,” I said, shrugging off his arm. He squeezed my ass, making me jump. “Watch it.” I hissed.

“Calm yourself Jacob. Slutty isn’t my type.”

I bit back a response and only smirked.

“In other words, he means he can’t handle my type,” I retorted while flipping my blonde hair over my shoulder, causing Jacob to laugh.

“Enough,” Jesse said, glaring at the three of us. “You know where we stay now, so I expect you here at 10:30 sharp for your next assignment.” He didn’t say another word after that and only walked away with the folder in his hands.

“You’ll be an interesting recruitment,” Taylor said, looking at me. Taylor and Jacob followed after Jesse, leaving me alone.

I took that opportunity to leave. I texted Joey, telling him to meet me about two blocks away. We needed to find those two girls.

Chapter 4

Jesse's Point of View

I sat back in my chair in the conference room we use to discuss different deals. I watched as my gang members bickered back and forth, trying to agree on a price for the new type of drug we made. I blocked them out and focused on my own thoughts. I was fucking sick of this whole thing. I wanted to be a new man after prison. I didn't want to follow in my brothers' foot steps, but it seemed I was.

If there was one person to blame for making me give up on a fresh start, it would be Claire Martez. She was probably the only girl who I ever truly found attractive and irresistible from the second I saw her. She would've been the death of me if she wasn't dating such a monster. Hypocritical? I know. But I tried to change. Caiden on the other hand didn't. He is still a bastard with a haunting past. I don't get what such a kind-hearted woman like her sees in him.

Slamming my fists on the table, I stood up completely furious. All attention was on me, but I could care less. You may ask: Do I really want Claire dead? The answer to that: No, I didn't. Now don't get me wrong, I wouldn't mind if Caiden took a couple of bullets to the head. But someone as precious as Claire, I think I would actually feel pain after shooting her.

"Jesse? Is everything okay?" Leon asked me and I sneered at him.

"If any other gang or person came in here they would think we are pathetic and weak because of you three arguing. I'm disgusted that someone of such a high rank would be even arguing over this," I hissed.

Leon and the other two guys immediately apologized.

I left the room, slamming the door behind me. My brother would slice my throat right now if he knew I wasn't taking what's mine.

"Taylor," I yelled into the locating room. He looked up. There were about twenty three other men in here, but Taylor was the only one who I knew for a fact would do his job right. Believe it or not, but to be in a gang you have to be smart, which is one of the reasons why I chose Reese as a new recruit. I could tell she was smart and would definitely be effective when it came to getting goods from other gangs.

This gang is more powerful now than it ever was, which is why I wasn't worried about the EA catching us again. I am purposely leading them here. I would get my revenge on Riley Scott. "Find the location of Claire," I demanded. He nodded, immediately going to work.

Claire's Point of View

"What's wrong?" Caiden asked me, his eyes having a tint of concern in them.

"I saw Jesse at the store yesterday. Caiden, I don't trust him. He's going to try to do something to you," I told him.

Caiden smirked.

"It's sad that after all of these years, you always think so lowly of me? I mean you should know I can protect us Claire," his husky voice said while he pulled me onto his lap. I looked at the TV screen, pursing my lips.

"It would be nice if we didn't always have to live our lives in fear," I told him at the same time he started playing with my fingers, something that seemed to be a habit of his when he was thinking.

"Fuck Claire! I've told you multiple times you have nothing to worry about! It's my past not yours, so just stay out of it," he hissed, already getting mad.

I took a deep breath, trying not to get mad as well.

I laughed. "You think since we've been together for so long you would finally decide to open up a bit more. You told me everything in our college years, but now it feels like you're further than ever. All you do is work these days."

He moved my head with his hand, forcing me to look at him. My blue eyes met with his hazel ones, and I didn't look away because of their intensity. "You know that I love you right? That's why I'm working so much. I want you to be able to have the best life possible," he told me, holding onto my hands again.

"I love you too. But we're both making so much money that we'll be be millionaires if not billionaires by the time we hit our early thirties," I told him, standing up.

"Instead of yelling at me, why don't you think for a second that maybe it's not me! I'm not the only one working all day. You are always at work too. This is why this relationship is going nowhere!" he hissed, standing up too.

"No, don't put this on our schedules! This relationship isn't going anywhere because you're still afraid of commitment!" I yelled throwing my hands up.

His eyes noticeably darkened, making me flinched at the harsh look that replaced the warm one on his face. "Let's get one thing straight, I am not afraid. I never was. I just don't do relationships because I see what it does to people. But you know what, baby doll? I made an exception for you. Because I care about you more then I should. Hell! I would take the world for you if you asked because I love you!" he said, his arms wrapping around my waist.

Guilt filled my body as I looked into his dark eyes. His face showed anger, but behind that menacing look I knew there was much more. “What happened to us?” I asked, resting my head against his chest as he pulled me closer to his body.

“I think we need to take a break from work and do something fun,” I said, pulling away and looking at him with a large smile on my face.

His eyes lightened at the look on my face and he pecked my lips. “What do you want to do? We can go on vacation if you want.” His suggestion made me excited, but I knew that would take too much planning right now.

“We’ll have to plan one soon. But I think tomorrow we should both take the day off and go to the beach!” I heard his deep chuckle echo through the room making me narrow my eyes.

“What? What’s wrong with the beach?” I asked, pouting and he shook his head.

“Nothing, I just wasn’t expecting you to say that. But yes, we can go,” he said, making me give him a long kiss.

“Yes! This will be so much fun!” I told him, my eyes sparkling with happiness.

“Are you sure you just don’t want to see me half naked?” he asked, an arrogant smirk on his face. Yeah, for everyone who was wondering, a guy’s cockiness does not disappear as the years go on. Personally I think they only get more arrogant.

“If I wanted to see you half naked or even completely naked, all I would have to do is this.” I pulled roughly on the top of his shirt, popping a button.

“And this,” I said, my voice getting quieter as I made another button pop off, pulling his shirt as I bit my lip seductively. His eyes darkened with lust, making me smirk.

“And this,” I said, letting my voice get even quieter so it was now just above a whisper.

“And this.” My lips were now next to his ear, touching them as I spoke. I popped the last few buttons causing him to let out almost a growl.

“Dammit, baby doll.” His lips attacked mine, making me smirk against his lips. Our kiss was heated, and I only felt my body get hotter as his hands roamed it. He didn’t even hesitate before completely removing my blouse. And I’m sure it wouldn’t take you very long to guess where that led to next.

***

“See isn’t this nice!” I said smiling, leaning my hands back on my towel. I loved the feeling of the hot sun on my skin. It gave me a warm feeling that no one else could give you. It made you feel hot, yet refreshed.

“I think it would be even nicer to see you laying out without anything on,” his husky voice whispered next to my ear. He tried to tease me by pulling on my ear with his teeth, but when he pulled away I scowled at him.

“No! We are going to have a nice, relaxing day today! No teasing!” I said him, giving him a pointed look.

“That’s not fair. You’re teasing me by being in the bikini of yours!” he said.

I frowned.

“Well doesn’t that just sound like a personal problem?” I said while trying to hold back a smirk.

“You shouldn’t of said that, baby doll,” he said before lifting me up and running into the water. I felt my body getting thrown into the icy water, making me scowl after I came up.

“That was cruel,” I told him and he shrugged.

“What wrong? Is someone cold?” he said, giving me an innocent look – that one look you would never expect to see on such a dark man.

“Have I ever told you that you’re an ass?”

“Multiple times,” he said before pecking my lips.

Clover’s Point of View

“It’s not nearly as hot here as it is in Long Beach,” I complained. Andrew just shook his head.

“We could just go home and enjoy the beaches there,” Andrew suggested as Tori glared at him.

“No! This is our vacation time! We’ve got the parents watching all the kids for another week. Let’s enjoy this paradise,” Tori said, sipping on her martini.

“No one said you had to come,” Andrew retorted.

“C’mon Tori is right! Plus I have old friends to meet up with!” Jasmin said, keeping her eyes closed as she soaked in the hot rays of the sun.

“You heard the girls. We can’t leave. Plus I still have one more fashion show next Saturday,” I told him. He rolled his eyes.

“Yeah, I know. It was only a suggestion. No need to bite my head off,” he said, peeling the sweaty shirt off his body.

“Hey sorry man,” Chris said, joining us with Michael by his side.

"We got caught in traffic on the way to the store, but we did get the beers," he said, tossing Andrew one.

I was more than surprised when Stacey let Chris come here to Seattle with us while she stayed home to watch their kids. Zach did the same thing for Jasmin. Who knew Stacey and Zach could be kind enough to let their husband/wife go on a vacation without them.

"Does that woman look familiar to you guys?" Tori asked, looking in the distance at a blonde woman in the water with what I could guess was her boyfriend.

She did look really familiar, but I just couldn't place my finger on how I knew her.

"Wait, I know who that is! That's Claire Martez. She designed my wedding dress years ago," Tori said.

"Oh really? That dress was gorgeous. You were in wedding magazines for months after your wedding because of that dress," Jasmin gushed, sitting up and moving her sunglasses so they were on top of her head.

My eyes narrowed.

"Trust me when I said she's nothing special. She's just a royal bitch," I said, flipping blonde my hair out of my face.

"How do you know?" Tori asked, raising an eyebrow.

"The other night when I went out with Andrew, I accidently spilled my drink, and she was a complete bitch. I swear she must think she's all that because she's one of the top designers," I said, glancing at her to see her and her boyfriend holding each other's hand and swinging them as they talked in the water.

"Really? She was so sweet when my stepbrother introduced us," Tori said.

"Tori, people change. She was nothing more than a college student then," I said, opening up a magazine I brought.

She sighed, shaking her head.

"Ugh, I should of expected it. I don't think I can order clothes from her again knowing now that she was a bitch to my best friend," Tori said.

I nodded in agreement. I don't think I would look through her catalogues anymore either.

My eyes wondered up again in curiosity as the girl and her boyfriend flirted and splashed each other. She looked so carefree compared to the night at the club.

I watched as they exited the water and Claire walked off. I couldn't contain my curiosity and excused myself. "I'm just gonna head to the bathroom. I'll be back in a few minutes," I told them before rushing off after her.

I felt stupid when I caught up only to see her just ordering something from the concession stand.

"Claire, I'm surprised. I didn't expect to see you here," I gasped. I completely hid when I saw that creepy guy from the other night.

"All I have to do is scream and Caiden will be here in seconds," she warned.

"Now, no need to be rash. I just wanted to apologize for the other day. I hope I didn't freak you out," he said, letting his thumb stroke her cheek. She shivered in what I think was disgust, and she slapped his hand away.

"Don't touch me," she hissed. "Jesse, you have one minute to tell me what you want or so god help you I'll scream." That was this man's name, Jesse?

"There's no need for that. I'm only being friendly," he said as her glared turned darker.

"45 seconds."

"Fine. I want you to give me another chance. We were great friends until you told Caiden about me. I never actually did anything wrong to you," he told her.

She just started at him blankly.

"You didn't have to! Your goal in life is to take out the one person I love more than anything and you expect me to want to be friends with you? Are you fucking stupid?" Her words were laced with disgust as she glared at this guy.

When she said take him out did she mean—

"He betrayed me! He deserves to be put six feet under!" Jesse said, trying to defend himself.

—kill? This man is a killer. He told me he would be seeing me soon. Does that mean? "N- n- no this can't be," I said to myself. Obviously that was a stupid decision when they all looked over here. I was thankful when they glanced this way that they couldn't see me.

"Who's over there? What are you recording this conversation or something?" Claire said, pushing on his chest, making him stumble back since he wasn't expecting that.

"No! I don't know who the fuck is over there. Just listen to me. Claire, I just need you to forgive me. I won't beg you, but I simply am asking you because your friendship was probably the closest thing I've had to living a normal life since I was a child."

Anyone from a mile away could tell this man was in love with her. It almost made me feel bad for the guy. Keyword almost. He was a killer – No, he is a killer. And people like him deserve to rot in hell.

“Go to hell,” she sneered before walking up to the counter and grabbing her food and heading back to where her boyfriend was talking on his phone.

This was my chance. I could go up to her and confront her about that whole conversation or I could mind my own business and go back by Andrew and the others.

“Hey!” I yelled, running up to her. I was now walking right next to her.

“Are you stalking me or something?” she asked as she stopped walking to look at me.

“No, we just so happened to be at the same place at the same time,” I said, rolling my eyes. I could see someone is full of themselves. “I just overheard your conversation with that man and I have a question for you,” I told her. She narrowed her eyes.

“You should really stay out of things that don’t concern you,” she said, but I still asked my question anyway.

“Is he a killer?” I asked her. She raised an eyebrow looking almost amused.

“He is from LA. How can you not know if this man is a killer? Do you ever watch the news?”

“When you’re busy walking down runways and spending time with your husband while taking care of two kids it’s not exactly your first thing you want to watch,” I retorted. I watched as her eyes flashed with what looked like jealousy and a bit of pain. I smirked, liking the fact that I finally got to her.

Clearing her throat, she finally answered my question. “Yes, he’s a killer. He was in jail for nine years after helping is brother murder a poor girl.”

The disgust was evident on her face, but I felt myself freeze.

“W-what?”

“Yeah and I’m only telling you this to help you out. There has been murder after murder here lately, so watch your back,” she told me before turning around to leave. I grabbed her arm, making her stop.

“That man told me he’d see me soon. Do you think—” I stopped not even wanting to finish the sentence.

I was surprised when she gave me a sympathetic look. “You should tell the police. He’s probably their number one suspect right now. If you tell them that, it would at least give them some type of reason to lock him behind bars for 24 hours,” she suggested, making me shake my head.

“And then when they find no proof and he’s released I just get to end up dead like everyone just because he’s mad. How about no,” I said, looking at my new manicure.

“Do whatever, I don’t really care,” Claire said, rolling her eyes before walking off. I didn’t even try to stop her and only watched her walk away.

I felt someone’s arms wrap around my waist and a head sit on my shoulder. “What was that all about?” my husband asked me, and I simply shrugged.

“Nothing, nothing at all,” I said, removing his arms and moving towards our friends. “Where’s Chris and Jasmin?” I asked, sitting down.

“They both wanted to go meet up with some family they have here,” Tori said, shrugging as she took another sip of her martini.

“Oh okay,” I said, looking out at the ocean. I never really understand how I managed to stay friends with those two after all this time. There was something weird about them. I didn’t think of how odd it was moving to our school right after we met them in jail as a teenager, but I’ve thought about it quite a few times as an adult. It was just weird especially because neither Andrew nor I ever told them that little piece of information about us living in Long Beach. Shrugging it off, I decided to relax and tune into whatever Tori and Andrew were arguing about now.

Claire’s Point of View

I sighed dramatically, setting the food beside Caiden before taking a seat on Caiden’s lap.

“That took longer then I thought it would?” he said with a suspicious tone, and I nodded agreeing. I held my breath, making my face like a puffer fish, and I looked up at Caiden at the same time while crossing my eyes.

“You’re so weird,” he said, letting out a deep chuckle before trying to press his lips against mine. Keyword trying. As soon as he got close, I let out my minty breath and blew it in his face. I gave him a huge smile while still looking up at him as I sat in his lap. Times like this I loved that he was taller than me.

Caiden rolled his eyes and pecked my lips. “Now I think I should tell you something,” he said, suddenly making me narrow my eyes.

“What?” I asked.

“I invited Nick to the beach and—” he said, making me get out of his lap and stand up.

“What?!” I repeated, glaring at him. I know he doesn’t get to see his best friend a lot because of his schedule, but today was suppose to be our day.

“And before you get mad, I invited Mia and Nathan too,” he finished, but I didn’t lose my glare.

“That’s nice of you, but today was still suppose to be our day,” I said, turning around to face the water with my arms crossed over my chest.

I felt him grab my hips and soon enough I was sitting on his lap again. “Don’t get all dramatic with me,” I heard him say before his soft lips pressed against my shoulder. “It’ll be fun having some of our friends here.”

“Yeah, but if Nick brings Jax then I’m leaving with or without you. I don’t care how long it’s been, I will never forgive him,” I said frowning. That man would always have to live with the fact that a sweet, innocent, boy killed himself because of him. He could have had a happy life if Jax didn’t torment and bully him. I mean look at the world now! He could have even gotten married to whatever guy he wanted to now!”

“He’s not going to,” Caiden said. I felt a bit of tension in the air.

Caiden’s list of reasons why he still hated Jax could have gone on forever, but he managed to tolerate him when ever Nick, Tom, Kyle and him went out.

“I guess I’ll let this pass this once because I’ve missed Nick,” I said before pursing my lips.

“Talking about me again?” I heard a familiar voice. I turned my head to see a tall, handsome man. I wouldn’t have even recognized it was Nick if it wasn’t for the cheeky smile on his face.

“Nick!” I yelled as I jumped out of Caiden’s lap and ran up giving him a hug. I let my arms wrap around his neck and his wrap around my waist.

“I don’t know if you know this, but it’s a bit weird to not see your fiancé for about 5 years,” Nick said, making me smile. I slapped his hard chest and just shook my head.

“Ha very funny,” I said, taking a step away from him.

“Yeah, it’s also not right to get engaged to his best friend,” he said, giving me a playful glare. I tried to keep the smile on my face, but it must have been sad because Nick lost the playful glare and instead gave me a look of curiosity and confusion.

“Oh uh, we aren’t engaged, so you don’t have to worry about that one,” I said, licking my lips nervously,

“What? I thought he popped the question like months ago?” Nick whispered to me confused.

I only shook my head and kept silent.

“Caiden, my main man, don’t you wanna hug me too?” he asked Caiden, quickly sensing the tension that the conversation started.

“Why am I friends with you again?” he asked with a raised eyebrow. It doesn’t matter how long they’ve been friends Caiden still barely showed any real emotion to his friend. It made me sad in a way to see him close up when anyone but me got near. Yes, he may have been a bit more social and talked more, but he was still cold as ever.

“Because you love me? C’mon lets go get married. You can just leave Claire,” he suggested as he laid out his towel and sat down on it. I decided to sit next to Caiden on our blanket instead of on his lap.

“Yeah, I’m right on that,” he retorted sarcastically. Nick only chuckled.

“So Nick, what about your real love life? Are you still on the market?” I asked before taking a bite of our now cold french fries.

“Yeah,” he said almost disappointedly. “But you know I still go on a few dates every now an then. I just haven’t found the right girl yet.”

“And basically that means he still sleeps around every now and then,” another voice said. Looking up I saw Mia and gave her a smile.

“Oh you’re here!” I said, patting the extra space on our blanket.

“Yeah, I’m here,” she said, laying out her own towel as Nathan did the same. I gave them both quick hugs before sitting back down. “And If you think I’m gonna sit on that blanket where you probably did the tango a hundred times you must be on crazy bitch.”

“We have not,” I denied.

“It was only once,” Caiden said at the same time, making me glare at him.

“Damn, all we need is a few more people and we’ll just have the whole gang here,” Nick said, giving Nathan a man hug and Mia just a quick regular hug.

“Hey ho, pass me one of of those fries,” my best friend said, holding out her hand. I laughed, handing her a few. “Did you guys have sex and forget you bought food? These things are cold as fuck.”

“And hey, just so you know, I don’t sleep around that much anymore!” Nick suddenly said making us all laugh.

“Did something happen in that department of yours?” Mia asked, smirking as she gestured to his pants.

“No, actually it’s just fine! Claire would know!” Nick said, making me narrow my eyes at him. Why the hell would he say that? Caiden didn’t seem to find that too amusing as he glared at his friend.

“Do you want me to fucking punch you now or later?” he hissed. Nick put his hands up in surrender.

“Hey, that was like nine years ago. A lot can change in that time. Why don’t you both stop acting like a bunch of little girls?” Mia suggested.

“Gosh you’re such a bitch,” I said, shaking my head in amusement.

“Yeah, but that’s why you love me,” she said.

“Nathan, what’s up? Why are you so quiet?” I asked my other best friend and he immediately apologized.

“Sorry, I was texting my dad,” he said. My eyes widened.

“Your actual dad?”

“Yeah, he’s paranoid because of all the killings here,” he said, rolling his eyes. “He wants me to meet my sister, who is the girl that took over his agency.”

“Your step sister?” Mia asked. He nodded.

“He wants you to fly to London?” I asked with wide eyes.

“No, apparently she’s here for the case. I don’t know how exactly she’s going to stop them, but it’s whatever,” Nathan said shrugging and slipping his phone in his swimming trunks pockets.

“Hey, man if you, go to meet her can I come with? She could be hot,” Nick said.

Nathan raised an eyebrow.

“That is my stepsister you’re talking about,” Nathan said with a disgusted look.

“And?” Nick said, doing some weird thing with his eyebrows.

“That’s it. I can’t take it anymore. This is eating me alive. Can you just find out if that man is after me?” a familiar blonde said out of nowhere, making us all look up at her standing figure. Standing behind her was a handsome man who was narrowing his eyes at Caiden.

“Y-you’re Clover Thompson. Damn you’re definitely hotter in person,” Nick said. I wanted to slap him just for inflating his ego. The guy with her moved his glare to Nick.

“Hey, it’s you again,” Mia said. Clover rolled her eyes.

“What man?” Nathan asked after a minute of her ignoring everyone.

“That Jesse guy. The one you were talking to earlier.”

She just had to know his name, didn’t she.

“You talked to Jesse again?”

“She knows Jesse?”

“Who the fuck is Jesse?”

All of these questions were directed at me. The last one specifically came from the guy next to Clover.

“Can you all shut the hell up?” I asked. Why couldn’t I just have a relaxing day?

“Well?” Clover said, making me glare at her. This bitch just wanted to fight me.

“If you couldn’t tell earlier when you were eavesdropping, me and him aren’t friends. I want nothing to do with that ass,” I hissed and she snorted.

“I find that hard to believe due to the fact that man is like in love with you,” she said, making me laugh. I actually laughed for a good three minutes over that. By this point everyone was standing in a huge circle.

“What the fuck do you mean he’s in love with her?” Caiden’s glare was now deadly and actually made the girl take a step back into the guy’s chest.

“He was practically begging her to talk to him and be friends again,” Clover said rolling her eyes. Who invited her over here?

“Were you going to tell me this? I should’ve fucking known you were fucking him all this time. I knew you two were a little too friendly,” Caiden hissed at me with a menacing glare before storming off. I’ll admit that hurt. I haven’t been the cause of Caiden’s rage in years. The last time he’d ever even looked at me with such a deadly look was in college.

“You couldn’t have just left me the hell alone,” I hissed at the blonde before folding up our blanket and grabbing our towels.

“Honey, don’t blame me for your boyfriend problems. All I did was ask you a simple question,” Clover said glaring at me.

“And I’m simply telling you that you need to leave me the fuck alone,” I sneered at her.

“C’mon Clo, let’s leave the bitch to PMS,” the guy with her said as he grabbed her hand and pulled her away.

“Oi bitch you’re lucky I can’t hit you,” Mia yelled at her. I knew Mia would have beaten the crap out of her if she wasn’t worried about the complications it would have with her job since they’re currently focusing on the model.

“Wow, who knew Clover Thompson was actually the biggest bitch around,” Nick said shaking his head.

“Hey, I’ll make this up to you guys. Dinner at my place tomorrow night at seven,” I told them, blowing a kiss.

“Fine, but I’m taking this food,” she said, snatching up our large basket of fries.

“Nathan, text me details about that meeting with your sis. I’ll come with you for support,” I told him before walking in the direction Caiden went.

“Don’t worry. You know Caiden is just being his usual dramatic self. Somewhere deep down in his heart he knows you aren’t actually sleeping with Jesse,” Nick said, walking with me.

“Thank you, Nick,” I said pecking his cheek. “I appreciate that. I’m sure he’s just brooding in the—” My sentence was cut short when I realized one thing.

“In the what?” Nick asked, looking where I was. “Claire? What’s wrong?” he asked after a moment when I didn’t respond.

“That asshole left me here.”

Chapter 5

Claire's Point of View

"Thanks again Nick," I said stepping out of his car.

"No problem, see you tomorrow," he said, and I nodded, shutting his car door. I still couldn't believe Caiden left me at the beach. Actually, on second thought I could. That's something he would definitely do, but only if he was really pissed.

"Caiden!" I called, opening the door and locking it behind me. I knew he was here because both of our cars were in the driveway. When I didn't see him on the first floor of the house I went upstairs and saw him sitting on our bed with his back against the headboard. "Caiden?" I called again this time softly.

"I love you," Caiden said suddenly, completely surprising me. I thought he was furious with me?

"What?"

"I said, I love you. I know I don't show it often, which is why you decide to fuck my enemies, but you should know you're the only reason I even did something with my life. I could've been some alcoholic and just sat in my apartment drinking my life away, but then I met you and I hated you."

Was that last part suppose to be sweet?

"I really did hate you and I wanted nothing to do with you, but then you followed me into the park that day and just talked to me. You didn't speak to me like I was some person who just escaped from some insane asylum, you spoke to me like you actually wanted to get to know me."

Caiden's eyes turned away from me and instead focused out the window at the setting sun.

"Why are you telling me all of this now?" I asked, taking a seat at the end of our bed.

"Because I don't want to lose you. Everything in my life has been going great. And if you leave then I'll just turn back into the man I was," he said, shaking his head in disgust. "Just answer one question for me: Are you just doing this to spite me?"

I was offended that he would think such a thing, but then I remembered he's never been in a relationship and part of him will always feel like everyone is trying to hurt him.

"Of course not. Caiden, I will say this once and once only. I would never sleep with anyone besides you. I love you, and I wouldn't ruin what we have for some low life like Jesse," I told him, moving so I was sitting on my knees in between his legs. I grabbed ahold of his hands.

"That's good to hear," Caiden said, still not looking at me. He removed my hands from his and picked me up, moving me so I was sitting next to him.

"Are you seriously still upset?" I asked, throwing my hands up.

He smirked. It wasn't a charming smirk that would make my heart melt; no, it was a sinister smirk.

"Claire, you know so much about my past, but I've come to find out I don't know much about yours," he snarled, making me confused.

"There isn't much to know. I've pretty much told you everything," I said frowning.

"Yeah, everything you say, but it seems you failed to mention anything about your exes," he hissed, letting his hazel eyes snap to my blue ones.

I wasn't sure what he was worried about, but it was starting to irritate me. We've been together for years, yet he still doesn't trust me.

"I've had like two boyfriends my whole life, not including you," I said, raising my eyebrow. I had no idea where he was even going with this.

"Yeah, you told me that you had two boyfriends in your middle school life, but you didn't ever mention anything about the other one. You know like how he ended the relationship and not you. And that he fucking left you because he had to, not because he wanted to," Caiden said clenching his fists.

Liam. I knew he was talking about Liam. I wouldn't lie – he was definitely an important part of my life at one point. Thinking back I remembered how I meant to him at such a strange time.

I wiped my tears as I sat on the swing rocking back and forth. I was thankful the park was empty because I'm sure people would laugh if they saw me crying. I was suppose to be a strong, stubborn girl, yet here I was crying over a little conversation with Nathan. I'm pathetic. At age seventeen I'm over here crying over a boy for the first time in my life. I should've known he would always think of me as his best friend. I mean, how dumb could I be to not realize he liked Mia.

"You okay?" I immediately sat up taller and focused on the handsome man in front of me with midnight blue hair.

"I'm fine," I replied, wiping the tears.

"Your tears say otherwise," he said, taking a seat on the swing next to me. I looked at him carefully and studied his appearance. I could tell he was definitely not a high school student.

"Like I said before, I'm fine," I said, standing up. I wiped my hands on my jeans and put my hands in my coat pockets. I started walking down the path watching as little snowflakes started to fall.

"Whatever it is, don't let it ruin your day. You're too pretty to be crying over some guy," the man said from behind me. I narrowed my eyes when he was suddenly next to me.

"I never said I was crying over a guy," I told him, pursing my lips in irritation.

"You didn't have to. My guess is you're about sixteen or seventeen and some highschool fuck boy broke your heart and that's why you're here crying," he said, making me pause and look at him. I stared at him for a minute before cracking a smile and letting out a small laugh. I expected him to call him a player – never before have I heard someone call a guy that's with a lot of girls a fuck boy. Maybe it's a UK thing.

"I'm seventeen and he isn't some fuck boy. He's my best friend, and I made the mistake of falling for him," I said.

He gave me a sad smile.

"Like I said before, a pretty girl like you shouldn't be wasting her tears on a guy," he said, moving his hand to wipe my tears. But before his hand could touch my face I smacked it away.

"Thank you, but I don't know you so don't touch me," I told him before starting to walk away again. I wasn't some pushover girl who would let any random guy touch her.

"How about you let me get to know you over dinner tomorrow?" he asked, giving me a charming smile. I raised an eyebrow, silently thinking about it.

"That's always the best idea, dinner with a stranger."

"How do you expect someone to become something more if you don't take the time to know them?"

"You're just some guy who showed up at a park," I said slightly amused.

"True, yet something tells me you're not going to say no to my offer," he said smiling.

I couldn't help but return the look before narrowing my eyes.

"Fine. Steak and Shake tomorrow at five," I responded.

He smirked.

"Deal."

That time when I walked away he didn't follow, making me crack a smile. Something about him intrigued me.

I gasped suddenly when I realized I didn't know his name. Turning around, I was about to ask, but he was already gone.

Liam was there for me at a time when I needed someone and that's why after getting to know him it didn't take me long to fall in love, but the thing is it only lasted a year. During that year I found out Liam was an agent, and he was there on a mission. And when he had to go back to London that was where our connections had to be cut off, just like Caiden said. We broke up because we had to not because we wanted to. Agents aren't allowed to date outside the agency, which is why I didn't understand why Caiden was worried.

"I haven't talked to him in years," I said softly. I wasn't going to sit here and fight with him. I'm tired of fighting.

"Which is why you can't promise that you won't have any feelings for him if you see him again," Caiden said, picking me up, moving me to the side of him, and standing up.

"I can promise you because I haven't seen him in years! When I hear his name I don't feel anything. When I think about him I don't feel anything. Don't you understand Caiden? I don't feel anything at all for him because I was a teenager when I had feelings for him!" I said, following him out of the room." I'll never see him again so this conversation is completely irrelevant. Caiden simply scoffed and shook his head almost like he knew something I didn't.

"Fine, let's just drop this then," he said, grabbing his keys.

"Where are you going?" I asked, frowning as he slipped on his shoes.

"Out," he said before the front door slammed closed.

Shaking my head, I went upstairs and took a quick shower before getting into bed. If he wanted to act like a child then he could, I definitely wouldn't stop him.

Riley's Point of View

"Are you coming with me today?" I asked Joey as he tried to style his hair in the mirror.

"Yeah, it'll be nice to get out the house. We've been here for four days already and I haven't got to do anything," he complained, making me roll my eyes.

"You could go undercover with me," I suggested.

He shook his head.

"Not yet. Jesse will figure it out that it's us and then this whole mission will be ruined and will take time that we don't have to finish it," Joey said.

I nodded in agreement.

"Good point. Now come on, I don't want to be late," I said, grabbing his hand and pulling him to the front door.

“I hope your brother likes me,” he said almost nervously.

I smiled at him.

“He will. But remember the focus of this meeting is to talk to him a bit about the killings around here. He needs to know about me being undercover in case he sees me and decides he wants to yell out my name or something,” I said. He nodded.

It only took us about fifteen minutes to arrive at the little cafe. I narrowed my eyes when I caught sight of my brother and some girl. This meeting was suppose to be private. What was so hard to understand about that?

“Nathan,” I greeted. He nodded in acknowledgment.

“Riley? It’s a pleasure to see you again. I haven’t seen you in years. You look so different,” Nathan said, sending me a bright smile and giving me a quick hug.

“Yes, it’s been a while,” I said before turning my attention to a familiar looking blonde. “Who might this be?”

“This is my best friend Claire,” he introduced. She smiled and shook my hand. Joey and I took a seat, getting straight down to business.

“I don’t mean to sound rude, but you do know this meeting is suppose to be private. Right?” Joey said. Nathan raised an eyebrow.

“And you are?”

“I’m Joey, Riley’s fiancé.”

He introduced himself and I grabbed his hand from underneath and gave it an encouraging squeeze.

“As I said before, Claire is my best friend. Whatever is said here will only be repeated to her later,” he said. Joey and I shared a look. That was like us.

“Okay then. I just wanted to make it clear that I am here on a mission to find the serial killer, so as long as I look like this you will not know me. Okay?” I asked. He agreed.

“Out of curiosity who do you think it is?” Nathan asked me. I hesitated. I really shouldn’t have told him, but I thought I could trust him enough to keep this a secret.

“A man by the name of Jesse Farone.” The blonde choked on her drink, making Nathan hit her on the back a few times. After she calmed down and was breathing okay she turned her attention completely on me.

"You're kidding right?"

"Why would I kid about a serial killer?" I asked with a raised eyebrow. Why did Nathan trust this girl?

"I know him," she said after a minute, making my eyes widen.

"What do you mean you know him? What type of relationship do you have with him?" Joey asked immediately, and she bit her lip nervously.

"He was a man that I had gotten to know a few months back before I found out that he has a past with my boyfriend and wants to get some type of revenge," she said.

I raised an eyebrow.

"What type of past?" I asked.

She quickly explained her boyfriend, Caiden's past of drugs, and all that.

"Do you still have any contact with Jesse?" Joey questioned. She scowled.

"No, I try not to," she said.

Nathan snorted.

"He tries to contact her all the time. The man's practically in love with her," my brother said.

"Claire, this could be very very useful information. You could even be a useful person to us," I said as my mind started thinking of all the ways we could get Jesse back into prison with her help.

"How would you feel about going undercover?"

"Undercover as what exactly?" she asked after a minute.

"You're going to get close to Jesse for us. If he wants to be friends, then you'll be friends. If he wants to be your boyfriend, then you'll be his girlfriend. You need him to trust you so he can tell you all his secrets and plans," I said.

She shook her head immediately.

"Caiden would never be okay with this," Claire said.

I sighed and looked at Joey for help.

"Make him okay with it. We won't kill you if you tell him. We need you Claire," Joey told her. She looked at her best friend. After giving her a moment to think and him sending her encouraging smiles, she nodded.

"I'll do it," she said, making me smile.

"Good, because I've already got a plan set up. But I'll make it all official with a contract," I told her seriously. She couldn't mess this up for us. I couldn't have her deciding she can't do this in a week and then just quit on us. It doesn't work like that. Especially because she's too valuable to our plan.

"Gosh Claire, what's up with you always going undercover," Nathan said, playfully elbowing her.

"You've been undercover before? As what?" Joey asked curiously watching her narrow her eyes at Nathan.

"She was undercover as a –" Her hand covered Nathan's mouth and gave us a tight smile.

"It's not important now."

"How about we meet here again tomorrow at the same time," I said.

She shook her head.

"I have to work."

"Lunch break?"

"At one, but I have multiple meetings tomorrow so I probably won't be able to make it," Claire said, looking at her phone.

"Then I'll fax you the papers and you'll read through them and sign them and get on with this case. Once the contract is signed and in my hands, you will be begin fixing your relationship with Jesse," I told her. She frowned.

"You do realize I hate this guy right? He disgusts me and I can barely hold back that disgust around him, so if I'm gonna do this I have to do it right and do it my way. I have to slowly go back into this friendship thing or he'll be suspicious," Claire said, causing me to look at Joey. I had a bad feeling she wouldn't be able to pull this off. She was focusing more on her feelings than the case itself.

"Okay then, I'm glad it's all settled," Joey said standing up.

"It was great seeing you again Nathan. I know we'll see each other before I go back to London," I said, standing up and giving him a hug.

"Yeah, definitely," Nathan said releasing me. Claire stood up, about to leave with Nathan, but she swayed a bit.

"Hey are you okay?" Nathan asked her, placing a hand on he shoulder. She quickly shook her head and ran to the nearest garbage with her hand in her mouth. I watched as Nathan rushed over to her, pulled her hair, and rubbed her back.

“Isn’t he married?” Joey asked me.

I nodded slowly.

“Yeah, he’s married to some Mia girl, but it’s strange. The way he looks at her and cares for her isn’t in any normal friendship way,” I said. Joey agreed.

About a minute or two later she was finally done puking and was wiping her face with a few napkins we found.

“Were you feeling like this this morning?” Nathan asked her. She shook her head.

“I was feeling a little sore, but not sick,” she said frowning. “I only feel a bit nauseous now.”

“You probably have food poisoning,” I told her.

“Yeah, probably. It’s probably those fries I ate at the beach yesterday,” Claire said frowning.

“I wonder if Mia’s sick too?” Nathan said, pulling out his phone.

“Well, I hope you feel better and it was nice meeting you. Try to get sone rest. You have a big job to do now,” I said, shaking the hand that wasn’t holding her stomach.

Nathan excused the two of them, mumbling something about getting her home.

“I could definitely see them together,” Joey said smirking. I shook my head. “No, don’t shake that head at me. I know you could too!” he insisted, watching as I tried to hold back a smile.

“It doesn’t matter. He’s been married happily for a few years now.”

“And we both know divorces aren’t rare,” he said, sliding into the driver’s seat of the car.

“Yeah, I feel bad for the other girl though,” I said. He nodded in agreement. I turned up the volume on the radio and blasted Twenty-One Pilots throughout the car.

I had a feeling things wouldn’t turn out for the worst. We could definitely do this. Right?

Chapter 6

Claire's Point of View

I read and signed the last paper before faxing it to Riley. I had lots of meetings today, but I had to cancel them because I was feeling sick. This nauseous feeling just wouldn't go away. I carefully sat at the end of the bed and looked at Caiden's peaceful sleeping form. It was only eight in the morning and I knew I shouldn't disturb him. He was probably going to have a hangover since all he did was drink coffee-sized cups of whiskey while he was at work.

I still didn't talk to him about this whole going undercover thing, but I thought I should wait until today when he wasn't drunk.

"Hey," Caiden said in his sexy morning voice, while slowly sitting up and running his hand through his hair. The blanket fell down on his lap making my eyes immediately go to his bare chest. I swear for being thirty-one years old he still looked like he was in his early twenties.

"You know, drinking until you almost pass out isn't going to help you solve your problems," I told him, looking away and staring at the wall.

"But it at least helps me forget them and it gets me away from my slutty girlfriend," he said, getting out of bed and leaving the room. I followed him out while trying to ignore the nauseous feeling forming at the pit of my stomach for the third time since I woke up. He was doing it again. We were fine for years and now he was returning to his old ways. He only called me a slut to try to get me mad at him. Why can't he just realize that I care for him? It's not impossible for someone to love him.

"I'll keep saying this until the time comes where I take my last breath. You can't go around pushing everyone out your life who tries to get close to you," I repeated. I've said those words to him a million times, but he just never listens to me. "Especially not now. I love you and if you don't feel the same way or even if you feel that the connection we have has disappeared, I will still love you. You just need to finally realize it's really not impossible for someone to love you," I told him frowning.

"I'm not going to let you do this to yourself again, even if you leave me. Dr. Miller helped you with these problems. She helped you open up again and I'm not going to sit here and let your guy's hard work go down the drain!"

He paused in the hallway and faced me, letting a chuckle sound throughout the house as he shook his head. "You seriously are fucking blind aren't you? I love you and that's the issue. You're my whole world Claire Martez. I can't sleep or breathe at the thought of you with someone else. I feel

like my world is ending just at the thought of you leaving me." He ran his hand through his hair before clenching it tightly. After a minute, he released his hair and put his hand on his heart.

"In here has always been a block of ice that never melts. Dr. Miller only helped me realize that it's okay to care. Everything else is the same. I still have the terrible memories of my childhood. I still hate my father for marrying my captor's sister. I still hate my parents for not caring. I still hate women for being awful, manipulating and deceiving people. You are the only one I feel different about. You are the exception to those thoughts. You broke that ice and forced your way in and ever since then, you have been my world. You never gave up on me and that's always what meant the most to me. I'm still a cold-hearted asshole – just I try not to be around you," he said, still standing a few feet away from me. My eyes started to tear up a little at his words. I should've known nothing changed. He was still so hurt inside. He doesn't deserve this.

"But that's the difference between the two of us. You're my world, but I'm not yours." His voice was now void of emotion as he turned his back to me.

"Don't you dare say that," I said, shaking my head and walking so I was standing right in front of him.

"Caiden, I spent four or five years worrying that one day I'd wake up and you'd be gone, so don't you dare act like I don't care about you. I love you and I care so much for you. That's why I wish you would just ask me to marry you. I want something that tells the world that I'm yours and you're mine." I shouldn't have mentioned marriage. That was such a stupid mistake. I probably just messed up everything.

"I knew you'd want to be married one day and that's what I don't want. That's a huge commitment that I don't think I can take yet. My parents were stupid. They got married too early and they had me too early and just look where it got them," he said, shaking his head in disgust.

"How long am I suppose to wait! I don't want to be an old woman getting married and trying to have kids!" I said furiously. I knew this was all mushy and was probably dramatic to some people, but at our age we were still working on our relationship. This wasn't a fairytale, it was reality. We don't just fall in love and get married. We work on our relationship as the years go on.

Taking a deep breath, I tried to calm myself down. "I get it. I know commitment scares you, but it's just a ring. We can wait as long as you want on kids, but I do want to get married before I even get close to my mid-thirties."

"I'm sorry, I just can't," he said, walking around me. I didn't follow him as he made his way to the kitchen and only returned to our room. I quickly got dressed into a grey dress and a blue jacket. Maybe I would just suck it up and head to work; anyways, I don't think I could just sit here all day by myself.

I brushed my hair before quickly doing my finishing touches: putting on light makeup, strapping a cute belt around my waist, and slipping on my grey heels.

I walked downstairs to see Caiden sitting at the table drinking coffee and scrolling through his phone. “I need to tell you something,” I said, suddenly causing him to look up.

“I’m going undercover,” I said.

He chuckled and a smirk appeared on his face.

“And here I thought pretending to be a boy once was good enough,” he said.

I failed trying to hold back a smile.

“No, I’m not going undercover as anyone,” I said, becoming serious.

“Nathan’s sister, Riley, is an agent in London and her and a few others are here on a case to find out who this serial killer is.”

Caiden raised an eyebrow and was no longer smiling.

“What does this have to do with you?”

Biting my lip nervously, I finally told him the part he was going to have a problem with. “They want me to get as close as possible to the suspect, whether it’s being just a friend or a girlfriend. I will try to get him to tell me all of his secrets. I won’t be alone with this because she is going undercover too.”

“Why can’t she get close to this guy? I don’t get why she needs you,” he said with narrowed eyes, clearly not liking the idea.

“The suspect is Jesse, and they feel that he has feelings for me,” I said.

He immediately shook his head.

“Listen, I know this isn’t the best time,” I said, “but if we get him put in prison with his little gang then he’s out of our lives forever. We won’t have anything to worry about.”

“I think you all are fucking crazy to think I’d be okay with you snuggling all close with him. They should be having a professional do this. We’ve got an agency here too. Why can’t they do this?” His hands were clenched into fists.

“Because they’re stupid and don’t take care of cases that involve going undercover. Plus from what I read, any case that involves Jesse goes straight to Riley and her partner Joey because they’ve dealt with him in the past,” I said.

He nodded, scowling.

“I know all about that. She was the one who put him in prison in the first place. I knew I recognized her at the airport a few days ago.”

“I don’t trust that fucking bastard, but I’ll let you do this just so he ends up rotting in prison for the rest of his life. But I swear if he even scratches you or tries to have sex with you, I will fucking shoot him without any hesitation whatsoever,” he hissed. I smiled, pecking his lips.

“I’m not happy about doing this either, but thank you,” I said, stealing a sip of his coffee. I know we were just arguing twenty minutes ago, but as I’ve said before, I’m tired of arguing. And as of right now the overall problem isn’t going to be resolved.

“Where are you going?” he asked curiously. Just as I was about to respond, I felt the nauseous feeling hit me harder this time. I clutched the edge of the table with my hand over my mouth. I was hoping it would pass, but about thirty seconds later I found myself with my head over the garbage and Caiden holding my hair.

After my whole dinner and breakfast was in the garbage, I headed upstairs and brushed my teeth before coming back down to a waiting Caiden. “You are not going anywhere now. I’m going to tell the office I’m not coming in and you’re going to head upstairs and lay down and let me take care of you.” But I shook my head.

“Thank you, but I’m fine. It happened yesterday too. I think I have some stomach virus, but I’m almost positive it will be gone in a few days. I really have to stop by the office and make sure everything's okay.”

“Come straight home after,” he said. I just poured.

“C’mon grandpa, don’t be such a downer. I have plans to go shopping with Mia, I need some new clothes,” I told him. He frowned.

“You just went shopping last month for some new clothes,” he said. I shrugged. It was true, just last month I bought a bunch of new stuff cause it was getting tight.

“I’m kind of growing out of them. I think it’s cause of all the fast food we eat,” I said, honestly looking down at my stomach. I didn’t seem any larger, and I didn’t feel it either, but these bras were definitely getting tighter.

“I am going to Victoria Secret for some new bras. Maybe I can even show you one later if you let me leave for a bit,” I said, biting my lip seductively. His eyes immediately went to my lips.

“I’ll give you three hours,” he said sternly. I smiled. “You should stop at an urgent care or something while you’re out just to see what’s going on.”

"I'll think about it," I said, pecking his lips before putting my purse on my shoulder and heading out the door. First stop, the office.

***

Clover's Point of View

"I still cannot believe the police aren't doing anything about this," I said to Andrew, shaking my head in annoyance, before taking a bite of my subway sandwich.

"What proof do they want from me? My dead body?" I said sarcastically.

Andrew chuckled.

"I don't think so, but don't worry, we go home in about a week. I don't think this man is going to follow you there," Andrew said. I nodded. He did have a point. "Plus I'll keep you safe."

I smiled at my husband and leaned over the table giving him a peck on the lips.

"And this is why I love you," I told him, sipping my drink.

He smirked. "You only love me because I was the first person to catch you undercover."

"Oh sweetie, no I hated you for that," I said, putting my hand on his." When he frowned I decide to crack a smile to show I was kidding.

"Clover Thompson right?" a man around our aged asked me.

I nodded my head.

"Can I have an autograph?" he asked me with a sly grin.

"Yes, of course. Who should I make it out to?" I asked, holding his pen and paper in his hand.

"Taylor Jones." I quickly scribbled a note to him before handing it back.

"I actually wanted to ask you for one more favor." This request made me mentally groan. I can never just enjoy myself.

"What's the favor?" I asked politely with a smile plastered on my face.

"I'm writing an article for the local newspaper, and they will only put it in if I have something interesting or newsworthy. And you, Clover Thompson of all people, are definitely interesting. Would you let me ask you a few questions?" Taylor asked me and I hesitated saying yes. Something about this man gave me a bad feeling. Looking at Andrew, he nodded his head slowly.

"Yes, only a few and if I don't like a question, then I won't answer it," I said. He nodded, sending me a smile. He took a seat in the empty chair and turned his page on his notebook.

"So you're married with two kids correct?" he started off. I nodded.

"Are they here with you in Seattle?" he asked.

I frowned. "No, they are not," I said, not going into detail. He didn't need to know where they were currently staying. He simply nodded while writing on the paper.

"Would you prefer to be called Clover or Lucky?"

"Either one works for me," I said, glancing at the time on my phone.

"How long are you staying here?" he asked me curiously.

"I'll be here for one more week and then we'll be returning home," I responded after taking a sip of my lemonade.

"Is your manager, Sarah, in Seattle?" he asked. I nodded.

"She's currently somewhere in this mall with him," I responded looking around. I'm thankful this guy found me interesting, but these questions were boring.

"Okay, I only have a couple more questions. Do you ever still talk to Damien Richards?" His question caused me to almost choke on my sandwich.

"Excuse me?"

"Damien Richards, do you ever still talk to him?"

I narrowed my eyes.

"The last time I talked to him was years ago in high school. I don't have any type of relationship with the ass."

"Is this because of him cheating on you with your best friend at the time?"

I narrowed my eyes at him.

"What?"

"You know that girl Katy was the other girl he cheated with, except she actually knew," he said, giving me a non-apologetic smile. "And don't tell me you forgot about who Katy is cause I know that's impossible after the whole blackmailing shit in your high school days."

"Who are you and how do you know all of this?" I hissed, standing up. I never talked to the press or anyone besides my friends about the Katy incident and I never cared enough to find out who the other girl was Damien cheated on me with. I mean, he just took advantage of the fact that I was a popular model. I was so naive at the time I just didn't realize.

“Clover, this is all old news. Why do you seem so surprised?” he asked with a small smirk on his face.

“I know for a fact she has never said anything to the press about all of that,” Andrew said grabbing the guy by his shirt.

“You have about five fucking seconds to release me or Clover will be dead by the time I get to six,” Taylor said.

Andrew sent him a hatred-filled glare before letting him go.

“Who are you?” I repeated.

His smirk widened.

“Don’t worry your pretty like head about it. You’ll know in the future. But for now I must say thanks for the information – it will be very useful,” Taylor said, pecking my cheek before running off.

“I will murder him,” Andrew said absolutely seething.

“I don’t get it. I’ve never met or even seen that guy in my life. What does he want with me?” I asked, honestly afraid.

“He has to be working for that Jesse guy. That would be the only possible explanation.” I silently agreed.

“I just gave that guy information about our kids, Sarah, and even us. He knows we’re only here for a week, Andrew. That means I could be dead by the end of the week,” I said hysterically. Andrew wrapped his arm around my waist, trying to comfort me, but I shook my head.

“We have to leave right now,” I told him, grabbing my food and throwing it away.

“Clove, breathe. It’s gonna be okay,” Andrew said with both of his hands on my shoulders, forcing me to look at him.

“Andrew, this isn’t some time little freaking thing to brush off! I could be dead. You could never see me again. Our kids will grow up without their mother. I just—” My hands shook in fear the more I thought about it. Andrew’s lips slammed against mine as he kissed me fiercely, yet passionately.

“I love you and everything will be okay. You have three more photo shoots and then you’re done. We just won’t stay for those extra few days, and we can even get you a body guard.”

I nodded, taking a deep breath. He was right – I need to calm down. Everything was going to be fine.

"Let's go find Sarah," I told him, and he removed his hands from my shoulders.

I quickly texted Sarah asking her where she was, and she responded a minute later.

"Was that Sarah?" Andrew asked me, hearing my phone go off.

"Yeah, she's at Victoria's Secret," I said, rolling my eyes.

"How surprising," he said, putting his arm around my waist as we walked to Victoria Secret. It didn't matter how many years I've been working there, it was still strange to see pictures of me on the walls.

"Ah, look who it is. The face of Victoria Secret," Sarah said smiling. I noticed her adoptive son was standing next to her looking as bored as ever.

"Andrew, why don't you and Calum go hang out somewhere," I suggested, giving him a look. He was only a few years younger than us, and he and Andrew have hung out before, so I knew it wasn't a problem.

I know it confuses people to find out that Sarah has a son who's only a few years younger than her, but when her sister's husband and her older sister died, she took Calum in and raised him as if he was her own.

I watched as the two walked out of the store, already talking about something before I turned to face Sarah. "We're gonna be going home a few days early." I told her and she raised an eyebrow as she lifted up a pair of lacy underwear to look at.

"Why? Don't you like it here?" she asked me and a sad smile appeared on my face.

"Yeah, I really do, but it's just I don't feel safe away from home," I said, looking around the store. I didn't think it was a good idea to tell her. The less she knew the better.

"Understandable. I'll change your flight later then," she said, giving me a smile. I thanked her. When my eyes caught on a familiar blonde, I immediately excused myself to go talk to her.

"Claire!" I called to her standing directly in front of her. Her happy persona disappeared, and she started to scowl. "Listen, I wouldn't be bothering you if it wasn't important."

"I'm just going to look at the perfume," her friend said, awkwardly excusing herself.

"What?" she asked, crossing her arms over chest.

"That Jesse man is having me followed. I don't know what to do and no one knows him," I said. She quickly shushed me, looking around. Setting her few pieces of lingerie on a stand, she dragged me outside of the store.

“He’s even having people question me about my past and my kids. I honestly think I’m going to be dead by the end of the week,” I said, not even bothering to hide the fear in my eyes.

She stared at me for minute, her eyes scanning over my face before hugging me. “It’s going to be okay. I can help you,” she said, completely surprising me.

Claire pulled away and sighed. “I know I’ve been a bitch to you, but I don’t dislike you that much to want you dead, especially by the hands of Mr. Farone.”

“What can you do?” I asked suspiciously.

“I think if you meet a girl I know. everything will be cleared you. Her name is Riley Scott, and she’s currently trying to find out information and clues to figure out if Jesse is the killer,” Claire told me quietly. Hope filled me as the words left her mouth.

“When can I meet her?”

“I’ll schedule a day. Here, add your number and I’ll text you,” she said, handing me her iPhone. I quickly entered my number and gave her a small smile.

“Thank you so much. I appreciate this,” I told her.

She nodded, already making her way back into Victoria’s Secret.

“I can get you a discount on that stuff you know,” I told her as she picked up a few bras and underwear.

“I know I’m helping you, but I think it would be best if you don’t talk to me in public. I have a job in this case and it can all be blown if you’re talking to me,” Claire said.

I quietly apologized. I still followed behind her and made sure the girl at the register gave her a discount before going to find Sarah.

I just hoped everything would get better.

Chapter 7

Claire's Point of View

It's been two days since the whole fight with Caiden and the encounter with Clover. We have a meeting tomorrow with Riley, but the whole Jesse thing was only one of my worries. This virus still hasn't gone away and it seems to only get worse. I've been getting lightheaded at times, and I'm still sore. I feel like someone who has been working out for hours going past their limits.

"What's wrong?" Caiden asked me, running the back of his hand along my cheek. I closed my eyes and embraced the feeling, but I opened them only a few seconds later.

Sitting up in the bed, I brought my knees as close to my chest as I could, not really caring that I was only in my underwear and bra. "I'm worried something's wrong with me. I'm throwing up almost everyday, I've been more tired then usual, my boobs are always sore, I'm so bloated all the time," I told him as tears filled my eyes. Remember that time that I said I pretty much never cry? Yeah, I don't know what happened. Caiden sat up looking worriedly at me.

"That's not some normal virus Claire," Caiden said. I squeezed my eyes closed. "We're going to the doctor."

"It's not like I'm in pain. Like I said, it will all pass," I told him as I felt him squeezing my hand. I didn't like feeling sick all the time. I swear whatever virus it is, it really gave me some great symptoms.

"If you won't go to the doctor, then I'm going to make you stay home from work until you're better."

I shook my head.

"I'm supposed to be heading to a party with Clover and Riley tomorrow after our meeting," I said.

He raised an eyebrow.

"What party or I think I should ask, who's party?"

"Jesse's," I told him, biting my lip as I waited for his reaction.

"No drinking. That last thing I need to hear is that some fucker tried to mess with you," Caiden said, glaring at the wall.

"I can handle myself, but if it helps you sleep better at night, I won't drink tomorrow." I laid back down. He took it as a sign I was tired and turned off the light before joining me.

"Hey Caiden?" I said suddenly, and since I was so close to him I could see him raising an eyebrow.

"Yes?"

"Will you go get me some fries from McDonald's?" I asked and he stared at me like I was crazy. I promise you I'm not – it's just called having sudden cravings.

"Are you on your period again?" he asked me frowning. And I shook my head. My period? A period is something a girl gets every single month. She gets sudden cravings, terrible cramps, and some girls even throw up because theirs is so bad. Funny thing was I can't even remember the last time I got mine. I've been so consumed with work that I just didn't even think about it.

"You do realize it's one in the morning right?" he asked me.

I rolled my eyes.

"Yeah, but I'm hungry. Especially because I can barely hold anything down these days," I told him pouting. His thumb moved over my lip, pulling the bottom one down.

"Only for you Claire, only for you."

I watched as he threw on a pair of shoes and a shirt and was about to leave the room.

"Uh Caiden? Don't you want some pants on?"

"I'm going through a drive-through, I'm fine." He sent me a wink before leaving me alone in the room.

I quickly grabbed my phone from the table next to our bed and went to my calendar. I swear I had one last month. Or wait, was it the month before that?

***

"You sure you're okay?" Caiden asked me for the hundredth time this morning.

I plastered a smile on my face. If I don't get my period in the next few days, then that means I may have a serious issue on my hand.

"For the last time, I'm fine. The usual nausea decided not to make an appearance today," I said before giving him a lingering kiss. "I love you and I'll see you later after the party. Hurry up and get to work – you're already like six hours late," I ordered before quickly leaving the house. I got in my car, making my way to an abandoned park that people rarely go to unless they're teenagers looking for a place to have sex. I'm guessing it isn't too hard to figure out who suggested the spot.

I arrived at my destination to see Clover and Riley already here. "I already explained things to her and I have a plan," Riley said as soon as I joined the two of them.

“What’s the plan then?” I asked, raising a perfectly plucked eyebrow.

“Clover, you’re going to go to the airport in about three hours and you’re going to make it look like you’re going home. In reality you’re going to get there and go to the bathroom and I’m going to dye your hair.”

“Excuse me?” Clover said, looking at her with wide eyes.

“You’re kidding me right? You must be high if you think I’m going to let you dye my hair.”

“It’s either you want to live or you don’t,” Riley said, narrowing her eyes.

“I think I have a better idea,” I told her, biting my lip nervously.

“Tonight she goes to that party as Clover. And maybe if Jesse learns that me and her are just the greatest friends he won’t want to kill her anymore and will back off,” I said, rolling my eyes at the stupid plan. Sure it wasn’t the best, but the whole dying her hair plan seemed like it wouldn’t make it too far either.

“You were just telling me how much you hated me two days ago?” Clover said, giving me a blank stare.

I sighed.

“Sorry, my bitch mode has been a little out of control lately, but even though we are barely friends right now I think we could pull this off. It really shouldn’t be that hard to,” I shrugged. In reality I knew if I was that thing that I wasn’t allowed to be, then it was the hormones that explained why my emotions were like a roller coaster.

Riley shook her head completely disagreeing. “Listen, I know what I’m doing here. You two may have been undercover before-"

“You went undercover?” I questioned Clover, not hiding my surprise.

“Yeah, I went undercover as a nerd. What about you?” she asked me, taking a sip of her iced coffee. Interesting, I definitely wasn’t expecting something like that. It’s nice to know mine wasn’t the weirdest thing to do.

“I went undercover in an all boys school,” I told her.

She gasped.

“There must of been some hot guys there, huh?” she said, winking.

I tried to hold back my smirk.

“I’m not gonna lie, there was quite a few,” I said and she squealed, making both Riley and I wince.

“Like I was saying, you two may have been undercover in the past, but this is different and more serious. Life or death serious,” Riley told us. It was quiet for a minute. She had a point; she was more experienced but that didn’t mean we were stupid when it came to being undercover.

“Okay, so maybe he won’t just back off right away, but it may give us some extra time we oh so desperately need. Like you said, this was life or death, and it seems if she wants to stay on the living side, then she should do it my way. Plus, it wouldn’t be crazy for us to be friends,” I said, moving my blonde hair over my shoulder.

“Fine, but if it doesn’t work and he doesn’t seem like he’s going to back off, then be prepared for my plan,” Riley said, narrowing her eyes.

Clover nodded determinedly.

“I’m almost positive this will work,” she said.

I agreed.

“Well, let’s go get ready for this party then. You have the address right?” Riley asked.

“Yeah, we’ll meet you there,” I said and she nodded before heading towards her car.

“So are we getting ready at your place then?” Clover asked me.

I nodded.

“Do you have your dress in your car?” I asked her. She shook her head and gave me a sheepish smile.

“I only brought one dress to go out in for this whole trip so I was kind of hoping you’d have one?” she said.

I scowled.

“I probably do somewhere. We look about the same size,” I told her. She bit her lip looking away.

“What?” I asked, narrowing my eyes are her attitude.

“Like I’m not trying to be rude, but you look a size or two bigger then me,” she said. I scowled, looking down at my stomach. My tank top was a type that would flow and didn’t stick to me, so I couldn’t really notice a difference between the two of us.

Choosing not to respond, we both took our separate cars and traveled the short drive to my house with her following me from behind.

As I got out of the car I continued to sing the lyrics from the song I was just listening to. “But I know a thing or two about pain and darkness. If it wasn’t for this music, I don’t know how I

would've fought this regardless, all these song in hearing are so heartless. Don't trust a perfect person and don't trust a song that's flawless—" I cut off my singing when Clover got out of her car saying something to me.

"Okay, so how long do we have until this party?" Clover asked.

"About an hour, maybe a little less," I said.

Her eyes widened.

"What are we doing just standing here then? Let's go!" I unlocked the empty house since Caiden was still working and showed her to the bathroom so she could do her makeup.

"I was not expecting you to live in a house like this," Clover said. I immediately got defensive and crossed my arms over my chest.

"What did you expect? Some mansion?" I ask scoffing.

She nodded.

"Actually yes. You and your husband are like millionaires," she said.

I let out a bitter laugh.

"He's only my boyfriend, and we'd rather live in a medium-sized house than some big one that would only be used to show off our amount of money in our bank accounts. And there's only two of us, so that would be absolutely pointless."

She was silent. Yes, Caiden and I make lots of money, but we appreciate it and we'd probably lose our true selves if we just bought mansions and hired limo drivers and all that.

I skimmed through my closet and smiled when I came across a black lace dress that I designed and knew would be perfect for Clover. I told her she was free to get ready in that bathroom before I went to my own. I took a quick shower in our bathroom and did my usual routine when I was going out: washing my hair and body and shaving.

Looking in the mirror I almost cried at the sight of the tight red dress on me. This dress was one I loved since it showed off my perfect figure, but the thing is I now I didn't have a perfect figure. Looking down at my stomach in the mirror there was a small bump. If you didn't know me you probably wouldn't even notice, or if you did know me you'd just think I gained a bit of weight. But I mean that's probably it, I just gained a bit of weight. Anyways. I'm probably just overthinking things as always because Caiden always uses protection. I have nothing to worry about.

"Ready?" Clover asked me, peaking her head in my room.

I wiped a small tear that formed in my eye.

“Yeah, I’m ready,” I told her as I turned around to look at her. She looks flawless with her long tan legs, and the dress fitted her perfectly.

“No makeup?” she asked me, looking surprise and I shrugged.

“I can go without it,” I told her.

She shook her head.

“You need to look hot, and although that dress does look great on you, I think you need to straighten that hair of yours and add just a touch of makeup.”

“We have only fifteen minutes,” I told her, checking my phone.

She smiled.

“Yeah, and I can do it all in ten.”

She brought me into the bathroom and set me down on a little stool.

Just like she said, she was able to do my hair and makeup in ten minutes, and right after we left for the party.

“Okay, so you’re not going to leave me alone tonight. Right?” Clover asked, glancing at me before focusing on the road again.

“You have nothing to worry about. I wouldn’t be surprised if Jesse even told Riley or Reese, I guess, to watch you,” I told her while leaning my head back and closing my eyes. I was too tired for this, and all I wanted to do was run a hot bubble bath and sit there with my eyes closed while blasting Panic! At the Disco or something.

“Hey, no falling asleep on me now. We’re almost there,” Clover said, flicking my arm.

“Ouch. What the hell?” I hissed, rubbing that spot.

“You need to be wide awake. As soon as we get there you are going to have ten cups of beer,” she told me.

I snorted.

“Yeah, that sounds like a great idea. Maybe I’ll just have sex with every guy I see too. Maybe while me and Jesse are going at it, I can even tell him our whole plan.”

She rolled her eyes.

"Whatever. We're here. Riley texted me and said she's already inside and to not screw this up," Clover said, fixing her hair in the mirror. I almost just left her right then and there. Seriously this girl made even me want to kill her sometimes. She had to focus.

The music was blasting in a large mansion, making me cringe. This was definitely not my scene anymore. I plastered a fake smile on my face as we walked through the door.

"What is that smell?" Clover asked wrinkling her nose.

"That, my friend, is pot," I told her as my eyes scanned the room. My eyes landed on the one and the only Jesse Farone, whose eyes were already on me. In his hand was a joint as he stood there looking over the whole place on a balcony. It was a strange thing to see inside the house, but it fit in here.

Four of the little balconies were filled with people looking over the party at people grinding and people who were going at it. I take it there weren't any rooms available then. My eyes locked with Jesse's again, and this time I raised an eyebrow, challenging him to come talk to me. Obviously taking the challenge he smirked and exited his private balcony with no one on it.

"Here he comes. I want you to go find a guy and just dance with him. Make it look like you are having the best time of your life," I told Clover as she nodded.

"Be careful," she said in return before grabbing some random dude walking by and forcing him to dance with her.

"I think you have the wrong address," Jesse said, suddenly making me jump as I looked at his figure now standing in front of me.

"I'm positive that this is the right one," I said, looking at him blankly. I had to act myself. I couldn't give in too early.

"So you came to my party willingly? How did you even find out about it? And where's Caiden?" he asked suspiciously.

"Who gives a fuck where he is, and I've been here before. You always have parties here every Friday night," I said scowling. He smirked.

"What happened? Did you and Caiden have a fallout?" he said, faking sympathy.

I scoffed.

"I didn't come here for you to show me your fake sympathy. I came to have a good time so excuse me," I hissed, pushing past him.

He grabbed my arm.

"I'm sorry, I know you cared for that ass, but trust me, you'll be a lot happier away from him."

I pursed my lips.

"Here, why don't you come with me up there? It's less crowded and you can watch people make fools out of themselves."

I acted like I was thinking a minute before accepting his offer.

"Fine, but it better be hilarious because I didn't come here to be bored," I said, following him up the stairs. Yes, I was being a complete bitch to him, but he's Jesse – he deserves it.

I'll admit it was pretty hilarious, yet sometimes disgusting watching all people make fools of themselves. Some were playing games like Beer Pong. It's actually hilarious due to the fact that we aren't teenagers anymore.

"You know these people act like teenagers," I told him, glancing at him. I was surprised to already find his eyes on my face.

"That's because most of them are," he said, shrugging and looking back down at all the people.

"What do you mean most of them are?" I hissed.

"They're all in their teen years or early twenties. No one really makes it to an age older than me," he replied. I tried to keep my feet planted on the ground. I wanted to run far away from him. This man had a gang and he was just letting teenagers ruin their lives before they even started.

"You make me sick," I said, shaking my head. I know Riley wanted me to get him close, not push him away, but she didn't know this man like I did. I was friends with him for months. I cared for him and I would do anything for him, but then I found out his little dirty secret about his gang. I found out about him assisting his brother in raping and murdering a child. I found about about his long deserved time in prison, and I just couldn't believe it. He was such a great guy and he was nicest as can be, but I knew all about fake facades that people put up. My own boyfriend was the king at them.

He made me believe he had changed until the dark look crossed his eyes, and I knew nothing had changed.

"You do know that this isn't who I was to be right?" Jesse asked, trying to get me to look at him. I shook my head, heading down the stairs. I felt him pull on my wrist, and the next thing I knew my back was digging into the rail painfully and his hand clenched on to my chin, forcing me to look at him.

"Fuck you," I hissed, and I saw a menacing smirk on his face.

"Shh now, c'mon Claire, terrible words like that shouldn't come out of your pretty little mouth," he said.

I glared at him fiercely.

"My friend is here. If I scream loud enough, she'll come and get me," I hissed. He let out a dark chuckle.

"Who? Clover Thompson? She can't even come close to helping you. She's pathetic and weak. And remember something Claire," he said, stroking my cheek with the back side of his hand and keeping my body against the railing with his body, "you're in my fucking area now."

"No, let me tell you something Jesse. You do not intimidate me one bit." That was complete and utter bullshit. "This is just proving you'll never change," I told him with a fierce glare. Looking out of the corner of my eyes I realized no one would be able to see us since it was those twisty type of stairs and we were at an odd angle. So what were my options to get out of this?

A. Spit in his face.

B. Beat his ass.

C. Knee him in his precious jewels.

D. Kiss him until he releases his tight grips and suffer from a severe case of mono later on.

E. Options A, C, then B

"With you and Caiden fighting and him being a stubborn ass, he won't come looking for you, so get used to this life Claire," Jesse said, his face close to mine. I took it as my time to smirk. Plan E sounded nice.

I spit in his face and moved my knee up to his his precious jewels, which let me tell you isn't as easy as it looks when you're in a tight dress.

Jesse completely loosened his grip and fell on the steps. He sat there cupping his precious jewels for exactly 1.5 seconds before he was back up and trying to murder me. Guess I didn't kick him hard enough. I ran down the stairs and searched all over for Riley.

I finally caught her standing next to someone familiar. What was his name again? I knew it had to be either Tommy? Tyler? Or Taylor?

"You have to help me," I hissed, checking behind me.

"Excuse me?" Riley asked in a stuck up voice and raised an eyebrow. I could tell by the look in her eye she was a bit nervous.

“There’s a man chasing me. I think he’s trying to kill me,” I told her. The guy next to her just stared at me.

“Claire?” the guy asked, looking at me with a foreign expression. That’s when it hit me. His name was Taylor.

“I don’t have time for special reunions,” I told him, quickly scanning the room for Clover.

“You know this girl?” Riley asked, not hiding her surprise.

“Yeah, I met her at a club once years ago.”

“Did you miss the part where I told you there isn’t fu—”

“Ladies and gentlemen, it’s time for a nice show. We haven’t had a good one in a while so how about we change it up a bit.” Jesse’s voice cut me off. The music was completely shut off, and he stood up on the balcony. What scared me was who he had with him. He had his hand gripping Clover’s hair tightly as he looked directly at me.

“Help,” Clover screamed as his grip tightened. Our plan for tonight was completely done for.

“Let her go Jesse,” I yelled up at him.

He chuckled.

“Now Claire, I gave you your chance and you decided to spit in my face.”

He pushed Clover to the railing and then so far over that she was hanging over the balcony railing from her stomach up.

“I didn’t do anything to you! Why are you doing this?” Clover sobbed. He acted like he was honestly thinking about it for a minute.

“Because I fucking can,” he said before moving his body so it was against hers completely. His pelvic areas was straight against her ass. “What would you all like for tonight? I could fuck her right here or I could throw her over the balcony a few times until every bone in her body is broken.” Never in my life have I ever hated or felt so disgusted with someone.

“I said fuck her,” a familiar voice replied. All eyes moved to the figure standing there with his arms crossed and that smirk I always hated plastered on his face. I’m sure you guess which douchebag it was.

“Jax, I think that’s a great idea. I mean I might as well get some pleasure out of this,” Jesse replied.

I shook my head. I couldn’t watch this.

“This is just fucking wrong,” Taylor hissed quietly from behind me.

The door suddenly kicked open and in strolled Joey. “Sorry I’m late guys. I brought some beer to make it up,” he said with a cheeky smile on his face.

“Why am I not surprised that you showed up?” Jesse sneered, pushing Clover’s body harder against the railing. He started fumbling with his belt as he talked to Joey from across the room.

“For once Joseph, you and Riley are too late,” he said.

Joey shrugged.

“Riley’s not even in the United States right now,” Joey said, rolling his eyes. I didn’t know what game he was playing at, but it wasn’t working.

“Oh, so you’re here all by yourself?” Jesse asked before snapping his fingers twice. Guns started coming out of people’s pockets and soon they were all facing towards Joey. When I glanced at Riley, I was surprised to see her gun facing towards him too.

“Not exactly,” he said, not looking worried at all. From all different directions a few new people walked into the room with some automatic guns. None looked familiar to me, but it made Joey smirk.

“So you think about four of your agents can take out two hundred or so people from my gang?” Jesse asked, chuckling.

“Nah,” Joey said dropping the bottle of wine in front of him. I watched the glass bottle shatter and soon white smoke started to come out. I noticed the same thing happened in a few different directions, making everyone panic. Jesse went to take out his gun, but Joey disappeared.

“What the fuck is that?” he hissed as people started falling to the ground. I held my breath and grabbed some random jacket on a nearby chair and covered my mouth with it.

By the time the smoke was covering the whole room, almost everyone was down including Jesse and Clover. I almost gasped when I saw through the smoke Jesse’s body laying on the balcony floor and Clover’s body no longer in sight. Did she fall?

I realized I couldn’t stay in the house any longer because of this smoke and immediately left the house. As I kneeled on the grass outside, I gasped and let oxygen into my lungs.

“Well, that was close,” I heard a muffled voice say. Looking behind me I saw four people standing there, all taking off masks.

“Oh, thank god,” I said when I saw Clover in Joey’s arms.

“She’ll probably be out for an hour,” Joey said, laying her on the grass.

I nodded, thanking him. If she would've died because of my stupid plan I would never have forgiven myself. I already have had one death on my hands, and I really don't need another one.

"Claire?" I looked up from Clover's unconscious state. The handsome man looked unfamiliar with his dirty blonde hair and tall figure.

"Sorry do I know you?" I asked, my eyebrows furrowing.

"It's me, Liam."

Chapter 8

Claire's Point of View

"It's me, Liam." The words left the man's mouth, and I stared at him for a good two minutes before bursting out laughing.

"That's funny. Liam has like a midnight blue colored hair and he lives in London."

"I only dyed my hair that color years ago. I thought it looked good back then. And I'm here on a case," he said slowly as he watched for my reaction. Tears filled my eyes and I angrily wiped them.

You are not weak, so stop crying.

That's right, I'm not weak, yet there are tears that won't stop streaming down my face.

I stood up from the grass. "You see here's the thing. You can't be Liam because Liam wouldn't be talking to me because he knows how upset it would make me," I hissed, wiping pathetic tears from my face.

"I'm not trying to hurt you Claire. I didn't even know I was going to see you here," the guy claiming to be Liam said.

"Okay, as interesting as this is, we need to leave here because I really don't know how long that's going to last on all of them," Joey interjected.

I narrowed my eyes.

Joey picked up Clover and instructed me to follow him to the house they're staying at. I got in my car and followed them about thirty minutes away to their place. It was a medium-sized house with white paint peeling a bit on the sides.

A sudden knock on my window made me jump and put my hand to my chest. "Don't do that to me. I'm feeling very stressed right now," I said once I exited the car.

"Sorry, I forgot this must be a lot for you," Joey said before leading the way to the house with me, the imposter holding Clover, and two other girls following behind him.

"Is everyone okay?" a man asked. Joey nodded.

"Everything's all good," he said.

"Nothing is okay. She just almost got fucking raped, Riley is laying amongst all of those killers, and we are still absolutely nowhere!" I said, throwing my hands up in the air with more fucking tears filling my eyes. How on Earth can he act like everything's all sunshine and daisies?

"I meant if you two were safely out, and I can see you are. How about you take a seat on the couch?" he said with his hand on my back, directing me to their living room.

"Sorry, I'm just a bit of a wreck right now," I told him wiping my eyes and watching as the imposter set Clover's body on a loveseat.

"Can you get her some tea?" the man asked the imposter, and I shook my head.

"I'm fine. I hate tea." That was a completely lie, but I didn't want him to get it for me. You make think I'm being childish, but I personally think it's just me being stubborn.

"No, you don't. That's one of your favorite drinks," he said. I narrowed my eyes. This guy acts like he knows me. Even if he was Liam, he has no right to act like he's known me forever.

"Claire, Just so you know, Riley is okay. We just had to leave her with the rest of them or else her cover would be blown and then we'd really be going completely nowhere." A girl said before another argument was started and I raised an eyebrow.

"Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry. My name's Emily and this is Rachel."

"Thank you for telling me that, and it's nice to meet you." I gave her an appreciative smile.

"No problem. Liam should be back with your tea shortly," she said.

I nodded, trying to calm myself.

I sat there moving my right leg up and down. This whole case thing was stressing me out big time. I gasped as I felt a sudden pain. "Shit," I hissed, putting my hand to my lower stomach. It was only there for a minute before it went away. Taking a deep breath I frowned as I felt it again a minute later. It wasn't so painful that I needed to go to the hospital, but it was starting to reoccur and it freaked me out. I was thankful no one was in here with me as these pains came and went. Must be cramps starting, which meant my time of the month was definitely coming.

"Are you okay?" this so called Liam said.

I nodded as I started releasing heavy breaths. Okay these cramps needed to go away.

"No, I'm not okay," I said with my hand still to my stomach and releasing fast breaths.

“Claire, what’s wrong?” he asked when I moaned out in pain. Okay, I lied, I’m not fine. I feel like something’s inside my stomach and throwing rocks at it.

“Liam it hurts. It really hurts.” I almost yelled as my left hand clenched the couch. My right hand held my stomach as I tried to get myself to breathe right again.

“Claire, it’s going to be okay.” He rubbed my back, taking a seat next to me. “Just cramps right?” he asked.

I shook my head moaning in pain.

“What’s wrong?” Clover mumbled, rubbing her eyes and sitting up. I shook my head, not responding. I was going to hit someone if they asked me what’s wrong again.

“Claire?” she said now, fully awake as I let out deep breaths and moaned in pain.

“Can you all shut the hell up?” I hissed in between clenched teeth.

“No, we’re taking you to the hospital right now,” Liam said, standing up and taking my hand.

“I don’t even know you, so no,” I responded rubbing my stomach as it made the pain start to disappear. Maybe they were gone for good this time.

“Inside you know I’m Liam, so stop being stubborn,” he hissed. I narrowed my eyes at him and pointed my finger at him ready to snap some response back before bringing my hand right against my stomach again. Shit, it was back.

“Claire? I think we should take you to the hospital too,” Clover said.

I glared at her for agreeing with him.

“I already got my keys,” Liam said, pulling them out of his pocket.

I gasped in pain before nodding.

“Fine,” I hissed still trying to control my breathing. What the hell was wrong with me?

It was a ten minute drive to an urgent care, and they let me in after about a twenty-minute wait. Apparently me feeling like something was attacking my stomach wasn’t an urgent problem for them.

“Hello Claire, I’m Nurse Layla. I’m just going to need you to take a few deep breaths to get you calm okay?”

I nodded. She went through an inhaling and exhaling exercise about ten times that actually helped quite a bit.

“Now I’m just going to ask you a few questions.” I agreed to answer all of them.

“First of all, I need to know what’s going on? You obviously came here for a reason so what kind of pain do you have?”

“I feel like I have an extreme version of cramps in my lower stomach, but it comes and goes every few minutes.”

“On a scale of one to ten, ten being the worst, how bad is the pain?” she asked me gently as she entered the information in the computer.

“I’d probably say a solid 7,” I said honestly, and she nodded typing it in before looking at me again. She started to ask me the basic questions like if I have any allergies and stuff like that.

“Okay, last question, have you had any other problems?”

“I’ve been nauseous and throwing up lately, and I’m light headed at times. I’ve been bloating more then usual, plus I gained weight on top of all of that.” She nodded and typed in the information into the computer with a small smile on her face. What the hell was she smiling about?

“Okay, the doctor will be in here in a few minutes,” she told me before logging out of the computer and standing up. She sent me a friendly smile before leaving and closing the door behind her.

About two minutes later there was a knock on the door and the doctor entered.

“Hello Claire, I’m Doctor Loris and this is Mr. Thompson who’s currently in training. Do you mind if he joins us?” she asked, and my eyes widened at the sight of my old friend.

“No, of course not,” I said still looking at West, who gave me a shy smile. He must have gone back to school to be a doctor.

“Okay so you’re having stomach pains correct?” She looked at her clipboard and I nodded.

“Yes, this has been the first time in the past hour that I haven’t had any,” I told her and she nodded.

“Okay, now Claire I’m just going to throw out an idea based on everything I’ve been told about all of your symptoms lately and the reason why you came here in the first place,” she said before a smile appeared on your face. “I think you may be pregnant Claire, and I think the pain you’re experiencing is what we call Braxton Hicks Contractions. In case you don’t know, those are false labor pains you can start to get if you are close to your delivery day.”

I thought I was going to pass out. She had to be kidding me. Where was the camera? Because I knew there was no way. Like I said, Caiden always used protection. He told me himself he didn’t want kids. And trust me when I said he never forgets. He has stopped at intense, unexpected moments just to put a condom on.

“That’s impossible. My boyfriend is always wearing protection when we have sex,” I told her completely forgetting about West’s presence.

“Now we won’t know for sure until we do some tests, but it is a possibility Claire, especially because condoms do not always work.” I shook my head with tears filling my eyes. I can’t be pregnant. Caiden would kill me. He’d probably even leave me as soon as he found out. I’d be that single mother and would one day have I tell the child that their father didn’t want them.

“How long will it take for the results?” I asked, biting my lip nervously while trying to blink the tears out of my eyes. I probably looked like some prostitute who got knocked up since I walked in here in a short dress and high heels.

“For you, I can get them in an hour,” she said, giving me an encouraging smile.

“Thank you,” I said. She nodded, standing up.

“I’m just going to need you to take a quick blood test. Nurse Layla can help you with that.” She held out her hand to shake.

“It was a pleasure meeting you Claire. I love your clothes.” I gave her a small smile.

“Thank you,” I said before shaking West’s hand too. “It was nice to see you again West. Maybe we can get a cup of coffee and catch up sometime soon?”

“Yeah, sounds good,” he said, sending me a smile before leaving the room behind Dr. Loris.

About a minute later Nurse Layla led me to another room where I got my blood taken. Walking out to the waiting room with a bandaid on, I sat next to Clover. These weren’t the people I wanted to be surrounded by right now. I wanted to be next to Mia, Nathan, and Caiden. I wanted Nathan’s bear hug, I wanted to hear Mia’s sass, and I wanted Caiden to be here with me for support and to tell me he’s not angry with me. But I guess I can’t always get what I want.

“What’d they say?” Clover asked me after a minute of silence.

“They took a few tests, and they’re going to tell me the results in about an hour. You guys don’t have to stay if you don’t want to,” I told them, looking blankly at the floor.

“I don’t mind staying, and by the way I called Caiden,” she said, making me glare at her.

“Where’d you even get the number?” I questioned.

She rolled her eyes.

“Calm down, I was worried about you so I had to call. And I got it from Liam who got it from Joey who found it on your emergency contact papers for the case. He should be here any minute.” I shouldn’t be angry with her since she was only trying to help. I’ve turned into such a bitch lately.

It's the hormones.

"Thank you for everything," I said, leaning back in the chair trying to ignore my conscious. I'm not pregnant. There's no way.

Yes, you are.

"I should be saying thank you for helping me get out of there," she said, giving me a closed-mouth smile. I nodded, looking at my shaky hands in my lap.

"Claire, we should really talk," Liam said, looking straight at me. But I ignored his presence.

"You do know that when Riley became owner of our agency she got rid of the rule that says you can't date outside of the agency." I frowned looking at him.

"And? Do you want me to jump into your arms now? Because if so, then I'd hate to disappoint but that's not happening. I am perfectly happy with my boyfriend."

"Keyword: boyfriend. Clover how long have you and your husband been married?" he asked, not taking his eyes off me.

"I'm not getting involved with this," she said, flipping her hair over her shoulder while she continued to look at some fashion magazine.

Liam rolled his eyes. "Well, my point is if you two were really happy then you'd be married by now."

"Stay out of my business Liam. You want to be friends? Sure then we can be friends, but don't come to me now almost eleven years later and tell me you want something more because I didn't wait for something that you told me was never going to happen." I wiped the tears away from my eyes. I was tired of crying.

"Now can you please leave. The doctor told me that stress wasn't good for me," I said softly.

He nodded before leaving the building.

I wrapped my arms around my stomach. Could there really be a little human being inside of me? Was it a girl? A boy? It was sad that I was feeling so scared to be pregnant. Most girls would be ecstatic to find out her and her boyfriend of about 8 years were going to have a baby together.

"Claire?" Caiden said a few feet away, and I jumped up rushing over to him. It'd been about thirty minutes of me sitting in silence, and it was killing me. He wrapped his arms around me and brought me close to him. "Please tell me you're okay," he whispered, pulling back a little to examine me for any injuries.

"I'm okay," I responded softly. He nodded, kissing my forehead before giving me a plastic bag.

"I heard you were still in your party clothes so I brought you a change of clothes," he said.

I kissed his cheek, thanking him. I walked over to the bathroom and changed into what he brought me: a pair of pink pants and a tan-colored tank top.

Looking at the pair of heels in the bag, I scrunched up my nose and left them in there. Although they were adorable, I didn't feel like wearing shoes. Caiden must have known that because there were a pair of black ankle socks in the bag too. Slipping those on, I left the bathroom and went back over to Caiden, who was sitting in a chair while tapping his foot impatiently.

"So what did the doctors say?" he asked.

I bit my lip nervously.

"They don't know what's wrong with me yet, but they took a test and they said they would get back to me in an hour," I said.

"Don't worry, everything is going to be okay. You're Claire Martez, one of the strongest girls I know," he whispered to me with his hands on my cheeks. I covered my hands with his and gave him a weak smile.

I pulled away when I felt the pain start in my stomach again. Could these really be false labor pains? I mean I know I've gained a bit of wait, but it's not like my stomach is humongous.

"Claire, are you okay?" Caiden asked when I clenched my teeth and bent over in the chair. Usually this worked for cramps, so it probably works for this too.

"Baby doll?" he asked and I shook my head sitting up. That did nothing. I rubbed my stomach and leaned back when the pain left for a minute.

"I'm okay," I told him. He just sighed before lifting me into his lap.

"Well as adorable as this is I'm gonna get going. Andrew is here to get me, and since our plan failed I'm probably going to be taking a flight home tomorrow," Clover said, standing up and stretching.

"You do know this won't go away if you leave right?" Caiden told her coldly. She flinched at his tone.

"He can't get me if I'm in a different state," she said not so confidently.

"Are you fucking stupid?" he asked her loudly, causing the few people in here to look our way. I elbowed him in his stomach and sent him a glare.

"Don't give me that look. That man is a murderer, and trust me when I said I know more about him than any of you do. He will follow you to the end of the Earth if he has to until he sees your

dead body in front of him with your blood staining his hands." Caiden's words even made me flinch back.

"I'm not surprised you two know each other. I mean, it seems you two aren't really different. Both monsters in my eyes." She spat before walking out of the urgent care. I grabbed Caiden's clenched fist and set it on top of my lap, turned his face towards me, and rested my palm against his cheek

"You are not a monster and she knows that. She is only scared and upset right now," I told him softly and his oh-so-famous dark look appeared.

"Baby doll, I've known since I was sixteen that I'm a monster. Nothing you say can change that. It's just who I am, and I've learned to accept it, so you should too."

"Jesse is the monster here," I told him. He looked away from me, and my hand fell to my side. How could I get him to see he's not this terrible person he thinks he is?

"Claire Martez?" Nurse Layla interrupted, and I quickly got off Caiden's lap and stood up. Caiden followed me over and the nurse immediately put her hand up, gesturing him to stop.

"Excuse me, sir, you have to wait out here unless you're family," she said. Caiden narrowed his eyes.

"She's my girlfriend," he told her with a glare. She gulped and nodded.

"This way then," she said and led us to the same room as earlier. "Dr. Loris will be with you in one moment," she said before leaving the room.

In reality I didn't want Caiden here. Yes, I know earlier I said I did, but if she tells me those cursed words in front of him I'll probably be left here all by myself and be forced to stay at Mia and Nathan's place.

Three knocks sounded through the room before Dr. Loris entered with West right behind her.

"Hello Claire, how are you feeling?" she asked me.

I shrugged.

"The pain keeps coming and going," I replied honestly.

"I see you have a guest with you. Hello I'm Dr. Loris. My guess is you're Claire's husband?" She held out her hand, which he shook.

"Boyfriend. What's Wesley doing here?" he questioned, nodding his head at West, who awkwardly avoided his gaze.

"This is West, he's currently in training. If it bothers you that he's here, then he can be sent out," she said politely.

"It does."

"He's fine. Can we just talk about my results," I asked right after sending Caiden a glare.

"Yes, of course," she said, looking down at her clipboard.

"Now I am happy to announce you are indeed pregnant Ms. Martez."

I stared at her blankly. I didn't look at Caiden to see his disgusted look or anything like that. I just stared. I was pregnant. I have a baby boy or girl growing inside of me.

When Dr. Loris realized I wasn't going to say anything, she cleared her throat and continued. "Now it's strange that you're having Braxton Hicks Contractions since you obviously aren't close to your delivery day, so my guess is that it's because of stress. "

"How do I get them to stop?" I asked her quietly.

"Well, based on what you told me, the amount you're having in an hour is very unhealthy, and I have to say you should go on bed rest for a couple of days to get them to stop."

I nodded.

"Anything else?" I asked, and she gave me a frown.

"There is one more thing," she said, pushing a piece of hair behind her ear. "If these contractions don't stop, then we will have to deliver the baby early and that will give he or she about a 60% chance of living. So it is highly suggested that you stay in bed and you make sure to keep her in bed." She looked at Caiden during the last part.

"I will. Thank you for helping me today," I told her, standing up. She smiled, following my lead.

"It was no problem at all, and congratulations on the pregnancy! I know you're going to be looking for a doctor, and I actually have an office. You can come by in two days at 10 a.m if you'd like, and I can tell you how far you are along and all the fun stuff." She wrote down her information before handing the paper to me with a smile

"That'd be great. Thank you so much," I said.

"See you soon. And it was nice meeting both of you," she said, shaking mine and Caiden's hand before excusing herself along with West.

Caiden and I left urgent care in complete silence. The whole ride was awkward and was only filled with Falling In Reverse in the background. Caiden's hands were white as they clenched the steering wheel.

What do I even say? I'm sorry for being pregnant? I'm sorry that both of us created another human being even though you didn't want to have any children.

No, I wouldn't apologize for being pregnant because it definitely takes two to tango, and he or she will become my world even if Caiden decides to leave me.

"Caiden, listen I'm not—"

"Stop." He cut me off and I shut my mouth immediately. His tone didn't have a hard edge to it, yet it didn't have a soft one either. It sounded completely normal. Not angry, not sad, just normal.

"You know what, you can be mad at me, you can leave me, or whatever you want, but I'm letting you know this child growing inside of me is here to stay with me." He slammed on his brakes. Luckily, the streets were empty because it was almost two in the morning.

"Do you really think I'd leave you?" he hissed. I shrugged in response. He unbuckled his seatbelt and got out of the car pacing. I slowly followed his lead and got out.

"Caiden?"

"I love you Claire Martez, and I would never leave you. I don't know how the fuck I'm suppose to help raise a kid when I can't even fix my fucked-up self. I'm still a mess Claire. I grew up without any responsible or caring parents. I grew up with some crazy woman till I was sixteen, and then after that I pretty my grew up by myself in the university. Yet now I'm supposed to be some responsible adult without any help." He slammed his fist into the side of his car.

"Dammit, dammit, dammit!" he yelled, and I quickly stopped him by grabbing a hold of his hand. I held it in mine and gave him a sad smile as I looked at his tears.

"I don't know if I can fucking do this," he told me, looking at me right in my eyes.

"I know you can because you're not alone anymore. I'll will be here every step of the way helping you raise this child because it's not just your baby and it's not just my baby. It's our baby, Caiden, and we will learn how to raise him or her together." I wiped the tears that fell from his hazel eyes. He wrapped his arms around me and brought me as close as possible to his body.

All this time I thought he was just afraid of commitment, but yet here he was afraid of being irresponsible and stupid like his parents.

"I love you, Claire Martez," he told me before pressing his lips to my bare shoulder.

"And I love you, Caiden Anderson." I closed my eyes and embraced the feeling of him hugging me. I guess we'd be okay after all.

***

Riley's Point of View (Reese)

"Get up," someone hissed. I felt someone kick my side. I resisted the urge to punch the person and opened my eyes instead.

"What?" I snapped, quickly scanning the room. I was still at the party. Last thing I remember was Joey coming in here with Emily, Rachel, and Liam.

Liam better have a good reason for being here. He's supposed to be looking after the agency with Lex.

"They got away," Taylor said to me quietly.

I glanced around the room and saw most people were still knocked out, including Jesse.

"What are we going to do?" I asked, standing up and stretching.

"Jesse is going to be fucking pissed. We have to start getting people up. He'll want every person in the room to get back to work. And be prepared to go out on a raid with Jacob and Jax after this," he told me, kicking someone else's side nearby.

"A raid?" I questioned raising an eyebrow. He chuckled.

"C'mon Reese, you're supposed to have this down by now," Taylor said.

I shrugged.

"Sorry I didn't get a handbook," I retorted.

He rolled his eyes.

"Jesse wants to start killing someone every Friday after a party, but the thing is he's going to go crazy with killing tonight since he got beat by the agents again." Taylor smirked and I pretended to be confused.

"The agents?"

"You know they're like the FBI. Except these specific agents are from London. The leader wasn't with them tonight, but I'm sure she'll be around here soon." He lit up a joint.

"Jacob, get your ass up," Taylor hissed. Jacob groaned.

"How much did I drink? I can barely remember a fucking thing. Jasmin really knows how to make that pot," Jacob said, sitting up and placing his hand on his head.

"We were attacked by agents, so stop whining and start helping wake people up," he ordered.

"Don't tell me what the fuck to do." Taylor grabbed him by his shirt and sneered.

“I have a higher rank in this gang so step down.” Taylor spat before letting him go and continued to wake people. I followed his lead and did the same. We wouldn’t wake Jesse until everyone was up and back to work or else he’d be even more pissed.

“Man, those two blonde chicks Jesse had a beef with were hot as hell. I’m getting a fucking boner just from thinking about them in their tight ass dresses,” Jacob said to Taylor, and he hummed in agreement.

“You must be talkin’ about Clover Thompson and Claire Martez. They are definitely something, but don’t let Jesse hear you say anything about Claire or else you’ll probably be shot. She belongs to him.”

“Well, you won’t tell if I have a quick round with her soon right?” Jacob asked. Taylor snorted.

“She would never let you near her.”

“No one said she has to consent to it,” Jacob said. I glared at the body I was currently shaking awake. I swear almost everyone in here were big arses.

“That’s just sick. I swear, is rape all you guys think about?” They both looked at me.

“I don’t touch girls without their permission, so don’t act like you know me,” Taylor told me while glaring at me. It almost confused me why Taylor was still in this whole gang business. He wasn’t anything like these guys, and he obviously didn’t like it here so why didn’t he get far away from this side of the country when Jesse went to prison. Something else had to be going on without me knowing.

“Well Reese, unless you want to help me fix my fucking problem, I’d suggest you shut the fuck up,” Jacob said.

I raised an eyebrow and kept up with my role.

“And who says I won’t?” I said, raising an eyebrow. Jacob smirked.

“Well babe, how about you meet me upstairs after we wake everyone up?” He was testing me. He wouldn’t believe I would do it, and he was right I wouldn’t. To them I was single, but in reality I was engaged to Joey.

“Please you and I both know she’s probably a virgin Jake,” another girl named Jasmin said, rolling her eyes.

“Will you help me then?” he asked her, and she smirked walking over to him.

“Oh you know I will,” she said, touching him right through his jeans. I tried not to gag. Over the past week I’d come to learn that Jasmin was the gang’s prostitute.

“Yeah, you’re right I won’t. I really don’t want your STDs,” I said. The few people that were up chuckled.

“Hey asshole, get up,” I hissed, kicking Jax since he wasn’t waking from me shaking him.

“Bitch, I’m up, so back the fuck up,” Jax hissed, sitting up.

I rolled my eyes and continued to wake people. It took only an hour to wake everyone up and by that time most of the house was cleared out. It was only Jax, Jacob, Taylor, some girl named Lily, and me. Oh and Jesse of course.

“They want to play games so we’re gonna play. Get your guns ready. We’re taking out a club tonight and not one person is leaving that fucking club alive,” Jesse spat, opening a closet and throwing a few automatic guns at our feet.

“I don’t kill,” Taylor said.

Jesse turned his fully loaded gun towards him.

“Does it look like I give a fuck?”

“I don’t remember asking you if you did. I’m telling you right now I won’t kill whether you want me to or not,” Taylor responded without a second thought.

Jesse shook his head.

“You’re lucky I need you,” he said, lowering his gun. “I don’t care if you kill or not. Just make sure to do your job and we won’t have a problem.”

So Jesse needed Taylor for something. I knew it couldn’t be for this little killing spree, so what was he getting from Taylor?

Chapter 9

Taylor's Point of View

I watched as Claire bought probably three dozen chocolate chip muffins and stood there waiting for them to box it up. It amazed me how oblivious she was to the fact that every man she walks by basically falls to his knees.

She was gorgeous, that was for sure, but she was too kind, too selfless, too perfect. And that's why she couldn't be with Jesse. He was wrong for her on so many levels. He wanted her because he liked that she was so innocent. Of course, I don't know if she was sexually innocent, but just her personality made you think she was wasn't real. I have never met anyone in this world that was as sweet as her. This is why Jesse has to be stopped.

Ring. Ring. Ring.

I glanced at my phone and immediately answered it when I looked at the name that appeared. "Melody," I greeted.

"What do you have for me, Taylor?"

"He took down every damn person in that club last night. He even killed Jack and he's the gang's bartender. He'd use him when he needed to roofie someone's drink," I told her. She sighed.

"Dammit. And you made sure that the Clover girl couldn't leave right?" she questioned me and I smirked.

"Of course. I made all of her and her husband's bank accounts show a balance of zero dollars. But the plane she was still planning to go on is still chipped and has explosives in one of the bags someone was bringing on," I told her. Melody sighed, sounding stressed.

"Jesse is definitely stepping up his game. I'll get someone to handle that. You need to worry about keeping Claire and Clover out of trouble," she said.

I almost groaned out loud. I don't know why she has to remind me 100 times every phone call.

"Yeah, I got it, but you should know something Mel," I said, watching as Claire stuffed half a muffin in her mouth. "Agents from the EA agency arrived."

"Of course they did," she muttered. "Well, don't let them know who you really are Taylor. No matter what, keep your identity a secret."

“I know, but hey I have to go, Claire’s on the move,” I said, watching as she struggled to carry her boxes from out of the small bakery.

“Okay, stick with the plan Jones,” she said before hanging up. I stuffed my phone in my suit pocket and slowly followed her.

“Damn!” she yelled when she tripped over a dip in the sidewalk and her boxes of muffins fell on the ground.

“Hey are you okay?” I asked her.

“Are you following me?” she retorted.

I shook my head.

“No, I’m out doing something for Jesse.” I lied easily.

“Which is following me?”

“Jesse has his mind on more important things right now.” She rolled her eyes before picking up her sealed muffin boxes.

“It’s disgusting how sick you all are. I mean he was about to rape a woman right in front of you and you just sat there,” she said with disgust written on her face as she continued to walk.

“I don’t agree with what he does, but I have to follow him or else I’ll end up dead, and you know that. The only reason Caiden isn’t dead is because Jesse doesn’t want you to hate him,” I said.

“Well, pass this message on to Jesse. I’ll never like him if he wants to spend his life trying to ruin everyone else’s,” she said. I clenched my teeth together.

“You and Caiden broke up,” I stated as I continued to walk next to her.

She narrowed her eyes.

“That doesn’t concern you, Taylor,” she said. If she wasn’t with Caiden anymore like she claimed, then that means that Jesse will take things to a new level, to a new type of game.

“Just be careful tonight at your little fancy work party thing,” I told her. She raised an eyebrow.

“How the hell do you know about that?” she demanded, stopping and looking at me.

“Sweetheart, it’s one of my many jobs in the gang. I know everything,” I told her.

She scowled.

“Just like it’s your job to sit back and watch while Jesse does all the wrong things,” she retorted.

“I don’t even agree with half of the shit he does, but it’s either listen to him or get killed.”

She sighed thinking over my words for a few minutes.

“I’m sorry,” she replied softly.

I looked at her completely confused. I never noticed that she could be so bipolar.

“For what?”

“I judged you without even knowing you,” Claire responded.

I stared at her, shocked.

“It’s cool you wouldn’t be the first,” I told her with a small fake smile. Everyone judges me from the start, so of course I’m used to it. She shouldn’t apologize cause I’m over it. I mean it’s not like I’m going to fucking cry about it.

“No, I am truly sorry. I shouldn’t have judged you so fast, you obviously aren’t the bad guy here. You’re just a guy who was at the wrong place at the wrong time and Jesse took advantage of it,” she said as she stopped outside of a wedding store to look at a wedding dress.

I didn’t respond and only silently watched her as she gazed at the puffy wedding dress. Why was everyone so interested in Claire Martez? The answer was right here. She’s probably one of the most amazing girls you can meet. She’s nice, compassionate, kind-hearted, and cool, yet she’s with a man with one of the darkest hearts of us all. But the funny thing is somehow they work, and I don’t know why anyone would want to ruin someone’s happiness. I mean that fucking man beat the impossible here.

***

Clover’s Point of View

“You’re back? I thought you were going home early?” Jasmin asked, standing up from the couch in the penthouse we were all staying in.

“Some asshole stole all of our money,” Andrew hissed, dropping his luggage straight on the ground. I followed his lead and then sat next to Jas on the couch.

“What do you mean?” Jasmin asked with narrowed eyes.

“We have like nothing in our accounts!” I exclaimed.

“Of course, that happens when you finally get ready to leave this crazy place,” Chris said, walking into the room with a Pepsi in his hand.

“I bet it was that Jesse guy,” Andrew said, shaking his head.

“I don’t think so,” Jasmin said. We all looked at her.

“This guy is trying to kill me. Of course, he’d stop me from going home or else he wouldn’t have succeeded,” I said.

Jasmin shrugged.

“He seems like he would have followed you either way,” she said. Before I could respond, Andrew cut in.

“How would you know? You’ve never even met the ass.”

I silently wondered the same thing. Out of all of us, I was the only one who actually met him, and trust me when I said they aren’t missing out on anything special. But still there’s been something off about Jas ever since we got here.

“Oh, you know I think that just because of how you described him,” she said, her eyes twinkling with a look I couldn’t describe.

“Well, I think we should call the cops and report an identity theft,” Andrew interrupted.

I shook my head.

“No, I need to go talk to Claire first. She may know what’s going on,” I said.

After hesitating for a minute, he agreed.

“Fine, but I’m going with you. I don’t like this whole being left in the dark shit. Especially because last time you almost got yourself killed by the bastard,” Andrew said seriously.

I nodded. I’d feel better if Andrew was with me anyways.

“Hey Clover?” Chris called.

“Yeah?”

“We have to be out of here by eleven.”

We all looked at him.

“And? It’s ten thirty. I can just pay them for some extra days,” I told him.

He rolled his eyes.

“No, Clove I don’t think you realize. You have no money in your accounts, and we don’t have enough to pay for all of us to stay somewhere else in Seattle.”

Suddenly it was like a brick hit me.

"Oh my gosh. Oh my freaking gosh. Andrew, we're actually broke," I said, staring at him blankly.

He nodded slowly.

"Clo, honey, we discussed this already. Some asshole robbed us," he said.

I threw a pillow from the couch at him.

"We can't afford anything now. We can't even afford a ride, let alone a room," I said.

"Where are we all gonna stay?!" Chris asked.

I paced back and fourth, trying to think.

"I could ask Claire," I said.

Andrew scrunched up his nose.

"She pretty much hates you half the time."

"We fixed things!" I said, sending him a glare.

"What about Tori?" Jasmin asked us and I immediately shook my head.

"She already left. She had to get back to her family," I told her.

She shrugged.

"Hmm, I guess Claire's our only option then. Do you think she'd really let us stay with her?"

I didn't comment about the glint in her eyes, but something about it made me feel uneasy.

"Possibly. I'll talk to her about it," I told her.

She smiled and clapped her hands.

"Great!"

"Well, on the bright side you already paid for this place ahead of time. The downside though is we need to get out of here in the next twenty minutes before we get kicked out," Chris said.

I nodded in agreement.

"I'll call Claire now and figure everything out," I said, taking out my phone and looking for her contact.

***

Claire's Point of View

“Fuck no,” Caiden hissed.

I narrowed my eyes.

“Caiden, they can’t just live on the streets! She’ll be eatn alive out there. I mean she’s a celebrity for heaven’s sake!” I told him, throwing my hands in the air.

He sent me a dark glare.

“I don’t want that stuck up bitch in our house,” he grumbled.

I rolled my eyes.

“Caiden, can you stop being an ass for ten seconds. If it was us, I’m sure she wouldn’t hesitate to take us in. There’s only four of them and we have two extra bedrooms!” I said.

He scowled.

“When are we ever going to clean out that room for the baby if someone’s sleeping in it?”

“I’ve been wanting to clean that room out for two days now and all you’ve done is work,” I yelled.

He scoffed.

“That’s all you do too. How the hell do you expect us to have time for a baby if we can’t even find time for ourselves,” he yelled.

“So that’s how you feel? Something told me you wouldn’t be able to handle this, and everything's been such an act lately,” I said, shaking my head. The door bell rang and I walked towards it. Who cares what the ass has to say? It’s my house too.

“Claire, can I just thank you so much,” Clover said, trying to bring me into a hug, but I stepped back.

“This is Andrew, Jasmin, and Chris,” she introduced.

I sent them all a friendly smile.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Chris said, sending me a charming smile, I simply nodded in agreement.

“It’s not to meet all of you. This is my boyfriend Caiden. Feel free to stay as long as you need to.” I told them and Caiden grunted in disagreement, causing me to elbow his hard chest. Yeah, in case you were wondering that did hurt me more then it hurt him.

“Let me show you guys to your rooms.”

I lead them all upstairs and put two in each room.

“I noticed Caiden was in a nice tux – are you two going somewhere special?” Clover asked me, sending me a wink.

I nodded smiling.

“I have an important charity event tonight. If you want you could all come,” I told them.

“As great as that sounds, it would probably be best if we stayed here for the night,” Clover replied.

As soon as I was away from Clover’s room, Caiden tried grabbing my waist. “Claire,” he called, but I quickly moved to the side and headed back downstairs and sat on the couch.

“You’re mad.”

I’d say that’s an understatement.

“C’mon, baby doll. Listen I’m sorry, but it’s great. Between me working full-time and you working full-time, this baby is gonna end up growing up with babysitters,” he said sitting next to me, but I still refused to look at him.

“I can quit my job.”

“That’s your own company.”

“I’ll sell the whole place. We’ll be rich for years,” I replied.

“Stop being dramatic and actually work with me on this,” he said, irritation behind his words.

“I don’t know what you want me to say Caiden! It’s starting to sound like you don’t want the baby! So make up your mind. If you can’t handle this commitment, then tell me now before we go even deeper into this relationship.” The thing that had to hurt the most was he stayed silent for a minute.

And I just sat in silence.

Really? Now was not the time.

“Claire, you’re killing me here.” He clenches his hair with his hands. “I love you, okay? To this day you are still my everything, and I don’t want you to think for one second that you’re not. I just need sometime to get used to the fact that this is all real.”

“Claire?” Chris called.

I gave Caiden one more look before plastering a fake smile on my face.

“Yes?” I asked turning around.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt but I think one of your guy’s phone is ringing,” he said, holding up my cell that showed an unknown number. I quickly thanked him and grabbed it.

“Claire Martez,” I answered immediately, putting my work/serious voice on.

“Please tell me you’re on your way,” a soft voice asked me from the other side of the line.

“Elena?”

“Yes, it’s me. Things are getting weird here. A bunch of random guys showed up,” she whispered into the line.

My eyebrows furrowed.

“Elena, are you sure they aren’t just from other companies?” I asked, heading up stairs.

“Yes!” she said immediately. “They refused to sign in with their company name and they all just give me a bad vibe. Even security has been watching them carefully.”

“I want you to check if they’ve made a donation. I’ll be there in thirty minutes,” I told her as I entered my room.

“Okay, see you soon,” she said before hanging up.

I was planning to go to this since it is mine, but I didn’t mind showing up late. It only started a half an hour ago. I quickly grabbed a dress and changed. The white dress with its little detailed designs looked great on me. This whole pregnancy hasn’t really taken its toll on me yet (well, beside the hormones and fake contractions). But I guess those are pretty normal when you’re almost four months pregnant. Yeah, you must think I’m crazy for not noticing it sooner, but you’d completely understand if you were in my situation. I mean I thought it was close to impossible to be pregnant, but now I know that I didn’t just randomly start gaining weight.

I looked in the mirror at myself and smoothed out my wavy hair and reapplied my lipstick. It was going to be a good night.

Caiden entered our room with his hair no longer sticking up in different directions – it was gelled down.

“Ready?” he said.

I gave him a short nod, turning away from the mirror, and grabbed my purse.

“We’re heading out. Feel free to eat anything in the fridge,” I yelled before we left. The limo I called was sitting out front, patiently waiting for us. As soon as we got in, he closed the door behind us, which I thanked him for, and he got in himself before quickly speeding off.

Soon enough we pulled in front of the large building. A small red carpet led to the door, and little ropes kept the paparazzi to the side.

The driver opened the door, and I took a stepped out, letting my black heels touch the bright red carpet.

“Claire over here!”

“Which charity is all the money going to tonight?”

“How much money do you hope to raise?”

“Are the rumors true that you’re pregnant?”

“Look this way!”

The paparazzi tried to get my attention, but I only smiled and let them take pictures of me and some with Caiden too before going inside.

My assistant Elena gasped, “Claire, thank God you’re here.”

“What’s the situation with those guys?” I asked immediately, and she quickly pointed them out.

“I checked the donation list and they donated about 5,000 tonight.”

My eyes widened.

“That’s great. I’m gonna go speak with them and see who they are exactly,” I told her, narrowing my eyes at the guys, and she nodded.

“You should get security to kick them out,” Caiden hissed.

I shook my head.

“If they donated anything, it would be rude to do that,” I responded, sending fake smiles to people who greeted me.

“They’re fucking murderers,” he said, causing people to glance over here.

I scowled at him.

“Can you watch your mouth? This is an important event with very big people here,” I told him. He just shook his head.

“Claire, it’s a pleasure. I had no idea you’d be here,” Jesse said with a smirk as soon as we stopped right in front of him.

“It’s my event,” I said dryly.

“Cut the shit,” Caiden hissed.

Jesse sneered at him.

“I thought you dropped this ass.”

“That really isn’t your concern, Jesse,” I retorted. “Just tell me why you’re here.”

“I just wanted to donate some money for charity, and you know maybe stay a while, have some champagne,” Jesse said, his voice heavily laced with sarcasm.

“Oh Jesse, is this the Claire Martez?” a guy asked, walking up to us. He was handsome with his dark hair and tanned skin.

“Who are you?” Caiden demanded. “Did you bring your whole gang here?”

“Shh, Caiden, no need for the dramatics,” Jax said.

Caiden sneered.

“I’m Jacob. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you. I’ve definitely heard lots about you,” Jacob winked, shaking my hand.

I quickly removed mine.

“Don’t touch me,” I snapped quietly.

“Ooh feisty. Now I see the interest in her Jess.”

“Why does everyone have this strange interest in me?” I asked, honestly confused. I mean I knew I definitely wasn’t ugly but it’s not like I’m Angelina Jolie. I mean Angelina is absolutely stunning.

“Because your looks, innocence, and personality all make you so much more appealing,” Taylor replied smirking.

“Well, as lovely as this conversation has been, I have a job to do, so if you’ll just excuse me,” I said, turning away from the group of men.

“As do we,” Jesse replie,d leaving me with a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach.

“Claire, it’s such a pleasure to see you,” A woman said, doing the little fake kisses thing.

“Yes, thank you so much for coming. I hope you enjoy everything that’s planned for the night,” I told her with a polite smile. Many people seemed to like the symphony orchestra, which sounded beautiful as it played The Planets.

"You have your speech in ten minutes," Elena told me. I thanked her. My eyes skimmed the room for Caiden, and I sighed in relief when I caught him talking to an acquaintance instead of beating Jesse to death.

"Claire, you look lovely," a guy named Damien told me. I sent him a huge smile.

"Damien Richards. Wow, I honestly can't believe it's you. How's the modeling life going?" I asked.

"It's been better."

"Don't forget you are always welcome to model some of my designs. Just give me a call sometime," I told him. He sent me a charming smile.

"Thanks," he said before waving over a girl.

"Claire, I'd like you to meet my wife Katy."

"It's nice to meet you, and I love that dress. It's absolutely gorgeous on you," I said.

She smiled, thanking me.

I decided to excuse myself to go get a drink and hoped that I wouldn't get disturbed this time. I was used to these kind of events. I always had to talk to everyone and thank them and listen to what's new in their lives. I grabbed a glass of champagne from one of the servers trays and took a seat at one of the many tables.

"I warned you," Taylor said sitting in the seat next to me.

"What?"

"I warned you to be careful tonight," Taylor repeated.

I studied his face carefully.

"Ms. Martez, can I get a picture if you two?" a reporter asked.

I hesitated before standing up and posing with Taylor. The reporter thanked us before moving on to a group of people.

"You did," I agreed before continuing. "But that's the thing I don't understand. You'd only warn me if something was going to happen. So what is he planning?" I asked nonchalantly.

"It wouldn't be fun if I told you everything now, would it," he said, standing up.

"Taylor, I won't beg you. But I'm warning you now, if you guys pull something at an event like this I won't hesitate to—"

"You won't hesitate to what call the police on us?" Jax interrupted. "I hate to break it to you, babe but that won't do shit."

"Sorry to interrupt, but it's time for your introduction," Elena told me, nervously glancing at the guys around me.

"Thank you. I'll go up now," I responded. "But could you do me a favor and ask security to please escort these two men out and the three in the corner as well?"

She nodded and headed towards the front where security was.

"That's a very stupid thing to do, Claire," Jax said, shaking his head.

I raised on eyebrow and smirked.

"It was a very stupid thing to come here, Jax," I replied in the same tone. "You and the rest of your gang think you can do whatever the hell you want, but feel free to pass my message along."

"What message?"

"I'm not afraid of you, so bring it on."

I walked away from the table with my head held high and a smug smile on my face.

I stepped on stage and walked to the podium, and everyone went silent. "Hello," I said into the microphone. "I just wanted to give a quick thank you to everyone who has came here and donated money towards such a wonderful cause. This money won't just go to one charity. It will be split and will go to multiple charities. So please feel free to participate in every activity there is. Our goal was $20,000 tonight, but if you look to the right where our chart is, you can see we are already at $28,658. That's incredible! And in case you didn't know, all the money from the raffles will be added to the chart at the end of the night too," I said. Everyone clapped. "Oh, please don't forget to help yourselves to the bar." I finished and everyone cheered while the DJ replaced the orchestra and played music to dance to.

I decided to head to the bathroom, checking my hair and makeup before just staring at my reflection. It should be obvious to everyone by now that I was pregnant, but maybe they're just thinking what I was thinking. I just didn't keep up with my figure.

"Want to play a game?" Jesse whispered in my ear, moving my completely to my left shoulder. He was close, too close.

"This is the women's bathroom and shouldn't you be gone by now? I'm pretty sure I watched security escort your ass out."

“Your security believed my men when they simply told them I left earlier,” he said, looking at me through the mirror.

“Okay, well I don’t have time for this.” I tried to move away from him, but Jesse placed his hand on my waist.

“Stop acting like I don’t affect you, Claire.” Jesse’s hand tightened and he placed his lips on my shoulder.

“Get off of me!” I yelled, attempting to push him off. He only turned me around and placed my back on the counter. I tried to scoot as far back as possible but his hands gripped my legs.

“I asked you if you wanted to play a game,” he hissed in my ear.

“I swear if you don’t let me go in the next five seconds.”

He smirked.

“Claire, baby, I think the fact that you’re threatening me makes you even hotter.”

“What makes you think—” Jesse was interrupted when the door banged open. Two people pushed their way into the bathroom basically eating each other’s faces off.

“Ah, look who it is. Nicolas.”

Nick pulled away from the girl with wide eyes.

“Katy?”

“Claire!”

“Jesse?”

“Now that we’ve gone through names, you two can stay for the show. Claire and I were just about to play a little game.”

“You’re cheating on Caiden?” Nick asked me.

I let the disgust show on my face.

“Of course not! If you paid close attention right now, then you’d notice I’m being sexually assaulted! Or if you came in a minute earlier you would have heard me scream for help.”

Nick narrowed his eyes.

“Back away from her Jesse,” Nick hissed, moving closer and Jesse made a tsk sound.

“Guess we have to change the rules to the game,” Jesse said.

Jesse pulled out a gun out of the back of his pants and smiled.

“I’ll keep the rules simple—”

Before he could finish, the door busted open for the second time.

“SPD. Put your hands up.”

Chapter 10

Claire's Point of View

For the first time in my life, I saw someone share a look as dark and hateful as Caiden's. Jesse glared at the officers as he slowly went to put his gun down.

"Now put your hands up and behind your head," the officer ordered.

He did as he was told. It was strange to see Jesse actually giving up and letting this happen. He was in prison for about 9 years. I don't understand why would he go back this easily.

We all watched as he walked out of the bathroom in handcuffs. I was almost positive at least half of my guests were freaking out, so I straightened out my dress and hair before turning to Nick. "You're at a charity event. So try acting like it," I told him disappointedly. "And you should clean yourself up and return to your husband before I go and have a chat with him," I told her before leaving the room.

"You have a husband?" was the last thing I heard before the door completely shut behind me.

"Claire, what the hell is going on?" Caiden demanded.

I hesitated, knowing he would get even more mad.

"Jesse basically cornered me in the bathroom and almost killed Nick," I stated nonchalantly while looking around.

"The cops were in there and out in less than four minutes. Did he let them arrest him?" Caiden asked suspiciously.

I nodded.

"It was strange – he didn't even try to argue or fight them either," I said.

"I think we should get everyone out of here," he said.

I took one look at him before agreeing. He wouldn't want us to kick everyone out for something small, so I had to trust him. I walked towards the stage where the orchestra was playing. I quietly whispered to the conductor to quiet down the orchestra, and he immediately did so they were only playing piano.

"Excuse me, I hate to interrupt, but I thought it would be a great time to thank you all for the lovely donations. I promise you all of your money will go to great causes. Due to some unfortunate circumstances, I am going to have to end this event early. I will be rescheduling this, since I know

we didn't actually get a chance to reach the goal, but I wanted to thank you all for coming, and it would be great if you all could start making your way out."

Chatter immediately filled the room. I walked across the room and stood next to the door thanking everyone as they walked out.

"HELP!" someone yelled, running this way.

"Please help me!" a woman yelled, running over and grabbing my arm as she glanced behind her. Fear was written all over her face as she looked at me again.

"What's wrong?" I asked immediately. Worry crossed my face and she removed her hands and stood up straighter, sending me a smirk before coming closer so she was right next to my ear.

"Remember Claire, the game's not over just yet," she said before pushing herself back and walking out of the building. The woman looked to be in her mid-twenties and she seemed to have an innocent look. How does Jesse get such people to join his disgusting gang?

"What is going on?" Elena asked, trying to stay calm.

"I was assaulted in the bathroom, and he had guys crawling everywhere so the cops asked me to evacuate the place so nothing else happened. I want you to check my schedule and find me another place and day for this. Do not speak with anyone besides me about the re-schedule."

Elena gave me a tight smile.

"Okay, anything else?"

"No, that's it. Thank you for your hard work tonight," I told her softly before pulling out my wallet and grabbing a hundred dollar bill. "Go out and enjoy the rest of your night." I smiled, sending her a wink, and she laughed, returning the smile.

"Thank you so much. Just call me if you need anything," Elena said, and I nodded before shooing her away.

"She's the last," a waiter told me.

I nodded and mumbled a thank you.

"Everyone got out safe," I said, leaning my body against the side of the doorway. Caiden didn't respond, causing me to glance at him.

"That girl wouldn't have made such a scene for nothing," he said aloud. I followed his gaze. At the left side of the room was a door and there seemed to be dark, black colored smoke coming out little by little from underneath it.

"Oh God," I mumbled, placing my hand to my mouth. "What if someone's in there?" I gasped. Slipping off my heels, I started running towards the door.

"Claire, wait!" yelled Caiden, running after me.

"Don't go in that door!" an unknown voice yelled at me.

I paused. I looked behind me to see a tall, brunette standing there.

"Emily?" I asked confused. "What are you doing here?"

"Jesse is our case, and when he was spotted here they sent me in. I'm trained for things like this and you don't know what you're going to see in there," she told me, walking closer.

"It smells like something's burning," I told her.

She nodded before heading in. I watched as she put a mask on and entered the room. Her gloved hands had no difficulty with opening the door. I stood there silently and just prayed everything would be okay. I wasn't really a religious person, but I would definitely hope for the best.

"Are you just going to stand there all day or come with me?" Caiden asked, breaking me out of my thoughts. "Put on your shoes in case there's glass or something." He told me and I slipped on my heels again and followed him to the door. He used his jacket to open the hot handle.

Huh? I guess he is good for something.

Of all times now you decide to come back?

It's not my fault you decide to listen to me now after all these years.

The room was blazing and seemed like it was going to start breaking apart any minute. "What the hell are you two doing in here?" Emily asked as she slowly helped a man up from the ground. "I told you to stay inside."

"I don't listen to rules very well, and for future reference you should know I do what I want," he told her before bringing my body close to him. I coughed at the smoke that filled my lungs, and he looked at me with worry.

"You should go back out there. This isn't good for the baby."

"You're in here and pregnant?"

"Hey, help me!" a woman yelled.

I looked to see it was Caitlyn Mccluskey, a woman who worked with me from time to time when it came to making designs for huge labels. She was sitting on the ground with her hand on her ankle. "I think I did something to my ankle."

Caiden pulled her up, trying to help her out of the large room that was slowly becoming consumed with flames.

“What happened in here?” I asked her softly before she had a coughing fit.

“There was one of those old oil candles in here, and some guy poured it everywhere and lit it on fire with a match. When I tried to stop him all he did was push me and beat up the few other people in there,” she said, rubbing her throat as we helped her limp out of the room.

“There’s more people in there?” Emily asked, setting the guy in the chair next to her.

She nodded.

“Yeah, a girl came in and helped the guy who started the fire put the rest of them in the back room where all the extra trays of food were,” she said.

I looked back at the burning room.

“We have to go back in,” I said.

Emily shook her head already heading back that way.

“The room she’s talking about is almost impossible to get to at this point. You’ll only be a nuisance,” she told me and I frowned as she ran back in.

“Did anyone call 911 yet?” Caitlyn asked.

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure Emily did, but call again just to be safe. I have to go back in and help whoever I can. Stay safe Cait,” I told her before we rushed back in. I paused at the doorway when all I could see was flames slowly eating everything. The curtains in front of the window fell, making me jump.

“That’s it!” I said suddenly. I rushed over to the bathrooms, which I knew had curtains. Grabbing the curtains from the window, I basically ran as fast I could in heels and threw one at Caiden.

“They’re heavy enough to help. Now where’s the door?” I asked, putting my hand in front of my eyes for a second. There was enough smoke in here to make someone go blind.

“Over here,” Emily yelled as she attempted to push a huge, antique table from in front of the door. The one side was on fire, making me panic. Caiden grabbed her side and helped her push the heavy table away. If we weren’t in such a crisis, I probably would have just stood there watching Caiden since his muscle really showed through his white shirt. But instead I started hitting the door that had flames on top of it.

“Forget about that,” Emily yelled at me as she heard the sound of sirens outside. She tried to open the door, but it didn’t open, making her run her hand through her hair.

“Damn,” she muttered to herself before taking four steps back and running, slamming her foot into the door. The door surprising went off the hinges and hit the ground.

“Oh, thank goodness!” a woman yelled, jumping up.

“Who is hurt?” Emily said.

“Basically everyone in here has something wrong with them.”

“Okay, well if you can walk you’re going to have to get out of here and immediately exit the building. The room leading to this one is in flames. I give it maybe two minutes before the ceiling caves in,” Emily announced.

Everyone started panicking. Some even cried.

“Shut the fuck up and get the hell up and start leaving before we all end up here stuck for the dead,” Caiden yelled. The room went silent. Three of the ten people could walk. We all grabbed one person who couldn’t and helped them out of the room.

“Claire?” the man I was helping said, and I frowned not recognizing exactly who he was.

“Yeah, it’s me,” I told him, struggling to help him since he must have weighed a little more than me.

“Don’t think for one second everyone won’t hear about this. Never in my forty years have I left a charity event with what I’m guessing is a broken rib or even a black eye,” he hissed.

I frowned realizing it was the one reporter who was supposed to write a story for his paper about this event.

“Listen, I’m really sorry about all of this, but I didn’t know the building was going to catch on fire,” I told him before setting him by the door right as firemen came rushing in.

“How many people are still in there?” a man asked me.

“About four more,” I told him.

He nodded, running in there after the rest of the men.

“That was all Jesse wasn’t it?” Emily asked us, setting down another person.

I bit my lip thinking about it.

“It had to have been someone from his gang because I watched as he got brought out, handcuffed and everything,” I said.

“I’m not surprised,” she said, rolling her eyes.

“Neither am I,” Caiden said, coming up from behind me and wrapping his arms around my waist. He leaned in so his mouth was right by my ear. “If you ever do something that stupid again, I swear I will never let you leave the house.”

“I’m sorry, I just feel partly responsible for all of this since I’m the one who got involved with Jesse in the first place, and I hosted this event.”

He shook his head. He turned me around so I was completely facing him.

“Never blame yourself for anything that he does,” Caiden told me.

I just shook my head, not responding.

“Excuse me, Claire Martez?” a man in a black coat asked, coming up to me.

I pulled away from my boyfriend and took a few steps away, clearing my throat.

“Yes?” I asked, glancing at the notepad in his hand.

“It’s nice to meet you, I’m detective Wills. I just wanted to inform you that the man you were with, Jesse Farone, has assaulted the two officers tonight and got away, so he is no longer in captivity. If he tries to contact you or come near you at all, just call my department. Due to some of the responses from some of the others here, I have come to the conclusion that he was most likely behind the fire too. So if you know anything about him, please let us know.”

I felt goosebumps trail up my arm, almost like someone was watching me.

“I definitely will and thank you for telling me, detective,” I said, shaking his hand. He nodded, mumbling something about it not being a problem. I walked back to Caiden and just shook my head.

“Can we go home?” I asked softly. He nodded, putting his left arm on my shoulder and leading me to the limo. The driver opened the door and we slid in. I laid my head on his shoulder and closed my eyes for the rest of the ride.

Riley’s Point of View(Reese)

I watched as Jesse slammed his fist into a nearby wall.

“Chris!” Jesse yelled, and two men ran over. One was unfamiliar, but I recognized the other one from the past.

“Did I say Chris Levine?” he hissed, and the guy shook his head.

“No.”

“Then get the fuck out of my sight,” Jesse said. The guy apoligized and left.

“I need to know immediately if Clover Thompson is dead,” he said.

Chris kept his face blank.

“She didn’t get on the plane,” he told him.

Jesse sneered.

“Why?”

“I don’t know, but Jason almost got caught for not actually being in charge of baggage check,” Chris told him.

Jesse rolled his eyes.

“So are you telling me that he didn’t even get the bag on the plane?”

“No, he did, but it didn’t go off. Somehow it got stopped,” Chris said.

I noticed the fear that flickered through his eyes. How is it that even Chris is scared of Jesse?

“No one knew about the bomb besides the five of us,” he said.

“Someone may have overheard us talking about it and told the agents or something,” Jesse said smirking, not holding back a dark chuckle.

“Now don’t tell me that Christopher. I may just end up killing everyone in this fucking place if necessary,” he said and Chris shut his mouth after that.

“We need to get someone on the inside,” Jesse demanded before looking at me. I had my back leaned against the wall with my right foot on it as well. “You. Claire wouldn’t hesitate to trust you.”

“I don’t think that’s the best idea,” Jacob interrupted.

Jesse raised an eyebrow.

“And why not?”

“Claire will know by her clothes that she’s not there to really be friends.”

I narrowed my eyes and pretended to get mad.

“I like my clothes, thank you,” I said before looking at Jesse. “I can do it.” I only agreed so no one else would be secretly getting close to Claire.

“No, he’s right. You won’t work.”

“Who would be a better option than me?” I asked, pushing myself off the wall.

He let his eyes skim around the room.

“I have an idea,” James said suddenly.

Jesse motioned him to continue.

“Claire has been spotted going to the doctors recently, and rumors have it she’s pregnant. Maybe do something about that doctor of hers and have someone fill in,” James suggested smirking.

Jesse mirrored his expression.

“Not bad, Ward. We need someone who’s actually a doctor to fill in though,” Jesse said.

I narrowed my eyes. This was all a bad idea. I couldn’t even go and warn Claire because it would most likely lead Jesse to realize I’m the one leaking information. But the thing is, I had no idea about a bomb being on the plane Clover was going to be on, so I think the real question is who else is in here undercover? I wondered looking around the room.

“Keith Mabry,” Jacob said.

The room went silent.

“Hell no. The guy is the most antisocial one here,” Taylor pitched in.

I raised an eyebrow. This was the first time I’d ever heard of the guy.

“Someone go get him. He’s perfect,” Jesse said.

Everyone’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Jess, man, think this through,” Taylor said, stepping closer.

He looked at his friend seriously.

“I did.”

“He’s a fucking prick,” Jax said.

I almost snorted. He’s the one to talk.

“Who’s this Keith guy?” I asked, causing him to roll his eyes.

“Oh, I forgot we have a newbie here.”

“Just because I’m new doesn’t mean I’m stupid,” I said, narrowing my eyes at him.

“He’s basically the top guy around here. If something were to happen to Jesse—”

“And we all know nothing will,” Jesse cut in, giving him a pointed look.

"Then he would probably take over 'cause he is the smartest, the fastest, and the biggest ass. He also has this mysterious vibe that apparently girls love."

Taylor and I let that information sink in. All this time I thought Taylor would take over, but I guess I was wrong.

"Bet you thirty bucks she'll be all over him," Jacob said.

Jax laughed.

"You're on."

"Wait, if he has all those qualities then why don't you want him to do the job?" I wondered aloud.

"Because the prick doesn't deserve the job. We all know he'll go his own way with this whole thing."

"You can only go so many ways with being a doctor," I said slowly. In return I got multiple glares.

"Keith," Jacob suddenly said, causing everyone in the room to look at the new figure that entered the room. Standing there was a man with beautiful, dark black hair – the one and only Keith Mabry. They were definitely right about the mysterious vibe he gave off.

"You're going undercover," Jesse said.

I almost smiled at the irony. They were going undercover so they could have someone on the inside for Claire, yet here I was the person on the inside for that whole group.

"Why?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Because I said so, and you're the only one for the job, " Jesse said.

"Okay, whatever," he said, sitting on the side of the couch. Jesse nodded and had Chris follow him.

"Chris, your job is to get rid of the current doctor." That was the last thing I heard Jesse say before he walked out of the room with Chris right next to him.

"Who's the newbie?" Keith asked, nodding his head towards me as he lit up a cigarette.

"The names Ri—Reese."

I mentally scolded myself for almost blowing my cover. I needed to put my defenses up again. These guys were all unpredictable, and there's so many more of them that I still don't know. Hundreds more.

"You owe me thirty. She's already stuttering over him," Jacob said laughing.

I rolled my eyes.

"I am not. He's nothing special," I said.

Keith raised an eyebrow, pulling the cigarette out of his mouth.

"Is that so?" he asked, walking over to me, or basically stumbling over to me.

"Man, you're completely wasted," Jacob said.

Keith brought his body so it was directly in front of mine. He placed his left hand with the cigarette on the wall behind me and brought his face so close that our noses were almost touching.

"I think the whole tough girl thing is just an act," he said.

I resisted the urge to scrunch up my nose in disgust at the smell of alcohol.

"You know to actually pull a job like this off, right, you're going to have to actually be silver," I said, pushing his body away from mine. It took very little strength since he stumbled and bumped into the chair.

"Huh, I guess Jesse actually picked a girl with brains for once," he said.

Taylor chuckled.

"Anyone have a picture of the girl I'm suppose to be getting information on?" Keith asked.

Another guy from the gang named Leon threw a folder at him.

"The name's Claire Martez. Don't let the innocent look fool you. She's smart, very smart, and her boyfriend or ex-boyfriend is on Jesse's list to kill since he left the gang years ago," Leon explained.

Keith looked carefully at the picture of Claire.

"I don't understand what all the hype is about. From the looks of it she's nothing special," he said, blowing smoke out of his mouth. "Why does the big man care so much about her?"

"He has some type of feelings for her," Jacob said, taking a sip out of a beer.

"Who's actually met her?"

"Almost all of us have," Jax replied cooly.

"Tell me about her," Keith instructed.

"At one point the chick was even going undercover at some all boys university. And she's great in bed in case you were wondering," Leon said.

I looked at him in surprise. Claire slept with him?

"You slept with her?" Taylor asked, speaking my thoughts.

"Yeah, it was years ago, but it was one hell of a one-night stand."

Keith watched Leon carefully for a minute before smirking.

"C'mon mate, don't tell me you have feelings for her too," he said chuckling.

Leon shook his head.

"I thought it was obvious. Everyone just wants to sleep with her. No one here has real feelings for the chick," Jacob said.

Everyone chuckled. I scrunched up my nose as they started talking about what they would do to her in bed. It surprised me when even Taylor joined in on the conversation.

"I look forward to meeting her then," Keith said, standing up and grabbing the bottle of whiskey that sat on top of the table next to the couch. "We'll see why it's so hard for Jesse to get one woman to like him."

Chapter 11

Claire's Point of View

"I'll see you after work," Caiden said, pressing a long kiss to my lips before pulling back.

"Yeah, I'll make sure to bring a picture from my appointment today," I told him, and he nodded, grabbing a piece of bacon off the plate on the counter and heading towards the door. "Love you!" I yelled through the house – and I heard him yell it back – but it came out more like a bunch of gibberish since his mouth was full.

"You have another appointment?" Clover asked me.

I looked over at the table where her and Andrew were sitting.

"My doctor left me a voicemail last night telling me she'd like to see me again soon since I went so many months without proper monthly check ups," I said.

"How far are you anyways?"

I bit my lip trying to remember what the doctor told me. I know I'm a horrible mother already.

"I'm pretty sure at most 18 weeks," I told her, looking down at my stomach. She suddenly jumped up and squealed.

"You're so far along! I remember those days," Clover said, placing her hand on her stomach before looking at Andrew.

"Let's have another baby," she said. Andrew started coughing on his orange juice. The poor man sat there choking for a good three minutes .

"We have two seven-year-old children at home right now. I don't think we need anymore. They're both a pain already," Andrew said, but you could see the adoration for his children in his eyes. I couldn't help but wonder if Caiden would be like that one day.

"What time does the appointment start?" she asked, watching me take a sip out my glass of milk.

"Ten," I said, looking at the watch on my hand.

She looked at me with wide eyes.

"Can I please come?" she begged.

I stared at her for a minute before reluctantly agreeing.

“Caiden can’t come, so I don’t see why not. It would be nice to have someone else there,” I said.

She squealed, making me cringe.

“You can’t do that again if you’re coming.”

She only nodded in response and sent me a huge smile.

“I’ll go get ready really quick,” she yelled, rushing upstairs when she saw it was already eight fifty.

“Where’s Chris and Jasmin?” I asked Andrew.

He shrugged, scowling through his phone.

“They have some friends here that they rarely get to see, so they’ve been visiting them a lot recently,” he said.

I frowned. They couldn’t have stayed with them then? I don’t mind the company since I’m not working as much, but having four grown adults in the house was kind of a lot when you’re use to just having two.

It took Clover a solid twenty minutes to get ready before we were rushing to my appointment. I tried to pay attention to her ranting about some other model, but I could hardly focus as butterflies filled my stomach. This would be my second ultrasound and I could only hope my doctor would tell me everything was okay.

“Claire?” Clover asked, breaking me out of my thoughts.

I almost slammed on the breaks.

Pulling into the doctor's office, I finally responded, “Yeah?”

I looked at her as I parked the car.

“You okay? You look like you’re going to puke,” she said.

I waved her off. I was perfectly fine. What could have possibly happened in the past couple of weeks that I need to worry about.

“I’m fine,” I told her as we entered the large building. We took the elevator to the fifth floor where my doctor’s office was usually located.

“Hi, I’m here to check in,” I said to the lady in pink scrubs at the desk. She looked up and smiled.

“Here, just fill this out,” she said, handing me a paper on a clipboard.

I quickly did so since there were only a few questions on it.

“Oh, you’re Ms. Martez?” she asked.

I nodded. The nurse immediately brought me into one of the rooms. “I was scheduled to be your nurse for the day so we can get started right away, but I wanted to let you know about an unexpected change due to certain problems.”

I looked at Clover with wide eyes and she held up her hands mouthing ‘calm down.’

“What kind of problems?” I asked.

She looked almost embarrassed to say it.

“We found out your doctor had leaked your personal information about you being pregnant. As soon as we found out, we got rid of her and replaced her with a new and better doctor,” she said.

I wonder how much money she got from information I wasn’t actually hiding.

“This new doctor is good right?” I asked as she began her tests.

“Yes, better even. He came from a great medical school and has helped deliver plenty of babies before. You have to be in the best hands,” she said smiling. I didn’t return the smile. A thousand questions filled my head as I thought about everything that could be wrong with the doctor. God, I was turning into my mother, I thought, shaking my head.

“I promise you Ms. Martez he is the best doctor for you. If you for some reason don’t think so and have a problem with him, just let us know, and we’ll find you a new one,” she said.

“Thank you for letting me know,” I told her.

She nodded, sending me a smile. We finally got to the most exciting part of my examination where I could finally see the baby that was growing inside of me.

“Can you tell me the gender?” I asked her as she started putting a cold gel like substance on my stomach, causing Clover to almost bounce in excitement in her seat.

“Dr. Mabry will discuss everything with you,” she told me.

I sighed. I jumped a little in surprise when the sound of some female singer filled the room. I looked at Clover who sent me an apologetic look, excusing herself.

“Would you like pictures?” she asked and I mumbled a yes. I watched as she moved the transducer across my stomach. I looked up at the screen and couldn’t help it when tears filled my eyes. I didn’t really understand what exactly was each part of the baby’s body yet until she quickly went through what was what. Once she was done she excused herself and mumbled something about the doctor being on his way in. I started to wipe the gel off my stomach and jumped in surprised when, about

twenty seconds after she left, the doctor knocked on the door. I quickly rubbed the excess off and pulled down the shirt I was wearing, sitting up on the edge of the bed.

"Come in," I yelled, and the door opened. My eyes widened in surprise as the handsome man entered the room. His dark, curly hair stood out the most, and I couldn't help but wonder how this man was a doctor. Doctors have a friendly look to them. This man had a mysterious look, one that almost seemed like he was hurt.

"Hello, I'm doctor Mabry, but since we're going to be seeing each other so often you can call me Keith if you'd like," he said, holding out his hand for me to shake. Something about his accent left me dazed for a moment before I snapped out of it and let my hand touch his and shook it before immediately letting it go.

No hand should be that soft.

He sent me a charming smile, and I realized I never introduced myself.

"Oh sorry! I'm Claire. It's nice to meet you. Thank you for taking over," I said.

He chuckled.

"It's no problem at all. It is my job," he said.

I stared at his perfect smile. Gosh, what am I thinking? I have a boyfriend, who I'm going to be having a baby with in the next few months.

You're only appreciating the fact that he's a handsome man.

I'm allowed to do something like this right? I mean it's not like he can hear my private thoughts.

"Now your results, everything seems to be perfectly healthy with you and your baby, but I'd like to start doing an every two week check up with you," he told me, looking at the clipboard.

"I'm only at eighteen weeks though?" I said looking at him with worry.

He stared at me in what looked like surprise before clearing his throat.

"You have nothing to worry about. I just want to really know as many details I can about the little man inside there before I help you deliver him," he said.

I sighed in relief. The fact that he cared that much for the delivery that's months away warmed my heart a bit.

"Wait, what did you say?" I asked with wide eyes.

"I said you have nothing—"

"No, I heard all that. But did you say little man?" I asked.

His eyebrows furrowed.

"Yes, I—"

"It's a boy. I'm having a little baby boy," I said out loud, cutting him off. I placed my hand on my stomach and looked down at the small bump.

"I apologize if you did not want to know," he said sincerely.

I shook my head.

"No, it's okay, I wanted to know," I said smiling.

He returned the smile.

"Oh well, that's good then," he said after a moment. I nodded, standing up.

"Is that all then?" I asked, looking at him expectantly.

"Do you know your due date?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"April 19th," he said.

That seemed so far away.

"Good to know. Thank you," I said.

A knock sounded on the door. It was the nurse from before, and she handed me an envelope.

"Those are your sonogram pictures," she said.

I thanked her.

"It was nice meeting you, Dr. Mabry," I said, holding out my hand for him to shake again. Unlike me, he didn't stare at it like it was some foreign object. He grabbed my hand and shook it.

Again with those soft hands.

I wonder what he could—

Caiden!

I swear you're such a buzz kill.

I thanked him again before we both exited the room. I walked out to the waiting room where I saw Clover sitting there still talking on her phone. She frowned when she saw that I was finished already.

“Done already?” she pouted.

I rolled my eyes.

“You’ve been out here for a while,” I told her.

“Sorry, it’s an important call,” she whispered before focusing on what the person on the phone was saying. I made my next appointment before we made our way out. All that filled my thoughts the whole way home was the baby boy inside my stomach. I wondered if Caiden would be happy about it being a boy or did he want a girl?

Or maybe he didn’t want either.

The thought itself made my smile turn into a frown because I knew it was true. But I had to remember he just had to warm up to the idea.

***

Riley’s Point of View

“I hate this whole barely seeing each other thing,” I said to Joey, leaning my head against his shoulder as we sat in some random parking lot.

“Me too, but we just have to remember you’re my fiancé, and once this whole mission is finally over we will be finally having that wedding,” he said, pulling away so he could look at me. I did the same before pressing my lips against his, something I haven’t had the opportunity to do in a while. I smiled into the kiss when Joey brought me onto his lap. The kiss got heated, but was quickly ruined when some random teenage boys knocked on the window.

“Get it!” one yelled before they all ran off laughing. I pulled back, narrowing my eyes at the teenagers.

“Way to ruin a moment,” I muttered.

“Oh, don’t get all grumpy. I’d rather hear that teenagers are interrupting makeout session than doing drugs and drinking,” Joey said.

I raised an eyebrow.

“They’re probably doing both,” I said, but he ignored me and made loud noises.

“Don’t darken my thoughts with your negativity!” he said, and I couldn’t help but laugh at him. It’s hard to believe he was twenty-nine years old since he still acted like a child.

“Whatever, just shut up and kiss me,” I said, pressing my lips to his. About a minute later we were interrupted again when the alarm on my phone went off.

“That’s my call,” I muttered, moving back into my own seat and opening the door.

“Thanks for freeing up an hour of your life to come see me. Maybe next year we can get and hour and two minutes,” Joey said sarcastically.

I scowled, slapping his arm. He laughed.

“Let’s not forget this was your idea.”

He responded by sticking his tongue out at me, before quickly presseing another quick kiss to my lips, mumbling a goodbye.

“Love you,” I told him before getting out and shutting the door. The gang house was about a ten-minute walk from here so I started jogging that way being careful to not slip on ice. Though there was snow and ice on the ground, I wasn’t feeling any winter spirit. It’s the first winter I’ve spent away from home in years, but all I wanted to do was snuggle up with Joey on our couch by our fireplace as we watched some Christmas movies.

“Where have you been?” Jacob questioned suspiciously when I showed up at the house suddenly.

“Out.”

“Look at the sex hair. She was definitely getting it on,” Lily said smirking.

I plastered a fake smile on my face and tried to hold back the urge to hit the girl. It doesn’t matter how long it’s been, I still didn’t like the girl.

The door suddenly slammed closed, causing me to look at the figure that entered the room.

“Keith?” Jacob question as he entered the living room. I was surprised to see how nice he cleaned up. He grabbed a bottle of bourbon and a glass cup, pouring a little in it.

“How’d it go?” Jax asked curiously.

Keith looked up from his glass and smirked.

“Better than expected,” he said on the chair, putting his feet up on the side.

“Care to elaborate?” I asked with a raised eyebrow.

“She trusts me.”

"How do you know?" I asked immediately, causing him to look at me carefully.

"Because I do. The look of adoration was all over her face every time she looked at me," he said before drinking the rest of the alcohol in the cup.

Jax snorted, "Bullshit."

"Yeah, you're right, but I can see she trusts me or else she would have requested a new doctor," Keith said, pouring more into his glass.

"So when's her next appointment?" Jacob asked, lighting a joint.

"In two weeks."

"It'll be a while before you see her again," Leon said, looking like he was thinking, but Keith chuckled.

"No, that's the next time I'll be seeing her as Dr. Mabry. No one said I couldn't run into on the streets," he said, just as Taylor walked into the room.

"What? You're not talking about Claire, right?" Taylor asked

Keith shrugged.

"Why?"

"Jesse will never allow it."

"Jesse needs someone on the inside, and I'm the closest person he's got right now so there shouldn't be a problem," Keith said. The way he looked at him was like he was daring for him to question him again.

"Plus, who says he needs to know." A dark smirk appeared on his face as he did a little bow with his head, holding the cup in his hand up. I shook my head in disgust and walked out of the room without a word. I left the house and walked to the parking lot I was in earlier, texting Joey to come and get me.

This was getting out of hand. I needed someone else to come in with me. I needed Joey. I couldn't take down this whole gang by myself. Yes, I've seen underage teens smoking and drinking, I've seen adults with different types of drugs, but that wasn't enough. I needed to get every last one of them to make sure this gang dies. Every single one of them needed to rot in prison.

When I got to the parking lot a few minutes early, I decided to just sit on the curb. But something caught my attention in a nearby alleyway.

“I said, do you have the fucking money?” a voice yelled. I heard someone getting hit. I stood up and slowly walked closer.

“I just need one more week. If I don’t pay my rent, my family won’t have a house to live in. Please, I have three children,” a guy begged, making my heart clench for him.

“I told you I don’t give extensions, so if you’re telling me you don’t have the money, then you know what it means.” The man sneered. Looking into the alley, I gasped when I saw a guy that looked to be in his thirties getting his head slammed against a wall. My gasp caught the attention of the man, causing him to look up at me.

“Get out of here wench,” he hissed.

I raised an eyebrow amused. It’s been a long time since I’ve kicked someone’s arse.

“You could at least say please,” I pouted.

He released the hair he was holding and let the man’s body hit the concrete.

“Or you can be next. I’m sure we could have some fun,” the disgusting man said, making me raise an eyebrow at him and tuck my hands in my front pockets.

“Awe that’s cute. You think I would get with you so easily,” I said with my signature smirk.

“I don’t remember asking you for permission, little lady,” he said.

I shook my head as he took a step closer.

“You see I don’t remember giving you the option in the first place,” I said, just as he grabbed a piece of my blonde hair, twirling it in my fingers.

“There’s something I don’t understand about you gang members,” I said, turning my head to the side innocently before kneeing him where the sun doesn’t shine. He gasped for air, knees hitting the ground. “You all don’t seem to understand the answer no,” I said, clenching his hair in my hand. “And let me tell you something,” I whispered in his ear before kicking his chest, making him fall back onto the concrete in pain, “it’s really starting to get on my nerves.” I left him laying there.

I knew it was probably stupid of me to mess with a gang member while being undercover as one, but I was sure he wasn’t apart of Jesse’s gang. Jesse would take care of late payments himself. “Thank y-you.” The other guy choked out, and I walked over to him, kneeling down. His face was definitely going to have many bruises tomorrow, but he’s lucky to be alive.

“Listen, don’t ever risk such a great thing for money or drugs or whatever. Your kids would be heartbroken to have to grow up without their father,” I told him, helping him up. I pulled my phone out of my back pocket and dialed 911, briefly telling them what happened.

“I won’t, never again,” he said, shaking his head, tears forming in his eyes. Damn, why must everyone cry when I’m with them.

“You still got it Riles,” Joey said shaking his head with a smile playing at his lips.

“I know,” I said, sending him a wink. Joey walked over and handcuffed the guy on the ground who was finally coming to it. I helped the guy leaning on me move so he was sitting against the brick wall. Looking at the time on my phone, I knew I should get out of sight. Jesse had eyes everywhere and that includes the people who were suppose to be most trusted, the cops.

“I’ll be in the car,” I told Joey.

He nodded.

“I’ve got it here. I’ll explain everything to them,” he said.

I pecked his cheek.

“Thanks J.”

I headed to the car, sitting on the passenger side. I laid down so my body wouldn’t be seen through the window. It only took fifteen minutes for everything to be settled before we started on our way back to the house.

“Joey, I think you should come undercover with me,” I said.

He glanced at me, looking surprised before looking back at the road.

“I can’t.” He shook his head, frowning. “We would only get caught. They know I’m here, and they’re already suspicious about why you aren’t with us.”

I let out a deep breath. I knew he was right but part of me hated going undercover by myself in such a serious case. Yes, I’m suppose to be the best agent there is at the EA agency, but even I get worried about being by myself when there are too many threats to count.

“You’re fine.”

He grabbed my hand and sent me a loving smile. I don’t know why it took me so long to see it, but at this point in my life I couldn’t imagine myself with anyone else besides Joey. He was the love of my life, and I couldn’t wait for the day when we would really settle down and start our lives.

About ten minutes later we finally reached the house. Quickly rushing out of the car, I ran inside, opening the door. “Joey?” Matt called, peeking his head out of the kitchen.

I couldn’t stop the wide smile from spreading across my face.

“Riley?” he asked, causing two more familiar heads to look this way.

“Bloody hell, I’ve really missed you guys,” I said, running over and giving them all a group hug.

“We’ve missed you too,” Emily said, squeezing me even tighter before releasing me.

“Wow, you really learned how to dress like a slut, huh?” Rachel joked.

I winked.

“You know it.”

“Last time I saw you, you were pointing guns at us,” Liam said.

I wrapped my arms around him.

“It’s been awhile. You spend more time here in America than you do at home,” I said, pulling away and he shrugged.

“I’ve really started to like it here,” he said.

My smile turned into a frown.

“Now as great as it is having you here, you are suppose to be running my agency,” I said, pursing my lips as he rubbed the back of his neck.

“Lex has it taken care of and Joey called me in,” he said.

I raised an eyebrow looking at Joey.

“Oh did he?” I said and he nodded.

“Party in the agent house.” Joey started fist pumping, causing everyone to just shake their heads.

“So Joey filled us in a little, but I think you need to explain everything that’s going on. Is that plan with Claire still going on?” he asked.

I turned my head to the side a little, scratching the side of my face.

“Kind of, I can’t exactly plan anything with her because the gang interfered.”

“How so?” Matt asked, leaning his body against the wall with his arms crossed over his chest.

“They got Claire’s doctor fired, and now they substituted someone in the gang named Keith Mabry as her doctor,” I said.

Liam sneered.

“What? How are you just sitting back and letting this happen?” he hissed at me.

I narrowed my eyes.

"I'm just doing my job, and only about seven people from the gang know about this, so if she suddenly finds out and changes doctors, the first person they're going to look at is me."

"Well, people rarely go to their doctors," Liam said, calming himself down.

"Usually, but Liam she's pregnant," I said.

He looked heartbroken. I remember him telling me the story about a girl who he fell in love with, but Cole wouldn't allow the relationship to continue on. I felt my heart clench at the sight of him. There was nothing I could do to help him. There are just too many people who wanted Claire.

"How far along?" he asked, taking a seat at the table.

"She has to be at least a couple months. She's starting to show," Emily said.

He bit his lip and clenched his fists.

"So what's the plan?" Joey asked, grabbing an apple from the bowl on the counter.

Everyone stayed silent, thinking. What could we possibly do to stop all of this?

"We need Claire to get close with Jesse," Rachel said.

Joey chuckled.

"Rach, you're a little late," she scowled and shook her head.

"No, I mean she needs to get close to him. No fake little meetings trying to get them close. We just simply need to remind her about the contract and start having some accidental meetings," Rachel said, biting her nail as she thought more about it.

"How does this stop the whole gang? Getting Jesse distracted will only cause Keith to take over," I said.

Emily cut in.

"No, I get what she's saying. If we can get Jesse really distracted then we can start moving in. We can start shutting this thing down," Emily said, shaking her finger and getting that look on her face when she thinks something's a good idea.

"Okay, so let's say Jesse's distracted and Keith is temporarily in charge. I don't understand how we stop it?" Matt said. Yes, this plan seemed confusing but something about it made sense.

"How much does Keith know about Clover Thompson?" Liam asked.

I shrugged.

"Probably not much. We had to explain to him who Claire was," I said.

He smirked.

“Clover had be Keith's distraction then,” he suggested.

We all nodded, agreeing with the idea.

“Great, we got two people down. Now please explain to me how we’re supposed to stop the other four hundred people,” Matt asked, looking at us like we were a bunch of idiots. I thought about it for a second before shaking my head.

“We don’t.”

Chapter 12

Claire's Point of View

I moaned slightly in my half-awake state as I felt a hand caressing my abdomen. My stomach clenched a little at the odd feeling. Finally, I opened my eyes to see Caiden staring at me.

"Good morning," I mumbled, moving closer. "How long have you been awake?"

"About an hour," he murmured, standing directly in my eyes. His hand was still on my abdomen and it didn't seem like he was going to move it anytime soon.

"I have to go to work today," I frowned.

He shook his head.

"You can miss another day," he told me.

I placed my hand on the side of his face and gave him a closed-mouth kiss, pulling away after a minute.

"I can't. I've missed too many already. Everything is probably behind," I said before sitting up. Caiden removed his hand and sat up as well.

"I love you," he told me suddenly, pressing me close to his body. I frowned, not hiding my confusion for all the sudden affection. I unintentionally scrunched up my nose as I studied him carefully.

"Are you drunk?" I asked, and he chuckled, wrapping his arms around me, placing his head in the crook of my neck.

"Hey Claire, do you have any – oh God, are you two about to have sex?!" Clover yelled suddenly covering her eyes. Andrew poked his head in and smirked.

"Get it man!" Caiden pulled away from me and scowled.

"Why the hell are they staying here again?"

"We were not. Now, what was it you needed?" I asked.

Clover removed her hands before walking over and plopping herself down on the bed.

"Do you have any aspirin? "

"In the right side of the cupboard above the sink," I told her.

“Thanks! I ended up getting a few photo shoots scheduled for today so I won’t be back here till late tonight. Andrew and I are going out to dinner after,” she said, smiling sweetly at Andrew who returned it.

“What about the other two?” Caiden asked curiously.

“I don’t think they’ll be here either,” Clover said, shrugging as she stood up. “Did you guys decide on a name yet?” she asked. I shook my head. I haven’t even told him about the gender yet.

“Awe well, definitely let me know when you do!” she said and I smiled.

“Don’t worry I will,” I said before watching her leave the room.

“Speaking of, I have to tell you something,” I said, grabbing his hands and looking at him.

“What is it?” he asked curiously.

“We’re having a boy,” I blurted.

He stared at me blankly for a minute.

“Cool.”

I blinked once, twice, and even three times, hoping he would add to the statement, but that was it. I guess he honestly didn’t care anything about him. I was going to have to do this all alone. The thought made my eyes tear up. Gosh, I’ve become such a baby.

“Yeah,” I mumbled, releasing his hands and getting out of bed.

“Do you have any pictures?” he asked suddenly, surprising me. I nodded and opened the drawer in the little table beside our bed. I handed him the envelope before leaving the room. I quickly brushed my teeth and hair, not doing anything special. I was mentally giving myself a round of applause for taking a shower last night. I now had plenty of time to get ready. I was about to head back into the room, but then I heard it: Caiden was talking quietly. To who, I wasn’t sure. I put my back against the wall and strained my ears to listen carefully.

“I hope you grow up to look like just like your mother. And before you worry, I promise I’ll be the best father possible,” I heard him whisper. My heart clenched. It may seem weird to picture him talking to a picture, but it really wasn’t as weird as it seemed. I quietly tiptoed back to the bathroom before taking loud steps towards the room. I walked into the bedroom glancing at Caiden who watched me enter.

“When are you leaving?” I asked as I started pulling off my Soffe shorts and replacing them with black tights and then a pair of black jean shorts. I slipped on a nice white shirt and necklace and then a black blazer. The outfit did nothing to hide my bump, but I didn’t mind. I wasn’t ashamed of

being pregnant, I thought, as I placed my hand on my stomach. I looked in the mirror as Caiden came up behind me, placing his arms around me, his hand on top of mine.

“Whenever I feel like it,” he said, and I couldn’t help the smile that played on my lips.

“Why am I not surprised?” I brought my head back, pursing my lips. He placed his on mine, giving me a quick peck. Girls, this is exactly why we get boyfriends taller than us.

“Because I do what I want,” he said, smirking.

I shook my head.

“It was a rhetorical question,” I told him. He simply shrugged.

“I’m stopping to get a latte before work, so I’ll see you later,” I said, pulling out of his arms and slipping on my black heels, making us the same height. He kissed my lips once again before mumbling a goodbye.

I took about ten minutes to get to the closest café, and I smiled at the wonderful aroma when I walked in. Looking at the menu, I frowned remembering something.

No coffee when pregnant.

After waiting in a line for a minute, I walked up to the counter I ordered a raspberry lemonade. It took only a minute for it to be made before I was able to leave. A familiar figure caught my eye in the corner.

Ignore him, just go to work.

I couldn’t help myself from walking over and sitting across the man.

“Claire," Jesse breathed out, looking at me in surprise.

“Hi,” I said softly, looking at him carefully. He was wearing a light blue shirt with jeans. His hair was in the sunlight that streamed through the cafe.

“How have you been?” he asked me with a guarded expression, worried that I would get mad at him.

“I’ve been well, and you?”

“I’m sorry, for everything. You know I would never want to intentionally hurt you,” he told me, holding his coffee cup tightly in his hand. I looked out the window not responding. “I know it’s hard to believe, but you mean the world to me. You make me want to become a better person.”

“Then why don’t you?” I questioned.

He chuckled.

"That's like asking someone why they aren't happy after everyone they've cared for has been killed," Jesse said, his blue eyes looking into mine seriously. I was at loss for words, not sure what to say.

"I don't understand your feelings for me, Jesse," I said honestly. "We talked for a few months at most," I said thinking back to a week after we first met.

~~~~~~~~

I let my eyes skim around the room, looking for a familiar face. I smiled when I caught sight of the man I met the other night. I walked forward, standing next to the table the handsome man was sitting at. He was dressed in a nice black buttoned-up shirt and a black blazer. His hair had tons of curls everywhere. His five o'clock shadow was now even darker and more noticeable.

"Claire," Jesse said, standing up and smiling at me.

"Hi," I said smiling as well. He pulled out my chair for me, letting me take a seat before returning to his own. "You picked a nice place," I said, looking around the restaurant.

"I thought you'd like it," he said, not taking his eyes off of me. "You look beautiful."

"You don't look too bad yourself. I could barely recognize you now," I told him.

He chuckled.

"I clean up nicely, huh?" He sent me a wink, causing me to shake my head at him, my smile only widening.

"How do you like Seattle?" I asked him curiously, trying to strike up a conversation.

"It's nice. I'm used to crazy Los Angeles, so it's nice to see somewhere new. The only place my older brother took me when I was younger was New York and that was back in high school," he said.

"What about your parents? Didn't they ever take you anywhere?" I asked curiously, and a dark look crossed his face.

"Parents? I don't know what those are. They never existed in my life. For all I know they're dead," he said.

I couldn't help frown as I looked at him carefully, studying his face. Something in his eyes made him seem so dark, so sad.

"I can understand the feeling of never going anywhere. I've only ever lived here. I've never really wanted to go anywhere else I guess," I said, biting my lip as I thought of all the places there are. Sure it would be nice to go visit Paris or London, but it's something I could live without. I was happy here with all of my friends, Caiden, and my job.
~~~~~~~~

"Maybe one day we can go visit somewhere cool. Italy has always sounded nice," he said before taking a sip out of his wine.

"I don't think that could ever happen. My boyfriend probably wouldn't like that and work seems to consume my life these days," I said.

His grip on his glass tightened.

"Your boyfriend would be welcomed of course and you own the business. I'm sure they wouldn't mind if you took some time off. A week at most," he said just before a waiter came over. He took our orders before disappearing again. I took a sip out of my own glass before responding.

"You're right then. Maybe one day we can go," I responded softly after thinking about it.

"That's the spirit," he said, doing a little swing with his arm.

"When are you planning on going back home?" I asked him suddenly.

"Thanks to my past I no longer have a place I call home there. I was considering about making a new one here," he told me.

My curiosity spiked. What happened in his past that hurt him? And why did he remind me so much of Caiden?

"If you don't mind me asking, what happened?"

Jesse didn't seem surprised that I asked and only looked away, down at the table.

"My brother got me into some trouble, and now I'll only relive that life every day if I ever went back." He looked disgusted as he spoke.

"Like you said before, you should stay here and make a new life. You don't have to go into detail about what happened, but you shouldn't let it define who you are. Who cares what happened before here? You're in a new place, make new memories, make new friends, find a new love. It's your life Jesse, so don't let anyone control how you live it," I said placing my hand on top of his. He looked at me for a long time, making me feel awkward. I removed my hand and used it to pick up my drink, not sure what to say.

"Thank you, Claire," Jesse whispered, his voice hoarse. I stared at him, watching as he let out a deep, unsteady breath. He closed his eyes for a long minute looking down before he looked back up at me. He cleared his throat. "Enough with this sad stuff. Let's go have some fun."

"Wait, what about dinner?" I asked, watching him stand up.

"We can get something later," he said, throwing a fifty down on the table before holding out his hand for me to stand up and take. I shook my head in amusement and grabbed it.

"Where are we going?"

"Where else do you go at seven o'clock on a Monday night?" he asked, wiggling his eyebrows. He surprised me by driving us all the way to the beach.

"Jesse! It's October!" I hissed as we stood in the sand, my heels now forgotten in the car.

"And? Don't tell me you're one of those overly professional girls who are too afraid to have a little fun," he said pouting.

I lightly smacked his chest.

"Cute, but no. I'm not even close to being afraid Farone," I said, narrowing my eyes playfully before rushing off into the water. I didn't mind that my gray, long, lace dress was getting all wet as I stood knee deep in the ice-cold water. I watched as Jesse slowly shrugged off his jacket and took off his shoes and socks.

"C'mon Farone, let's not be a baby now," I said.

A light smile appeared on his face.

"Not all of us have closets full of expensive clothes. Some of us have to take care of the few nice outfits they have," Jesse said, defending himself.

I rolled my eyes.

"Don't think you completely know me. If I remember correctly, you told me all about you. I don't remember me telling you anything about me," I said as he walked into the water, his pants rolled up.

What a baby.

"Your name is Claire Martez, you're twenty-eight years old, and you own your own fashion company. You've never traveled anywhere besides here and you have some mysterious boyfriend. Am I missing anything?" he asked, looking confident with himself.

"I went undercover in an all boys school."

He stared at me for a good two minutes, waiting for me to start laughing or something.

"You can't be serious?" he asked, looking at me with wide eyes.

"It's a real thing that happened. That's how I met my boyfriend, Caiden. He was my roommate," I told him, moving my foot in the water.

"That's the craziest thing I've ever heard," he said bursting out laughing. It was nice to see someone so carefree as he bent over, hands on his knees as he laughed.

"It's not funny!" I pouted.

He nodded.

"You're right, that's not funny, it's absolutely hysterical," he said in between laughing.

"Hey, that had to be the most exciting part of my life!" I tried defending myself as I cracked a smile while he laughed even harder.

"Well, Claire Martez, I must say it's a good thing I took the time to get to know you because information like that is very valuable for blackmail," he said after calming down.

"Good luck with that. This kid Jax once blackmailed me over it, and in the end I'm pretty sure he was the one who turned me in," I said, rolling my eyes.

"Hmm, he sounds like an asshole."

"Yeah, he's a complete douche. I only dealt with him because he was my ex-boyfriend's friend."

"You getting more and more interesting every time I talk to you," he said smiling, and I shrugged.

"It's cause I got that Martez charm," I said, winking, and I pretended to wipe off fake dusk.

"Well, has anyone every told you that you're a complete dork?" he asked me.

I smiled, thinking about my little brother.

"Yeah, quite a few times."

~~~~~~

I let a sad smile slip onto my face as I thought back to all of our good times. Why did he have to be a killer?

"I've never had someone treat me how you did, and whenever I imagine you not in my life I see myself ending up in a place pretty close to hell," Jesse said.

I bit my lip as I stared at the almost unfamiliar man now.

"I've told you this before: you can't let anyone else control how you live your life. That includes even me Jesse," I said softly. He looked out the window. Riley wanted me to get through to Jesse and make a connection with him, but maybe that wasn't the way to stop all of this. The only way I could stop him was by opening him up to the part of the world he's missing.

"Your heart is made of gold, Claire Martez," Jesse said, standing up and shaking his head. He leaned forward and placed a long kiss on my cheek before slipping on his coat and pulling his head away. "But killing is necessary to survive. Killing is how you succeed. And killing is how you don't get caught," he told me with no emotion before leaving the cafe. I placed my hand on my cheek as I stared out the window, watching as he walked down the sidewalk with his head down. Maybe the
~~~~~~

Jesse I knew is still somewhere inside of there. Standing up with my drink, I decided to finally head to work, everything else pushed out of my head. I needed to focus.

***

Taylor's Point of View

I smirked as I watched Clover rush out of the back of some building. I walked slowly down the alley, hands in pockets.

"Paparazzi a little crazy, huh?" I asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Do I know you?" she said.

I shook my head.

"No, but I like to think I'm someone that you'd like to be acquainted with," I said, holding my arms out.

"Yeah, that's what everyone around out there likes to think too. Just keep moving buddy," she said, rolling her eyes as she took out her phone. I noticed a few people coming from the right and left making me frown. They were from the gang.

"You need to turn around and walk straight down that pathway," I whispered in her ear. She looked up, she looked around, and her eyes widened as she noticed the group of men coming towards her. She did exactly as I said and started walking. I lifted my black hood over my head and kept my head down as I walked next to her.

"Who are you, and who are they?" she whispered, glancing behind to see them now behind us.

"Not important. They're from the gang."

Her eyes flashed understanding as she nodded.

"Are you with Riley?" she asked. Riley? Does that mean she was here?

"Riley's here?" I asked as we fastened our pace, taking a sudden right.

"I'll take that as a no then," she muttered before pausing and placing her hand on the brick wall as she started to remove her heels.

"What the hell are you doing? You can't do that later?" I hissed. They were only a minute behind us at least.

"They hurt," she said, undoing one strap at a time. "Plus all that's back here is mud and disgusting water," she said distastefully.

I shook my head just as the familiar looking guys appeared.

“Back off Taylor. Jesse told us to collect her,” a guy named Mike said.

I shook my head. Clover looked at me in shock as if she recognized the name from somewhere.

“You see I can’t let you do that,” I said, pulling down my hood.

“And why is that?” he asked, narrowing his eyes.

“Because what would be the fun in that.”

Mike looked at the guys behind him before nodding. All four of them started heading towards me, the other two heading towards Clover. She struggled against their grips, and I shook my head. A bunch of amateurs.

As my gaze was focused on Clover, I didn’t notice the fist flying forward. My face turned to the side from the impact, and I placed my hand on my face, rubbing my jaw. Shaking my head, I responded by letting my leg fly up and kicking him in the chest. My elbow went back and hit the other guy who was coming up behind me in the jaw. Another guy came up and grabbed my leg as I tried to kick him and in response I slammed my head against his. The guy stumbled back holding his head, and I held back the wince from the pain. The fourth guy attempted to punch me, but my reflexes were too fast and in one swift moment he was flipped over and laying on the ground. He attempted to get back up, but I slammed my fist into his face.

I headed over to the two guys who were nervously watching me while holding a struggling Clover. I grabbed one of the guys by the back of his neck and slammed my knee into his stomach about three times before he fell over. The last guy tried to be smooth by jumping on me. His weight made me stumble back and trip over another body. He attempted to throw a few punches, but I moved my head from side to side, just barely missing the hits. I hit my knee into his stomach and managed to flip his body over mine before standing up and letting my boot hit the side of his face, knocking him out.

“Wait you’re Taylor? You’re a part of that gang?” Clover said, trying to unnoticeably take steps away from me.

“I just saved your ass so you should know that I won’t hurt you,” I said, crossing my arms over my chest and leaning against the wall.

“Why were they here? Why did you help me?” Clover asked before rubbing her hands down her face and shaking her head, fear evident on her face.

“Jesse must have sent an order to collect you. And because I’m not the enemy here Clover,” I said, my voice softening at the end.

“He really takes this whole wanting me dead thing to a new level,” she muttered, taking her phone out of her pocket.

“Listen, you can’t tell anyone I helped you. Just tell everyone you managed to escape. But earlier you asked if I’m with Riley – does that mean she is here?” I asked.

Clover kept her mouth shut. I walked over, snatching the phone out of her hand.

“Does that mean she’s here?” I repeated.

She looked away from me.

I sighed at her stubbornness. Thinking about the past and her going undercover, I tried to think of all the new girls who recently entered the gang. There were three of them. I knew for sure she wasn’t the one with dark skin, and I knew she couldn’t be the one who looked like she’d been doing cocaine since she was a baby.

“She’s that new girl, what’s her name again?” I mumbled to myself. “Reese, she’s Reese isn’t she?” I took her eyes widening as a yes.

“Dammit, she should be smarter than this,” I hissed before looking closely at Clover. I placed my hands on her shoulder, causing her to finally look at me in the eyes again.

“Never go out by yourself anymore. And remember you never saw me,” I told her before handing her phone back and taking out my own. I texted a familiar number for clean up before leaving all the men that were out cold. Clover ran after me and attempted to keep up with my pace.

“What are you going to do about them?” she hissed, looking back at them. “I’m sure Jesse is going to find it odd that you beat up the guys that were sent to get me and—"

I placed my hand over her mouth and pulled her back against the brick wall. Her back was against my chest, but I didn’t dare to move. There was the devil himself walking out of a cafe. Clover tried to say something but stopped trying when she realized I wasn’t going to remove my hand. My eyes narrowed when through the window I could see Claire sitting there. What was Jesse doing with her?

“Something is up. Just go back inside your little photoshoot thing and don’t leave until someone comes to pick you up. And Clover, don’t trust anyone you don’t know,” I told her after Jesse was out of sight. I released her, and she nodded before rushing off towards the way we came, awkwardly jumping over the bodies.

Once she was gone I knew I had to get back to one place and that was the gang house.

***

Jesse's Point of View

I walked down the sidewalk, hands in my pockets. Thoughts of Claire didn't leave my head, making me punch my fist into the building I walked past. She consumed my thoughts – her body, her face, her hair, her eyes, her smell, the innocent look she'd get on her face when she was thinking. Everything about her screamed for my attention.

"I've told you this before – you can't let anyone else control how you live your life. That includes even me Jesse."

She made it sound so easy, but my life would be different if she'd just leave fucking Anderson completely. She claims they broke up, yet they still live in the same house together. I wasn't a fucking idiot. I could tell when she lied and I'm not exactly a stranger when it came to her. We spent so many great times together it was almost impossible not to love her.

"Jesse, you should meet Caiden. He's a little distant at first, but I could see you two being good friends. You have so much in common," Claire insisted, smiling at me.

I stared at the smile grazing her lips before nodding.

"As much as I'd love to I agree that that's a good idea, it's not. I'm sure he already hates me for spending every other day with his girlfriend," I told her.

She frowned.

"More like every few days, but he doesn't mind. I think he's getting a bit curious about you, though," she said as she took a large bite out of her cookie dough blizzard. "I'm starting to hang out with you more than Nathan, and he's my best friend ever."

"I promise I'll meet him sometime soon," I told her. She stuck out her tongue at me, making me chuckle. She was a fully-grown woman, yet sometimes she still acted like she was still a child.

"Claire?" a voice asked, causing her to look over and jump up from her chair. Her arms flung around the male's neck, making me glare at the guy.

"Gosh, Jeff, I haven't seen you in forever," she said, pulling back.

He rubbed his hand on her head, making her hair go out of place

"Yeah, it's been a while. How's Caiden? I haven't got any cards about any engagement," the guy named Jeff asked, raising an eyebrow.

I scowled.

"He's great. I thought he was going to propose about a month ago, but it never happened," she said shrugging, a small frown slipping on her face.

“That man needs to get on it. I mean at this rate I’m going to be getting married before you,” he said.

She rolled her eyes.

“Hey, let’s not forget who you even got that little Martez charm from,” Claire said.

It was his time to roll his eyes.

“Definitely not my big sister,” he said, causing her to pout. A woman appeared at the man's side and Claire pulled her into a hug as well.

“Kim, it’s great to you! I see you’re taking care of my little bro well,” Claire said sending her a gentle smile. She nodded. So he was her brother then. I stood up and decided to make my presence known by standing next to Claire.

“Hey, I’m taller than you!”

“Yeah, it’s hard to believe you ever put up living with him so long. He’s a pig,” she said, shaking her head.

He placed a kiss on her cheek, causing her to groan.

“Ew, what are you, a dog?” she said, wiping her cheek with her hand.

Claire chuckled at the couple.

“Ew, Jeff,” Claire muttered, shaking her head in disgust. “Oh, by the way, Jesse, this is my brother Jeff and his girlfriend Kim,” she quickly introduced. I held out my hand, giving them both a polite smile.

“It’s nice to meet you,” I said, shaking their hands.

“I’m surprised you even have any friends still. All you do is work. You can’t even come to your brother’s new apartment,” he said dramatically. I couldn’t help but smirk as I watched the siblings and she slapped his arm.

Thinking back to the sweet encounter, I thought how strange the encounter was. If my brother treated me in such a way and didn’t end up dragging me to prison with him, then I probably wouldn’t be such a cold-hearted killer. I walked into the liquor store where one of my guys was working. I paid for a bottle of whiskey before leaving again. The prison was what made me into this killer I am. It made me into something that I never wanted to be. I remember the days when I first got there, and all I wished for is a different life. Caring parents, loving brother, or even a house that didn’t smell like pot everywhere. That thought didn’t take long to disappear when they let us out to have lunch together at the prison.

"This place isn't that bad," Jackson said, taking a seat in front of me. I ignored him, looking at the food in disgust. He acted like it was some temporary place. I was going to spend nine years here – nine years I could have used to turn my life around.

"You spend your time moping around here or you can grow a pair. You need to get it through your head, Jesse. Killing is necessary to survive. Killing is how you succeed. Killing is how you don't get caught."

I stared at the bottle in my hand and threw it against the house. The glass flew everywhere, but I didn't care and only went inside.

"Jesse, they didn't return. I think the agents got to them," Jacob said.

I sneered at him.

"I want Clover Thompson in my possession. Why is it so hard for one of you to get her? I've dealt with those agents before. They aren't as scary as they look. All it takes is one fucking shot and they're dead. They aren't the only ones who trained," I hissed at everyone nearby.

"But some of us don't kill and you know that. We don't want to all end up in prison like you when those agents take us out," a guy said.

I looked at him. I couldn't remember his name, which meant he wasn't important anyways. I grabbed a gun out of the back of my waistband and didn't hesitate to pull the trigger. The bullet flew through the air and hit directly in the center of his forehead. His body hit the ground, his empty eyes wide open as he laid there motionless.

"Killing is necessary to survive. Killing is how you succeed. Killing is how you don't get caught," I told everyone around me as a girl ran over to him, sobbing.

"How could you?" she hissed, looking at me with hatred.

I sent her a dark smirk.

"He should have known to shut his mouth," I told her.

She shook her head, pushing the hair out of the blonde's face. She laid her head on her brother's chest as she cried nonstop.

"Jesse, he was the one who told you about Clover," James said.

I looked over at the dead body and shrugged. "And he was living with her at the moment."

"Hmm, well shit happens and now he's not. I'm sure Jasmin can keep an eye on Mrs. Thompson by herself without the boy. Unless she wants to get something off her chest too?" I asked, turning my head to the side, daring her to argue as well.

“Don’t worry, I wouldn’t dare to mess with the oh so important Jesse Farone,” she said.

I shook my head.

“Learn how to hold your tongue or else you’re next,” I warned before walking away. I should have felt bad for killing the girl’s brother, but I couldn’t get myself to feel remorse. After all, killing is how you don’t get caught.

Chapter 13

Clover's Point of View

I glanced behind me and looked at Riley who was watching me carefully. She wasn't dressed in her normal attire; instead, she wore all black clothes with chains on her pants and combat boots. Her bright blue hair stood out, making me cringe. She definitely took the whole going undercover thing seriously. Joey sat next to her wearing a green wig and all black as well. They looked to be on a date, but I knew, in reality, they were watching me make the first move with a man named Keith Mabry.

Facing forward again, I knew it was time to finally enter the building a couple steps away. I glanced at the glass windows and took in my reflection. My hair was up in a high, tight ponytail, and I wore skin tight black capris and a gray sports bra. I had black headphones in and one of those phone holders on my arm for joggers. My black fingerless gloves were on, along with my all-black Nike shoes. My eyeliner and mascara were perfectly in place, yet I still looked as if I had just gone jogging with my semi-wet shoulders, forehead, and hair. Anyone who knew me could easily tell I was Clover Thompson since everything about me was the exact same except the new highlights I got put in. Instead of plain blonde hair, I now had caramel and blonde highlights. Yes, it wasn't a huge change, but I needed something new to show that I'm not that same girl I use to be. I'm now seriously in some risky business, and I needed to put my game face on. This was only the beginning.

Inside of this store awaited the one and only Keith Mabry, the same guy who Claire had no idea was faking to be her doctor. If going undercover was the new thing around here, then that's fine. I've done it before I could do it again. This was all a test to see if this guy knew who I was, a risky test I may add, but still a test.

Ding, ding.

The door jingled as I opened it and entered. It was a small, inconvenient store, but apparently it was where Keith was currently located.

I glanced around the small store. There were only about five aisles, which meant it should be fairly easy to find him since Riley showed me a picture beforehand. I headed over to the back where the drinks were located. I reached my hand out to grab a bottle of water but paused when another hand reached out for the same item. I immediately retracted my hand and removed my headphones, holding them tightly in my left hand. "I'm sorry!" I said looking up at the handsome man wearing a low cut black shirt, black jeans, and a black leather jacket. I saw his hair was all styled to one side, and it made me curious to how Claire couldn't realize this man screamed bad.

He looked at me closely and raised an eyebrow at most likely my appearance. “Just get done with a marathon?” he asked me.

I shrugged sending him a smile.

“Something like that,” I winked before grabbing the water. “I went on a short jog.” I shrugged and his eyes skimmed my body, making me mentally shutter in disgust. This body only belongs to one man, and it is definitely not this one.

“You sure you’re going to be able to pay for that?” he asked me, noticing my lack of pockets when I placed my headphones around my neck.

“Would I do this if I wasn’t going to?” I asked, opening the water and taking a long sip out of it.

“I don’t know. I probably would,” he said.

I bit my lip, turning my head to the side a little as I rubbed the back of my neck.

“Why am I not surprised.”

“Hey, you never gave me a name,” he said as he leaned against the cooler.

“You never asked,” I said simply.

He smirked.

“The name’s Keith.” He held out his hand. I put the water bottle underneath my left arm and shook his head carefully.

“I’m Key,” I said.

He chuckled.

“I’m guessing you don’t have a lock on you?” he said.

I gave him a blank look.

“It’s short for Keara,” I told him.

He rubbed his chin, looking like he was thinking.

“I don’t like it. I’ll call you Ky.”

I didn’t question it and only nodded.

“Where did that nickname come from?” he asked, following me as I headed toward the snack aisle.

“One of my friends gave it to me in grade school when I complained about everyone having a nickname besides me. Somehow it stuck all these years later.”

I lied as I pretended to look at the chips carefully. I wasn't doing too bad at keeping this act up and it seemed he honestly didn't know who I truly was.

"So do you run often?" he asked me.

I glanced at him with an amused smile.

"Every morning. I usually go to the gym at night as well," I told him, acting like it was nothing. In reality, I did run often to stay in shape, which was something that stuck with me from when Mary was my manager.

"Funny, I go to the gym sometimes at night too. I've never seen you there," he said.

I bit my lip as I felt his gaze still on me.

"I don't usually come down here often. I just so happened to go on a longer jog and found myself on this side of town."

I told him trying to hide my nervousness. C'mon Clo, you can do this.

"That's probably a good thing since it can get a little wild around here, especially with all of those recent murders," Keith said.

I couldn't help but look at him.

"Careful now, you don't want me to think you're the one doing the killing," I said, lightly elbowing him and cracking a smile to show I was joking.

"Has a pretty thing like you ever fought anyone off before?" he asked me, grabbing a few snacks and adding them to his basket, next to the 6 pack of glass beer bottles.

"I don't think I should tell you that," I said, taking a step closer and sending him a challenging look. I hoped I was actually giving off a seductive look like I give in magazines instead of some constipated look that some models get when they try it.

"How about tonight, you meet at the gym around the corner from here, and I could see how talented you really are," he suggested, taking a step closer so he was only a couple centimeters away. I smirked as I looked up at him.

"Most guys just ask to go out to dinner. You must be feeling a little too confident," I said, causing him to shrug as he smirked.

"I have a good feeling you won't be denying my offer," he said, bringing his face even closer to mine. I silently panicked at the closeness and took a step back, turning around and grabbing a random bag of chips.

"We'll see," I said, starting to walk away.

"See you at six," he yelled.

I didn't look back as I left the aisle and went to check out my two items. As soon as I left the store I released a long breath, looking up at the sky. Damn, I'm good. I didn't think I could pull something like that off. I guess living with Claire had some perks, seeing her and Caiden flirt when they thought no one was looking really helped me just now. Next time I need to stick with it, though, no matter where it leads. Unless it starts leading to sex, cause Andrew and I both agreed that's a definite no.

Riley and Joey stood up as they saw me beginning to head their way again. They slowly walked to their car and slid in. I glanced behind me when I got a good distance away to see Keith was still nowhere in sight and quickly got into the car as they pulled up next to me. Joey sped off and Riley finally looked back at me.

"How'd it go?"

"I'm meeting him later at the gym up here," I muttered.

She frowned.

"That's good, so what's wrong?" she asked me.

I looked out the window.

"I think I'm going to puke. He thinks I can fight. Does it look like I can fight?" I asked, getting louder at the end.

"Yes, you look very fit, which is why this is the perfect job for you. We can have someone back at the house help teach you a bit, but overall you did great. Now, what do you do if someone questions you about being Lucky?" She asked me again for what felt like the millionth time.

"I just tell them they must have me mixed up with the wrong girl because my name's Keara. But I'm sure any paparazzi in Seattle is down by all of those top notch clubs," I said rolling my eyes. "Now tell me what exactly is the point of all of this again?"

"Claire is going to keep Jesse distracted, you're going to keep Keith distracted, and while you both have the two men's hearts in your hands, the rest of the gang is going to start falling apart and we're going to let it. Then eventually, I will get them all to turn against the two, and I'll find out all their dirty gang secrets," she said as if it was the simplest thing in the world.

"And finally, we'll be able to let the gang fall apart by itself and put an end to all of this once in for all, " Joey added.

"What about me and Keith? And how long is this suppose to take because I think Andrew's sister will eventually get tired of taking care of our kids like my mom did," I said.

Riley looked at Joey.

"Don't worry it should only take a month at most. It just depends on how long it takes you to get a cold-hearted man to fall in love with you," Riley said.

I didn't respond. Andrew and I had it easy. We were like soulmates. We fell in love so easily all through that Katy situation. Even Damien wasn't that bad before he turned into a cheating jackass. We knew each other for quite some time.

"He's not as cold as Claire's boyfriend, so it shouldn't be that hard," I said.

Riley shared a look with her fiance.

"Yeah, but at the same time from what I've come to find out is that Keith isn't stupid. If you mess up and do anything suspicious, he would immediately stop trusting you and at the point you're better off dead, so watch your back," Joey warned me.

I nodded, not responding. How did my life change so fast? I missed being at home and hanging out with Tori as our daughters tried to chase after Xavier to paint his nails. I only silently hoped I could go back to all of that soon.

***

Jasmin's Point of View

I walked up to the house, not caring that blood was all over my hands and on my face too. I was done hiding – they needed to know everything. Jesse was a monster. Chris only stated a simple fact that was true for many people in the gang, yet he shot him without a single drop of remorse. He killed him. He killed my brother and then threatened my life. If he thought everything was going to fine, then he was wrong.

"Jasmin?" Clover asked, getting out of a car with unfamiliar faces. She looked at me wearily and I only stared back blankly.

"Is that blood?" she asked.

I looked down at my hands.

"Yes."

"Jas, who's blood is that? Is it yours or is it someone else's?" Clover asked slowly.

I couldn't help but let out a dark chuckle.

“Oh, how I wish it was,” I said before closing my eyes and shaking my head. I felt my knees hit the concrete, and Clover ran over to me. She placed her arms around my body.

“Shh, it’s okay,” she whispered, rocking me back and forth.

“What happened?” a woman asked, stepping out of the passenger seat of the car. I didn’t respond and Clover repeated the same question as her.

“They killed h-him,” I stated, my voice cracking at the end. “They killed him.”

“Jasmin, who killed who?”

“Chris, the gang killed Chris,” I said, looking up at the woman.

She stood up, looking at the man in the car who was getting out.

“Okay, Jasmin, you’re going to have to tell us how they killed him.”

I didn’t respond and only stared at the grass.

“You can tell them, they’re agents, they’re here to help,” Clover reassured me softly, but I could hear by the tone of her voice she was upset, and my eyes snapped up to theirs. No, no, this is bad. This is really bad.

“You can’t be here,” I hissed at them.

“Why?”

“They’re watching me. They’re watching you, every single one of you,” Clover slowly released me and stood up.

“We should go inside,” Clover stated. We all nodded. We all entered Claire’s house and I was silently thankful her and Caiden weren’t home. It would only make this even more, difficult.

“How do you know?” the woman asked. I looked at her carefully as I sat at the kitchen table.

“I know because I’ve been following Jesse Farone for over 10 years,” I said, not even hesitating.

“You’re an agent?” the man asked.

I smirked looking at them.

“An agent? Now that’s a crazy idea. I’m a gang member. I followed Jesse’s order in high school, and even when he was in prison I was still following his secret notes and helping get things ready for him so he could come back and start his new business, his assassin business.”

“You’ve been watching me this whole time?” Clover looked disgusted with me as she dropped the glass cup she was holding.

"Yes, but I didn't have a choice. When we met you in New York, Chris told Jesse about you and Jesse wanted you, but he knew it wasn't the time then. You were too big, too new, and too known."

"So then you know why Jesse's after her then? It's not just about a death wish," the woman said.

I looked at her carefully.

"Who are you?" I asked.

She rolled her eyes and took off a wig.

"The name's Riley Scott and that's Joey Maxwell. I'm sure you've heard of us," she said, staring at me without any sort of friendliness.

"So you are here then," I said, staring at the blonde. I've seen her before. She was that new girl in the gang. "You've been going undercover."

"Yes, that's a discussion for another time. You're going to explain to us why Clover was being hunted and why you are telling us all of this now," Joey said seriously with his arms crossed against his chest as he leaned against the counter.

"My brother Chris told Jesse about her years ago when we first met Clover in New York. As a result Jesse got interested in her money, but when she came here another case was opened up about her. A woman offered to pay over hundred thousand dollars to get this girl assassinated so Jesse wants all of her money and then he wants to dispose of her forever," I said.

Clover started to hyperventilate.

"I thought you were my friend!" she yelled.

I stared at her sadly.

"I am! Maybe, at first, it was all fake, but then you grew on me and I realized I cared for you and Andrew. You became my best friends—"

"Best friends don't try to get each other killed!" she hissed.

I bit my lip – if only she knew who was trying to get her killed.

"I know and I'm sorry! It was either you or me, and I couldn't die. I was only eighteen back then and if I backed out and ran I would be like Caiden who has a death wish too. I would be tracked down until I'm killed," I told her and she shook her head, trying to wipe away any of the tears forming.

"You're disgusting. I hope Jesse knows you failed, then you can have the same fate of always running and I won't have to deal with you anymore," Clover yelled at me before leaving the room.

“Why are you telling us all of this?” Joey asked.

I looked at him.

“Because Jesse killed my brother and that was the last straw. My brother didn’t want to kill and as a result he got killed for it!” I told them.

Riley stared at me.

“You’re going to be a great use to us.”

I stared at her confused before it clicked.

“No, I won’t work against Jesse. Anyone who works against him ends up dead, and I’m not ready to die. I have a husband back at home! My brother had kids and a wife, and he lost all of that by making one simple comment against him. I won’t risk it.”

“You really don’t have much of a choice. You just admitted to helping to try to get Clover Thompson killed, and I’d say murder is a pretty big crime that I’m definitely sure the agency around here won’t mind dealing with. Who knows what other murders around here you helped with?” Riley said.

I looked down ashamed. I may not kill people myself, but I can’t say I haven’t helped with leading people to their death. Disgusting, I know.

“Hello?” Claire yelled out.

“In the kitchen," Riley yelled out.

“Hurry, come here, I’m in the living room,” she said, sounding out of breath. We all ran to the living room to see her turning up the volume on the TV.

“What’s going on?” Joey asked.

She glanced at him.

“It’s all over the radio and the news. A small plaza a couple blocks from here just got blown up,” Claire said looking at us. Her eyes glanced at the blood on me but she didn’t question it.

“A whole plaza?”

“In the broad daylight?”

“Jesse wouldn’t be that stupid,” I told them.

“So far they said 30 are announced dead and ten injured. They’ve only been in one building out of the four that were down there,” Claire said, looking disgusted.

"There are no other big gangs around here that would make such a move," I said.

I heard Clover scoff from behind me.

"You would know, wouldn't you?"

I looked back at her to see her send me a glare. I knew I deserved it so I only turned around again.

"Okay I don't know what's going on between you two, but what are we going to do about this?" Claire asked.

Riley raised an eyebrow.

"We?"

"Yes, we're a team now. We can do this together."

Clover agreed and I watched a wide smile appear on Joey's face. Riley just stared at the two of them for a moment before the corner of her lip started to twitch as she tried to hold back a smile.

"You two are already doing your jobs, you don't need to help with anything else. There are plenty more of us to do this job," Riley assured them.

"We can kick some ass. You told me you'd help learn how to fight," Clover said, doing a quick kick in the air.

"Claire's pregnant," Joey pointed out and she frowned.

"I can still help. No one said I had to fight," she retorted.

Riley bit her lip thinking.

"Plus I'm still pretty good when it comes to charming people."

"We'll see how this goes. Let's go then," Riley said before looking at me.

"You're staying here. You can try to go back and tell Jesse everything, but we know your complete identity, and you just spilled everything so you'll either be killed by him or we'll lock you up. I'd make a wise choice and just listen," she told me and I nodded.

I wasn't going to go off to Jesse. He was the enemy now and couldn't be trusted. I watched as they all left the room, and I settled on a spot on the couch, bringing my feet up to my chest and placing my chin on my knees. I really felt all alone, and I wasn't sure if I could pick myself up from this.

Chapter 14

Claire's Point of View

We all arrived at the scene, but Riley made sure we were in the back so we wouldn't be caught on TV. Clover walked around looking at things, and as soon as she stepped away from a garbage can, something blew up inside. I was silently thankful she didn't get hurt.

"Okay, you two should know some rules," Riley said sternly, glancing at both of us. Clover had a sheepish look as she continued. "Rule number one of being an agent: don't die."

Joey snorted, "Huh, I guess I've been living this life wrong for a long time then. I usually try to go for the deathly experience, I mean we all know the saying 'live life to the fullest,' " Joey said.

Riley didn't seem to find it funny as she sent him a dark glare.

"So what are we doing exactly?" Clover asked. Riley sighed, sending Joey a look that I knew only he would understand.

"At this point, the cops have already looked for any civilians alive. Eventually, someone will come in and try to find the cause of the explosion, which will most likely be a bomb unless Jesse was actually smart enough to actually cover his tracks. Our jobs are to notice things out of the ordinary. For example, if you see all but one room burned to the ground I would obviously question it," Joey said.

"I want every single paper looked at and anything that is left checked. To be safe Joey and I will go into the main building were the root of the explosion came from. You two will go to one of the side buildings. If you get stopped by any remaining officers, which we should try to avoid, just say you're with us," I said simply.

"Okay, but one problem. What if someone from Jesse's gang is here and tries to make a move on one of us. I know the basics to fight, but you haven't exactly taught us anything that will help us," I said.

Another voice pitched in.

"That's exactly why we're here as well." Liam appeared in my view with Emily and Rachel by his side, and I stared at him speechless. I hadn't seen him since the day I went to the urgent care and found out I was pregnant.

"Emily, you can go with Clover and Liam go with Claire. Rach, you can come with us," Riley instructed and everyone nodded. I tried to hide my scowl and focused on the task at hand. "Meet back in forty minutes at the latest."

"You have got to be kidding me," I muttered to myself.

Don't be a baby.

"Soooo, how have you been?" Liam asked after walking in silence for a minute.

I shrugged.

"I've been better."

"Yeah, I heard you're pregnant now," he said casually.

I narrowed my eyes at him. That day he left before I got my results, so I knew for a fact he didn't find out from me. Geez, agents really are all up in your business.

"Yup," I said awkwardly before we stopped in front of a metal door that managed to stay in place. We were at the farthest building in the plaza so I had a feeling the left side, closest to the explosion, would be bad. Liam tried the door handle, but when it wouldn't open he looked at me.

"Hairpin," he said, holding out his palm.

I just looked at him.

"How do you know I have any?" I asked, crossing my arms over my chest stubbornly.

He chuckled.

"Because you're Claire. You always put pins in your hair," he stated truthfully. I rolled my eyes, removing a bobby pin that was keeping little pieces out of my face during work. He grabbed the hairpin from my hand and quickly managed to unlock the door.

The building was dark, and I tried the light switch, which unsurprisingly didn't work. Liam grabbed two small, black flashlights from a bag and handed me one. I turned it on and scanned the room. "So what is that we're looking for exactly? Just clues?" I asked.

"Basically yes, so guns, knives, jackets, really just anything," he said.

I nodded. This was a furniture place, so I knew it wouldn't be hard to find a clue. The place was pretty big so I decided to go to the back.

As soon as I walked into the back room, I found my back against a wall, the flashlight falling out of my grip as a hand was pressed over my mouth.

"Let's keep this conversation just between us okay?" Jax said smirking.

I glared at him, barely able to make out his face in the dark.

"You know I knew since day one that you and Caiden would be perfect together because you're so kind – it's your weakness," he said, letting his knuckles on his right hand run down my cheek.

"Jesse seems to want to do things the nice way with you and have you join him because you want to, but there's a little thing called Stockholm Syndrome, and let me tell you something – it works." I went to pull my knee up and hit him where the sun doesn't shine but he stopped me, quickly removing his hand from my mouth and grabbing my leg.

"Claire, be careful now. We don't want to forget about your little friend in there," Jax said, releasing my leg and placing his hand on my stomach making me feel sick.

"Go to hell," I hissed.

He smirked.

"What if I told you I've already been there and back," he asked.

I sent him a wry smile.

"I wouldn't be surprised."

I glanced at the door and still saw no sign of Liam. Jax didn't miss the movement and placed his index finger over my lips.

"Shh, don't worry, I won't hurt you, so there's no need to call for another one of your boy toys."

"What do you want with me then?" I asked.

He stepped away, dropping his hands and moving away a little, taking his time to answer the question as he sat in a spinny chair.

"I mean there's the obvious one that everyone wants from you, which is sex, but you'd be too annoying so I think we're going to play a game. That's okay with you, right?" he asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

"It would only take five seconds for me to escape this room or even call for Liam," I said, stepping closer to the door.

He looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

"Go ahead then, try it," Jax said before slipping a gun out of his pocket and clicking the safety off." C'mon Claire, we're feeling a little risky today, so try it out for me."

I didn't move and stayed put – one shot could kill me and if not me, then possibly the baby. The thought made me place a hand on my stomach.

"See I knew you could be smart sometimes. Now about that game?" he asked before making a movement with his hand for me to come closer. I did what he said and took a few steps closer to him.

"What's up with your gang and its stupid games?" I asked.

"Your gang, my gang. I actually like the sound of that," Jax said, tasting the words on his tongue before shaking his head. "But that's beside the point, we like to play with our friends a little, you know, to get them excited for everything that's going to be coming to them," he said standing up.

"Now Claire, I want you to meet me at this address, by yourself. And you're not going to tell anyone about this or our meeting later if you want one of your friends to stay alive, okay?" Jax asked.

I glared at him with hatred.

"Where?" I asked and he scribbled a hotel and a room number down on a piece of paper. The motel was on the sketchy part of town and every time I've ever seen it, it looked like it could fall to pieces.

"See you there in about an hour?" he asked. I narrowed my eyes, not responding.

"Bye Claire, see you soon. Say hello to Eddie for me next time you see him okay?"

His disgusting lips touched my cheek before he went out the emergency exit door a few feet away. I stared at the door for who knows how long, but I felt the familiar ache in my heart remembering my old friend. Jax deserved to rot in hell for everything he's ever done.

"Claire? You okay?" Liam asked me.

I plastered a fake smile on my face.

"I'm fine, perfectly fine," I said, picking up the flashlight and looking at him.

"Let's keep looking."

***

Riley's Point of View

Joey and I ended up splitting up, going into different buildings since we were both definitely strong enough to protect ourselves. I frowned when I found nothing in the half burned up store.

"Riley Scott, Reese Scott," a familiar voice said, as if they were testing my name on their tongue.

Wuickly turning around, pointing my gun at the figure, I caught sight of Taylor who was sitting on the counter where the register was.

“Sounds all the same to me.”

“Taylor, it’s been a while hasn’t it?” I asked, turning my head to the side a little as I looked at him through the flickering lights.

“Has it, though? I mean we just spoke yesterday, but maybe you’re right because that’s all just one of those fake undercover acts, right?” Taylor said, sending me a challenging look.

“You barely got in trouble last time we met. Was that a mistake? Here I thought you actually wanted to get out of Jesse’s gang. Heck, you even saved me at one point in time, yet here you are again following in those same footsteps,” I said, shaking my head.

He stood up, walking closer to me, causing me to hold on to my gun even tighter, ready to shoot.

“You actually don’t know a thing Scott. For once, I actually know more than you and you know it truly does feel great, except we have a problem.”

“Yes, the problem is you and your gang are killing hundreds of people and just blew up a whole plaza,” I said and he waved me off, stepping even closer.

“They wouldn’t do something so easy, the gang likes to torture people and let them pay for what they’ve done. This was another small gang that’s already being taken care of.” Taylor said before quickly kicking the gun out of my hand, causing it to go sliding across the tile floor, far away from me.

“By who?” I asked raising an eyebrow, not worried that my gun was across the room.

“By my agency.” This caused an amused smirk to appear on my face.

“Your agency?” I asked and a smirk appeared on his face.

“Don’t look so amused Scott. You are, after all, on my territory,” Taylor told me, and the twitch of his hand told me he was about to throw a punch. I quickly dodged it, sliding to the left and missing it. I went to kick his chest, but he quickly grabbed my leg, stopping me.

“We’ve had the same training now, so good luck trying to get me down,” he said, twisting my leg and causing me to flip over and land on the ground on my stomach.

“You’ve had probably a couple of years of training, that’s very impressive, I’ve had over 15, so if a little fight was all you wanted Jones, then that’s all you had to say.”

I rolled over and quickly brought my foot up, hitting him in his precious jewels, causing him to groan, bending over a little.

"You see as a guy that's always your weakness, but if you were smart you would have had some type of protection there or you would have been faster if you were really that good. Be prepared next time you want to pick a fight with another agent, Jones," I said as I stood up before slamming my foot in his chest, causing him to be pushed back and hit his head on the wood from the counter.

Taylor quickly recovered, doing the little quick jump up onto his feet and watching me. "All I'm telling you is this is my case," he said.

I raised an eyebrow.

"Every agency in the world knows Jesse Farone's case is always my agency's. Sorry if your new boss didn't get the memo, but you're wasting your time fighting me on this."

The LA agency didn't have anyone to take up the case so they sent a message to all agencies. We were the first to respond, hence us going undercover and being in charge.

"Well, this is a new case. He isn't just a drug dealer—"

"I know he's a bloody assassin now too, which is why he won't just end up in prison this time," I told him.

Taylor seemed to understand what I was implying. Jesse would go to trial for a death sentence, which may be pretty rare these days, but it had to happen. He was a cold-blooded killer, and he needed to be put down if he doesn't do something that gets him shot first.

"I don't know who the boss is over in the Seattle agency, but I'm telling you this Jones, us agents don't work against each other. We work with one another, and if you want to do that then that's fine, but if you'd rather fight over a mission then we can do that too, but I can guarantee it now you will lose," I told him.

He stared at me for a long time.

"My boss, Melody, doesn't want us working with you," Taylor told me.

"I don't know if you know this or not Taylor, but I own the Europe agency. Everyone follows my orders and they do the jobs I assign them. If I am counted as the untrustworthy one by your boss, then I would be questioning her motives not mine because I'm the one who cares so much that I left my position for a while to get this case done and finished," I said seriously. All of the agents trusted each other, yes we all may not be friends, but we still could trust our lives in any agency or any agent's hands. But if an agency had a problem with another, then that should definitely be questioned.

Taylor didn't respond, at first, only watching me carefully, unsure of what to say.

"Fine, let's do this together then," he said nodding.

“What are you doing here?” I suddenly heard Joey's voice, causing me to look as he came up beside me, prepared to help fight.

“He’s on our side, apparently he’s apart of the SA.”

“Since when are you an agent?” Joey asked.

I couldn’t help but wonder that myself.

“I’ve been one for a few years now. When I moved to Seattle I did every single thing I could by telling them about Jesse’s letters, his plans he sent from prison. And even if we take care of Jesse, it won’t be the end because Jackson’s getting out soon and then we’re all screwed,” Taylor said.

I frowned thinking about the date: today was October eighteenth and Jackson was due to be released November second.

“He has no gang, everyone is following Jesse’s new one now, and who knows, Jackson may have changed his ways,” Joey said.

“Yeah, just like how Jesse changed his ways.”

“Jackson has big plans, starting with you,” Taylor told us as I went over, picking up my gun and putting it back in its holster.

“What kinds of plans?” I asked and Taylor smirked.

“See it’s more like you need me in this situation. You know nothing about the plans because you just joined the gang. Jackson has ordered your assassination,” Taylor said, grabbing a beer nearby on the floor and opening it before pulling himself up to sit on the counter.

“They don’t even know I’m here,” I said.

He shrugged.

“They figured you would come down eventually, and if they can’t get to you just yet, then they’ll get to Joey and then Emily and then Rachel before finally you.”

“That won’t happen,” I said.

“Why, because you say so?”

I let my eyes skim over him before responding. I knew he was testing me and he could try but I know how to do my job.

“Yes, I won’t let it happen. That gang will be taken down no matter the cost,” I said confidently.

Taylor raised an eyebrow, giving me a challenging look.

"Even at the possible cost of your life," Taylor asked.

"Even at the cost of my life," I confirmed, nodding.

***

Claire's Point of View

I stood in front of the peach colored door. Half of the paint was missing and the door handle was rusted. I wouldn't stay here even if somebody else paid, but I had to do this. I couldn't let anyone die because of me.

"How long are you planning on standing there?" a guy asked, holding a twenty-ounce bottle of mountain dew.

"What?" I asked dumbly.

He nodded his head towards the door, pointing his drink as well.

"How long are you planning on standing in front of my door?" he asked.

I looked at the number and realized I was at the wrong room; the right one was next store.

"Sorry, wrong room," I said awkwardly stepping aside and letting him enter his room, receiving a look that told me what I already know: I'm crazy. I mean who would actually listen and not tell anyone? I had the perfect chance to tell Riley earlier when we were leaving the plaza all together but I didn't. Why? Because I'm stupid as hell.

Walking over to the next room, I brought my right hand up, knocking on the door.

"Claire? What are you doing here? It's such a pleasant surprise, please do come in and make yourself at home," Jax said.

I sneered at him, reluctantly walking into the room. My eyes landed on Nick, who sat on the edge of the bed, hands tied up behind him.

"Don't worry, you get to play the game too," Jax said in a reassuring voice before grabbing my hands from behind me. The sound of clicking and metal cutting into my skin was a sign I had handcuffs on.

"Kinky, huh?" Jax said before pushing me face first in the bed.

"Let's not forget I'm a pregnant woman over here," I hissed, my voice smothered by the bed.

"Oh, how could I forget? You're the size of a cow," Jax said smacking my ass. I growled and silently regretted wearing one of my work outfits, a black dress here. "Now we're going to get started," he said before turning me around. I moved up so I was sitting on the bed and glared at him with what

I hope looked like a dark glare. I've never really tried the look before, but it seemed to always work well for Caiden.

"Claire, you're going to get on top of Nick and kiss him," Jax said.

"Like hell I am," I sneered.

He sighed.

"Don't make me take out the gun. It ruins the game," he said, running his knuckles down the side of my face. I turned my head to the side, trying to get him to remove them. "Just do what I said and no one gets hurt."

"Claire, just do it," Nick said solemnly.

"Why? What on Earth does he possibly get out of this?" I asked Nick.

"I get to watch you and Caiden fall apart," Jax said simply, pulling out a gun.

"Earlier you were just saying how perfect we were together and now you want to break us up? I really don't understand your mind, Jax," I said and he shrugged.

"You don't have to understand it. Caiden was good at the time, you two were the typical love story. You cured the bad boy of his haunting past, but then something happened. His past came up and consumed you, pulling you in it and now you're drowning in it," he said.

I felt goosebumps appear on my arm as we stared into each other's eyes.

All my words were suddenly caught in my throat. I hated saying it, but it was true. Jax was actually right, Caiden's past came up and bit me in the ass harder than anyone, and now I'm suffocating, drowning with problems. I'm twenty-eight years old, yet I feel sixty with everything I've be through. My baby boy is going to grow up into a world that I'm lucky to survive, that he'll be lucky to survive.

"What happened? Cat got your tongue?"

"Are you telling me it will be much better with Jesse? I'll be stuck with gangs and drugs and the color of blood forever stuck on my hands," I told him, trying to move my hands around behind my back. There had to be a way to get out of these handcuffs.

"No, I'm trying to tell you to leave town. Get out of here while you can. I actually feel bad for you, shocking I know, but you were dragged into this life. Eventually those agents will take care of all of us, and you'll be left behind scrubbing blood off your hands anyways, but not your blood darling, Caiden's or someone you dearly all over again." Jax's words stabbed a knife in me, a knife I couldn't seem to pull out. It was stuck and suddenly blood was pooling around me, drowning me.

“Since when do you care what happens to me?”

“I don’t. I care what happens to him,” Jax said, nodding to Nick. I glanced at Nick who gave me a soft smile.

“He’s right Claire, you need to get out of town. It’s not safe here and you don’t deserve the pain from all of this. People are dying everywhere and I’d rather you not be one of them,” Nick said.

I stared at him in shock.

“So you brought me all the way here and handcuffed me to simply warn me?” I asked.

Jax shook his head.

“Nah, we’re still going to have a little game since I have a job to complete, bosses orders, but I’m trying to somewhat help you.”

“Jesse will only follow me,” I said.

He shook his head.

“He’ll be taken care of before he even has the chance to skip town.”

“If you care so much about Nick, then why is he here tied up too,” I asked accusingly.

Jax rolled his eyes and untied Nick’s hands, proving he trusted him.

“Because he just so happens to be on the list of things I need for this job.”

“When you said the agents will take care of everyone what did you mean exactly?” I asked after a minute of silence.

“They’ll take every single person in the gang out until they’re either dead or behind bars, and I know you Claire. As I said earlier, your kindness will be the death of you. People will die during all of this. It’s no longer a simple case for anyone. It’s war, and does anyone ever really win in war?”

The answer was no, no one actually wins and everyone only ends up dead whether it be physically or mentally.

“You know what Jax, you’re smarter than what I thought, but I think it’s a risk I’m willing to take. I’m an optimist. I believe we’re all going to finish this and everything will be fine,” I said confidently. It will all be okay.

“Half of the gang are professional assassins. You’ve met Jacob, he jokes around with you and gives you that cool guy, right? Yeah, he’s fucking killed more people than you could ever remember.”

“I’m not stupid, I know what I’m in right now so you can stop lecturing me like I’m some teenager who doesn’t know what she’s getting herself into,” I snapped.

“Fine, then let’s get started. Claire, kiss Nick. The faster you do it, the faster we all get out of this and make it look real,” Jax said pressing the gun to the side of my head.

“I can’t exactly kiss someone the right way with handcuffs on,” I muttered. He rolled his eyes, taking them off before pressing the gun on my head again.

“Nothing less than thirty seconds.”

I let out a sigh and closed my eyes, pressing my lips to Nick. It was a strange feeling kissing anyone else besides Caiden, a feeling I didn’t like. Nick's hands went into my hair and mine went around his neck. The sound of an iPhone camera went off, making me quickly pull away. I stood up and threw my hands up.

“Happy?” I asked and he looked at the picture and nodded.

“Very.”

“That was just as good as I remembered it being,” Nick winked at me.

I rolled my eyes.

“That’s cause I still got it,” I said, winking back before heading towards the door.

Jax grabbed my arm, stopping me before I opened it.

“Remember what I said.” He gave me a look I didn’t understand, and I only gave him a nod before pulling my arm out of his grip and leaving. Nick was suddenly walking next to me, and I gave him a questioning look.

“Caiden’s going to kill me.”

“No, I’ll be honest with him and tell him it was all because of Jax,” I said .

“You know he’ll think that’s complete bullshit,” Nick said.

“I’ll do whatever I have to do to get him to believe me.”

“You really love him, don’t you?” Nick asked me.

I looked at him and sent him a small smile.

“Probably more than is healthy.”

“Well, you know the saying, love never dies.”

I sent Nick a huge smile and pulled him into a hug.

“This is why we were close friends back then,” I said. Love Never Dies was the sequel to one of my favorite musicals, The Phantom of the Opera.

“Aye, I only watched that stupid shit because you forced me to. It’s sad I can still reference it,” Nick said, pouting.

I lightly smacked his chest.

“Whatever you say, Nicolaus,” I said, giving him a knowing look. When I forced him to watch it the first time he was so into the movie he cried at the ending.

“I have to stop in at work. I’ll see you soon and don’t worry about Caiden, I’ll take care of it,” I said.

“Don’t be a stranger,” he said, smiling, and I nodded, giving him a quick hug before heading out to my car.

It was about a twenty-five-minute drive to my job, and it made me smile at the sight of the building. It feels like ages since I last was in here. Walking in, I smiled at the woman sitting at the front desk.

“Welcome back, Claire!” she said, pausing her typing.

“Thank you, Jacqui. It’s nice to see you,” I said, sending her a smile before heading into the elevator and going up to the floor where my office was.

“Elena, what do you have for me?” I asked my assistant.

She pulled out a file.

“There have been lots of orders that have been all taken care of, but Mr. Franklin would like to meet with you as soon as possible,” she said.

“Do you know what for?”

“No idea, he said it was a private matter.”

“Next time tell him that nothing is a private matter. Anything he’s going to tell me he can tell you too. And you can tell him he can meet me in my office in thirty minutes,” I said.

She nodded.

“I’ll tell him right away, and by the way, congratulations on the pregnancy," Elena said, nodding to my stomach.

I smiled, sending her a ‘thank you’ before grabbing the file and heading into my office.

Thirty minutes later, I managed to sign and approve all the order forms Elena gave me. I handed her the file back before I headed into the conference room, which was on the floor directly underneath.

“Ah Claire, it’s a pleasure,” Mr. Franklin said, standing up and holding out his hand for me to shake when I entered. I quickly shook his hand before taking a seat across from him, ignoring his eyes on my stomach.

“What is so important that it needs to be discussed at this time?” I asked him curiously, causing him to pay attention to my face again.

“I would like to be your new business partner,” he announced.

I raised an eyebrow at him, waiting for him to continue.

“I think your work and all your styles would look great with mine. Think of what our brains combined could make together. Our work would be everywhere, on everyone,” he said.

I leaned back in my chair as my matte black nails lightly tapped the desk.

“I don’t mean to sound rude or arrogant, Mr. Franklin, but I’m very big in this industry and around here. I see my clothes and my designs on plenty of people, and I sign enough shipment orders and agreements to know they’re not just big in quite a few places around the world.”

“As am I. But that’s it, Ms. Martez, you see your clothes around here and you know they’re being worn in different places, but that’s simply among the celebrities.”

“People follow celebrities styles all the time,” I interrupted.

“Yes, but here’s what I’m thinking.” He opened his Macbook, airplaying a presentation to the screen. “We make a new clothes line, one never seen before with gorgeous clothes, but cheap clothes. We need to make items for lower class people, and I think a man and a woman working together could do it perfectly. “

“Yes, but in reality can’t you just do this clothing line yourself?” I asked, unconsciously twirling my pen with my fingers as I listened carefully.

“I could, but for once in the fashion industry we need a man and a woman clashing heads, combining heads, to make a less expensive and more excitingly new brand of clothes.”

I looked at him carefully, studying his face. His eyes shined with excitement, with curiosity, while the biting of his lip and the fiddling of his hands showed nervousness. He was sincere about the idea and it was truly a great one.

I stood up, walking directly in front of him. “Mr. Franklin, I think you have yourself a deal.”

I held out my hand and he placed his large one in mine and shook it, smiling.

"Great."

Chapter 15

Caiden's Point of View

I looked around the familiar bright store and saw the usual glass cases everywhere. A perky woman with red hair walked over to me with a bright smile, making me automatically scowl.

"Hello, I'm Kelsey Schwind." She introduced herself and held out her hand. I quickly shook it before releasing it, almost like it was fire.

"Since you're looking a little lost, can I be of assistance?"

Not responding, I looked at her waiting to continue. "Soo, uh we have thousands of rings, what is the occasion? Random present? Engagement?"

My body froze and the thought of all of this, could I really do this?

You love her.

I do, I really do. Claire Martez is the only person I truly care about. She's the only thing that keeps me sane, but this lady doesn't know me, she doesn't understand what I go through to just walk into this place. Everyone usually knows to just let me look.

Clearing my throat, I said, "I'm looking for an engagement ring."

Kelsey smiled.

"Caiden?" someone interrupted.

Looking to where the sound of the voice came from I saw Leigh, a woman who worked here as well. "You're back again? Are you just looking again or are you actually ready to buy?" Leigh asked with her hands on her hips.

"I think I'm ready to buy," I muttered.

She smiled. I've been visiting this place, at least, two times a day for the past few months during the work day. Almost every employee knew me except this one.

"Great! I can't help you today, Mr. Anderson, but Kelsey is one of our new employees who will do a great job assisting you."

I didn't respond and only nodded.

"Let me know how everything goes and what you decide on," Leigh said, giving me a knowing look before walking over to a customer who was currently looking at a few rings.

"Well, since you're looking for an engagement ring you can follow me back here."

She led me to a familiar room and opened and closed the curtain behind us.

"Is there a certain price you'd like to stay around?" she asked me as she headed behind one of the glass cases.

"No, I'm fine with any price." A glint appeared in the woman's eyes before she nodded. She stopped at the last case, farthest from the door before starting to speak about all of the rings. I didn't care to listen and only looked at them all carefully. These rings were thousands of dollars back here, some even millions, but I only wanted the best one that Claire would like the most.

"I want that one," I interrupted her and she blinked at me a few times before unlocking the case and opening it. She pulled out the ring I pointed to and bit her lip, a habit that Claire had as well when she was thinking.

"This is one of our newest and most expensive rings, 20 million dollars to be exact," she said, still holding the ring and staring at me with uncertainty.

"The price is fine," I said.

The woman walked from behind the counter and then next to me. She handed me the ring to look at and sent me a smile. Her chest was suddenly against my shoulder as she looked at the ring carefully in my hands.

"I think any girl would be happy to have someone like you to spend that much on such a gorgeous ring," she said, placing her hand on my chest.

Looking up at her blankly, I stared into her eyes with a dark and callous look.

"Are you trying to seduce me, Ms. Schwind?" I asked her.

She ran her pointer finger along my jaw.

"Now why would I do that, Mr. Anderson. All I was saying is that any girl would be happy to have a handsome husband like you who would spend such an amount on a sumptuous ring. It would be such an honor."

Her voice held a soft yet lust-filled sound to it.

"Yes, well I would only buy such a ring for someone I care deeply for."

"Of course you would."

She took the ring out of my hand carefully and set it on top of the glass before pushing me hard so my body was against the closest wall. I didn't stop her as she stood in front of me, her hand running up and down my chest.

"That would be so kind of you. I think the thing that always happens with marriages though is everyone's not exactly always happy," she said, her mouth right next to my ear. She pulled on it a little with her teeth before moving her face so it was only a centimeter away from mine.

"Is that so?" I asked just as seductively, our lips almost brushing as I talked.

"Yes, sir," she said, her eyes dark and hooded as she glanced from my eyes to my lips.

"How do you think my girlfriend would feel about you trying to seduce me right now, Ms. Schwind."

She moved even closer so our noses were brushing each others.

"I don't think we have to let her find out," she said, letting her hands play with the buttons of my shirt underneath my tie, letting two unbutton, showing the top of my chest.

"Are you suggesting I cheat on her?" I asked and she bit her lip again, trying to tease me.

"You could call it whatever you like," Kelsey said.

I turned my head to the side a little, looking at her carefully.

"I thought Jesse would be smarter when it came to this, but I guess not."

I pushed her body back, not caring when she landed on her butt.

"I would never cheat on Claire. Make sure to pass that message to your boss for me," I said, grabbing the ring off the counter.

"They already got a picture by now. There's no way you could try to cover up this."

Kelsey held up her iPhone 6 that had a picture that looked like we were kissing.

"She'll believe me over any of you any day," I told her, shaking my head at her stupidity.

"Really? I wouldn't be so sure about that because it seems as if she's losing faith in you. No one stays only boyfriend and girlfriend for eight years. You should have been over your little Lisa issues by now."

I kept my face blank, not showing how much her comment affected me. I was trying, I was going to get past everything, I had to.

It was true, I should be over the fact that I was kidnapped and that my parents didn't care. I should be other the fact that my father married my kidnapper's sister. Yet I couldn't get over any of it and that's what made me weak. That's why I couldn't commit to Claire because I was afraid, nothing but afraid.

"I should be surprised that someone at such a low rank in his little gang would know anything about my past, but I'm not because I know that either way it goes, you're just another little prostitute, or baiter trying to finish the task Jesse can't do himself. Now next time if I were you I'd try the more classy approach instead of the slutty one," I told.

An offended look showed on her face as she glared at me. She reached in her back pocket, looking for a handgun, but I knew she didn't find the weapon she was looking for.

"I'd put your defenses up as well," I said, waving the gun I now had.

I emptied all the bullets out and threw the gun out in front of her before walking out of the curtained area, fixing my shirt along the way.

"Caiden, did you find the one you wanted?" Leigh asked me.

I nodded, tossing the bullets into the nearest trash by the door. I placed the ring on the counter and she gave me a knowing smile.

"I had a feeling you'd get this one. You've been looking at it for months now."

I didn't respond and only paid for it before she gave me a date to come pick it up, as she had to have it resized.

"Any particular box you want?" she asked me.

I shook my head.

"Just plain black."

"Well, come back in two days, and we'll have it ready for you," Leigh told me.

"You should keep a close eye on Ms. Schwind. She knew I was choosing an engagement ring for my girlfriend yet she still tried to hit on me. I would appreciate if you would be the only one to take care of that ring and keep a close eye on it," I said. Leigh nodded, looking appalled and immediately apologized on her behalf.

"I will take care of that right away. I'm very sorry that happen and only will I touch that ring."

"Good," I said before taking my credit card from her hand and leaving the store without any problems.

Andrew's Point of View

"I promise everything will be okay," Clover reassured me, her hand holding my chin, forcing me to keep my eyes on hers.

"I know, just be careful. I'm sure Aria and Xavier would like their mother back home in one piece," I said.

She gave me a sad smile, leaning her head on my shoulder.

"I miss them. It's been so long since I've last seen them," she said sadly, and I moved her head and pressed my lips against hers in a sweet, slow and passionate kiss. A minute later I pulled away and smiled at her.

"We just have to remember it's safer to be here than at home. We don't want them in danger," I told her carefully and she sighed, knowing I was right.

"I love you." She whispered against my lips again and my smile only got bigger.

"I love you," I saod before our lips touched again. The spark from the first time we kissed still remained as her arms slipped around my neck and mine holding her face. I brought her body so she was on my lap, not breaking the kiss as I leaned back. A knock on the door interrupted us, and I groaned. At times like this I hated staying at someone else's house.

"Hey, we're heading out. We'll be back later to get you," Riley called.

Clover yelled back a quick okay before focusing her gaze on me again.

"You know, ot hasn't hit me that Chris is dead yet," Clover said.

I nodded in agreement. It hasn't exactly hit me yet either that someone who we have known and been close to for years now is now gone forever and all we know is that he betrayed us this whole time.

"I feel bad for Stacey and all of their kids. Do you think she knew?" I asked.

My wife shook her head.

"I doubt it. Knowing her, she probably would have left him," Clover said before rolling off me and laying beside me. Closing her eyes, she leaned her head against my chest.

"Times likes this I wonder how the agents do it. You can't ever have a normal life with all these problems, cases, and mysteries, it's sad really," I said honestly. If I lived a life like Riley and Joey I would probably never have had children. I would fear for their lives, and I would forever fear that my enemies would try to harm them as retaliation.

"Me too." Her voice was muffled against my chest, but I still managed to hear her. The doorbell downstairs went off, and we both stood up and headed downstairs together since we knew no one else was home. When we got to the door all we saw was a square brown box.

I picked up the box and closed the door behind us. I placed it on the table and saw it was addressed to everyone in the house: Caiden, Claire, Jasmin, Clover, and me.

"Should we wait for everyone to open it?" Clover asked.

I shook my head.

"By the time Claire and Caiden get home, you'll be heading off with that little gym rendezvous with Keith," I said.

She rolled her eyes at my words.

"Well then, here we go."

I was handed a pair of scissors and I quickly opened the box. Inside of it was a white envelope. Opening it, I pulled out the white letter and read it out loud.

Dear acquaintances,

It's been awhile hasn't it? I sure have missed you all. We're all going to play a game again. This time, you're not going to get out so easily. You see the key to this game is you can't tell anyone what's happening, more specifically not those agent friends you all seem to have. Before we start this new game, I'd like to remind everyone of something special that will get those hearts racing. Maybe we'll even have a few panic attacks if we're lucky.

First of all, the saying, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer" is a stupid saying, don't you agree Clove? I mean that just makes it harder to trust everyone you're close to because you don't know who's being a fake bitch and who is being real, but I guess in the end you always find out, huh?

Second of all, Andrew, babe, you know daddy isn't happy you haven't visited him or gave him a paycheck ever since you found the so-called "love of your life." It's pretty harsh actually. Maybe pay him a little visit sometime soon? Yes, that means actually returning to your other home for once.

Third of all, This is getting exciting, huh? Caiden, darling, don't you think it's a little rude to not visit your family too? You boys are all the same, never showing respect to those who care for you. Maybe the adults need to try the alternative route and show you all a bit of discipline.

Fourth of all, Claire, honey, it's time to stop the act you're pulling. I mean we all know that baby isn't Caidens. For goodness sake, we've all known you're supposed to end up with Nick. That's how the story was always supposed to end, right?

Now Jasmin, sweetie, you're getting a bit too friendly now aren't you? You should know playing devil's advocate never ends up well for anyone, but hey, make sure to say hi to your brother for me when you join him in hell.

Is anyone else getting excited to find out what this game is yet? Well, in case you aren't, let's start with a few appetizers. Anyone interested in a few kisses? Trust me, friends, some get a little hot and steamy.

Looking forward to our next touch,

You're one and only friend. Xx

Inside the envelope was a set of pictures. One was Claire with a black dress on with her lips connected to another man who definitely wasn't Caiden. The next one was another one of Claire but with a different outfit on. She was now sitting on a man's waist with nothing on but a sheet that pooled around her. Another one photo was of Caiden kissing a red head girl who was definitely not Claire and then him with another girl that had jet black hair, his mouth on her breast. The next photo was of me sitting next to my father with a bright smile on face. The one after was of me sitting on the ground, my arm bleeding with a glass beer bottle broken in front of me. Clover was in the next photo with her arm around Katy and Tori who were smiling brightly next to her, a photo from early high schoo, since Clover was wearing her wig. Then there was a piece of newspaper that stated Katy Richard went to jail.

The last photo in the envelope left my body even colder and left me even forgetting to breathe for a moment. Chris's dead body laid on the ground with blood all around him, the blood that completely surrounded his body was shaped in flames. Chris's lifeless eyes stared at the camera, and I felt sick.

"I think I'm going to be sick," Clover spoke my thoughts as I dropped everything back in the box. "This has to be Katy again. Only she plays games like this." She shook her head, tears filling her eyes.

"She's definitely playing on a new level then, I mean how the hell would she get this picture of me, of Claire, of Caiden! How does she know so much?" I asked aloud, sitting at the table.

"I don't know Andrew, I don't know," she said, putting her face in her palms.

"What's going on?" Claire asked walking into the kitchen, placing her keys on the counter. I held my wife in my arms as she sobbed and Claire frowned. "Are you freaked out about searching the building earlier? I think we're still safe since no one found anything that hinted it was from Jesse's gang. It was most likely just a smaller one trying to get the eyes of them."

“We were left a little note,” I said, my tone hard. Claire noticed the box and looked inside, picking up the paper. She took a few minutes to read it, her eyes showing her anger. Picking up the pictures she looked at the one of Chris with disgust. When her eyes finally found the one of her with a guy and Caiden with a girl her eyes teared up.

“What is this person playing at? These are old. Last time I kissed Nick or even slept with him was when we were in college and dating. And Caiden, he would never cheat on me.” The last part of Claire’s sentence didn’t come out as confidently as she probably hoped, and I cringed. This person seemed to know the exact buttons to push for all of us.

“We think it’s Katy Richards. She was my ex-best friend and played little games with me anonymously while were in high school,” Clover said.

I squeezed her hand tightly, showing her I was here for her.

“Katy Richards, as in Damien Richard’s wife?” she asked. We both nodded.

“No, I think it was someone else, someone from the gang,” Claire said, shaking her head. No one responded. Katy isn’t a part of the gang so I guess she may be right. Clover hasn’t been contacted by Katy in years.

“So that is an old picture of you and that guy right?” Clover asked curiously.

Claire hesitated before nodding.

“The one of us having sex was old, back when I was dating him, Caiden’s best friend, but the one of us kissing was a few hours ago,” Claire said.

I shared a look with Clover. So she cheated on him? “But it’s not what you think! Jax from the gang gave me an option with a gun to my head: kiss him or he kills both of us. I wasn’t allowed to tell anyone I was even going there, I may even get in trouble now.”

“I’m sure Caiden will understand that," Clover reassured her softly.

“I don’t understand how they got this picture so fast,” she said.

“This is a professional gang. I’ve come to learn they can do just about anything,” I said.

She groaned loudly.

“They want to break us up. I bet this was either Jax or Jesse,” Claire said standing up, grabbing the note.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

She looked at me with a determined look.

"I'm going to confront the asshole himself," she said.

Clover quickly stood up grabbing her arm.

"No, you're not meeting with any one of them by yourself, and it wouldn't be smart to do anything stupid right now, especially by yourself. We need to tell Riley like right away and we need to get everyone here. I am calling a group meeting!" Clover declared.

My lips twitched up at the sight of my wife trying to be all calm and professional about all of this – not that she couldn't be. But it was cute that she was trying.

***

Third Person Point of View

"Hello, we are all gathered here today at Claire's house to officially announce that we are all royally screwed," Clover said with her hands in the air like a V shape as if she was preaching before she sat down again. Rolling her eyes, Riley grabbed the letter and read through it, looking over the pictures too.

"There wasn't a warning," Joey noted.

They nodded.

"Just in case, we're going to keep this a secret because it does say not to tell us, so remember we don't know a thing about this," Riley said.

Once again they nodded, agreeing.

"I think everyone needs to explain what each point made at them means, starting with Clover," Riley suggested.

"I don't think that's really necessary," Claire said, glancing at Caiden whose fists were now clenched. She knew he wouldn't want to share his past because they both understood what that message was saying. They hit him exactly in the hardest spot, and they closed him all back up again.

"It is if we want to figure out who's behind this," Riley snapped back.

Caiden glared at her causing Joey to narrow his eyes, not liking the look on his fiance.

"We're trying to solve a case here not play games, so just do it and get it over with," Joey ordered them, looking at Caiden the whole time so the point went across.

"Okay, well I told Claire earlier, my best friend in high school betrayed me, and for a long period of time sent anonymous notes and little gifts and stuff too. Eventually, I found it was her when she tried to take my job but failed in the end, so I'm guessing she was talking about that. Or she could

have been talking about Jasmin staying close to me all these years and, in the end, stabbing me in the back," Clover said shrugging.

Her message didn't bother her as much as this person probably wanted it to, but it was most likely the latter one. They wanted to take a stab at her about Jasmin and Chris faking their whole friendship, but she was really only mad, not really sad.

"Andrew, your turn." Joey nodded to him and Andrew sighed.

"This is a touchy subject that I barely even told Clover," Andrew said, looking out the window behind the couch. "When I was younger I use to get abused by my father, and as a result when my mom found out she got a divorce from him. My sister and I went and lived with her but since he was my father, I would still go visit him sometimes when I got older. He was poor and almost living on the streets so I got a job, and I used to give him most of my paychecks. But when I met Clover I kind of slowly stopped visiting him and giving him all my money because he was a piece of shit father only using me."

All eyes watched Andrew who was gazed out the window looking angry.

"I don't know how this person knew about my father because I never mention him. I never tell anyone about him. I treat him as if he doesn't exist." Clover pulled Andrew's body closer to hers, pulling him into a hug, which immediately relaxed him. Andrew hated his father with a passion, and he hasn't seen or even heard from him in years since his senior year in high school.

Everyone felt pity for Andrew, but no one dared to show it knowing it was a sensitive subject for him.

"Caiden?" Joey asked.

Caiden gave him a dark smirk, one that surprisingly gave him chills.

"I don't speak to my family anymore since they've all betrayed me, and I'm guessing when this person talks about discipline they're probably referring to when I was kidnapped and the woman abused me."

Riley frowned at the short explanation. If everyone else had to dig in and share their past, he had to as well. That little explanation won't do anyone any good, Riley thought.

"You're going to have to go in a bit more detail for us to get anywhere," Riley said.

His fists started to turn white, obviously not happy with having to talk about his past. Claire placed her hand on top of his and whispered soothing words in his ear, telling him it would be okay. Caiden's hands slowly unclenched at hearing Claire's soothing words and the feeling of her hands on top of his.

"My mother and father barely cared when I returned ten years later after being kidnapped. They got a divorce and my father married my kidnapper's sister. Simple as that," he sneered, his eyes ice cold looking at Riley and Joey.

"And if you'd really like me to go deep into detail I will. I can explain to you all about the discipline she showed me since she was my 'mother.' She use to play little games with me, cut me, beat me. She would sometimes even let me think I had a chance to get out and be free, but as soon as I would try, she would beat me so hard I would end up with bruised ribs or something broken."

Caiden left everyone silent, unsure what to say, unsure how to react. His voice held no emotion while he spoke of this woman making it all more uncomfortable and causing everyone to feel sorry for him.

How did the agency here not take care of that? Joey wondered to himself. Their agency would have taken a week, at least, to find him and get the kidnapper in jail.

"How did you escape then?" Clover suddenly asked, breaking the silence. She was curious and even though curiosity killed the cat, she still had to ask the question because satisfaction always brought the cat back and having nine lives helped too. She slightly smiled at her thought before focusing back on Caiden.

"I gave it all back to her. I murdered her with my bare hands and to this day, I still feel no remorse," Caiden said. A dark smirk came to his face as he thought back to the day he murdered her. He remembered his fists pounding in her face, her gasping for air but not succeeding to get any, her ice blue eyes pleading for him to stop. A cold-hearted monster people called him – a cold-hearted monster was a compliment.

Clearing his throat after a short silence, Joey said "Claire, it's your turn."

"To me, mine sounded more like a jealous ex-fling or something of Caiden's because I haven't been with anyone since Caiden for years. The baby boy inside of me is mine and Caiden's and if anyone, Caiden especially, doubts me for one second on that then a blood test will be taken, proving what I've already said," Claire said seriously, her eyes meeting Caiden's, who had a speck of disbelief. And about the Nick part, that's completely BS. Which makes me wonder though if it was someone from our college years."

"How do we know it's not this Nick guy. He's the one you're kissing in this photo, right?" Riley asked curiously.

"That kiss was fake and forced by Jax when he threatened to kill my baby, me, and Nick. I don't think Jax would threaten Nick's life if he was on their side."

Everyone agreed, but the thought didn't leave Caiden's mind. It was a huge possibility, he thought, narrowing his eyes at the letter in Joey's hands. Nick was close with Jax for years, knowing exactly who he was and how he worked with Leon and the other's secretly spying on him for Jesse all those years.

"Okay then, Jasmin, go ahead," Riley said nodding her head for her to talk.

"I'm guessing it means the secret's out, and they know I told you all about everything I've been doing with Jesse. It may have been a warning to stop the act, though. Pretending to help Jesse and then come back and tell you all of his plans will only result in me dead," Jasmin said.

Clover scoffed.

"I'm not surprised, but in the end, everyone gets what they deserve," Clover muttered to Andrew. His lips twitched up into a small smile.

"Well everything's going smoothly then," Liam said after awhile of silently watching. "We're still absolutely nowhere. Can someone please explain to me how a bunch of gang members are smarter than a bunch of agents?"

Claire stared at Liam frowning. Although she didn't care for him like the way she used to, she still wanted to be there for him and help him like she used to when he got stressed on his missions.

"They're not. We have an overall plan that's already starting to work."

"Do you? Because I mean we're like sitting ducks in here. It's time to get inside," Liam said.

Matt sighed.

"I think he has a point. We need to go in," Matt said agreeing.

"We already have Riley undercover and technically Taylor too."

"Taylor?" Claire asked, not hiding her surprise. Everyone waved her off, telling her they'd explain later.

"No, you're both only at the gang house where the drugs happen. I looked at some old news reports and to all the places that either killing sprees have happened or places that have just randomly caught on fire and they all surround one spot."

Eyes stared at Matt expectingly, waiting for him to continue.

"Where?"

Matt hesitated for a moment before finally responding, "Here."

Chapter 16

Claire's Point of View

"No, you're both only at the gang house where the drugs happen. I looked at some old news reports and to all the places that either killing sprees have happened or places that have just randomly caught on fire and they all surround one spot."

Everyone stared at Matt expectantly, waiting for him to continue.

"Where?"

Matt hesitated for a moment before finally responding, "Here."

"What does that mean exactly?" I asked as I felt fear slowly creep up my spine.

"I don't know exactly," Matt said, frowning.

Riley looked at the note in Joey's hands again before looking back at Matt.

"Does that mean we're next?" Clover asked, standing up and Matt shook his head.

"Rachel, Emily, and Liam have already checked it out. There's no sign of bombs or any threat even near your house."

"Something is not adding up. We're missing something to all of this," Riley said, standing up as well.

Joey nodded, taking his place next to her.

"It's almost like—" Joey was cut off by the front door slamming against the wall. Everyone looked up at the now-opened door and a small can went rolling across the floor. White smoke starting puffing out of the can.

"What is—"

"Everyone kitchen now, cover your mouths," Liam yelled. Everyone ran through the dining room and into the kitchen. "C'mon out the back door." He ushered us all out to where we were all standing in the back yard, the back door closed. Feeling the cold October breeze against my skin I frowned, but it was quickly replaced by the warmth of Caiden's suit jacket. I sent him a small smile, one which he didn't return, and glanced at my house.

"What was that?" I finally asked, breaking the silence.

“It’s exactly like what we used at Jesse’s party that one time,” Joey said looking through the windows that only showed the white smoke. Suddenly the back door was kicked open and twelve men with guns and masks over their faces came out.

“Hands up,” a man yelled, pointing his gun at us. They all wore black but he didn’t have a mask.

“Who the hell are you?” Joey hissed, reluctantly putting his hands up. Following his lead, we all did the same. I felt Caiden’s hip touch mine as he moved closer to me.

Ignoring him, he turned his gun so it was facing me.

“Which one of you is Clover Thompson?” a man yelled and Clover glanced at us with wide eyes, not responding. Riley shook her head as if saying not to answer.

“Answer now!” he yelled, taking a step closer toward us. With the corner of my eye, I could see the gun in Joey’s holster in the back of his jeans. I looked back at the guys with narrowed eyes.

“I am,” Clover said and took a small step forward. Andrew did the same, not letting his wife go by herself.

“Step back,” he hissed at Andrew, but he refused to move. He shot the ground next to them and Clover screamed.

“I said, step back.”

Andrew took a step away from Clover, returning next to Riley’s side. The man nodded, and two men stepped forward grabbing her and pulling her towards the rest of them. They kept tight grips on her arm as she struggled to get away.

“Who are you and what do you want from her?” Riley asked.

The man looked at her.

“Which one of you is Claire Martez?” he asked, not losing his grip on the gun as he only held it tighter, focusing it on us seven.

“You can go to hell,” Caiden hissed.

He smirked.

“I take it she’s the one next to you then.” He nodded his head at the guys to come closer, but Caiden grabbed my arm and pushed me behind him.

“Don’t you dare try to touch her.”

He sneered at her.

"I'll give you one more chance, who are you and what do you want?" They once again ignored Joey so in one quick second he pulled out his gun. Riley, Liam, and Matt did the same exact thing at the same time.

"Put the guns down." Ten guns were pointed at the four of them and Caiden grabbed my wrist, holding on to make sure I didn't disappear from behind him. I gasped as a hand went over my mouth. Caiden was suddenly kicked in the back of his knee causing him to fall forward. I stared at Caiden with fear, and he looked back at me with a glare on his face towards the man who had my back against his chest. His other hand was around my throat.

"I don't think I have to ask you again," he sneered, and the four slowly set their guns down in front of them. "Kick them over." They hesitated before they listened, kicking their guns over. We were now completely outnumbered as five more men appeared. I was walked over to the rest of the men in black. The guy holding me removed his hand from my mouth but kept one hand around my throat.

"I hope you know you're digging your own grave right now," Caiden hissed, standing up off the grass.

"No hard feelings, we're just following orders," the man said before looking at the other guys and sending them a nod. "Let's start heading out." One by one all the men started leaving around the house.

"Who sent you? Was it Jesse?" Liam suddenly asked, and the man held up his hand, pausing the guys from moving us.

"I don't know who Jesse is, but I can promise you one thing. Anyone who we take to our boss never makes it back to their loved ones," the man said before doing a little motion with his hand.

Clover started kicking and screaming, digging her feet in the ground to try to stop them from moving her.

"Just let them go! She's pregnant for heaven's sake!" Liam yelled, holding out his hand so it was pointing to my stomach.

"If I let them go, then I would really be signing my own death certificate," he said solemnly.

I looked at Clover who stood there no longer struggling since we weren't moving. She looked back at me with fear in my eyes.

I did a little nod of my head and looked up. Seeming to understand what I said, she nodded and started mouthing the countdown from three. Getting to one, I hit my head back and slammed my heel from my high heels onto his boots. The guy stumbled back a little, surprised by the impact.

Since Clover had two guys, she was able to hit the one on the right with her head and slam her elbow into the other guy's stomach.

Caiden rushed over and helped me by slamming his fist into the guy's face. We now gained an advantage because there were only four men left here and only one had a gun out.

"Now you're going to tell us a bit more information," Joey said, holding up another gun. "Why does this boss of yours want them?" The man placed his hands up in the air in surrender, and Riley kicked the gun straight out of his hand so it went flying across the yard.

"He didn't say. He doesn't tell us his reasons."

"What's your name?" Riley asked and he hesitated before answering.

"Josh."

"Well, Josh, let's clarify something. What exactly are you apart of?" Riley questioned, and he looked at one of the other men who was sitting on the ground not moving as Liam had a gun pointed at both of them.

"We can't say," he muttered.

Joey and Riley shared a look before taking a step closer. This time, Riley picked up her gun. Clover took a step closer to Andrew and I frowned.

"You're not the only one who can grant a death wish," Riley reminded the guy. His eyes looked over her and Joey before looking to the side and still ignoring them.

Liam sighed before kicking the guy in the chest and grabbing his neck, lifting him up so his face was directly in front of his own. "We won't ask you again. Who are you working with?" Liam hissed in Josh's face, causing him to gasp for air, clawing at Liam's hand.

"Jackson—" He barely stuttered out, his voice raspy. "—Farone." Liam dropped his body back to the ground before he looked back over at us.

"Who is that?" Clover asked, curiously.

"Jackson Farone, Jesse Farone's older brother. He used to be the one that was truly in charge of the old gang before we caught him and got him sentenced him to prison for years."

Riley said staring at Josh's face with disgust.

"So you're telling us that Jackson had all of you do this?" Caiden asked, stepping away from me so he was standing directly in front of Josh.

"Yes, Jackson is more powerful than Jesse still. He's been organizing all of this in prison too."

“But why did he want us? We’ve never even met him,” Clover said.

“We don’t ask questions. We just follow orders. It’s something you should try sometime,” he hissed, rubbing his neck that was a reddish color.

“So you’re telling me that I now have two gangs after me? This is great, freaking perfect. No, it’s fucking perfect,” she said.

Andrew looked at her surprised.

“At least your death will be over quick with Jesse. Jackson likes a little more excitement, if you know what I mean.” Josh smirked and everyone glared at him.

“You aren’t exactly in the position to be cracking jokes,”Liam told him.

His smirk dropped.

“Did you see how they all came in, though? The way they moved, the way they held their guns, they were trained. They looked like they went to a police academy or something,” Riley said seriously. Joey nodded.

“I just can’t figure out why they would want you two. Jackson never had a problem with me so I especially don’t know why they would want Claire,” Caiden said seriously.

Riley looked at me carefully before looking down at her watch.

“There’s only one way to find out,” Riley said before looking at the guys on the ground. “Stand up,” she told them. They narrowed their eyes.

“I said stand up.” She almost yelled and the tone of her voice, this time, made them listen. “We’re going to let you take Claire.”

“Like hell you are,” Caiden hissed, blocking me with his body.

“Claire has to go undercover in an hour, and the only way we’re going to find anything about what’s going on with Jackson is by someone going in,” Riley said.

I stayed silent. I would do this if I had to.

“Jackson wasn’t supposed to be released for a while still. Yet from the sounds of it, he’s already out so Taylor must have lied to us. Liam will go with her.”

“Now you must be high or something,” Caiden said, shaking his head, his fists tight. “The last thing I’m going to let you do is to put her in possible danger. She can’t die, she won’t die. I won’t let her.”

“Liam will make sure she doesn’t get hurt.”

“I don’t trust him. He’s her fucking ex-boyfriend.”

“Her ex-boyfriend who still cares for her. I won’t let them even scratch her,” Liam said confidently.

I stepped from behind Caiden and took a close look at all of them.

“Can we stop talking about me like I’m not here? I’m doing this, Caiden, they need me and I signed a contract that told them I would do whatever I had to – to help them.

“Fine, when you end up fucking dead don’t expect me to plan a funeral,” he hissed before looking away from me.

“Okay, Claire, we’re going to put this in your heel so no matter what you have to always keep those on,” Matt said, showing me a small chip. “Hand me your pen.”

Liam threw him a pen that he easily unscrewed the top with his hand, showing a small drill. I gave him one of my black heels and he drilled inside the heel. The black chip went in and he closed it up again with some black playdough-like substance. I slipped on my heel again, trying to ignore the slight fear I felt from all of this.

“This was originally for Clover, but we’ll get her a new one. That will help us track your every movement,” he said before unscrewing the other part of the pen and walking over to Josh. Without hesitation, he stabbed that side of the pen into Josh's back before pulling it out.

“What the hell was that?” he hissed.

Matt smirked.

“It will take me less than a minute to hook up to one of the cameras or the computers whereever you guys go. If any of you even say one thing about any of this, the pill that is now located in your body will explode. If you even try to remove the pill from your body it will automatically explode inside your body,” Matt told them before doing the same with the other two men.

“Don’t test us,” Matt said before looking at me. “Liam has a tracker already located in his actual body as well, so stay with him if possible.”

“He’ll kill him,” Josh told all of us. “He won’t even hesitate.”

“So you tell him that you took him to make sure that no one would know who took her. You left behind no evidence because you found just Claire and him alone,” Joey told him and he nodded.

“Go ahead.” Riley nodded to take us. One of the men reluctantly grabbed me as he did before, looking nervous from the look he was getting from Caiden and the other man grabbed Liam.

“Head to the car.” Josh nodded.

“Remember, don’t test your luck,” Matt told them all before we were gone from their sight.

“What took so long and what happened to the other girl?” a guy asked.

Josh just shook his head.

“There were complications after you all left. They managed to escape, and these were the only two we were able to catch.”

“What will we tell him?” he asked, referring to Jackson.

“That we only found these two to begin with. We never saw anyone else so we left behind no evidence,” Josh said simply before they pushed us into the van, a white cloth quickly covering our mouths, causing us both to slip into darkness.

***

Clover’s Point of View

It had been an hour since Claire and Liam were taken away, and in that time, Caiden broke every single picture frame in the house of them. Of course that was done after spending at least a minute glaring at them.

“I’ve never seen this side of him, he’s always so calm and quiet, especially around Claire,” I whispered to Andrew, almost afraid he would somehow hear me talking.

“I’ll even admit I’m worried he’ll take it out on us if she’s not back soon,” Andrew said staring at the bedroom door.

The sound of more glass shattering filled the air, causing us to share another look.

“I understand his pain, though. I can’t even imagine what I would do if you did something as stupid as offering yourself as some sacrifice or something,” Andrew said honestly. My eyes skimmed his face, noticing his honesty and sincerity.

“Are you sure you’re okay with me going undercover?” I asked.

He shrugged.

“It wouldn’t be the first time.”

“Yes, but the first time it was some silly high school thing. This time, it could get to the life or death point.” I took a deep breath, clearing my thoughts, waiting for him to say something, anything.

Andrew placed his hands on both sides of my face, causing me to look at him directly in the eye. “I’m not worried because you aren’t just Clover Carte, you’re Clover Thompson and you haven’t

been to hell yet and this may finally be your time but everyone who goes to hell comes back from it. You're going to go out there and be completely fine. You've been through more than most people and you've been closer to death more than most people as well. You're going to be the best damn actress you've ever been and you're going to pull this off, right?"

"Yes, but what about that letter? Someone's watching us again," I said still unsure.

Giving me a stern look he replied, "You're not in an episode of Pretty Little Liars. This isn't five years later and you're still getting messed with. This is nine years later and this time, we're ready for a fight."

I looked at the man I loved with a foreign look, to this day I still wasn't sure about how I came to be with Andrew Carter, yet I don't think I'd ever be ready for it to end.

"I love you," I whispered and a smirk appeared on his face.

"Of course you do, but trust me when I said not as much as I love you."

I placed a long kiss on Andrew's lips, pulling away only when a knock sounded on the door.

"It's time to go, but before you go you should know you have company," Joey said, making my curiosity spike. I took one more glance in the mirror at my black, skin tight yoga capris and my black and green sports bra that zips in the front. I fixed my hair so it was in a higher ponytail before heading downstairs with Andrew directly behind me.

"Mom, Dad!" a little girl's voice yelled from the living room, making tears start to well up in my eyes. I ran to my daughter with my arms wide open as I dropped to my knees, pulling her into me immediately.

"I've missed you so much," I whispered into her ear before feeling another small body wrap their arms around me. I pulled Xavier's into my arms, lightly squeezing them both to me.

"Why haven't we seen you in so long?" Aria asked quietly as I reluctantly pulled away from them, letting Andrew pull our kids into a hug.

"I'm so sorry. I've been very busy with work sweetie. Staying at Grandma's is okay, though, right," I asked her, tucking a piece of her hair behind her ear.

"Grandma makes us go to be early," she said, scrunching up her nose.

"And she makes us share a room," Xavier said, crossing his arms over his chest.

"She only does it to make sure you get enough rest." Andrew told them. I looked up and saw Tori standing in the doorway with a small smile on her face.

“Hey, ot’s been a while,” I said, standing up and pulling her into a quick hug. “But why did you bring them here?”

“I’m sorry, I know you’re busy but Andrew’s mother couldn’t handle the stress of dealing with them while she’s sick so she asked me to take care of them. But I’m going on another business trip tomorrow so you were the only option. I talked to Jasmin and she said it would probably be fine because you were staying in a house now, plus I figured you missed them and—”

“I got it, Tori,” I said, cutting her off, causing her to give me an innocent smile.

“Is this our new house?” Xavier asked.

I gave Andrew a tight smile before looking down at my son.

“No, this is just a friend’s house we’ve been staying at.” I told him before changing the subject. “But I was just on my way out for work so how about you tell your dad all about what you two have been learning in school and I’ll see you later, okay?” I suggested, pulling them both into another hug.

“You’re not leaving us again are you?” Aria asked, a sad look on her face.

“No, honey, I’ll be back soon,” I said, kissing her cheek.

“I’ll see you both later, I love you,” I said, blowing a kiss to Xavier who was in Andrew’s arms.

A bright smile appeared on Aria’s face. One of her bottom teeth missing, “I love you too!” they said in sync, causing a sad smile to appear on my face before I nodded to Riley who looked awkward about the whole situation.

“Thanks for bringing them all the way here, Tori,” I said, pulling her in another quick hug.

“It was no problem. As soon as I get back in a few days I can bring them back,” she said.

I shook my head.

“Don’t worry about it. Once Andrew’s mother gets better, he can drop them off, if we’re not done with everything by then,” I told my best friend.

“Okay, if you’re sure. Once your schedule clears up, and you’re back home, maybe we can go get a drink?” she suggested.

I nodded.

“Sounds good.” I watched her walk out to the waiting taxi.

"We need to leave. You're late," Riley told me as we followed her lead, getting into their car. "Just so you know, bringing kids into this situation was probably the worst thing you could have done. You're endangering their lives."

"You act like I'm trying to. There was nowhere else for them to go, and they're my kids! I haven't seen them in what a month or are we already hitting the two-month mark? It physically hurts to miss even that much of their life," I said, my hand on my chest. Riley only shook her head in response.

"You'll miss all of their lives if you're dead."

I didn't respond and only looked out the window, looking at the buildings that started to become familiar. Thankfully, it didn't take long for us to get to the gym.

"There's not many people here," Joey noted. "You know what to do if there are any problems."

"I'll text you when we're done or if we leave here."

"Try not to leave," Riley said. I only nodded before shutting the door. I put my black headphones in my ears before walking into the gym.

"Huh and here I thought you weren't going to show up," Keith said as he stood up from a bench. The first thing I noticed was the fact that he was shirtless and he had a few tattoos on his chest.

"Ouch, already don't trust me?" I asked, raising an eyebrow and smirking as I took out my headphones.

"It's the blonde hair," he said, flicking my ponytail.

"So do I get to know your real name now?" Keith asked, causing my heart rate to increase.

"What do you mean?"

"I know your name isn't Keara. You don't look like one," he said before circling around my body slowly. Checking out every inch of it.

"Why'd you give me the nickname Ky then?" I asked.

He paused a second before answering.

"You look like a Kylie."

"Try Kyrie, people use to call me Key because of the Ky part."

I lied. I guess I would need a name. If he truly didn't believe my name was Keara, then it would only cause problems in the future.

“Like the basketball player?” he asked amused.

“No, but you didn’t take me as the basketball type,” I told him as I slowly walked over to a treadmill, him following my lead.

“And you didn’t take me as the flirting type, but I guess we both have some surprises.”

“I guess so,” I said as I started the machine. It was strange to run on anything but the street or sidewalk, but I would have to get used to it.

“You’re very interesting, Ky,” he said after a minute of watching me run.

“Oh really? How so?” I asked, glancing at him as he started his own treadmill.

“I can see you have secrets, lots of them,” Keith said, smirking as he ran a hand through his dark hair.

“And I can see that you’re all dark inside,” I replied, causing him to shake his head, a small smile playing on his lips.

“Are you always going to have a smart ass reply?” he asked me.

I didn’t respond, turning up the speed.

“Are you always going to question everything I do?” I asked, my lips twitching into a smile.

“No.”

“Oh, well good to know,” I said awkwardly, unsure how to respond.

“How about the next time we go out and do something, we go get a meal or something instead of this? I would suggest going after, but you don’t take me as the girl to go out to a restaurant half-naked,” he told me.

I looked at him surprised before quickly covering it up. I wasn’t expecting him to ask me on a date so soon.

“Are you asking me on a date? You didn’t take me as the romantic type.”

“I’m not, which is why it’s a simple hangout. Maybe we’ll fuck after if you’re lucky.”

“You’re real classy,” I said, rolling my eyes as I took out the little card, making the machine stop almost right away.

“I know, I get that a lot. Already running?” he asked, referring to my sudden stop.

"From you? No," I said as I headed to a different machine nearby. I needed a break from all of this. This wasn't me and I felt slutty. Andrew would be disgusted with this fake me. Keith only hummed in response and continued to jog. This was going to be a long night.

Chapter 17

Claire's Point of View

It was dark and it was hot. The heat was consuming me and the water at my feet was starting to burn me. Where are my heels? Where am I? Where's Liam?

There was a stinging in my arm but the darkness made it difficult make out what it was. An IV maybe? Why would I have an IV?

"Hello?" I called out, hoping to see another figure in the darkness.

"Anyone here?" I yelled, trying to ignore the feeling of my own sweat trailing down my face and the rest of my body. I felt like I was suffocating. It was too hot in here.

"Liam?" I mumbled before feeling myself slowly lose consciousness again.

***

It was dark. It was hot, too hot. The water was now at my knees. How long have I been out? Was I going to die? Why am I tied to this chair? What happened? I had so many questions, yet I couldn't get myself to ask them.

"Liam?" My voice sounded almost foreign since it was dry, lacking the taste of my own spit. My body was exhausted, yet I still used every part that I could as I tried to shake the cold, metal chair. I needed to leave. I needed to get back to Caiden. This was a bad idea. I should have listened to him, I really was going to die.

Two loud dings sounded through the room before lights above me started to turn on. My eyes took a minute to adjust to the new light, but I took the opportunity to look around me. It looked like I was in a warehouse. As I thought, water was filling up around me, the source unknown. I noticed there were glass windows at the top on the front and the back of the building. The window in front of me had multiple people sitting there, watching me.

"W-who are you?" I yelled, my voice cracking. They talked among themselves, not one answering my question.

"Tell me now, dammit!" I yelled, my voice coming out a bit clearer.

"Claire Martez, age twenty-eight, 18 weeks pregnant. She is a well-known fashion designer who first became well known for her travelling around the world giving speeches about a dead boy named Edward Sterling. Also, she is the girlfriend of Caiden Anderson, CEO of his company and

ex-member of Jackson Farone's old gang," a feminine voice announced into a microphone. I stared at the woman with curiosity since she knew such small details that most people didn't know.

It was true, the way I got over my best friend's death was by sharing his story, saving many lives in the process. It was only a few months, but multiple people stuck with everything I did because they were inspired. The fact that they knew about Caiden's past too is what confirmed the fact that they were from Jackson's gang.

"So what? Your plan is to just drown me?" I yelled, still getting no response. My eyes skimmed through the people in the room, waiting for a response. My eyes stopped when they landed on the figure in the corner of the room, looking down at me from the glass.

"Explain to Ms. Martez what will happen to her," the man spoke, his voice sounding through the room.

"Your body will slowly start to be consumed by the water and at first, you will hold your breath and after about a minute, maybe two at most, your will have no choice but to exhale and when you do, your lungs will fill with water. You will try to swim up to get air, but the chair will stop you from doing so. You'll slowly start to feel your body shut down before you are knocked unconscious. After that you will be dead, and after about four to five minutes you baby will be as well," the woman said with no emotion in her voice.

"I don't even know any of you. Why do I deserve to die?" I yelled, feeling the fear fill my body as I felt the sides of my dress getting wet, along with my thighs.

"Explain to—"

"How about you tell me! Stop having everyone else do your damn dirty work," I hissed. A small smirk flashed on his face before he walked over to the mic, bending down just enough to speak into it.

"Well, darling, I was hoping you'd be smart enough to treat the man who holds your life in his hands with some respect, but I see that may not be possible for you," his deep voice said as he kept a confident look on his face. If this wasn't a life or death situation, I would probably appreciate how handsome he was.

"Where's Liam?" I demanded.

"Dead." The words slid off his tongue seductively, making me look at him with disgust, with hatred. He made it sound like death was such a pleasant thing.

"You're lying," I responded calmly.

"Am I?" he asked just as calmly. "Would you bet your life on it?"

“Yes, actually I would.”

“You’re brave, too brave.” The smirk slipped off his face and suddenly he was serious.

“Bring in Liam,” he called out, and two men brought him out. I watched as suddenly the glass started to move, going up in one area, almost like a garage door.

“Looks as though I was right,” I said, keeping my eyes on Liam. He was too close to the edge. The guys pushed Liam’s body forward but quickly grabbed him before he could fall. I fought to get out of the chair but my hands were tightly cuffed behind me.

“Just let him go. It’s obvious you only want me so just l-let him go,” I said.

“Awe, now she’s begging.”

“Your name's Jackson, right?” I asked. He looked surprised.

“That woman said your last name is Farone so you must be Jesse’s brother. Why would you try to kill someone your brother cares about?” I asked him.

His face hardened.

“That’s not any of your concern, and this has nothing to do with anything we’re talking about.”

“Are you sure? You seem to be getting worked up about him,” I said, causing him to slam his fist on the desk.

“Kill him,” Jackson said, looking at the men holding Liam.

“Wait.” He paused before looking at the woman from before. “Remind everyone here how Edward Sterling died again.”

I stared at him confused. What did Eddie have to do with anything?

“Edward Sterling, or as he liked to be called, Eddie. Eddie sliced his own throat open on top of the boys university and end up choking on his own blood as he dropped to the ground, breaking most of the bones in his body in front of the school. They declared him officially dead, all due to a suicide.” Her voice was once again monotone as she told the story of my old friend.

“Claire, you can confirm that story, right? I mean you were there after all,” Jackson said, causing my look of disgust to return. “Why don’t we take a minute to relive it?”

He pulled out a knife, throwing it to one of the guys holding Liam. The man released him, removing his hand from his mouth, and he caught the knife perfectly.

“Liam, is it? How about you do us a favor and bring this right across your throat? Don’t forget to fall towards the water, though, I’d rather not have to deal with blood on the carpet.”

"Go to hell," Liam hissed.

"You're disgusting. We've done nothing to you. Don't you dare hurt him."

"We won't be doing anything. We can't control it if he brings a knife across his own throat," Jackson said nonchalantly as he shrugged.

"He would never."

"It's him or you, Claire."

I glanced down at myself to see the water already halfway up my stomach.

"Why are you doing this?" Liam asked.

"It's always the same questions all the time. It's pretty infuriating actually."

I watched as sweat dripped down my nose from the humidity. I needed to think. I could get out of here. I tried pulling at the handcuffs that were underneath the water but it was no use.

"You don't want to kill us," I blurted, causing all eyes to focus on me. Liam narrowed his eyes at me, trying to understand where I was going with this.

"Oh, and why is that?"

"Because I know things, more than you. You were in prison for years, right," I confirmed before continuing, trying to ignore the panic rising in my chest. "W-well in this past year I've got to know your brother q-quite well."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"You hate him. I have information on him. I could be your own personal spy," I said before wincing. He wouldn't buy this, right? I am probably dead.

"I still don't see the need for your friend here," Jackson said looking at Liam. I let out a shaky breath before continuing.

"It's a package deal. You won't even get a sentence out of me. Besides, go to hell if you even think so much about killing him," I told him.

He smirked.

"You got nerve threatening me while both you and your friend are in a close to death situation."

"It's a risk that I am willing to take," I said, giving him a challenging look. "Look, I'm not threatening you. I'm just letting you see your possibilities before you do something you regret."

“Calla, go ahead and cancel procedure one. We’re going with protocol three,” he told me. I looked at Liam, who was panicked.

“What’s protocol three?” Liam asked, and suddenly I felt a bit queasy and looked down to see liquid being pumped into my body. I glanced at the IV, frowning.

“What are you putting in me?” I asked, suddenly feeling fatigue. I didn’t like this feeling, this feeling of hopelessness, this feeling of death.

Beep, beep.

My eyes started to become heavy, too heavy to keep open.

“Claire! Stay awake,” Liam yelled at me.

“Claire, you have to stay awake! Keep your eyes open.”

His voice started to sound farther and farther away, and soon I found myself once again unconscious.

***

I blinked slowly, my eyes adjusting to the light. “What are you doing?” I mumbled, not sure my words were coming out as English.

“Shh, don’t talk,” the man told me, my body suddenly lifted into the man’s arms. My eyes were blurry, barely making out the face of the stranger.

“Let go of me.”

A door was suddenly pushed open and a cold breeze hit me. I couldn’t control my shivering body as my wet dress clung to me. We entered another room before I was suddenly tossed on a couch.

“Where’s Liam?” I demanded, my voice less groggy and my eyesight clearer. Jackson leaned back in the chair he was sitting in behind a large, brown desk.

“Leave us,” Jackson said, waving the guy away before looking at me.

“You wake up and you’re not dead or underwater and your first thoughts are where is your friend? Pathetic.”

He spat, crossing his arms over his chest.

“It’s called having loyalty to someone, something you probably won’t ever know.”

“That tongue of yours will get you killed one of these days.”

I couldn’t resist letting a smirk crawl up my face.

"Funny, your brother said the same thing."

Jackson threw a glass beer bottle towards the wall, just barely missing my head.

"Sweetheart, stop testing me. I don't find it cute. It's rather annoying actually."

"You never answer my question. Where is my friend?"

"Dead."

"I'm going to ask you again and this time, you're going to give me a real answer."

"That was a real answer," he replied, a smirk sliding up his sickeningly handsome face. Why did the bad ones always have to be handsome? It's these family genes I swear.

"Well, where are my shoes at least?" I asked, making it sound like I was just being curious. In reality, that was the one thing keeping me semi-calm.

"Oh, sweetheart, do you think I'm honestly that stupid?" Yes. "I know those agents. I know this was a setup, and after doing a quick scan it only confirmed what I already knew. They put a tracker with you. In your shoes to be exact." My blood ran cold at his words. This guy was smarter than Riley anticipated.

"You're interesting," Jackson said, looking at me carefully after a moment of silence.

"So I've been told," I retorted, crossing one leg over the other. I bit my lip as I tried to not focus on the fact that Liam could potentially be dead and I could be next.

"So how long do you plan on sitting here and staring me down?"

"Claire Martez." He licked his lips, making it sound as if he was just testing out the words on his tongue. "I don't understand the appeal of you besides the simple looks."

"I could say the same for you," I said watching as his eyes followed the small movement of my dress moving up as I moved an inch on the couch.

"Prison did me well," he replied, standing up and walking to the front of his desk, leaning against it with his arms crossed over his chest.

"I'm not really into the whole small talk thing with someone who tried to kill me and my unborn child, so I'm going to have to cut this short," I said, standing up as well.

"How cute, you think you can just come and go. I hate to be the one to tell you but that's not how this works. I mean you can always come. I just can't guarantee you'll get to leave alive."

"You seem to have lots of empty threats and some very unappealing pet names as well."

"They're not empty and keep giving the seductive looks and you really might not leave the room," he said, pushing himself off the desk.

"Seductive? I have a boyfriend, the one I'm sure you're going to try to kill eventually as well."

He moved closer to me, our bodies only centimeters away from each other.

"Boyfriend, is it? I'm sure you miss the feeling of a random guy pressed up against you. No feelings, no emotions, just sex, just fucking," he whispered in my ear slowly and seductively.

I cleared my throat, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sweetheart, I know you would sleep around from time to time before you got tied down. I mean you slept with Leon – he's not exactly the definition of a good guy." His stubble scraped the side of my face, making my breath catch in my throat a bit. "I could see you fitting in here. You'd like the drugs, the parties, the sex." He emphasized each word carefully before pulling away so his face was even closer, his lips too close to mine.

My eyes searched his dark ones. "I think you should lay off the marijuana for a while, you seem to be imagining things." I slammed my knee into his "special spot" and watched as he gasped for breath, stepping away from me as he leaned over.

"Hurts like a bitch, huh?" I asked stepping away from him.

"You little—" he gasped out and I leaned down so I was inches from his face. I put my right hand on his face, my long acrylic nails digging into his face as I squeezed his cheeks together a bit.

"Bitch," I finished his sentence for him before stepping back and bringing my foot up and hitting him directly in the face, causing him to fall back. I slammed my fist into his face directly after and surprisingly he was knocked out cold after the one hit. It was a good day to wear some rings.

"And to think Caiden thought I couldn't take care of myself. Look at me, 18 weeks pregnant and still workin' it," I mumbled to myself as I searched through Jackson's desk drawers. My eyes landed on a pistol, and I hesitantly picked it up. The foreign object felt strange in my hand. I quickly went through the basics of using a gun. Thankful it was fully loaded. This is why we watch shows like The Walking Dead.

I looked around the room carefully. Jackson was a gang leader or, heck, maybe even a mafia leader. I mean how else would he have so many men and guns already. He wasn't even supposed to be getting out of prison for another week or so.

"C'mon Claire, think," I muttered, looking around trying to find something, anything out of the ordinary. He had to have another escape route in case something went bad. I couldn't just walk out the office door, he most likely had men out there guarding it. My eyes landed on the piece of wood

that looked just slightly different on the wall. The lines were going the opposite way compared to all the other pieces. I moved a small cabinet to the side a bit and poked the wall.

Stop being a baby and feel for a handle or something.

I actually listened to my conscious and felt around that area. My hands stopped as I felt a little handle. I pulled it up and a door opened. The path was dark but I knew I had to suck it up.

Yes, because going into a dark path with no shoes and no light is always the best idea.

Do you have any better options?

Just hurry up before you get caught.

I pulled the door shut behind me and walked down the path, my hands on the wall around me to make sure I didn't trip. You know when it's three in the morning and you really start to overthink things? Yeah, that was currently me in the life or death situation.

'Why the hell is my stomach so fat? Man I could really use some yogurt right now and please don't accidently trip and get yourself shot with this gun' were the three thoughts that kept running through my mind. Oh, and why hasn't Caiden proposed to me? I'm having his child, yet he still won't put a ring on my finger.

About two minutes later my head bumped into a wall, signaling the end of the path; I opened the door and found myself in a hallway.

"What the hell?" I mumbled. Who would make an escape path and not make it go outside? I rolled my eyes at his stupidity and slowly walked down the hallway, the gun carefully in my hand.

My eyes landed on a door towards the end of the hall, and I hesitantly went to it. There was no window to look inside so I wasn't positive whether I was about to walk into my death or my freedom. My free hand slowly turned the doorknob to the metal door.

Squeak.

I winced at the sound and made my way into the lit up room. There were jail-like cells everywhere, every single one filled with different men and women.

"Claire!" Liam yelled, and I ran to the third cell down on the right side. I sighed in relief at Liam's clear face. He wasn't dead.

"Hey, babe," a guy yelled, his voice raspy making it sound like he smoked five packs a day. "Why don't you come over here and ride on a real man." Ew.

"C'mon we have to get you out of here and get back to the others." I told him and he nodded.

"How'd you escape?" he asked.

"I am one badass pregnant woman," I said.

He shook his head at me smiling.

"Let's hurry," Liam suggested. I nodded Who knows how long Jackson will be out.

"I need a key," I told him, looking down at the lock.

He silently swore before looking around the cell.

"I got it," he said before holding out his hand. "Give me your hair pin."

I frowned. "I don't have one."

"You always have one." Liam stared at me like I was crazy and I shook my head.

"They took everything off of me beside this dress," I said, causing him to slam his fist against the concrete wall in the back. It was true while I was out they took my heels, pins, and even my phone.

"Find my shoes," he said suddenly, and I raised an eyebrow, confused.

"They didn't take them out of this room. They're black dress shoes. They open on the heel." I sighed and walked towards the opposite side of the room.

I opened multiple cabinets and frowned when I only found clothes hidden in a basket. What did they not believe in shoes in this place? I opened the last cabinet and a bunch of shoes came tumbling out. Great. There were plenty of heels and tennis shoes and thankfully only three pairs of dress shoes. I probably looked like an idiot trying to open the bottom of a shoe – either that or very drunk. Speaking of that, I've never been truly drunk. When I get out of here I don't think it would be a bad thing to try since Caiden seems to like it.

You're pregnant.

And people wonder why I'm in such a bad mood all the time.

"Found it!" I yelled and grabbed the shoes and headed back to his cell.

"Hey, help a girl out. Let me out of here," a girl said, suddenly grabbing my arm, her long nails digging into my arm as I walked past her.

"I'm sorry, I can't. Please let me go." I looked at her with sympathy, and she only glared at me.

"Fucking bitch," she hissed releasing my arm. "I hope you get caught."

I snorted at the quick change in her behavior and only hurried to Liam's cell. "Give me the right one." I handed it to him, and he quickly turned it to the bottom and pushed down on the inside of

the heel and suddenly the front part of the shoe opened and I looked at him in amazement. It opened a completely different part. How do agents fit so much in the bottom of a stupid shoe?

I watched as he pulled out a very similar pen that Matt used earlier, or yesterday, or whatever day we were taken. Liam took off the back of the pen and pressed the side, causing a little drill to spin.

“Put this in the lock.” I did as he said and placed it in the lock. A small crunching sound was heard after a minute, causing me to stop. Liam opened the door and grabbed my hand, preparing to run.

“Wait!” I gasped.

He paused, looking at me like I was crazy.

“The gun.”

I ran back over to the shoes and picked up the weapon I left sitting on the floor before running back. I handed him the pistol, causing him to send me an impressed look before we carefully left the room.

We stayed silent as we ran over to an elevator on the opposite end of the hall. He pressed the button before putting his finger to his mouth, signaling for me to stay silent.

“This will make them think we’re here,” he answered. He walked me over to a door that read “stairs.” I quickly followed him down three flights of stairs before pausing.

“You’re killing me here,” I told him, leaning against the rail, my other hand on my stomach.

“Claire, we have to keep moving,” he said seriously, causing me to glare at him.

“You don’t think I know that?” I hissed causing him to sigh in irritation. “My back is killing me.”

“We’re almost there. Just one more flight till we’re to the garage.” He encouraged me and I rolled my eyes before heading down the twelve more stairs that lead to the garage. Liam peeked through the little window and nodded at me, telling me it was clear.

“We don’t have any keys,” I reminded him.

He pointed to behind me where different keys hung on different hooks. Theye were all labeled underneath. “How fortunate,” I said sarcastically. Liam grabbed the keys to a nice, sleek, black Porsche, and we both got in.

“How do they have this many cars? Did he even go to prison?” I thought out loud, silently enjoying the feeling of sitting again.

"That's what I'm starting to wonder. He's out a week early, and he has too many people on his side. Even Jesse took a week or two to get back into everything," Liam noted as he pulled up to the garage door that automatically opened.

"Don't you find it strange that we got out that easy? I mean I knocked Jackson out, but he should've been up in five minutes tops," I said, looking at the unknown area. There was a red and white bar that stopped people from exiting and there was a man standing there in an all black suit with a gun.

"Do we run it?" I asked, and Liam looked at me amused.

"Would you run it?" he asked and I shrugged.

"They do it in GTA, and it works out fine for them."

"That's a game Claire. The windows are tinted. If he wasn't notified of any problem he'll probably just let us go through when we stop." I chewed on my bottom lip nervously as Liam moved again and stopped right in front of the bar. The man looked at the car for a minute before pressing something that caused the bar to slowly go up. As soon as it was up enough Liam pressed on the gas causing us to skid a little as he made a quick turn out of here, leaving black skid marks.

He glanced at me, a cocky look on his face, yet I still frowned.

"That was all too easy. Why would they just let us go?" I asked.

"We'll worry about it later when we get you safely home."

After a few minutes of silence, a red car from afar moved to our side of the road and started driving right towards.

"Liam," I asked looking at the car with fear.

"What are they doing? What are you doing? Liam, move!" I yelled as both cars drove toward each other at a fast speed.

"Put on your seatbelt and shut the hell up!" he yelled back.

I stared at the red car with fear but listened to him since he did the same. I closed my eyes right before I felt the car swerve to the right before the breaks were slammed on. My head flew to the right and slammed against the window, not hard enough to break it though. My eyes flew open at the impact, and I looked over at Liam.

"Are you fucking crazy?" I yelled.

He leaned his head against the back of his seat before looking at me.

"You hit your head, are you okay?" he asked.

I nodded, only feeling a small bump.

“Who the hell was that?” I asked, looking at the back window but not seeing any sign of the red car. That’s weird, I thought before looking at Liam. You know when you’re watching a movie and just before something bad happens the scene turns into slow motion? Yeah, I felt like I was living that scene as the familiar car slammed into Liam's side causing my head to hit against the window again causing it to shatter from the impact. I groaned in pain and looked at the large brown pole on my side that stopped the car from flipping.

I didn’t realize I was screaming until I ran out of air and the sound cut out from my throat. I looked over at Liam and saw his head leaning on his right shoulder, eyes closed, and glass all over his lap, blood leaking from the left side of his head. “Liam?” I whispered as my own eyes started to feel heavy. I felt the side of my head with my shaky hand and found blood leaking out of the top of my head.

I looked through the front window with my blurry vision to see a tall figure walking towards the car, “Caiden?” My eyes began to shut on their own accord. I guess a little sleep wouldn’t hurt.

Chapter 18

Claire's Point of View

"John Doe died on the way here. We just needed you to call it." I heard someone in the background and my eyebrows furrowed at the unfamiliar voice and my body being moved. Where was I?

"Time of Death: 16:25," I heard someone in the background call before I started to lose consciousness again.

I woke up again a few minutes later to find multiple people standing above me, a mask over my face. I looked up at them in fear and tried talking. One quickly removed the mask and talked quickly.

"Hey, calm down, just breathe," he said as he saw me starting to hyperventilate. What happened? Where am I? What was going on? Is my baby okay? So many questions formed in my head, but I couldn't get myself to say them.

"I'm Dr. Ernest from Northwest Hospital. Can you tell us your name?" he asked, stopping what he was doing and looking me straight in the eyes.

"Claire Martez," I responded as I felt my arm being stabbed, an IV being put in it.

"Do you remember what happened?" he asked.

I shook my head, causing my stomach to churn from the movement.

"You were in an accident," he said.

Suddenly flashes of the red car went through my head, and I heard the sound of my own heart starting to beat faster.

"Liam. Where's Liam?" I demanded, trying to sit up, but he gently pushed me back down.

"We have to take care of you and your baby, Claire. I'll have someone go check on him," he said, but something about the look he was giving another doctor didn't help my nerves.

"Is Liam your husband?" he asked.

I shook my head, wincing at the pain it brought to me once again. My eyes widened and I leaned over, throwing up all over the person next to me.

"I'm so sorry!" I said, closing my eyes as I let out heavy breaths. "Caiden Anderson, call him. He's my boyfriend." I told them before I felt my breathing start to slow down.

“Claire, keep talking to us. We need you to stay awake.”

“I’m still awake,” I mumbled incoherently, my eyes still closed.

“Claire! Claire!”

“Dammit, we’re gonna lose her. Get ready to charge to 100,” I heard them say before someone else yelled.

“Wait,” I heard before I once again lost consciousness.

***

Clover’s Point of View

I sat next to Keith, coffee in front of me as we talked about nothing serious. This was supposedly a date, a lame first date if I do say so myself.

“What about you?” he asked.

I looked up at him surprised.

“You weren’t listening to one word I was saying, were you?” Keith looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

I sighed.

“I’m sorry, I’m just really distracted right now. Work has me stressed,” I lied, and he leaned forward a bit.

“You’re lying. You don’t have to tell me whatever it is,” he said before taking out a pack of cigarettes from the pocket of his plaid t-shirt that was under his leather jacket.

“Why do you always think I’m lying?” I asked with a raised eyebrow.

“You lied about your name after all,” he said standing up.

“Well, I’m not the only one hiding things here. I mean look at you with your smoking habits. And earlier when I was looking down at my phone, I’m pretty sure you poured whiskey into your coffee,” I pointed out. He smirked.

“Babe, those aren’t secrets,” he said, pulling out a small canteen and taking a swig from it.

“Maybe I’m not into guys who drink or smoke,” I said, standing up as well and he chuckled.

“Something tells me otherwise,” he said, stepping closer to me. He was about to continue before my phone went off. Glancing at the screen on the tabl,e I saw the familiar number and stepped away from Keith.

"One second," I said before taking the call a few feet away. "Hello?"

"Clove, it's Claire and Liam. They got in an accident," Andrew said, causing my heart to drop to my stomach.

"Are they okay?" I asked immediately already grabbing my purse and pulling out Joey's car keys since he let me borrow his car.

"I'm not sure. We're on the way to the hospital now," Andrew said.

I heard Caiden in the background.

"Can you drive any fucking slower?" he yelled at someone.

I winced a bit at the tone. Caiden hasn't been okay since Claire was taken three days ago. All he's done is drink, swear, and break things. Andrew had to take the kids out a lot to shield their innocence.

"I'm on my way," I said immediately into the phone. "Is he at least somewhat sober?" I whispered into the phone, glancing at Keith who seemed to be watching me carefully.

"He was only drinking coffee since he woke up about an hour before the call."

"Stop fucking talking about me like I'm not right here. Tell Clover to mind her own damn business. Neither one of you are her real friends. Her real friends are Nathan and Mia. If you're going to be anywhere near that hospital room, then they should be the ones you're on the phone with," he hissed, his voice as cold as ice. I actually felt goosebumps crawl up my arm from the hatred in his tone.

Andrew didn't say anything for a minute. "We'll meet you there," he said before hanging up. I turned around and faced a curious Keith.

"Hey, I'm really sorry, but I have to go. There's an emergency with my friend so I'll talk to you later?" I said, although it sounded a bit more like a question.

"Yeah, do you need a ride?" he asked. I shook my head.

"This probably wouldn't be the best way for you to meet my friends," I told him.

He nodded. In reality, I think Caiden would probably beat him half to death, and Andrew probably wouldn't be very friendly either.

"I'll talk to you later then," he replied surprisingly understanding.

I got in the car and took the ten-minute drive to the hospital. When I arrived I was directed to a waiting room where everyone else was. I immediately spotted Andrew and threw my arms around him.

“Where’s the kids?” I asked.

“Emily agreed to watch them,” he said. I looked over to where Caiden was pacing and a familiar brunette was trying to talk to him. I watched the interaction trying to see and hear what happened exactly,

“Caiden, you need to calm down. When they let us go see her they’re not going to let you in if you’re acting all psycho,” she said. He glared at her.

“Mia, I’m not Claire. Smooth talking won’t help me so just back the fuck up,” he hissed, but the cold tone didn’t seem to faze her.

“Fine, Caiden Anderson, you have about five seconds to chill the fuck out or else I’m going to personally decapitate you to make sure you won’t have another kid. You acting all crazy like this is only stressing every other person in this room out. Nathan is about a second away from having a breakdown, and instead of comforting him I’m stuck standing here and trying to get you to at least sit the fuck down.”

“Fuck,” he hissed before sitting down and putting his face in his hands. “I’m scared,” he whispered to her. She sighed, taking a seat next to him.

Mia let out a deep breath. “We just have to hope for the best.”

“How’s Liam?” Riley asked, joining us. Everyone around us went silent. I looked at Andrew, and he shook his head with a frown on his face.

“Well someone needs to answer me.”

“He’s not doing that great. They brought him into immediate surgery,” Andrew said after a moment of realizing that no one else was going to say anything

“Lovely,” she muttered.

Joey pulled her into a hug.

“What exactly happened?” Joey asked.

Riley shrugged before looking at us for answers.

“They were in an accident,” I said just as a police officer walked over to us.

“Hello, by any chance are any of you related to Claire Martez?” the officer asked.

I looked at Caiden.

“I’m her boyfriend,” he said standing up. The officer walked over before attempting to talk in hushed voices.

“Do you know anyone who would be out to get Claire?” the officer asked quietly, and he glanced at Riley who was focusing on the conversation as well.

“No, she’s always been the type of girl who doesn’t get on people’s bad sides. She would feed every homeless person on the street if she could,” Caiden said, his fists clenching. “Why?”

“The accident Ms. Martez was involved in wasn’t a normal accident. The cameras are showing that the person intentionally hit her,” he said. The look on Caiden’s face was hostile.

“Excuse me, officer?” Riley interrupted.

He looked back at her curiously.

“Yes?”

“I’m Riley Scott and this is my partner, Joey Maxwell. We are from the Europe agency, which if you don’t know is a secret investigation company,” Riley said, pulling out a badge and showing the guy, who quickly studied the item. “Claire Martez and Liam Shea are a part of our current case, and I hope you don’t mind, but from here on out we will take over any further investigation on them. Later I’d like to meet take a look at that camera and follow up on your research so far.”

The officer studied her warily before nodding. “You can come down to the station later, and if our background check confirms everything you just told me, then we will talk,” he said.

She sent him a smile.

“Glad this is all taken care of then, thank you.”

Riley shook his hand before he went to go talk to another officer. As soon as he was out of sight, the smile dropped and she looked at Joey.

“The last thing we need is someone else tracking our every move,” she muttered.

Joey nodded in agreement before putting his arm around her shoulder.

“Just wait everything will work out.”

“I hope so,” she said, leaning her hand against his shoulder.

“I hate to interrupt, but shouldn’t you be worried about someone seeing you two together?” I asked.

"We should be, but if something happens to Liam then this mission will be put on hold. We will need to immediately fly back to London," Joey said. I felt goosebumps rise on my arms at the thought.

I didn't know Liam, but I know he's single and clearly feels something for Claire and he's young. He's not even in his thirties yet. He hasn't lived, and there's already a possibility that he was going to die. There's a possibility Claire could even die. Everyone was dying and I don't know if I could handle it. I can't watch the black parade, the parade that was leaving behind a lingering scent of death, a trail of blood.

"Clover?" Andrew mumbled and I looked up at him. He wiped my face with his thumb, making me realize I was crying.

"I'm scared," I told him softly, and he pulled me against him.

"I know, it's going to be okay. I won't let anything happen to you," he promised.

I gave him a weak smile in return.

Claire's Point of View

All I could see was darkness before I suddenly found myself standing in a cemetery. It was a familiar area, yet I still couldn't understand why I was here. I looked at the grave two feet away from me and to my surprise, there was someone standing there. Her blonde hair stood out in the dark, gloomy place along with her bright white dress. When she looked up at the sky, I let out a small gasp and took a step back. Why was I watching myself? I watched the familiar scene from almost nine years ago.

"Hey, Eddie, I know it's been awhile since I last saw you, and I just wanted to see how you're doing," I said, smiling as I bent down and waiting for a response.

Silence.

"I was looking through my pictures on my phone earlier and I came across a picture we took once when we were hanging out. It was a long time ago towards the beginning of the year, but one look at it made me cry like a baby for hours, yet at the same time smile for hours. You were sitting there with the biggest smile on your face, and I was right next to you making some disgusted face at the camera. Standing in the back was the guy from Steak & Shake, looking like he was in the middle of twerking," I told him, wiping the tear that threatened to fall.

Silence.

"I-I miss you," my voice cracked as I stared at his gravestone.

"I hope you're happy up there because if not, I'll make sure to come up there and kick someone's ass if needed," I started again after a minute of calming myself down. "You know Caiden finally admitted he doesn't hate me. I know you always thought he would end up some alcoholic or he would die by the time he reached twenty-five, but I like to think if I keep trying to convince him he will go and finally get some help. You know I got some help. I can't say it's definitely working, but recently my therapist keeps telling me I'm improving and getting better." I looked up as I felt a few drops of water on my face and then watched as it started to pour, water immediately soaking me. I embraced the feeling of the ice, cold water hitting me and finally let myself cry again.

I don't know how long I sat there talking to Eddie, but I knew it was time to go when it was pitch black with very few street lights on. I kissed my hand and touched the gravestone and gave a shaky smile. "See you soon," I whispered, before standing up and not even bothering to wipe my puffy eyes.

Pulling my black leather jacket closer to my body, I walked to my car.

I watched as my nineteen-year-old self got into the car and drove away. I turned back around and faced the cemetery, but suddenly all the graves were gone except one. I walked up to it, but there was no name on the stone. Looking up and away from the gravestone my eyes caught sight of a figure in front of me. They were too far to see a face, but I could see them walking towards me slowly. I narrowed my eyes trying to identify the figure, yet they stayed blurry.

Suddenly the scene changed, and I was back in a car. My head started pounding and my eyes watched as the same figure was walking towards me. I looked down at the blood that coated my hands and the pieces of glass all over my lap. Next to me, Liam sat with his eyes closed and his head leaning on his shoulder as blood leaked from his head as well.

Why couldn't I move? I tried to open my mouth to yell out for help from the stranger but my mouth wouldn't move.

"Claire, don't wor—" What was going on?

"When Mom gets here you'll really be dead in—"

Was I dead? What about Liam, was he dead?

"Claire, babydoll, I know you'll wake up soon. You have to."

Was that Caiden's voice? I looked at the mysterious figure walking towards me one last time before everything turned into darkness.

Slowly I opened my eyes, blinking slowly as I looked up at the white ceiling and the lights that were on low. I turned my head to see a machine with little lines moving up at the same rate. I glanced at

my arm to see a needle stuck into my hand. I looked down at the blue and white dress and winced at a sudden pressure in my head. My body ached all over and a bandage covered my left arm.

“Babydoll?”

Someone suddenly called and I looked up at the handsome figure. I saw his brown hair messy and the top buttons of his blue shirt not completely buttoned up all the way. He held a coffee in his hand as he stared at me with what looked like relief. I didn’t respond and watched as he walked towards me. He placed his drink on a seat next to my bed and placed his hand carefully in mine, so carefully that you’d think I would break if he moved any faster. His hazel eyes glanced over my face, and I frowned.

“What happened?” I asked, my voice a bit groggy.

“All anyone knows is that you were in a car accident with Liam. Someone hit you two,” Caiden said.

I squeezed his hand.

“Our baby? Is our baby okay?” I asked, feeling panicked as I placed my hand on my stomach.

“The baby is fine. He’s strong just like his mother,” Caiden said, moving his hand to the one over my stomach.

I let out a sigh of relief. “Is Liam okay?”

“His side was the one that was hit. He’s in the ICU,” he said before looking me directly in the eyes. The look on his face was heart-wrenching, and I wasn’t sure what to say.

“I was scared, Claire. I haven’t been so scared in years. I thought I lost you. If you ever pull any type of bullshit like that again I will tie you to our bed and never let you leave,” he said.

I smiled.

“I love you,” I said.

He frowned, staring at me.

“Did you hear anything I just said?”

“Yes, but I just wanted to let you know I love you. I feel like since we fight so often we sometimes forget to say it. Being in a life or death situation multiple times since I was taken only made me realize how much I actually care about you.”

“Claire, you little ho.”

I looked up to see Mia enter the room with Nathan.

“I’ll go tell the nurse you’re up,” Caiden said. I nodded. He pressed his lips against mine and gave me one last look.

“Thank you,” I mumbled.

He stood up straight. When he walked out, Mia took his chair, setting his coffee on the ground.

“How dare you. You know I had to stop Caiden from killing everyone in his line of vision multiple times for you.” I smiled at my best friend.

“Just give me a hug and tell me you’re glad I’m alive,” I said holding open my arms, and she pursed her lips for a minute before a smile broke out on her face and she pulled me into her arms. It was a little awkward because of the needle in my arm, and I couldn’t move very far since my body was a bit sore.

“I’m glad you’re not dead," Mia whispered in my ear before pulling away.

“What, I don’t get a hug?” Nathan asked, and my smile only got bigger as held my arms open for him.

“You had me worried sick,” he said after kissing my forehead – the side that didn’t have a bandage.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault. But if I ever see the asshole who put your life at risk I will—” Nathan stopped when Mia did a few fake coughs before she glared at him.

“Let’s just say I hope you’d be prepared to come visit me in prison.”

I couldn’t help but start laughing at him. It was still amazing how Nathan and I managed to stay friends all these years. I don’t think my life would be the same without him. I noticed his red eyes and his shaky hands and knew my best friend had been here the whole time. I spoke with Nathan for a few more minutes before Mia interrupted.

“Hey, we’ll come back and visit later. Your doctors said only a couple visitors at a time, and I’m sure Jeffery wants to see you,” Mia said.

My eyes widened.

“Jeff’s here?” I asked, surprised that my brother came to visit me. I didn’t get many opportunities to see him these days.

“Yeah, I’ll send him in,” she said before grabbing my hand and giving it a quick squeeze.

“I’m glad you’re okay, slut.” Nathan rolled his eyes at his wife and gave me a lingering peck on my cheek.

“I love you, Claire-bear. I’ll come back later before visiting hours end.”

“Thanks, guys,” I said sincerely as I watched them leave. I let out a long yawn as I patiently waited for my brother to come join me.

As I waited I couldn’t help but wonder about the mysterious man. Memories rushed at me from the time with Jackson, yet I still couldn’t remember ever clearly seeing his face. Was he the one who helped us?

“You are so lucky I didn’t call Mom and Dad. They’d have a heart attack if they found out you’re in the hopsital,” I heard my brother say. A wide smile appeared on my face.

“Jeff, it’s been a while,” I said, letting him carefully pull me in a hug. “Sorry, I haven’t come by to see your new house.”

“You’re fine. I know you’ve been busy with your multimillion dollar company,” he said teasingly.

“I told you that you could come work for me if you ever needed to,” I told him. He rolled his eyes.

“Yeah so I can go get you coffee and plan your dinner reservations? I told you I’m fine with my job as a salesman,” Jeff said.

“That place barely pays you minimum wage. How about I see if Caiden will hire you?”

“Have you see your boyfriend? He’s got that ‘I’m gonna pound your face into the sidewalk if you look at me the wrong way again’ vibe.”

I couldn’t help but burst out laughing before groaning from the small pounding it brought my head.

“So what’s wrong with you anyways?” he asked.

“I don’t know. Caiden went to go get the nurse about twenty minutes ago.”

“They still haven’t came?” he asked surprised, and I nodded.

“Must be busy.”

Jeffery pressed the call nurse button on the side of my bed and only a minute later a nurse showed up.

“Hi, we just wanted to let you know Claire Martez is up,” Jeff said. The nurse smiled at me.

“I’ll call your doctors and let them know.”

“Thank you.”

She walked away and it only took a few minutes of Jeff and I talking for three doctors to join us.

“Hi Claire, I’m glad to see you’re up. I don’t know if you remember but I’m Doctor Ernest,” he said with a polite smile. I easily returned it.” Your injuries weren’t very severe, but you did get a few stitches on your hairline on the right side and a small piece of glass did get into your left arm. It was removed but we did have to stitch up the spot as well. You showed signs of a small concussion so we’re going to keep you here for a night or two for observation to make sure it’s just that. Sometimes the CTs that we give miss things so we’re just going to take these precautions,” he said before looking at my chart.

“Oh, thank goodness,” I mumbled. “That’s really great to know. By any chance do you know how my friend Liam is?” I asked.

He shook his head.

“Last I heard he was just getting out of surgery,” Doctor Ernest told me.

I sighed in relief.

“Did everything go okay then?”

“His injuries were definitely more severe then yours, but it was a good thing you two were wearing your seat belts or else everything would have been much worse.”

“Can I see him?” I asked, not taking my eyes off the doctor in front of me. I didn’t want to miss anything he was saying.

“I’m afraid I can’t allow that just yet. However, If you’re hungry I can have a nurse get you so food.”

I frowned and told him no.

“Okay, well if you need anything just press the button on the side. Dr. Madison, our head gynecologist and obstetrician will speak with you now,” he said before excusing himself.

“Hi Claire, I did an ultrasound when you came in and your baby is thankfully fine and still healthy. I’d like you to meet Doctor Thompson. He will be by to monitor your baby every couple of hours.”

“West,” I mumbled under my breath surprised to see him again. He looked good dressed in scrubs and a white coat with his name on it. I cleared my throat and sent the doctor a smile. “Thank you,” she nodded before telling me something about them coming back later to check on me.

“You’re pregnant?” Jeff asked, looking at me with wide eyes.

“Like I said, it’s been a while.”

I gave him a innocent smile.

“Oh, just wait till Mom hears about this.”

“Jeffery, you got Kim pregnant after a year of you two being together.”

“Don’t judge my life choices,” he said with a guilty look.

I gave him a smug one in return.

“I’m older than you. I should’ve had a kid years ago.”

“Yeah, I always thought you’d get pregnant around twenty-one ish.”

“What? Why?” I asked my jaw dropping.

“Claire, I use to hear you sneak guys up to you room. That started around what? Fifteen?”

I smacked his arm, “Sixteen.”

“Still earlier than most.”

“Touché.”

***

Riley’s Point of View

I looked at Liam who had multiple machines hooked up to him. His arm was in a cast and his head had a bandage from where they went in for surgery. He could barely breathe on his own.

“He looks dead already,” Joey said.

“I’m scared for him,” Rachel whispered, holding his hand as he laid there unconscious.

“He has been shot three times at once and still survived. He can survive this,” Joey said confidently, but I didn’t agree. Liam had bags under his eyes, and he was in surgery for hours. The doctors weren’t promising us anything about his wellbeing and it made me worried. Lex wouldn’t ever forgive me if he died here. She loved him, yet he was always too blind to even notice.

“We need to know how this happened, and we need to know what happened when they were with Jackson. I mean they were gone for three days,” he said from beside me.

“Joey, I know. Don’t worry, it will be okay,” I assured placing my head on his shoulder.

“No, this isn’t fair,” he said, pulling away from me and pulling at his hair with his hands.

“Joey, you said it yourself. He'll get through this.”

I watched as he shook his head, angry tears welling up in his eyes.

“You don’t understand, Riley,” Joey whispered before slamming his fist into the wall but not hard enough to do any damage.

“Excuse me, is everything alright in here?” a nurse asked.

I nodded.

“Everything’s fine. He’s just upset.”

The nurse looked at Joey warily.

“Well, visiting hours are over. You can come back some other time,” she said.

“Okay, we’ll leave in a minu—”

“It’s only five o'clock. We still have another few hours,” Joey interrupted.

“Visiting hours are over for you,” the nurse said sternly before leaving the room.

“What is wrong with you?” I hissed, looking at my fiancé.

“This isn’t fair,” Joey said before walking out. I gave one last look at the unconscious Liam before following after him. After taking the elevator down, I found him already outside leaning against the brick wall of the hospital.

“You need to stop acting out like you’re five, and explain what the hell is going on with you. I’ve know you almost our whole lives and you’ve never acted like this,” I said, standing directly in front of him.

“Liam was our competition for as long as I can remember as well. Him, Lex, and the others would always try to get our cases, but even before all that he was in training with me. We were best friends at one point and he was even there for me that time we almost broke up,” Joey said and I stood there listening and letting him get it all out. I thought back to the time when we were only twenty-one and we got into our only drunken fight after being together for two years. It wouldn’t be as memorable if it wasn’t for the fact that it was the only time we’ve ever been in such a big argument. We didn’t talk for days after the silly argument, and even I almost thought we were going to be done.

“If he dies in this hospital it won’t be on Claire, or Jackson, or even Jesse. It will be on us, Riley. Me and you.”

I took a deep breath and put my hands on his cheeks. “No one is to blame here.”

“Yes, there is!” he shouted, pushing away from me. “Don’t you see that it was us who brought him here? We are agents who are damn good at our jobs, yet we’re acting like we’re twelve years old again, taking months to solve one mission. We have evidence on Jesse and half of that gang. You’re going undercover there almost every night for what exactly? To get more evidence? We

don't nerd it. This job should be done, and we should all be in London safely and pigging out to Nando's as we watch a movie in our flat."

I silently stared at him, unsure of what to say. He knew we had to stay here for many more reasons. This has gone beyond just Jesse being some assassin. I walked up to my fiancé and placed my arms around him, pulling his against my body. He didn't resist and only hesitantly wrapped his arms around me.

"I—I just need him to be okay," he said, his voice cracking as tears started to finally crack.

I nodded, rubbing my hand up and down his back comfortingly.

"I know, Joey. I know."

Chapter 19

Caiden's Point of View

I stood there looking at the man in front of me carefully. He was in the waiting room the whole time, his dark eyes trying to secretly look at us. His hands would have continued to shake if he didn't shove them into his white coat that had his name perfectly printed in blue lettering above the pocket.

"I was wondering when you were going to say something," I said, leaning against the wall. The hallway was almost empty besides the occasional nurse or doctor passing through. Not even one person questioned our presence as he pulled me into a room.

"Shut the fuck up," he hissed, making my eyes narrow. This guy really wanted to get his ass kicked.

"I was wondering in the waiting room if you were the one that hit my girlfriend and the other guy with her. But since you're in perfect condition, meaning you didn't hit them, I'll consider not fucking you up after our talk," I responded.

He pushed me against a wall, his right hand around my throat.

Such a doctorly thing to do.

"Caiden, let's not forget you are the one wanted by not one, but two gangs. They all want you dead, and it would only take three seconds tops to stab you in the heart now," the man said.

A menacing smirk appeared on my face. This guy was bold, too bold.

"Do me a favor and let's not throw around threats you couldn't possibly ever accomplish," I said.

He tightened his grip on my throat, cutting off most of my air supply, but I still didn't move.

"If you want to talk, then let's talk instead of fucking around," I spat before grabbing his left arm and twisting it, causing him to automatically let go of my throat. I pushed the fucking idiot away before leaning against the wall again, my arms crossed over my chest. I was positioned in a way that showed I was cocky and I had every right to be. This guy was nothing to me.

"Caiden, you can continue to run from me and you can be pissed that I've helped keep track of you all these years, but I told you not to leave the gang. Leon warned you, Jesse warned you, I warned you. Everyone warned you." He tried to reason with me, but I scoffed.

"You're the one that got me into all that shit. You had me dealing, and you were the one getting me drunk every night. Instead of helping me out of a dark situation, you just sat there and handed me a

new bottle of whiskey every night," I said, dropping off my arms and not removing my narrowed eyes from him.

"If you just come back, Jesse will stop trying to kill you and Claire will be safe."

"He wants to fuck her and have some nice eye candy hanging off his arm. He won't stop going after my girlfriend either way."

He only lifted his shoulders in response.

"So what if you lose the girl? It's better than being dead and leaving her to clean up your gang messes."

I stayed silent for a minute, thinking over the idea.

"I'd rather die while loving her than spend life without her," I said.

"Truly romantic, Caiden. Let me guess, you got that from a book?" he said sarcastically. "Listen, I refuse to sit here and watch my brother die."

"You're not my brother."

"You're still denying it? Your father fucked my mother long before you even got kidnapped, so don't pull that bullshit," he said.

I felt my hands clench into fists.

"You seem to forget that he did that behind my so-called family's back first. My mother didn't want you in our lives, which is why we keep this quiet. Don't you dare come in here and pull some brotherly shit. I won't fall for it," I told him before a smirk crawled on my face.

"Anyways my father never contacted you ever again after that quickie with your mother. All he did was pay child support after finding out. Let's not act like he actually cared for your existence."

A fist swing towards me but I easily blocked it.

"You're a fucking dick. I was the only one who was there for you after you got home. I hooked you up, yet you still continued to treat me like shit."

I let out a harsh laugh.

"You followed me everywhere so you could give Jesse updates! Hell, you even emptied the gas tank while I was at a party to help Jesse try to kill me. The only reason you didn't go through with it is because Claire was with me. So please save the dramatics."

"We went over this already. You were the dumbass who left a gang. You knew that came with a price."

"It was clearly a smart thing too. Half of you got sent to jail anyway," I told him before heading towards the door. I needed to get that nurse for Claire still.

He put his hand on my shoulder, stopping me from leaving.

"You already fucked up in this situation. If I wasn't there to save Claire, she would have been stuck in the car and would have ended up burning to death. I saved her for you. That's only attempt two to kill her. They have plenty more to come."

"Keep trying and one of these days you may just find yourself six feet underground." I shrugged off his hand and walked out of the room. Both gangs were trying to kill Claire to get to me. I can't let that happen. I won't let that happen.

I stopped a nurse on her way to the nurse station, letting her know that Claire was up before heading to the cafeteria. I stepped into the elevator and stood in the back so more people could come in. I thought back to the day I first met my supposed half brother.

"Hey, your name's Caiden, right?" a kid asked, looking to be around my age, sixteen.

"Yeah, who the hell are you?" I asked coldly. I wasn't up for chatting with people at the moment.

"Your half brother. Your dad and my mom hooked up years ago, didn't they tell you?" he asked, looking confused. I stared at him curiously. I wasn't surprised my dad was messing around with another woman. It seemed to be a habit of his when mom wasn't home.

"Never directly, but I overheard a few arguments before coming here on this so-called vacation that something needed to be settled with a kid named Keith since some woman named Melissa died."

"Yeah, I'm Keith. Melissa was my mom," he said, but there was no sign of any sadness that his mother was dead.

"You don't seem very sad." I stated my thoughts and he shrugged.

"I'm so high right now I couldn't care less, but rumor has it I'm moving in with you guys so I got to get with what I can," Keith told me and I snorted.

"That's smart. Buy some cheap, probably home-made drugs from kids at school," I said.

He chuckled, shaking his head.

"Nah, man. I get good stuff from a kid our age and his older brother. They have a whole gang," he said, glancing behind him at my parents who were talking furiously back and forth.

"Hey, we're going out. We'll be back later," Keith yelled to my parents, and my dad only waved him off. "I'll show you."

We left his house, which was located in Los Angeles and took a twenty-minute walk to some old factory."Where are we?" I questioned, not liking the feeling I got from the place.

"I overheard some things too. I know you got kidnapped for some years. I think this stuff they've got will make you feel better. It's no price if you help them do some deals," Keith told me.

"Keith, I don't fuck with drugs."

"It's cool man. They got some high ass brands of alcohol. They get you drunk with one sip. Plus, you may like drugs if you try it and feel the high it gives you," he told me.

I couldn't help but think about how great it would feel to just be numb.

"Fine, set me up," I said.

He smirked.

"Alright, that's the spirit, man." After that, he led me into a building that had tons of people. Some looked like they were packaging things and others looked like they were just smoking a joint or something. It was a strange scene, but something about the darkness to it made me like it.

"Jesse, this is my bro, Caiden. He needs a hook-up with some good bourbon or somethin'," he told the kid around our age. He looked at me up and down at my dark attire and my freshly dyed blonde hair.

"What are you offering in return? My brother will kill me if I don't start stepping up and showing how this gang is supposed to be run. I can't do any free shit," he said to me. I lifted my shoulders, putting my hands in my front pockets.

"He'll join us and do some deals for you," Keith offered, and the kid, Jesse, looked at me for confirmation.

"Is that so?" Keith asked and I agreed. I was unconsciously signing a deal with the Devil.

Back then I was stupid to get involved with a gang, and I was stupid to let Keith be my friend or even my brother. He only fucked me over in the end when my dad finally was taking us back to Seattle, bringing him with us. Keith only ran away, leaving us all behind. Ss far as I know, he never contacted my parents again after that. I remember my parents agreeing once to just let him be.

I walked up to the counter and paid for a few cups of vanilla yogurt and headed back up to Claire's room. She should be pleased that I stopped for some yogurt for her.

Claire's Point of View

"So are you almost done with being an intern yet?" I asked as West squeezed some cold gel stuff on my stomach that I've faced multiple times before.

"Yeah, just about. Only a few months, and as long as I pass my test in the end I'll be okay to move on," West said.

"That's great!" I said feeling excited for him. "Hey, by any chance will you guys alert my obstetrician?" I asked.

He frowned.

"Your chart says you don't have one?" he said before looking at me for confirmation.

"I recently changed over. I have Dr. Keith Mabry. He's from the office about a block from here. I've only been there a few times so I can't remember the name," I said, and he nodded, writing the name down.

"I'll look him up and see if I can get him here," West told me and I smiled.

"Thanks, West," I said, watching him leave just as Caiden came in. "There you are! I thought you died. In the time you took to get a nurse I've already had a visit from Nathan, Mia, and Jeff. A nurse already stopped by as well," I said.

Caiden kissed the side of my forehead.

"I'm sorry. I ran into an old friend."

"Who?" I asked with narrowed eyes.

"Tom. He was visiting his mother," he said.

I stared at him for a moment, looking for any signs he was lying. When I found no signs I let myself relax.

"Look who finally decided to come back," Nathan said entering the room.

"He ran into Tom who was visiting his mom," I said as he took a seat next to me on the opposite side from Caiden.

"I thought Tom's mom had been dead for years?" Nathan asked curiously.

Caiden sent him a glare.

"His stepmother is here," he said correcting himself.

"Huh, what for? I just talked to Tom a while ago. I'm surprised he didn't tell me," Nathan said casually making me raise an eyebrow. I knew in college they became close, but even Caiden wasn't that close with him.

“Heart attack. Just happened today. Anyways, I bought you a yogurt, Claire,” Caiden said, turning his attention to me. A wide smile appeared on my face.

“Awe!” I took the yogurt and spoon from his hand. I didn’t hesitate to open the container and took a huge bite, moaning at the wonderful taste that filled my mouth.

“So was that Wesley I saw?” Caiden asked.

I nodded, not even bothering to correct him.

“He an intern.”

“Claire, will you tell me what happened? Riley’s been keeping me updated so I am caught up with the whole stupid idea of going undercover. I didn’t know you would be that stupid to go and let yourself get taken, though,” Nathan said.

I paused, stopping myself from taking anther bite.

Swallowing the yogurt that was already in my mouth, I looked at my best friend. “I’m sure you want to know too?” I asked, glancing at Caiden. He nodded.

“Damn right.”

“It’s hard to explain because everything’s a little blurry still, but I just remember waking up in a humid room. There was water all around me filling up the room. I kept going in and out, but when I finally came to, Jackson started playing games. He almost killed Liam and tried to drown me,” I said, my mind flashing the scenes of Liam almost getting his throat slit and the water continuing to rise.

“I can’t remember how, but I eventually ended up in Jackson’s office. Just us two. After quickly beating the shit out of him, I found some weird door that led me to Liam. We escaped really easily actually. It was almost like they let us go,” I said, frowning as I thought back to the red car.

“A red car came out of nowhere trying to hit us. It missed because Liam swerved or something. The last thing I remember was looking at Liam after we stopped and seeing the car hit us,” I said.

Caiden’s fist clenched as he tried to stop himself from hitting something.

“It was those bastards,” he muttered.

“Did they survive? The one in the other car?” asked Nathan as he stared at me curiously.

“They died before we even got to the hospital,” I answered, remembering them call someone’s death. We all came in at the same time.

"Although there was someone on the road after. I remember someone walking towards the car. I was hoping it was you," I said, looking at Caiden.

"But now that I'm not all out of it I know it wasn't," I said, thinking hard about the man. He was only in jeans and a t-shirt, but everything was so blurry I'd never know who it was.

"Excuse me," a nurse said, walking in with a bouquet of flowers. "These were dropped off for you." She handed me the gorgeous flowers and I smiled.

"Awe, how sweet. Jeff probably told my mom," I said as I grabbed the fairly large card. Opening up the envelope, I felt my heart pause in my chest.

Dear Claire, you're wasting time. Playing around in factories and hospitals is making the time run out. The sand is falling and no one can stop it. It will continue to slip through the fingers of friends and foes until it's all gone and there's nothing left to catch. Your fate is in your own hands.

Tick tock.

Daddy's dying, mommy's crying. Jeffrey's missing. Caiden's kissing. Jesse's searching, Jackson's lurking. Mia's leaving, Nathan's screaming. Riley's turning, Clover's mourning. The baby is kicking, but mommy went missing.

I'll leave you with that.

Looking forward to our next touch,

Your one and only friend. Xx

The hairs on my arm stood up, and I felt my throat closing up. I needed to find the air in the room. I couldn't breathe.

"What'd she say?" Nathan asked

I shook my head, not able to respond.

"Baby doll, breathe," Caiden insisted before grabbing some water from a nearby table. She handed it to me, and I swallowed it in seconds. Caiden picked up the card I dropped on my lap and read it carefully. "Fucking hell," he muttered.

"What's wrong? Who's it from?"

"Nathan, go find Riley. She should still be in the ICU," Caiden ordered. Nathan gave me a confused look but did what he was told.

It only took two minutes for him to come back with a tired looking Riley. "What's up?" she asked, standing at the end of the bed.

Caiden handed her the note.

“This is what’s up. Not only is Claire being threatened, but they know you’re here. Whoever it is knows everything,” Caiden said.

Nathan read the note from over her shoulder as well. Riley’s eyes hardened as she got to the end.

“What does she mean I’m turning?”

“Changing sides maybe?” Nathan suggested, causing us all to look at him.

“What? It’s the first thing that came to my head.”

“I need to call my parents. I have to make sure everything’s okay,” I said, leaning over and grabbing my phone from the side table. I silently winced at the pain it still brought to my head. I clicked on my mom’s contact and waited patiently as the phone rang.

“Hello?” my mom’s voiced said through the speaker.

“Hey, mom. How are you?” I asked curiously, pretending that everything was okay.

“I-I’m good, honey. Listen, can I call you later? I’m kind of in the middle of something right now,” she told me. My eyebrows furrowed.

“Yeah, whenever’s fine,” I said, and she said okay before mumbling a goodbye. I dialed the number of my brother immediately after. There was no answer, which caused my skin crawl.

Daddy’s dying, mommy’s crying. Jeffrey’s missing. Caiden’s kissing. Jesse’s searching, Jackson’s lurking. Mia’s leaving, Nathan’s screaming, Riley’s turning, Clover’s mourning. The baby is kicking, but mommy went missing.

The words played over and over again in my head. “Why would you be screaming? And who would you be kissing?” I demanded.

Caiden grabbed ahold of my hand.

“You’re overthinking things. This person isn’t serious. I wouldn’t be kissing anyone but you,” he assured, but Nathan stayed silent.

“Nathan?” I asked, looking at him. He gave me a small smile, one that didn’t even come close to his eyes.

“Mia and I have been fighting a lot recently. I didn’t want to stress you out because of the baby and all that.”

My heart clenched at the thought.

“What’s going on? You can still tell me anything, Nate.”

“I know. It’s just that for quite some time, years even, we’ve been trying to get her pregnant. It’s not happening, and she’s blaming me for it. I went to the doctor so I know it’s definitely not my fault, but since you got pregnant she’s been losing hope. She comes home late and goes out drinking almost every night. I don’t know what to do Claire,” he said.

My eyes glassed over.

Mia’s leaving, Nathan’s screaming.

“It’ll be okay. It’s all going to be fine. I’ll talk to her,” I said, releasing my hand from Caiden’s and squeezing Nathan’s hand instead. I was still sensitive to using my left arm because of the injury.

“Claire, if things don’t work out, I promise you that neither of us will make you choose sides,” he said seriously.

I bit my lip thinking about everything’s he’d said so far.

“I didn’t think you would. Be optimistic, Nathan. We make it through everything. You and Mia are just going through a hard patch,” I said sincerely.

He kissed my forehead, obviously the side that wasn’t covered by a bandage.

“Love you Claire.”

“Love you too.”

“Back to the subject. Who would Clover be mourning?” Riley asked.

I shrugged as did everyone else.

“Chris?” I wondered out loud, but Caiden shook his head.

“Yes, she’s sad, but from what I can see, she’s not that sad to spend time mourning him.”

“So what? You’re telling me you think someone else is going to die?” I asked him.

He shrugged.

“I don’t care who dies as long as you stay safe because last time I checked you have a baby which makes you a mommy. I will sure as hell not let one person put their hands on you,” he said as his hands clenched into fists.

“I know.”

Riley cleared her throat to get our attention. “This was most likely Jesse. It has to be. He’s the only one who I can think is smart enough to do anything. Plus, they clearly said they were planning on taking you.”

“Clover suggested when we got the first one that it was her old friend Katy,” I said, but she only shook her head, waving that thought off.

“This person knows too much. They know about all of you and your family and your past. Don’t take anything they say lightly. Take it all as a threat,” Riley said seriously before handing the note back to me. “You get out later, correct?”

“Probably. They’re just going to give me one more check and decide then.”

“Go home for a while and visit your family. Make sure everything is okay with everyone,” she told me.

I nodded.

“I shall.”

“I’m gonna go back to Joey and Liam,” she said, turning to exit.

I gave her a sad smile.

“Hey, Riley, do us all a favor and watch your back as well,” Caiden said, causing her to pause and look back at him.

“Don’t worry, I always do,” she said before sending us a wink and leaving the room. I let out a long sigh. Things were definitely getting complicated once again.

Chapter 20

Claire's Point of View

I looked at the TV, focusing intently on the scene playing on the screen. My eyes were wide and watering from the scene in Les Misérables as I knew what was coming up.

There's a grief that can't be spoken. There's a pain goes on and on. Empty chairs at empty tables. Now my friends are dead and gone.

"Gosh, why did we watch this! Ugh, my emotions are so much worse right now," I said, wiping my tears.

"You said you wanted to watch something good while we got ready and you love this show," Mia said, throwing popcorn at me.

I sent her a playful glare.

"You're such a bitch."

"And you're still a hoe." She sent me a wink before passing me the bowl of buttered popcorn. She stood up, wiping the crumbs off her lap and onto the floor.

"If we watch anymore I'm going to cry like a baby and never get my makeup up done," I said, clicking the off button and refusing to let myself cry.

I blinked away the dramatic tears and finally started on my makeup. I did perfectly winged eyeliner along with some mascara and some matte red lipstick. I already had my dress on and only had to put in my earrings, which I quickly did.

"Hey, what time is Nathan getting home?" I asked curiously, taking a piece of popcorn and throwing it into my mouth with my good hand.

It's been exactly one week since I have been released from the hospital. In that time, Liam still hasn't woken up and I have visited my mom. My dad wasn't home at the time, still enjoying his final year as a teacher before he has to retire. I still hadn't heard anything from Jeffery, which left me with nothing besides anxiety.

I had to go to a special dinner in honor of partnering with Mr. Franklin or as he prefers me to call him, James.

"Who knows," she said, lifting her shoulders in a shrug. I raised an eyebrow, pretending to be surprised by her careless attitude.

"I would think you'd know since he's your husband," I said.

"Yeah, well, I don't see you exactly understanding my situation since Caiden isn't exactly your husband at the moment," she snapped, and my eyes widened. I couldn't believe she just said that to me. She knew that was a sensitive subject to me.

Seeing the hurt cross my face, she sighed and sat back down. "Claire, I'm sorry," she said placing her hands on her head. "I can't get pregnant. I've seen a doctor, and they keep giving me stupid little tips, and they try everything they can, but it never works. At this point it's impossible and it just makes me so mad how you accidentally got pregnant. You weren't even trying!" she said, looking at me with tears in her eyes.

I set the bowl of popcorn to the side and sat on the bed next to her, wrapping my arms around her petite figure. "I'm sorry, Mia," I whispered, rubbing her back.

"You can always adopt?" I suggested. She shook her head.

"I want a baby that's my own. One that I made with passion and love. If I adopt, I won't truly love the child. I would never want to put a child through that feeling." I felt my heart clench at her words.

"It'll be okay, Mia. You'll both get through this," I told her. She shook her head.

"No, you don't understand. We've been going through this for a couple of years. I–I don't think I can get through this with him. I know he's your best friend, Claire, but the feelings are slipping. All we do is fight constantly. I can't take it anymore," she said, shaking her head. I pulled away looking at her in confusion.

"So what are you saying exactly?" I asked.

She gave me a sad smile.

"I'm moving. I'm going back to LA. I went to college there as it was nice. I have an old friend who agreed to let me live with her as long as I pay rent," she said. I stood up running my hands down my face.

"Have you talked with Nathan yet?" I asked.

She gave me a guilty look before shaking her head.

"So what? You were just planning on leaving him?"

"Claire, you accept everyone's flaws. Today, I need you to accept mine as well. I believe what I'm doing is truly right. I've already signed the divorce papers. I planned on leaving them so he wouldn't wait for me to come back."

I shook my head at my friend angrily. “Were you even going to tell me?”

“Of course!”

I let out a sarcastic laugh. “Nathan loves you. He always has. He doesn’t deserve this. As your friend, I’m telling you that you’re fucking up.”

“Claire, c’mon.” She sighed.

I shook my head.

“You’re better than this. What happened to you?” I asked, grabbing my jacket and throwing it over my dress. I lifted my hair so it wasn’t under my jacket.

“If Nathan was the one leaving me I’m sure you’d stand by him,” she said, and I looked her straight in the eyes.

“No, I wouldn’t because no one deserves to just be left. They deserve a notice. Hell you know his parents got divorced and left him a wreck and here you are reliving his childhood. You’re just leaving him as his father did.” Mia shook her head with angry tears filling her eyes.

“Don’t even pull that card with me! I’m not happy here. You’re busy doing who knows what with Caiden and getting yourself into accidents while I’m just sitting here all the time with no one.”

I scoffed.

“Good luck with your life in LA, Mia. I truly hope something works out for you there and feel free to visit me if you ever come back. Maybe we can grab some dinner. That’s all. I’m a forgiving person, but I won’t ever truly forgive you for this,” I said, grabbing my keys off the dresser.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered before I left the room.

I paused in the doorway. “I’m not the one who needs an apology. Try the loyal husband you’re about to leave.” I exited the room and grabbed my purse off the couch.

“Claire-bear, you okay?” Nathan asked, entering the house.

I gave him a sad smile.

“I’m fine. I have a dinner to get to. I’ll see you soon,” I said, slipping on my heels. I placed a lingering kiss on his cheek before leaving out the front door. I wasn’t surprised when he came out after me.

“Isn't Mia going with you to that?” he asked.

A wry smile appeared on my face.

“She wasn’t feeling well. You know cramps and stuff,” I said.

He nodded, a look of understanding crossing his face.

“I should probably go get her chocolate or something, huh?” he asked.

A sad smile appeared on my face.

“I think she’ll be okay. She said she was feeling sick so she probably wouldn’t eat it,” I said before wrapping my arms around him. Unlike before, we were now the same height because of my heels.

Nathan seemed surprised by the gestured, but still wrapped his arms around me. He squeezed me tightly against his chest, and I felt tears well up in my eyes. He loved Mia so much. He went through so much just to get to where he is now with her, and it’s all falling apart. Everything in both of our lives was just slowly falling apart.

“I love you, Nathan. Gosh, I truly don’t know what I would do without you,” I said.

I could only picture him frowning.

“I love you too, Claire. You know this. Now tell me what the hell happened?” he asked pulling back a little.

“I’m just hormonal and being dramatic. Really, it’s nothing,” I said.

Ne narrowed his eyes at me.

“We tell each other everything. We have for over twenty years. Let’s not change that now,” he said.

I squeezed his hands.

“It’s not my place to say anything. I just want you to know I’m here for you and if you ever need me I will still drop everything I’m doing and will be there.”

He looked at me for the secrets that hid behind my eyes.

“Okay,” he said, nodding in understanding before kissing my forehead.

“Go have fun at your dinner. You deserve a night of celebration,” he said.

I smiled.

“I’ll text you later, okay?” he said as I pulled away from him completely.

“Sounds A-okay,” I winked.

He shook his in amusement.

“Once a loser, always a loser.”

"You know it."

I winked again.

That's not something to be proud of.

"Is there something in your eye?"

"Besides, the love I'm looking at you with? No," I said seriously before my expressionless faced turned into a grin.

"Why are we still friends?" he asked, shaking his head.

I let out a dramatic gasp. "Are you implying you want to be something more? Nathan, I told you I have a boyfriend."

Nathan narrowed his eyes at me and I stuck my tongue out. "Yes, which is why I need to tell you. The baby is yours," he said, placing his hand on his stomach.

I burst out laughing and smacked his arm.

"Man, I've missed you. We need to do something soon," I said with a light smile still playing on my lips.

He let out a dramatic gasp.

"Claire, are you implying we should have sex? I told you I'm a married man."

This made my smile waver for a second before it was back in place again.

"You suck." I pouted knowing he was mocking me.

"No, I bite." He winked and I smacked his arm.

"Damn, when did you turn into such a horny bastard?" I said.

He shrugged.

"When I fell for a prude," he said.

I couldn't help but laugh knowing he was referring back to our college days when my mother thought a prude was a "sex goddess."

"Whatever. I really have to go this time. See you later," I said, giving him one more quick hug.

"Alligator," he finished.

I pulled away from him.

“I’m not responding to that.”

“You just did,” he called out, a smirk playing at his lips.

“I hate you.”

“Love you too.”

“Go to hell,” I yelled back, opening my car door.

“Will you be there?”

“Definitely not,” I said, flicking him off.

He pretended to catch something as if I blew him a kiss.

“Claire, please, my wife is inside. Stop trying to seduce me,” he yelled.

I looked around the pretty empty neighborhood in embarrassment.

“Goodbye, Nathaniel.”

“Hey, that’s not my full name.”

“I swear—”

He cut me off with a loud chuckle as he raised his hands in surrender.

”I’m done, I’m done. Goodnight, Claire.”

“Mmhm. Goodnight Nathan,” I said before finally getting in my car.

The fifteen-minute drive to the five-star restaurant quickly turned into a twenty-five-minute drive due to traffic. I groaned lightly, slamming my head on the steering wheel. I glanced out the window to the left and saw a woman already staring me down.

Talk about awkward.

Ignoring her, I only turned up the music in my car. Looking to my right I saw two men standing in front of a corner store fighting on the sidewalk. I decided to be nosy and watch the argument. The one man looked so familiar, yet I couldn’t place my finger on it.

Yeah, you wanna find love then you know where the city is.

I glanced at my ringing phone and noticed it was Caiden. I put him on speaker as I noticed traffic was finally starting to move again.

“Hello?” his deep voice sounded through the speaker making me smile.

“Hey, can you tell Elena to apologize to Mr. Franklin for me? Traffic is awful, and I’m still ten minutes away,” I said, checking my black watch on my right wrist.

“Yeah, I just called to see when you’d be here. Drive safe. I’ll see you soon,” he said.

I nodded before remembering I couldn’t see him.

“See you soon. I love you.”

“Love you too,” he said before ending the call.

Glancing over to the where those men were fighting I continued to watch curiously. The one with the hat caught my gaze and sent me a glare.

“What the fuck do you want bitch?” he yelled.

I shook my head and held my hands up in surrender to show I was innocent. He only spit on the ground before focusing back on the guy he was with. Suddenly a woman walked up to the both of them. Her brown hair was long and curly.

“Boys, let’s play nice now,” she insisted. The other guy snorted.

“He owes me money,” the one without a hat yelled, causing people to intently watch them.

“So you decide to cause a scene? You were taught better than this,” she hissed, her ice blue eyes sending chills down spines.

“I did as you said and came to complete the deal, but he won’t give me the money.”

“Did I say to talk?” she asked and he immediately shut his mouth. Realizing there were another few feet I could move up, I let my car move forward, still keeping my eyes on the scene and only glancing up once to make sure I didn’t hit the car in front of me as I came to another stop.

“Good, darling. Glad to know that you still remember your place. Now, what’s this about you not wanting to pay, hmm?” she asked. The man noticeably took a step back.

“The job was completed. The woman won’t steal pot from you again. She’s dead. You saw her dead body first handily and pictures of the scene were sent to you before we disposed of the body. Therefore, the only problem I’m seeing here is that there are still fifty thousand dollars missing from my bank account.” Everything about her tone was condescending.

“I promise you’ll get your money,” he said.

I noticed his hands shaking as he held up his hands in surrender.

“The payment plan was clear. We were nice to let you pay after. I won’t be nice again by letting you go another day without handing me the money,” she hissed.

I was surprised by the fear the man showed. Surely she couldn't be that hard to take down with her short skirt and her five-inch heels.

Just one good yank on that curly hair would take her to the ground.

"Just let me talk to Jesse," he insisted. The name immediately interested me. He could only be talking about Jesse Farone, right?

"Jesse nor I have time for this."

"You're the one that takes people out, aren't you?" he accused. I couldn't remove my eyes as I waited for the answer. We needed this detail. We could finish this for sure if that's the case.

"No, but when I'm done with you, you'll wish I was," she said sickly sweet before grabbing his arm, her long colored nails digging into his skin.

The man with the hat suddenly looked over again and saw me watching still. He pointed over to my car making me silently curse. The woman looked over and instead of giving me the cold look, she was giving everyone else, she smiled at me.

"Turnaround, doll. Trust me, you don't want to see what happens next," she said as she pulled something out of her pocket. Of course just at the time a horn beeped from behind me. I noticed traffic was finally started to move and quickly slammed on the gas.

Who was that woman? If they were talking about the Jesse I know, then she must have some importance.

Taking my thoughts in a different direction I turned up my music and took the rest of the drive to the restaurant with only a few more random stops in traffic.

Once I parked, I stepped out, locking my car and rushing to the front doors. I was officially forty-five minutes late. I rushed to the front doors, surprised to see Elena standing outside.

"Oh, Elena! Is Mr. Franklin still here? Please tell me he didn't leave," I asked nervously, going through my clutch for my phone. Did I seriously leave the stupid thing in the car?

"Uh—" she started, but I shook my head, cutting her off and throwing her my keys, which she easily caught.

"Forget it. Can you go grab my phone out of my car? I think I left it in the cup holder," I told her before quickly sending her a thank you and smiling in appreciation when a man opened the door for me.

"Hello, is it just one?" the hostess asked. I shook my head.

"I have a group already here. Thank you, though," I said, scanning the room and catching sight of Caiden. I took a deep breath before walking over to where he sat at a table of twelve. No one sat there beside him.

"They all left?" I asked, running my hand over my face and stopping as it landed on my head. I was still being careful not to mess up my hair.

"It's okay, just you and I can have dinner. Just send Elena home early and pay for spending the night here and talking with Mr. Franklin," Caiden suggested. Appreciation for my assistant filled me as I thought of how great she really was.

"I guess that's fine. I still feel terrible," I said, sitting down across from him. It was awkward sitting down at a table with 10 more empty seats, but we were in a pretty private area.

"Just reschedule another night. He knows you got caught up in traffic," he said, waving me off and I narrowed my eyes.

"What's up with you?" I asked curiously.

Caiden simply shrugged.

"I'm just nervous about this business deal I have going on. If it works out I can be making ten million more for this company. If it doesn't, I'd lose at least five," he said.

I rolled my eyes.

"You're Caiden Anderson. You don't miss a business deal. It will all go smoothly as always," I assured.

He grabbed my hand and squeezed it.

Suddenly a high-pitched squeak interrupted the moment as a man wearing a black suit similar to Caiden's sat down next to me. I glanced at Caiden who stared at the man as well.

"Excuse me, can I help you?" I asked politely.

"We both know why we're here," he said.

My eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

"I'm sorry, but—" I was interrupted as a hand smacked against the table.

"There! Right! There!" a random woman said wearing a nice white and black dress.

What the hell?

"Look at that tan, that tinted skin. Look at the killer shape he's in."

Another man appeared next to the woman wearing an all gray suit.

“Look at that slightly stubbly chin. Oh please, he’s gay, totally gay.” The man finished pointing at Caiden, making my eyes widen. I would have been in tears laughing right now if I actually knew these people talking to us.

I looked to see Caiden’s reaction only to see him staring blankly at the guy. “Who the hell?”

“I’m not about to celebrate every trait that could indicate the totally straight expatriate. This guy’s not gay, I said not gay,” another woman said jumping up to sit on the table. This one was in a maroon pants suit.

Suddenly all four of them started singing quietly. Even though we were in a private area we were still only separated by everyone else by a simple wall. “That is the elephant in the room. Well, it’s relevant to assume that a man who wears perfume is automatically gay?”

“But look at his quiff and crispy looks!” A man holding a blue suit jacket that went with the rest of his attire appeared next to the woman, filling the last seat on my side of the table.

“Look at his silk translucent socks.”

“Uh, I’m pretty sure these aren’t silk,” Caiden’s deep voice interrupted, but they kept singing the familiar song.

Suddenly the man directly next to me stood up and said, “There’s an eternal paradox. Look what we’re seeing.”

“What are we seeing?” I asked slightly amused and slightly creeped out. Something told me that Mr. Franklin was never actually going to show up.

“Is he gay?” Nathan asked, appearing at the end of the table making my eyes widen.

“Of course, he’s gay,” the woman in the pantsuit exclaimed.

“Or European?” Nathan asked.

The table went silent.

“Caiden, what the hell is going on?” I whispered quietly.

He stared at me with wide eyes.

“Hell if I know.”

What a good liar. He obviously planned this.

"Why are they singing songs from *Legally Blonde*?" I asked with a raised eyebrow. He shrugged, honestly looking confused as me. I looked back at the table and looked directly at Nathan.

"Nathan, why are you—"

Suddenly I was caught off guard as he interrupted me.

"You see I had this little problem," Nathan said, making me stop talking. Of course, he could tell me anything, but I literally just left his house.

"See, I really couldn't sing. I could never really sing. What I couldn't do was—" another woman said, joining the end of the table on Caiden's side. My eyes widened in realization with the familiar words.

"—sing," a man sang, finishing for her. Unlike everyone else who was dressed all nice, he was wearing a green tank top and some brown pants while the girl was wearing a bright pink off-the-shoulder shirt with leggings.

"I have trouble with the—"

"—note!" the man sang, completing her sentence.

"It goes all around my—"

"—throat!"

"It's a terrifying—"

"—thing!"

Suddenly another woman appeared joining. This one wearing an all black blouse and a black skirt. "Oh, I know what you're thinking what a craz," she sang, skipping a few lines.

"—Ding-a-ling," Caiden suddenly said, making my eyes snap to him. He sent me a smirk.

"What? You made me watch *A Chorus Line* a hundred times."

"I've made you watch all of my favorite musicals a hundred times! This doesn't make sense. As amusing as this is—"

"Shh!" someone said loudly, but not so loud that they were yelling. The room fell silent.

Someone suddenly joined us. He would've filled the seat at the end of the table between Caiden and me if it wasn't for the fact that he used the chair as a stool and stood up on the chair and then stood on the table that only had drinks on it. This man was dressed in black dress pants and a black button up shirt. Around his neck was a bright red bandana.

"Hey, look out," he whispered.

"We will step in, step in—" he whispered, bending over a little as the table went silent.

"Step in time," the table sang together before the man motioned with his hands for everyone to get quieter.

"We will step in, step in—"

"Step in time."

"Never need a reason, never need a rhyme. We will step in, step in time," he sang quietly. He continued to sing the lyrics before he started tap dancing on the table.

"I swear if you planned this flash mob thing I will—" I started, but Caiden put his finger to his mouth, shh-ing me. I was slightly glad that this had all been a setup, and Mr. Franklin wasn't actually coming because I would have no idea how to explain this.

Suddenly the last man jumped off the stable as Nathan made a loud 'shh' noise. Everyone paused, sitting down in their seats looking dramatically at Nathan.

"Omigod, Omigod, you guys. Looks like Claire's gonna win the prize," the girl wearing the bright pink shirt suddenly yelled, standing up and clapping her hands together.

"Shh!" Nathan said standing up.

Slowly all the girls around started to get out of their chairs in sync singing together. "If there ever was a perfect couple, this one quali—"

"Shh! Omigod, guys I'm serious!" Nathan said, putting his hand on his hip.

"Claire and Caiden were meant to be," the woman wearing black and white said, putting her hands on the table.

"Not once ever has he hit on me!" the girl in the pantsuit said.

"He's hit on me."

"And me."

"Once he even took me and this other girl and—"

I snorted at this added part to the song.

"Okay, shut up!" Nathan yelled, holding up his hands.

Suddenly Nick walked in the room with a bouquet of red roses in his hand and a nice black suit on. "How 'bout a dance? What do you say? I've got some moves that I'd love to show you," Nick's voice asked.

I glanced at Caiden to see him perfectly fine. Nick was here quoting Bonnie and Clyde, yet he was still calm. Did he really plan all of this?

"Nick, c'mon we're serious," Nathan insisted. I couldn't hold back my smile. But as a sweet melody started playing through the restaurant, I wasn't sure what to do. Suddenly the first man who sat at the table started singing sweetly to the song until it was time for a break and just the music played.

"Will you share your life with me for the next ten minutes?" the man sang, and I felt goosebumps appear on my arm.

"For the next ten minutes. We can handle that," Caiden said suddenly. Not singing, yet still saying the words with a sweetness I've only seen a few times.

"We can handle that. We could watch the waves. We could watch the sky or just sit and wait as the time ticks by."

Caiden cut in again, "And if we make it till then can I ask you again for another ten?" My heart started beating faster and faster. The man started singing again, but my eyes wouldn't leave Caiden's. His hazel eyes were locked with mine, silently demanding me not to look away.

I didn't even look away when a woman started singing. His eyes held such emotions that I was unsure what to say to. They held passion. They held nervousness. They held fear. They held love.

"I don't know why people run .I don't know why things fall through. I don't know how anybody survives in this life without someone like you.

I could protect and preserve. I could say no and goodbye. But why, Caiden, why?

I want to be your wife, I want to bear your child, I want to die. Knowing I had a long, full life in your arms. That I can do," the woman sang loudly.

I felt tears well up in my eyes. The words suddenly hit a special spot more than I ever expected it to. Caiden stood up and grabbed my hand. I stood up and watch as he dropped to one knee.

This time, Caiden started speaking again over the man who's singing turned into a slight hum in the background. "*Will you share your life with me—"*

"*Forever,"* the girl sang quietly in the background.

"—for the next ten lifetimes?"

He pulled out a black box causing my breath to hitch.

"Forever, Caiden."

"F*or a million summers till the world explodes?"*

He opened the box.

"Till there's no one left who has ever known us apart."

At this point, I didn't even try to stop the tears from slowly but surely sliding down my face. This was it. We're here. Never did I imagine him to go through all of this.

I thought he'd be the type to just slide the ring on your finger and say you're marrying him.

Oh, didn't we all.

The singing in the background got even quieter. "Claire Martez, will you do me an honorable favor by taking this ring and agreeing to spend the next ten lifetimes filled with mysteries and who knows whatever else married to me?" he asked.

I felt my heart stop.

My mouth opened and closed like a fish. I couldn't find words. So I did the only thing I could think of. I bent down and slammed my lips down on his.

Hard.

Chapter 21

Claire's Point of View

"Claire Martez, will you do be an honorable favor by taking this ring and agreeing to spend the next ten lifetimes filled with mysteries and who knows whatever else married to me?" He asked staring at my tear-filled eyes. My mouth opened and closed a few times before I slammed my lips on his. He held the box carefully in one hand before wrapping his free one around my body, placing it firmly on my back. He didn't hesitate to respond, kissing me with just as much force.

I pulled away, staring into his eyes that were filled with such a strong emotion. "I—yes. Just yes," I whispered in his ear, pulling back.

He grabbed the ring and carefully slipped it on my finger.

"What on Earth? How much did you spend on this? It's gorgeous," I asked.

His signature smirk appear on his face.

"Don't worry about it. Let's just say that's probably going to be your wedding ring as well. But we can still buy you same wedding bands of course," he whispered in my ear, causing a slight shiver to run up my back.

"I love you so much," I said, hugging him. His eyes widened in surprise. It wasn't often we hugged anymore. We kissed and all that but just hugging was strange. He decided to follow my motion and wrapped his arms around my figure as well.

"I love you too."

"Great. Now I can finally hear you stop whining about how long you have to wait for him to propose," Nathan said, causing me to pull away and look at my friend.

"Shush." I rolled my eyes and slapped his chest, causing Nathan to only chuckle.

"How adorable," someone said sarcastically, not caring they were interrupting. We all faced the person only to see it was the waiter.

"Excuse me, is there a problem?" I asked politely.

"I'm guessing it's because none of you know me. I guess since none of those agents are here, which is probably why," he stated before simply shrugging.

"Who are you?" Caiden growled, positioning himself in front of my body.

“The name’s Christopher Hall. Most people call me Chris. Now, down to business, alright?”

He stated it more as a question as he ushered everyone away.

“Glee and friend leave. This doesn’t concern you,” he said, waving his hand.

Nathan glared at him.

“I’m staying,” Nathan hissed after everyone else left and Nick agreed.

“Very well.”

He looked back to see we still didn’t move, causing him to let out a sigh.

“Five seconds. You have five seconds before I click this single button causing every song bomb I placed on the outside of this building to blow up,” he said, holding a remote, his finger hovering over the red button. This immediately made me move.

I took my original seat at the table as did Caiden.

“I don’t do well with ultimatums so speak fast,” Caiden hissed, causing the guy to chuckle.

“I’m here to pass on a message,” the man said as his face went serious.

“What is it?” I asked.

He pulled an envelope from the inside of his coat before opening it.

He cleared his throat before he began reading the message.

“Dear Claire,

Clover is crying and this time it’s my fault. Clover once liked games, so I thought we’d play another one. It’s called let’s find the mouse. The mouse is Clover. Here’s your one and only hint, she’s not at home.

Looking forward to our next touch,

Your one and only friend. Xx”

“What was the purpose of you delivering that?” Nathan asked.

The man smirked.

“This,” he said, before clicking play on his phone. In the corner said the word ‘live’ in bright red letters. Suddenly a woman appeared on the screen. Her blonde hair was covering her face, there were streaks of red in it, but something told me it wasn’t hair dye. Someone yelled something in

the background, the voice unrecognizable. The person looked up, and I let out a loud gasp, my hands flying up to cover my mouth.

“Clover,” I whispered.

“H–help,” she screamed, her voice cracking. She was bloody, all bloody.

“Where is she?” Caiden hissed, grabbing his shirt and lifting him up. His phone dropped on the table, but I kept watching. Her mascara was all over her face, and her eyeliner was smeared. She was in nothing but a sports bra and capri like leggings all soaked with blood. Was it hers?

“Now, I can’t tell, but if you take a number I’m sure my boss will get back with you as soon as possible,” he insisted. In response, Caiden didn’t hesitate to slam his fist right into his face.

“Oh my gosh! Excuse me, sir! Release him immediately!”aA waitress yelled, setting the food Caiden must have ordered on the table.

The sickening sound of a fist slamming into a jaw was heard before Caiden dropped the man to the ground. The waitress ran over, immediately checking for any physical injuries. I looked away from the scene and focused directly on the phone once again only to find the phone screen completely black.

“No, no. C'mon,” I muttered while repeatedly slamming my finger on the screen and pressing all the different buttons.

“What’s wrong? What happened?” Nick asked.

I shook my head feeling tears well up in my eyes.

“The phones off. We lost connection. Dammit!” I hissed shaking my head. I pulled out my own phone and sent a quick text to Riley explaining what was going on. Just as the message sent, police officers came rushing in.

“SPD! Everyone put your hands where we can see them,” one ordered, and the officer next to him kept his eyes on the guy on the ground all while keeping his gun pointed at us.

It didn’t take long for us all to be in handcuffs and in the back of a police car. All of the officers talked quietly in a circle outside the cars, so I took the chance to talk to Caiden who luckily got put in the same car as me.

“What are we going to do?” I asked him, causing him to look over at me instead of the officers outside.

“About Clover? I don’t know. I can’t even name one person who would think about taking her,” he said, shaking his head, the frustration showing on his face. I knew he wouldn’t admit it, but part of

him would care if something happened to her. It's hard to not gain some type of acquaintance relationship with someone when they live with you.

"That woman Katy. She always comes to my galas, and she's always at the ones I attend as well. It could be a coincidence, but Clover once told me about her being sabotaged by the girl in high school," I said.

Caiden thought about it for a moment.

"There's a small possibility it's her, but I don't want to put all of our money on that," Caiden said.

I nodded in agreement.

"She must be in so much pain," I whispered thinking back to all the blood on her and the look of horror plastered on her face.

"Jesse deserves to rot in fucking hell," Caiden hissed, his hands still clenching into fists.

"All of them do," I agreed after a minute. This wasn't a game or a movie; it was real life with real drug dealers and assassins. How did I get here? How did I get to life of regular death and constant tears? On top of it all, I'm pregnant. Why does my luck keep turning into the burning coals in hell?

Two officers suddenly got into their sides of the car and started the engine up. All the police cars left the parking lot, turning left to head towards the station. Ours followed but turned right instead.

"Hey, police station is the other way," Caiden said loudly, noticing the same thing.

"Shut it. We're going to pick up one more person," the officer said.

"There's no more room back here. Get someone else," Caiden hissed back, causing the officer to turn around and glare at him.

"Son, I don't care if you are some hot shot business owner. You assaulted a man and you will get your jail time, but first, we have to do our jobs and pick up one more person," the officer snapped before turning back around in the passenger seat.

Neither of us said a word as we watched the sights of Seattle pass us. I didn't question it as we stopped at an old gas station. Thinking we only needed gas, it wasn't until my door opened, and I was pulled out by my arm that I became worried. I looked at Caiden with fear in my eyes.

"If you don't let her go in two fucking seconds, I swear—" Caiden started, but the door was slammed shut. Caiden response by slamming his foot on the door.

“Ah, boyfriends. So very needy,” a woman said, stepping out of black vehicle. Her brown, curly hair cascaded down her back as she shook it when she stepped out of the truck. I quickly realized it was the same woman from earlier.

“It’s you,” I said, staring at her with accusing eyes.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you face-to-face, darling,” she said, her blue, cold, calculating eyes not matching the smile plastered on her face.

Caiden suddenly stopped kicking and yelling threats as the woman came in his sight. Before I could look to see if he was okay, the woman slapped me across the face.

“If I talk to you, I expect a response,” she hissed before looking at the officer behind me. She held out her palm, her long blood red nails standing out as he placed a set of keys in her hand. “You can go,” she ordered.

“Yes, Madame,” he said, nodding before he left. I didn’t turn at the sound of his car door shutting or the sound of the car engine slowing distancing itself from me since the woman's hand was holding my face, forcing me to look at her.

“I’ve never had a doll before. I always thought they were too disobedient, but I think you’re smart. You should learn quick,” she said. smiling at me before grabbing my arm and forcing me to walk to the car. I didn’t put up a fight, and I didn’t want to risk my future son’s life again.

“Don’t worry, sweetie. I’ll take good care of you,” she said before shoving me in the back of her car and slamming the door.

***

Riley’s Point of View

I stared at the computer blankly. My brain trying to comprehend everything that was currently happening.

“You’re going to have to take me through this one more time, so Clover is missing and so is Claire. Nathan and Caiden are in jail. Andrew hasn’t been heard from and another club blew up?” I asked and Matt nodded.

“How did this all happen in less then twenty-four hours? Can someone please explain this to me? Rachel, you were watching over Clover, so explain to me what exactly went down with her,” I demanded, standing up straight and looking at the brunette. My arms crossed over my chest as I stared at her, waiting impatiently for a response.

"We were at her photo shoot, and she went to change so we can go, and when she didn't come out after five minutes and wasn't answering, I picked the lock and went in. Window was open and she was gone," Rachel said frowning. I nodded and turned to look at Emily.

"Update on what happened with Claire?" I asked.

I watched Emily's current frown deepen.

"Caiden was proposing, so I made sure to especially keep my distance at the restaurant, but things went south. Cameras got interrupted, and I went inside, but cops were blocking every entrance and refused to let me in even after I showed my ID. So I finally knocked the few out, but by the time I got in they were are in cop cars and heading out. After that I lost sight of her," Emily explained.

They both seemed liked reasonable excuses, but they didn't exactly help the problem at hand.

"What are we going to do first?" I asked, looking at them both. I already had an idea in my head, but if I was going to lead this mission I needed to make sure they were still learning something as well, trainees or not.

"We can track cell phones," Rachel suggested.

"No signal," Joey immediately responded.

"Riley can go undercover and get an update on what's been going on with the gang," Rachel suggested directly after.

"And if I find nothing?" I retorted.

"We hack into cell phones and we track every single camera and phone record from all the places Jesse and the lead gang members have been," Rachel said, causing me to smile.

"Go do exactly that then, Fayee," I said, calling her by her maiden name. Rachel nodded and headed off to the other computer next to Matt.

"We can try to hack into the restaurant cameras and see what we can salvage from those," Emily suggested.

I bit my lip thinking about the idea.

"And if those don't help?" I asked curiously.

"We hack into the police station records. It's risky and if caught we could get in quite a bit of trouble, but we have three lives in danger," she told me.

My lips curved upward. We've all grown so much as agents it was such a rush to do it all again.

"Get on it then," Joey said.

Emily nodded, grabbing her tablet off the charger.

"We've got a pretty good team don't we?" Joey asked.

I nodded.

"It sucks that we couldn't get any new agents on this. They could've learned a lot," I said, leaning against his side.

"Yeah, but look how dangerous it is. An agent with the same experience as us is in a coma in the hospital. They would be over their heads if they were doing this mission," Joey said before pressing a lingering kiss on my lips.

"Now, we've got a job to do," he said, flashing me a charming smile.

"What are you doing?" I asked curiously.

"Going to see what happened at that club."

He pressed his lips against mine once more before heading upstairs to get his gear together.

"Do you think we're honestly going to pull this off?" Matt asked quietly as he leaned against the back of his chair.

I let out a deep breath. "I don't know. I think this case may be even bigger than us."

I left it at that before going upstairs and quickly changing into a black tan top, tight jeans, and black high heel boots.

"Riley?" Matt called right before I left.

"Yeah?" I asked already half way out the door.

"Don't get killed."

I only sent him a smile in response. Easier said than done.

I took the short drive to the other side of town, parking my car in a random parking lot and walking the rest of the way.

"Oh, look who's here," Jacob said, smirking at my appearance. "You're lucky I took over deals. You owe me big time," he whispered in my ear as I walked past him.

"Where's Jesse?" I questioned with narrowed eyes.

"Out."

"Doing what?"

"It doesn't concern you, so don't worry 'bout it," Leon said, walking into the living room as he stuffed his face with an apple.

"You want to know something funny about Reese here?" Keith asked, placing his hand on my mostly bare shoulder. Before I could even respond he continued. "Not once have I seen her drink or even smoke." He lifted a blunt up to his lip, smirking at me.

"I sell because I need the money," I quickly covered, but he wasn't having it.

"So did our old friend Chris, but look where it got him. Listen Reese, you can't only build half of a bridge and expect to still make it across the river. You get what I'm sayin'?" Keith asked, the blunt hanging out of his mouth as he talked.

"Who's rules are these? Jesse's never mention anything about this," I said, hiding my nervousness. I didn't like where this was heading. Even if I left here now it wouldn't go down well.

"Jesse doesn't like any of his members sober," Jacob said, leaning against the wall. "He has his reasons," he added.

"So what are you suggesting?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Have some of this, and I won't share this little secret," Keith said, the glint in his eyes shining as he held a brown packet of something.

"Yeah, I'm good. For all I know that stuff will kill me," I said, tilting my head up to show my distaste.

"Any drug can kill you. It's if you're man enough to take the risk," Keith said taking a lighter out of his coat pocket.

"What about you, Keith? People do this out of money or just for the high, but you don't need either, so why are you here?" I asked, raising an eyebrow at Keith before I grabbed the glass out of Jacob's hand. He didn't complain when I finished the glass.

"That some hard liquor. You'll be feeling those effects in a minute with a body as little as yours," he said.

I smirked. I'm an agent, sometimes we live on straight liquor, I thought, but didn't comment on his ignorance.

"You're a smart one, I'll give you that," Keith said, taking his joint out of his mouth. "I don't need money. I'm fucking rich and I could easily buy all the drugs in this city, but what's the point of

living that oh, so-great live if you've got absolutely no one," he spit out before leaving the room. I stared blankly at the spot he was just standing in.

"Someone's had a bit too much of something," Leon snorted. "But c'mon Riles, just have something."

My blood ran cold,"W–what?" I asked.

Leon raised an eyebrow at my sudden frozen state.

"She has some of the homemade beer Jess makes," Jacob said.

Leon rolled his eyes.

"Riley, don't be a stick in the mud," Leon said.

I stood up straighter, setting the class cup on the table next to me. I reached my hand behind me back where my gun was ready in the waist band of my pants.

"The name's Reese," I corrected.

"Now, we both know that isn't true," he said, shaking his head. "Riley Scott, right?"

Chapter 22

Unknown Point of View

24 hours in the future

Love. It's a strange thing. It comes out of nowhere, hitting you so hard that it takes the breath out of you. Love grasps your heart and refuses to let go. It tangles its fingers into your heart and doesn't ever release until you accept it and let it stay apart of you. The special thing about love is that it can be deadly.

Hatred. Now, hatred is a funny thing. It consumes your whole body and masks you with nothing but the sight of red fury. Hatred goes a long way as it fills your body with a speed faster than lightning. Your body doesn't get the choice to stop that pinch of anger once it's been started, once the fire's been lit. Soon you'll find yourself with enough anger to kill.

Death. Death was an interesting thing. It's just like love and makes you succumb to its every demand. Death takes your heart and crushes it, leaving nothing but ashes and dust. As love, it takes you in, but as death, it forces you to leave. You can never recover from that darkness, and you can never get that part of your heart back. Suddenly you'll find yourself laying there in hell and next, you'll find yourself never returning.

Ah, now let's mix them together. Love can turn into hatred once the heart has been broken and ripped out of your chest. It causes a pain that can't be fixed right away. That hatred leads you to do things that you shouldn't. It leads you to become a monster at times. Why? I wasn't sure, but part of me was sure it had to do with the fact that the love is still there. The love in your heart never actually leaves, and you hate yourself for that. This is why we do those stupid things. This is why we hurt the ones we love the most, not physically of course, no, emotionally. We can't control the path our heart creates with our brain. We can't stop the unexpected love. Just like we can't stop death.

Blood. That was something I always found quite compelling. It releases from your body just by a simple scratch. Your body had plenty of the stuff, and if you lose some it doesn't take much to regenerate it. But for some, blood was disgusting. They would throw up or pass out because they can't handle the thought of the liquid leaking out of someone's body, drip by drip, pint by pint, quart by quart. Some were in love with the liquid. They would lick their wounds and others would donate it often because they truly enjoyed the feeling it gave them as it left their bodies. It was like a high.

Now, I didn't ever have a problem with blood. I wasn't the type to throw up or pass out and I wasn't the type to lick it either. I mean that's just disgusting. But I didn't ever mind donating blood ever so often either because it was for a good cause, yet here I sit. Blood dripping onto the concrete one drop by one. The red liquid was drowning me. I was sitting in a pool of it and barely staying afloat as it continued to try to pull me under. It was on my lips, my cheeks, and my nose; my forehead, my hands, my arms, and my clothes. It just kept appearing.

"Shh, you're going to be okay," I whispered holding the body in my arms closer. "Just close your eyes," I said tucking her blonde hair behind her ear. "It will all be over soon."

"I'm scared," she whispered, her eyes never leaving mine as her body shook.

"Don't be. It was inevitable," I said just as softly.

"This was bigger than all of us," she said coughing, blood sputtering all over my face. I didn't move to wipe it and only continued to stare down at her as I held her in my arms. "No one is strong enough to take on a case like this."

I didn't reply as I felt the tears surfacing once again.

Don't cry. Don't cry.

"I'm so cold," she mumbled. I only held her body tighter against me.

"I know. Just close your eyes," I told her once more. I bit my lip to keep a sob from escaping. How could this be happening? We did everything we were supposed to.

"I feel like I'm leaving things incomplete," she said, opening her eyes again.

"You are a hero. Your name will go around the world and people will hear what you did. I promise you," I responded shakily.

"I need you to tell him something for me," the blonde said, squeezing my bloody hands with hers.

"Anything."

"Just t–tell him that I'm s–sorry," she stuttered as she coughed up more blood. "No, tell him I love him."

"Of course," I promised. A small, sad smile appeared on her face. She closed her eyes again and part of me feared that it was the last time I was going to see those eyes. Her breathing got even slower, and I knew that this was it. It was happening. How is it that we were all healthy even a few months ago. We were all too serious for our own good over these past months, and although we started as strangers we were ending as best friends. Leaving as best friends. Dying as best friends.

Present

Claire's Point of View

"Who are you and what do you want with me?" I demanded as the woman pulled me out of the car, leading me into an old factory.

"You're the one that took Clover. Aren't you?" I questioned.

She laughed in response.

That wasn't a laugh. That was some evil cackling stuff.

Not the time.

"Clover Thompson? Never heard of her," she said, making me roll my eyes at this stupid game she was playing.

"You're working with Jesse," I stated.

She clapped her hands together excitedly. She pushed me down on a chair, and just like the chair at Jackson's place, metal cuffs came from the chair and went around my ankles and my wrists.

"Now, want to hear a bedtime story?" The woman asked sweetly, pulling a chair over. She held a scrapbook in her hand.

"No," I spit, but she only kept a disgusting smile on her face. "I want to be let go and I want to be left alone."

"Shh," she said, placing a piece of duck tape over my mouth. "Now, once upon a time there was a boy trick or treating, way back when, and he truly was a beautiful child. But then—"

"Lisa," a man called, cutting off her story.

The woman clenched her teeth.

"What did I tell you about interrupting me, Matthew?"

Lisa. Her name was Lisa. Could it – no, there was no way. Caiden killed her. This can't be her, this can't be his kidnapper.

"I–I'm sorry. I was told to alert you that Riley Scott is here in Jacob's possession. She's in the basement," he said, making my breath hitch in my throat. They caught Riley?

"How wonderful. Take this doll and put her behind the bars as well." The woman, Lisa, said standing up before looking at me. "The story will have to wait until next time." I watched as she walked out of the room, her heels clicking against the floor.

The man walked over, pressing a button on a remote that undid the cuffs on my wrists and ankles. "I'm so sorry," he whispered when he grabbed on to my arm to make sure I wouldn't run. I ripped the tape off my mouth, wincing at the feeling.

"I am too," I said before slamming my heel on his foot and trying to elbow him in the stomach. He easily stopped my attempt by twisting my arm behind my back and pulling my hair back with the other.

"Nice try," he said before pushing me forward. He kept me in the painful position until we went down a set of stairs. My wrists were tied up with rope before I was thrown into a cell. Riley helped catch me even with her tied up hands, so I wouldn't have the chance of injuring the baby when I hit the ground.

"Thank you," I mumbled turning around to see a beat up and bloody Clover was thrown in here too before the cell was locked.

"We're totally screwed," Clover said once she saw the both of us in here.

"Royally screwed," I added.

"Bloody hell," Riley muttered, leaning her head against the bars as she sat down again. I followed her lead and took a seat on the floor as well. I had a feeling we'd be here for a while.

"So I'm going to die today, right?" Clover asked, nodding and sliding down to the floor.

"No one's dying," Riley told us. "I've had to be out for hours. Joey and the others will notice if I don't come home."

I felt relief flood through me.

"That's good. Great even. Caiden's probably still stuck in jail with Nathan and Nick," I said aloud, causing Clover's eyes to widen.

"Ah, jail can be a fun place when with friends. I'm sure he'll be okay. He seems like the type to spend quite a bit of time there," Clove said before quickly adding, "No offense."

"Where's Andrew? Do you know if he said he was going anywhere?" Riley asked her.

"No, after Tori got the kids again, he said he was going to take a nap," she said letting the frown show on her face.

"What did they do to you exactly? Are you okay?" I asked Clover.

"I'm just peachy. I'm pretty sure my rib is broken, but other than that I should be okay. Oh, and I may need some alcohol, so I can forget this nightmare."

“Preach that,” I said, sending her a sad smile.

“It gets better, you know? Once we get through this you’ll feel great about yourself and you’ll get to move on to living the lives you want to,” Riley assured before her eyes suddenly brightened.

“I have an idea,” she said.

I raised an eyebrow.

“We’re listening,” I told her, causing her to continue.

“Let’s fight. Not physically, but if they hear us arguing or if they see us not getting along they’re going to have to do something about it. They want each of us for a separate reason. Clover, they want you dead. Claire, they want you for Jesse. And well me, they want to kill,” Riley whispered to us, causing my heart to beat faster at the thought of us truly losing this battle.

“Don’t be scared,” Riley said firmly to us.

I stared at her with determination.

“Never.”

I heard footsteps, moved my tied hands up to my mouth, and pressed a finger to my lips before pointing up. Both understood what I was hinting at.

“Seriously this is all your fault,” Clover suddenly whined, trying to move her hands that were tied up behind her back.

“I swear if you whine one more time I’m going to leave you here to fucking die when I get out,” I hissed.

“That’s if you can even get out,” Riley said snorting.

I sent her a glare, a fake one might I add.

“Well, you’re the agent here, so why are we still sitting here behind bars tied up?” I asked, and she responded by returning a glare towards me.

“You’ve been locked up for like two hours at most. You can’t even complain,” she snapped back.

“Those two hours are a long time when you’re pregnant! Plus, it’s not like you’ve made an attempt to get out in those two hours,” I retorted.

“I have kids at home with my best friend. I don’t care if you two die as long as I get out here alive,” Clover said. If I could move I would bang my head against a wall after strangling her to death, that is if she wasn’t acting of course.

“Do you ever shut the hell up?” I asked.

“I see someone’s jealous. I’m a model and I actually have a family,” she muttered.

I wanted to smash her head against the wall now instead of my own. I blame Caiden for making my thoughts so menacing. Acting or not, I still wanted to hit her. I let a smirk appear on my face as I heard multiple steps coming closer now.

“I can’t concentrate with you two bickering,” Riley said glaring at us. Clover only huffed while I rolled my eyes.

“Riley Scott, you don’t know how long I’ve waited to see you tied up like this,” a guy suddenly said. He was standing in front of the silver bars. He had blonde hair that went a little bit over his eyes, he was wearing a black shirt and black jeans.

How typical.

“Well if it isn’t the one and only James Ward. You know I remember perfectly how you got sent to prison. You went straight through our agency,” Riley said. I didn’t say anything since I had no idea who this guy was.

“Yeah, once you’re dead the agency will go down into flames,” he said, causing me to snort.

He’s such an idiot.

It’s nice to know it took over twenty years for us to finally agree on something.

“Um, James is it? You can’t be that much of an idiot, right? I mean you do realize my best friend is Cole’s son. He would take over if something were to happen to Riley and her fiancé Joseph.”

“And I have hundreds of agents who would take over if something were to happen to him,” Riley added.

“Wow, this is the guy we are seriously fighting against?” Clover asked, looking amused.

“Now, I’m actually curious about something. Did the rest of your group make it here? I mean I know Jack is dead, so I guess that’s already one down,” Riley asked, a small smirk rising on her face. I thought back to hearing about that. Jesse killed his own gang members by blowing up one of his own clubs, for what? To prove a point.

“I’m not here to chat. I’m just here to tell the blonde one she has a visitor.” We all looked at him blankly since we were all blondes. “Oh, I mean the model,” he added smirking before a woman took his place and Clover narrowed her eyes.

“Katy, I should have known you were the one that wanted me killed,” Clover hissed when a brunette appeared.

Katy? Why does that name sound so familiar?

Ah, she got a boob job and her cheeks lifted. That explains the familar name, yet the unfamilar face.

“You little bitch, just wait till I get out of here.”

Katy let out a sinister laugh.

“You won’t be getting out of here. I just wanted to pay you a visit so you at least know who paid for your assassination.” The woman waved before leaving and the room turned silent.

What the hell did I get myself into? Or better yet, what the hell did Caiden get me into? If Jesse wasn’t looking for Caiden then he would have never tried to get closer with me.

No, this isn’t Caiden’s fault and you know that.

I let out a small sigh. No, it really wasn’t his fault. It was mine. I got involved with Jesse against his wishes and that’s how I ended up here.

“Are you sure they’re not going to bite each other’s heads off in there? They all sound like they’re PMSing,” I heard Katy say from the hall.

“Who cares. It makes my job easier,” said a man.

I felt my heart beat quicken at the sound of a gun being loaded, the clicking sound heard even in here.

“We’re dead,” Clover whispered before her eyes widened. “No, I’m dead.”

“No one’s dying,” Riley snapped quietly. “I just need to think.”

“Go ahead and think. Think all you want because Riley, you’re a great person and all, but there’s nothing you can do in this sitaution. We’re tied up and in a freaking cage. It’s not happening,” Clover said.

“Is she in there?” I heard someone ask, making me take my focus off their argument.

“Yes, they all are.”

“I don’t care about the rest. I want her and only her.”

Jesse. Jesse was finally here. The door suddenly opened and in walked the one and only.

“Jesse,” I whispered, causing his eyes to focus directly on me. For once, his hair wasn’t a curly mess as he stood there in a nice suit. Riley and Clover immediately stopped talking and looked at the man who was holding us here.

“You’re an angel. A pure, innocent angel,” Jesse whispered, bending down to my level. He reached his hand through the bars and placed his hand on my cheek. I didn’t flinch back in disgust like I wanted to. I only silently stared at him.

“A pure, innocent distraction,” he said. I watched as his warm eyes turned cold. “A distraction I must get rid of,” he whispered.

I turned my head making his hand drop.

“So you’re just going to kill us all? Might as well just send a bullet to head now then,” Riley said and Jesses eyes snapped to hers.

“What are you doing?” Clover whispered, making me roll my eyes. Sure, because whispering to Riley when Jesse was standing two feet away was going to make a difference.

“Why don’t I? I mean it would be the easier option and you would just be out of my life forever. All I need is to take out Joey – oh, wait,” Jesse said, suddenly stopping himself mid-sentence before a dark menancing look appeared on his face. “I already did. I guess you’re it, Riles.”

“Who are you?” I questioned, shaking my head in disgust when I saw the look of fear in Riley’s eyes. She was scared for Joey. Did Jesse kill him? “You are a true monster. I used to trust you, cared for you even. Is this really all worth it? Killing them? Killing me? You can change, Jesse. You don’t have to go through all of this,” I said, not removing my eyes from his. I saw the flicker of emotion and knew I was getting somewhere.

“You don’t have to be a monster,” I whispered moving directly in front of the silver bars. “You are better than this Jesse. Contrary to what your brother may think, you can be someone. It’s not too late.”

“I’m going to prison either way. Not killing a few more people won’t change that,” he said, letting his eyes turn hard again.

“No, you’re right, but it will make you a better person because you’ll already be on your way for change, on your way to help.” I tried once more.

“You’re only saying this because you want out. You don’t mean a word of it,” He snapped.

I stared at him with pity.

He honestly thought he was stuck being this monster.

“Jesse, you could take these ropes off and let me out in the middle of a public place and I still would say these same words to you,” I said sincerely. “Everyone can change. Are you telling me you can’t or you won’t? If you won’t then that’s fine. Why am I trying? Why am I sitting here on death row?”

"I love you that's why," he whispered

I shook my head, letting a sad smile appear on my face.

"If you loved me, then you wouldn't be doing this," I said softly.

Jesse was about to respond but his eye noticed something else.

"I don't think it matters if I love you. The ring on the finger shows you won't be mine until someone else is taken care of."

"Hurting Caiden just makes you a killer once more." I yelled. "You're ruining yourself. You're sick, Jesse. Something is wrong with your head to kill this many people."

"It's called being an assasin, babe," he said standing up. I followed his lead, struggling a little because of the ropes.

"You aren't an assasin. No one is paying you to kill all of the people you've killed. You've blown up clubs, plazas, heck, you even set one of my parties on fire," I said. He smirked.

"It's called starting a new business. I need to let people know I'm on the market. Katy was one of my first clients. She wants Clover dead, but unlike everyone else she's choosing the longer route, the suffering one," he said.

I heard Clover suck in a sharp breath from behind me.

Jesse looked at her. "What? Did you really think my gang was that weak and couldn't take out one model? Sorry, sweetheart, but we're using you. Your friend Jasmin made us a good deal in exchange for her life."

I glanced at Clover to see her break. Her heart showed the anger she felt for the betrayal of her friend once again.

"One of you is dying tonight. Remember that," Jesse said before turning to leave.

"Funny way of showing your feelings," I muttered but he still heard me. He glanced back and looked at me.

"Yes, well, I have to get rid of the distraction. Distractions are how I get caught," he said before slamming the door shut behind him.

"Well, that did nothing," Clover said, leaning her head back on the bars.

I glanced at Riley, curious about why she was so quiet."What's up?" I asked and she shook her head.

"It's just so strange. This man I've talked to quite a few times in the gang, his name was Keith. Clover, you were going undercover and spying on him," she pointed out. I felt my blood run cold.

“Keith Mabry?” I asked, Riley raised an eyebrow at the name.

“Yeah, how did you—”

“He replaced my doctor a while ago. I’ve been doing checkups with him for weeks,” I said, feeling disgusted with the thought of a gang member even touching me, looking at my baby.

“But what about him?” Clover asked, wanting her to continue on.

“He’s in the gang. Completely rich from actually going to college and becoming a hot shot doctor, yet he’s here. He joined an illegal business,” Riley stated, her eyebrows furrowed as she thought hard about the man.

“He just wanted the high,” Clover said, clearly not understanding why she was thinking so hard about this.

“No, that’s the thing. He could buy truck loads of drugs without joining the gang, yet he still joined it. Now, if we could only figure out why.”

“No offense, but how on Earth does that help us in this situation?” I asked, feeling slightly irriated. We didn’t have time to work on any case besides getting our asses out of here.

“We just need to connect the dots,” she mumbled in response. “Wait, wait,” she said jumping up.

“Taylor lied. He made up some bullshit story about being an agent. I never checked on it because we were so busy, but what if he wasn’t the agent? What if all this time the agent has been right under our noses?”

“I’m not following. I thought you were the only agent? Why does there have to be two?” I asked, looking at Riley confused.

“There doesn’t, but there is. Keith is an agent,” Riley stated confidently.

“You just said he was doctor? You can’t be an agent and a doctor? It’s impossible. Those schedules would clash,” Clover said. I agreed. You can’t fight crime and be a hot shot surgeon.

“Dr. Mabry is the key to all of this. We were so wrong about everything,” Riley said shaking her head. “I know how we’re going to end this thing.”

“Riley, I don’t know if you’ve realized, but we’re all getting caught undercover. It’s not working anymore, so whatever is turning those little gears in your head, make it stop. It’s done. We’re caught, and if we get out of here alive I’m going to the police,” I said.

Suddenly Riley stood up, her ropes falling to the ground. I stared at her in amazement. Her ropes were like Clover’s and were tied behind her, yet she still got the tight knot undone.

“Just trust me. We’ll make it out of here,” Riley promised, undoing our ropes.

“Claire, I need a bobbypin,” Riley said, holding out her hand once all of our wrists were free from the rough ropes. I rubbed my wrists, wincing at the pain I finally noticed. I grabbed a pin out of my hair and handed it to her. I watched carefully as she bent the pin until it was completely straight. She reached her hand in between the bars and moved the bobby pin into the lock.

Click.

“This is too easy,” Clover said.

I nodded.

“Something’s going to go wrong.”

“It wouldn’t be my mission if something didn’t,” Riley said, sending me us a wink. “Now, let’s go.”

Chapter 23

Unknown Point of View

Some time in the future

The smell of a cigarette is an interesting thing. As it's lit you watch as the end turns into a red ember. You bring the white stick to your lips and inhale the poison. The white smoke leaves your lips shortly after before a new wave eventually returns once again as the white stick of addiction is brought back. Every time you inhale the poison your lungs die a little each time. It's saddening really.

"She's dying," another voice whispered, interrupting my thoughts. She looked down at the figure in my lap.

"Yes," I said just as softly, running my hands through her hair.

"How are we going to tell him?" she asked, kneeling down next to me.

"I don't know, but he won't forgive us," I said, lightly shaking my head.

"We need to get out of here," she told me, but I couldn't get myself to move.

"We're not leaving her here! She deserves better than this."

"We'll come back for her. Take her ring. He's going to want proof. I can't see him believing us without it," she told me.

I shakily moved my bloody hand to clutch onto hers. I slid the beautiful, diamond ring off her finger and clutched it into my right hand. I can't lose this.

"I'm so sorry," I whispered in her ear as I lightly set her body down on the concrete and then wiped off the excess tears on my face. Now wasn't the time to mourn.

"Listen, she became one of my good friends. I love her too; remember, you're doing the right thing."

"She's not completely dead yet. By leaving her here we are killing her," I snapped.

"Since when have you had a problem with killing?" Clover said, rolling her eyes. "I mean this is partly your fault. You joined this all by yourself."

I felt my fists clench, knowing she was right.

I shook my head, ready to make a retort, but she cut in again. “You see, it’s funny how you try so hard to make yourself seem like a savior right now, yet here you are. Blood coating every inch of you; all the once-black clothes are now red. You’re a killer,” she snapped while pointing a finger at me.

“Jesse is a killer and he won’t stop until you all are dead!” I hissed back.

“Until we’re all dead,” she repeated as she nodded her head slowly, tears slowly welling up in her eyes. “I don’t know if you’ve realized it, but he has that mission about halfway completed.”

“Wait, she’s not the first one of you three to die?” I asked, looking down at the elegant ring in my hand. How can Jesse actually be succeeding?

She shook her head. ”No one is officially dead, but this is the second one that’s just on the brink,” Clover informed me.

I felt my breath hitch in my throat.

“I didn’t mean for this all to happen,” I said, shaking my head.

“I need to see her. I owe her, and if she does die I don’t know what I’ll do,” I said, shaking my head.

Clover looked around the room.

“We don’t have time for this. If we want to get out of here alive, then we need to get going.”

Her phone rang throughout the room.

“Hello?” she said into the phone, wiping her forehead with her other hand, causing more blood to smear all over it. “Yeah, I’m on my way,” she said, glancing down at her hands.

“Listen, we should really talk about this in person. I’ll hopefully see you in a few.”

Clover looked back at me and acknowledged my presence again.

“Keith, Are you coming? I don’t have all day.”

***

Present

Riley’s Point of View

We quietly crept to the door. I held up my hand to stop them as I placed my ear against the door, listening for signs that anyone was waiting out there.

“So far we know we’ve got Jesse, James, Katy, and Jacob all here.”

"Also, a woman named Lisa and a man named Matthew," Claire added.

"Plus Taylor and someone named Leon," Clover said.

"So we have to guess that at the least eight people are up those stairs," I stated.

They nodded. I pressed my index finger to my lips before I quietly opened the door. I was thankful when the door didn't squeak.

That would be my luck.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Claire said, looking upward at the stairs.

"Yeah, this probably isn't going to end how we want it to," Clover agreed.

I didn't respond and only led them to a spot under the stairs and silently listened for any other voices. When I heard nothing, I turned back to them.

"I need a minute to think," I told them quietly. Everyone was doing their jobs and wouldn't notice for a while that I'm missing. I suspected that something was going to go wrong with the gang, but this was a whole different situation. We were all trapped now.

"Okay, we're going to—" I got cut off by the sound of a gun shot going through the room. I looked down at my stomach to see my black shirt being overruled by the blood red.

I was shot.

"Riley!" Clover yelled, running over to me as I grabbed onto the wall to keep myself up.

"I'm fine," I gasped out, trying to ignore the stinging pain. "It went straight through. I'll be fine," I told her, waving off the pain. I lifted up my shirt to see the side of my stomach with a small hole. I felt thankful when I saw it missed my hip.

Still hurt like a bitch, though.

"I don't see anyone. We were the only ones down here," Claire said, looking confused. I glanced where the bullet came from and didn't see anyone either.

"It could have been automatic. We probably set off a sensor, which means we need to get out of here," I said, letting out a small hiss as I held my hand tightly against the wound.

It's a bit hard fighting crime when you've got a bullet wound.

"Are you sure you're going to be okay?" Claire asked.

I nodded.

"You need to stop the bleeding," Clover argued.

Claire suddenly started taking off her dress, sliding the arms down and letting it fall down to her ankles.

“What the hell are you doing?” Clover muttered, looking at her with wide eyes. Claire slipped off a black tank top, which caused her baby bump to become more prominent. She easily slid her dress back on and raised an eyebrow at our staring.

“What? I heard it brings comfort to the baby,” she said defensively before pulling on the tank top and sliding it across a piece of metal on the wall. The tank top ripped and she pulled out it.

I glanced up at the stairs.

“We don’t have time for this, and that’s going to cause an infection,” I said, causing two sets of glares to land on me.

“It looks fairly new and it’s the best we’ve got right now,” Claire said.

“And we don’t have time for you trailing behind and bleeding to death,” Clover snapped, causing Claire to send her a nod in approval.

“It took a while, but ya girl finally got a backbone,” Claire said, pointing at Clover and sending me a wink. In response, Clover rolled her eyes, but still they lit up in amusement. I winced as I held my bloody shirt up, clenching it tightly as and Claire wrapped the tank top tightly around my waist, pinning it with a pin hidden under her dress.

“Where did you get that?” Clover asked her curiously.

“I had to alter this all dress last minute,” she said, pointing out the small piece that was now hanging at a longer length than the rest of her dress.

“We need to go,” I said, hearing voices coming closer toward the stairs. I pulled my shirt down and stood up straighter, trying not to show how much pain there still was. “Now.”

I knew the tank top was already soaked in blood, but it at least kept some pressure on the wound and it wasn’t like there was anything better to use.

“This way,” I suggested, leading them down a long hallway. I pursed my lips, trying to hide the disgust I felt about the gray, prickle-feeling walls with different things on it.

“What even is that white stuff?” Clover asked, pointing at it as we passed.

I slightly winced.

“It’s better not to ask,” I told her before stopping in front of a door. “This looks like a utility room,” I said, testing the lock. When it didn’t open I pulled out the bobby pin I used earlier from my

pocket. I quickly unlocked the door and turned on the light. I was immediately surprised by what was inside.

“Guns, they keep guns in here,” Clover said, looking just as surprised. Claire peeled at the realistic picture on the window of the door.

“I’ll admit they’re smart,” Claire said nodding.

I agreed, shutting the door and locking us in here.

I grabbed an assault rifle that was hanging on the wall. I checked the ammo and nodded in appreciation when it was fully loaded.

“Wait, we’re not actually going to use these things, right?” Clover asked.

“It’s our only option,” I said, tossing them both an automatic 9mm pistol. I grabbed another and quickly pointed out how to use it. “That’s an automatic gun. This button right here ejects the magazine,” I said, clicking it and showing them how it came off.

“I’m sure you can easily figure out how to put ammo in this thing, but once it’s completely loaded like it is now then you just push it back in like this.”

I pushed it up and smiled slightly at the clicking sound. “That’s the sound you need to hear to ensure it’s locked. Now, the most important part is the safety. If you don’t push it down, you’re not shooting anything or anyone,” I said, pointing at the small lever and pushing it down.

“Lastly, this is how you load the cartridge and this is clearly the button you use to shoot. I hope you both have good aim,” I said, tucking the gun into the waistband of my jeans. I grabbed another handgun and put it into my boots, hiding it from sight with my jeans. I felt a hand press on my side and jumped slightly from the pain. I looked over and saw it was Clover.

“You’re going to bleed out over here,” she said.

I looked down to notice the blood covering my pant leg and the small pool on the ground.

“We need to get out of here,” I said, not disagreeing with her statement. I looked up at the vent and frowned when I saw it needed to be unscrewed.

“I don’t have my gear on me, which means I don’t have a screwdriver. Therefore, we have a problem,” I said, unconsciously rubbing blood on my cheek as I rubbed an itch away.

“What are we going to do?” Claire asked before getting back to biting her lip nervously.

“We’re going to try something, but it will make our time limited,” I said, pulling back the cartridge and smirking when it moved back into place perfectly on the automatic weapon.

"What?" Clover asked with narrowed eyes.

"I'm going to get those bolts off or at the least loose. We're going to have to move fast, but we don't have time for sloppy. Therefore, once that's off we get in here, door gets locked, and we get up and out in that vent," I ordered.

They all nodded.

"You ready?" I asked.

Claire nodded. Clover grabbed another gun like I'm currently holding and put the strap on her back.

"Now I am."

"Definitely grew a pair of balls," I nodded in approval. I unlocked the door and slowly opened it, holding the gun up as I looked both ways. Once I saw it was clear, I ushered them out. They stood in the hall as I did I. I mouthed a countdown from three before I pressed the trigger. Dents went into the metal and soon the screws dropped to the ground.

"Let's go," Claire said, grabbing my arm as we rushed back into the room. We closed the door and locked ourselves in. Clover immediately started climbing one of the shelves and I pushed another in front of the door. I winced as a stabbing pain hit my side. I leaned against the wall as I watched Claire carefully go up with the help of Clover.

I looked down, pulling up my bloody shirt to see the tank top completely bled through "Riley, c'mon," Claire yelled over the sound of men yelling at and pounding the door.

"Yeah, I'm coming," I said breathlessly. I lifted myself up on the shelf and handed Claire my gun. She set it next to her before grabbing my hand and helping me up. Once I was in the fairly decent sized vent, I took a few breaths.

"You need help," Clover said seriously. Her hand was getting covered in blood just from touching me.

"We don't have time to worry about me. Let's go," I said, leading the way through the vent.

"We need to get her somewhere safe. She's going to die on us if she keeps losing all this blood," Claire whispered to Clover.

I clenched my teeth together.

"We need to get out of these vents. They could follow us up here, and if that's the case then I'm sure they're coming fully loaded," I said, feeling exhausted already.

"Where do we go then? We can't exactly go upstairs," Clovers said.

“I’m going to slow you guys down, which is why I’ll be the distraction. While they’re going after to me, you guys will—” I was cut off when my body slammed into another.

“You guys will find your way out,” a familiar voice said. The light from another room shined on the male’s face.

“Keith,” I said, my voice hard.

“You’re going to need my help,” he told me.

I didn’t lose my glare.

“You’re the one that put me here,” I hissed.

He let out an irritated sigh.

“We can discuss this now and you guys all get caught and probably killed on spot, or you can come with me and make it out of here alive,” he snapped back.

I didn’t comment him and followed him. I looked back at Clover and Claire and moved two fingers from my eyes to him. I mouthed two words which they easily understood, ‘Watch him.’

After five minutes of crawling around the vents, we finally stopped at a room. Keith used a small, quiet-sounding drill. The vent cover dropped to the ground, causing a loud crash through the room. Keith helped us down one by one. When he glanced down at the wet liquid on his hand his eyebrows furrowed.

“Who’s hurt?” he asked.

The two-blonde woman looked at me.

“I was shot. I’m fine. It’s just a little blood,” I said.

He narrowed his eyes. His hands came to my waist, lifting up my shirt. When he saw the blood covering the tank top, he quickly let go of the shirt before I could snap at him.

“You need to let me stitch this up,” he insisted and I snorted.

“Yeah, while you’re at it, would you mind making me some spaghetti too?” I reported, my sarcasm leaving thick tension in the air.

“I hate you,” Claire said suddenly.

Keith raised an eyebrow in amusement as he ran his hand through his curls.

"I'm not surprised, but I did what I had to do for this gang," he said as he pressed a rag to my wound. I wasn't sure where the rag came from but I didn't question it, as I bit my tongue, drawing even more blood.

A piece of duck tape was wrapped tightly around my stomach, keeping the wrap firmly against the wound. "Hopefully this will help the blood clot," he said before lifting the vent cover and screwing it back up.

"So where do we go now?" Clover asked, looking around the room. An old beat up couch sat by on the wall, and something told me that the red spots on it weren't paint.

"Clover, I must say it's quite cute that you tried to trick me. It sucks that everything was just an act," Keith said standing only centimeters in front of her, his thumb and index finger rubbing a piece of Clover's dried, bloody hair.

"You're an agent," I said, staring at him.

He smirked, stepping away from her and turning to me.

"As is Taylor," he said nodding.

I snorted.

"He's the one that got me in this mess," I snapped.

He shrugged.

"You have to do things to keep your own cover. You of all people should know this," Keith said before grabbing a pistol from underneath the couch.

"Yeah, but we don't hurt other agents in the process," I snapped.

He nodded in agreement.

"You're one of the best agents. We thought you could easily escape," he defended.

I rolled my eyes in response.

"So you're not a real doctor?" Claire finally asked.

Keith surprisingly sent her a soft smile.

"I am. It's where most of my income comes from. I was an agent for years, but I quit a few years about. They were desperate and needed help, which is why I'm here now," he explained.

She nodded in understanding.

"This is truly great and all, but I feel like someone's going to appear any minute and shoot me in the head, so can we please get out of here?" Clover said.

"At least 6 of them are still down here with us. Where? I'm not sure, but they're going to be checking the vents and rooms. So Mabry, where do we go from here?" I asked as I leaned against the wall. My exhaustion was slowly taking over my body, and I wasn't sure how long I could keep up with this.

"I'm not sure."

***

Joey's Point of View

"It took you all long enough," Caiden hissed as he lightly rubbed at his sore wrists.

"Where's Claire? Did you find her yet?" he questioned immediately.

"No, and we can't get ahold of Riley either. They have all three of them," I said, causing him to slam his fist into a nearby car.

"You're a bunch of high class, British fucking agents who claim to be the best, yet you can't even get three girls? More importantly, one?" he snapped.

I narrowed my eyes, not at all amused with his attitude.

"You think we aren't trying? That's my fiancé, his wife, and your girlfriend," I said, pointing my thumb in the direction where Andrew is standing,

"My fiancé," he corrected.

I looked at him with confusion, "What?"

"She's my fiancé. She was taken right after I proposed," he said, hiding his hurt with a blank look on my face.

"I'm sorry, but by any chance did you see who took her? We can't get the cameras on from the restaurant."

"I think so, but my eyes are fucking up because it can't be who I saw," Caiden said before sliding into the passenger seat of the car. I followed his lead and slid into the driver's seat.

"Who'd you see?" Andrew asked curiously as he rolled up the sleeves of his t-shirt.

"A woman named Lisa, but I don't know how it can be her. I killed her years ago. She was dead on the ground after I squeezed every once of oxygen from her lungs." His anger was clear as he clenched his fists beside me.

“No hard feelings, but you’re sick man,” Andrew said, shaking his head, disgust showing on his face.

“And you’re a fucking pus—” Caiden was cut off by me suddenly slamming on the breaks.

“What the fuck?”

“We’ve got incoming,” I said, backing up the car. I looked through the front windshield to see a guy pointing a gun towards us. The windshield was hit with multiple bullets causing the bullet proof glass to be almost impossible to see out of.

“Shit,” Andrew muttered.

I let out a sigh, switching gears and pressed on the gas. The car started speeding backwards before I turned the wheel, and we were speeding off in the opposite direction.

“I can’t see anything,” I muttered looking out the driver’s window for help. I glanced at the mirrors to see two black vans still following us.

“Andrew, I want you to grab the bag underneath my seat,” I instructed.

He did exactly that. I glanced back to see he was holding the bag of guns on his lap.

“You know in high school I was counted as the bad boy and all, but I’ve never actually used one of these things,” he said, holding up a rifle and causing Caiden to snort beside me.

“Why am I not surprised?” Caiden said, rolling his eyes. From the corner of my eye I saw him take the gun from Andrew’s hand before rolling down my window. Bullets immediately hit the black vehicle behind us thanks to Caiden.

“Great, this is just great,” Andrew muttered from the backseat.

I grabbed my cellphone and held it tightly in my right hand while the other was on the wheel. “Matt? Yeah, we’re going to need back up.”

“I’ll send Em and Rachel,” Matt said from the other line. “Oh, and Joey?”

“Yeah?” I asked while doing a quick turn into an alleyway. When there was no response I decided to ask again. “Matt, what’s wrong?”

“Liam’s awake.”

Chapter 24

Clover's Point of View

I poked my head out the door to check if it was clear. When I saw no one was there, I closed it again. "Is it clear?" Riley asked, sitting patiently on the chair as Keith stitched up her wound with some string and a needle lying around.

I nodded, "No one was in sight."

"This is stressing me out," Claire mumbled quietly to herself as she placed her hand on her stomach.

"Are you okay?" I asked her. Surprisingly, she was the cleanest out if all of us with only a few drops of blood on her dress compared to the rest of us. Riley was almost soaked in her own blood, while I had blood in my hair and a blood all over my leggings and splats on my sports bra all because of that video they made to get their attention.

I thought back to only a few hours ago.

My body was tied up in a chair, my once tied-up hair was now in my face, the hair tie completely gone.

"Clover, you're awake. That's great!" Jesse said, clapping his hands together twice. He leaned down so his face was leveled with mine.

"How ya doin', baby?" he questioned with fake concern.

I spit in his face in response. His hand grabbed on to my hair, immediately pulling. "I won't put up with your fucking attitude, so don't try any stupid shit like that again," he hissed in my face, causing hit own spit to sputter on my own complexion.

"Sorry, sir. Would you like a silk towel to wipe your face? Or do you prefer cotton?" His hand slammed against my left cheek, the impact causing my head to turn to the side.

"Fuckin' bitch," he muttered, turning his back from me. I was slightly glad when he turned because I couldn't stop the few tears from escaping my eyes.

Don't show weakness. Stay strong.

"What are you waiting for?" I snapped, causing him to turn back around, sliding his phone in his pocket.

"What?"

"What are you waiting for?" I repeated sharply. "You have me, so just kill me."

"Kill you? Right, that was the plan, wasn't it?" he said, turning his head to the side, causing his unshaven chin to stick out more.

"You see, sweetheart, there was a change of plans. We'll get a good amount of money from your family and then we'll make an agreement. with them. We won't kill you or your pretty little face. Now, Riley, has another thing coming," he said, pulling out a pistol from his holster.

"Riley?" I asked with a questioning tone.

"She has dropped me into the pit of hell and watched as the flames engulfed me, stripping every bit of my pride off of me."

"How deep," I said sarcastically before rolling my eyes. "And what about Claire? You're in love with her, yet she doesn't feel anything for you because of all this shit that you do," I snapped. I was surprised by my own language.

"You don't understand my relationship with Claire," he snapped as he took out a lighter and cigar. He placed the tobacco between his lips and lit it up.

"There is no relationship to understand, buddy."

"We were friends, good friends, and Caiden ruined it all. She was supposed to be my savior from all of this. I wasn't going to go back to the gang life. I was going to start over – hell, I did start over," he said after he pulled the stick of tobacco out of his mouth.

"So if you had that great redo with your life, then why are we all here right now? Why are we all close to death and you once again in charge of a gang?" I questioned, causing a scowl to appear on his face.

"Because life fucking sucks. When Claire found out about my history and all about me going after Caiden for a period of time, she hated me."

"She could've forgiven you if you didn't do all this," I snapped.

He chuckled, blowing out a circle of smoke.

"No, you see I still had some unfinished business. You were a part of that, so Jasmin and Chris returned to the gang for a while and filled me in on everything in your pathetic life. We came up with the conclusion that—"

"Can you stop with the clichés? We don't need to waste our time while you fill her in on the back stories," a woman with brown curly hair said. I stared at her with curiosity as she walked over from a dark corner.

"Eh, she's the innocent one out of all of them. She had no knowledge about gangs and all that, so I thought I'd fill her in a bit. Plus, I want her to spill the little secret that she's not actually dying to the others," he said to the woman.

She smirked in response and walked up to him, placing a hand on his chest. The hand slid all the way up to behind his neck before she placed a long kiss on his lips, causing me to fake gag as it started to get even deeper, invoking tongue.

"Please don't show me your disgusting version of porn. I mean he's like half of your age," I said, causing her to pull away. Her old eyes focused on me as she walked over in her tight dress.

Did she not believe in saving some things for imagination?

"Clover Thompson," she said, placing her hand on my cheek and digging her long nails into the skin."Clover Thompson-Carter. Also known as Lucky, the famous worldwide Victoria Secret angel," she said before pulling back and stepping away. I felt a drop of blood slide down my cheek, but couldn't focus on it as a sickening pain appeared on my chest as she sent a hard kick straight to it.

Yeah, no photoshoots for a while.

"That's me. Listen, I'm currently not doing the whole autograph thing because I'm kinda busy at the moment, but if you leave your card maybe I can get back to you soon," I said looking down at my, for once, plain nails.

"Your attitude won't get you anywhere but six feet under, darling."

"Huh, I guess it won't," I said, pursing my lips a bit and nodding. "But aye, you know what they say, if you're gonna die you might as well make it one hell of a time."

"No one's ever said that," Jesse said with a raised eyebrow.

"I know, but it sounded like the right thing to say," I said before gasping as the woman clenched onto my hair and pulled it to the side.

"Yeah, this isn't a good way for my neck to go. You know it causes cramps and everything, so if you don't mind letting go," I said, causing her to pull even harder. My teeth clenched at the pain, and I felt tears welling up in my eyes once more.

"Jasmin, you can come in now," she called.

The sound of a door opening and closing sounded through the room. My hair was released, causing me to look at the woman who entered the room.

I felt my heart clench at the sight of my supposed friend with a bruised face, one of her eyes swollen shut.

"Jasmin here is going to show you a trick."

"Lisa, please," Jasmin said, putting a name to the unknown woman.

"My dolls don't talk, so don't talk," she snappe,d putting Jasmin on the ground in front of me.

"Your dolls?" I questioned, watching as Jasmin sat on her legs with her hands resting on her things.

"Children are my dolls. I would have taken a pretty face like yours, but you're not the one I need for revenge. You're just the one he needs for money," she said, glancing at Jesse who only watched with the cigar hanging out of his mouth, barely being held up by his lips.

"Now, Jasmin, I want you to perform act twenty-three," she said loudly, her voice echoing through the room.

"I–I'm sorry," Jasmin whispered to me before she pulled out a knife from her back pocket. I stared at the sharp object with the fear creeping up my spine. Was she going to stab me?

Before I could say anything the knife slid down her own arm, not leaving room for any comment as her own screams pierced through the room.

"What are you doing? Stop it, Jasmin," I yelled, struggling to get out of my seat, knowing the movement itself was impossible.

Her own hovered over my lap as the blood dropped onto my lap. "Why are you making her do this?" I snapped, glaring at the woman named Lisa.

"It's one of my many games I play with my dolls. But shush so we can listen to her screams. Now, continue on," she ordered.

Jasmin pulled her arm back and slammed the knife into her leg, dragging it down, the action causing more blood to squirt everywhere.

"Jas, stop! Please," I begged, the tears falling from both of ours eyes. Hers from pain and mine from fear.

"Jasmin Levine, your days in the gang are done. You are now free to finalize the leaving process," Jesse said, his voice completely void of emotion. Jasmin sent me a week smile before gasping as she pulled the knife out of her leg. With shaky hands she slid the knife through her heart in one solid motion, the one motion that will scar me for the rest of my life as I watched her eyes become lifeless. The blood leaked out from her body.

"No!" I screamed, my voice sounding through the room. "Jasmin, cmon, no," I said shaking my head. My tears fell from closed eyes.

"Don't look away now," Lisa said pouting. I heard her heels click against the floor, coming closer to me. I opened my eyes to see a camera focused on me.

"Say hi to your friends," Jesse said smirking.

"H–help," I screamed, listening to my own voice crack.

"That's perfect."Lisa said, holding up her hand, her index and thumb forming a circle as the rest of her fingers stood straight up in the air, commonly known as the 'okay' gesture.

"You're disgusting. I hope all of you die and burn in hell," I hissed causing the woman to frown.

"You're no fun. You're like that annoying doll that won't shut up, even when you switch the off button. Whatever, your job is down. Now, Jesse, I'm going to get Claire. Have this all cleaned up before I return? Thanks," she said patting his cheek in a patronizing way before walking away.

The sounds of her heels clicking lasted forever as I stared at my friend's dead body in front me. My own shoes were becoming coated in blood as it leaked out of her body.

"Jas," I whispered softly, not caring that the notorious gang leader himself was in the room.

"It had to be done," Jesse said, walking over to me. His pulled a key out from his pocket and unlocked my hands and then my ankles. I stared at him in confusion as he turned away and headed out the same door Lisa exited from.

I knelt down next to my friend and sobbed softly. "You didn't deserve this." I sobbed, gasping for breathing. "You and Chris are in better place now," I whispered, placing my lips on her forehead before pulling away.

A few minutes later two men came in, locking my hands behind my back with handcuffs before they dragged me out of the room. I went through multiple hallways and down stairs before I found myself in a cell with two other blonde women.

The sudden question of who's blood was actually soaked into my clothes made me sick.

"Clover, you okay?" Claire asked, making my mind go back to the present time.

I nodded.

"I'm as okay as one can ever be in this situation," I said, causing her to grab my hand and give it a squeeze.

"We'll get through this," she said before releasing it and turning to look at Keith.

"How is Lisa alive?" she questioned, causing Keith to pause the stitching.

"She was never dead," he said simply, not looking away from the injury.

"Caiden told me she wasn't. He wouldn't lie about killing someone."

"Maybe he didn't lie. He probably thought she was dead too. She sure as hell was close to it."

"This is all turning into too much for me," Claire said, shaking her head as she placed her hand on her stomach where a child laid peacefully inside. Her eyes showed concern.

"It's like everything that we once thought was okay just isn't anymore," Riley said, wincing at the pain.

“I’m really starting to hate the color red,” Claire said as she watched Keith finish up the last stitch for Riley. He held out his hand for her to grab, but she ignored it as she stood up herself. I rushed to her side as she wobbled, almost falling over.

“I’ve lost a lot of blood,” she said, placing her hand on head, letting me help balance her.

“You can get some blood back once we all get out of here,” Keith said, going over to the door. He peaked his head out and nodded at us.

“C’mon, it’s time,” he said.

We all reluctantly followed him. The hallway was luckily still clear when we entered. It wasn’t until we passed a door that I realized we definitely weren’t alone.

“Don’t move or else she dead,” someone suddenly said. We all turned around to see Riley standing there with an arm around her throat. A gun was in the man's hand. The weapon pressed was directly against her forehead.

“Jacob,” Keith stated, causing the man to smirk.

“Keith, I didn’t take you to be one to betray the gang,” the man, Jacob, replied. Riley moved her hand to the man’s arm around her throat, her eyes showing us she had a plan.

“Daddy’s dying, mommy’s crying. Jeffrey’s missing. Caiden’s kissing. Jesse’s searching, Jackson’s lurking. Mia’s leaving, Nathan’s screaming. Riley’s turning, Clover’s mourning. The baby is kicking, but mommy went missing.”

Everyone went silent at words coming from someone new in the room.

“Daddy is dying and your momma is crying. Mia left. Nathan was screaming. Caiden was kissing and Jesse was searching, but now you’re all caught, so what’s left?”

Riley’s turning, Clover’s mourning. The baby is kicking, but mommy went missing

“What are you talking about?” I snapped, feeling Claire grab my wrist for support. Lisa only smirked in response.

“Your little report is wrong. I’m not turning on anyone,” Riley hissed, causing Jacob to tighten his grip.

“Really?” she said, raising an eyebrow. She looked over at Claire. “Is your baby not kicking?”

I heard Claire’s breathing catching in her throat from beside me. “How the hell would you know?”

“Because I’ve held a baby in my stomach once. I know when the time comes and with you constantly in distress right now will only make the kicking worse,” she said simply as she pulled a

gun out of her pocket. I felt the one in my waistband start to burn. The fear of having to use it consumed me.

In less than ten seconds, Riley elbowed Jacob in the stomach and flipped him over her, his gun sliding over to me. I picked up the object, hating the feeling of such a deadly item in my hand.

Her foot went to slam into his face, but the move was quickly interrupted when he grabbed her foot. In response, she jumped up and used her other foot, kicking him directly in the face. The force left him groaning on the ground.

“You see, you are definitely right. You’re not turning right now,” Lisa said, not looking fazed by one of her partners on the ground. “But it will amaze you what someone will do when you have someone they love in custody.”

“What are you talking about?” Riley snapped, pulling out her own gun and pointing it at the woman.

“Ah, right you don’t know. Joey is here along with Caiden and Andrew,” Lisa said nodding.

“How are you alive? Caiden killed you,” Claire said, suddenly causing her gaze to snap to her instead.

“Caiden tried to kill me. You see when you hold your breath for just a few seconds when someone is choking the life out of you, it’s easy to be blinded by the rage to not notice that I wasn’t actually dead,” she said shrugging.

“I hope you burn in hell,” Claire sneered.

“Where is Andrew?” I asked suddenly. The thoughts consumed me. Andrew didn’t deserve to be apart of this.

“He’s next to Joey and Caiden,” Lisa said, turning her head to the side and acting as if I asked a ridiculous question.

“Where are all three of them?” Riley questioned.

“Who?” Lisa said, making us all send her glares. Riley clicked off the safety on her gun and took a step closer.

“I won’t ask you again.”

“Now, let’s not be dramatic,” she said waving her off. “It’s time for the rest of the story.” In one blink of an eye, Lisa had a gun out. Riley didn’t hesitate to shoot at the woman.

The woman did a quick back bend, causing the bullet to skim over her stomach, but I didn't have time to register where the bullet went as Lisa shot one directly at Riley's leg. Riley fell to the ground, the excruciating pain finally catching up to her.

"Riley!" I yelled rushing over to her side. I held on to her arm, trying to help hold her up. Riley pressed her hand tightly against the wound, small tears forming in the corner of her eyes.

"Damnit," Riley snapped. I looked up to see Lisa now gone and Claire against the wall with Keith hovering in front of her.

"What happened? Get away from her," I snapped, pressing my hand over Riley's to make sure she kept pressure, no matter the pain. Something about Keith I didn't trust.

"Claire got shot," he said looking back at us. The movement showed a clear view of Keith's hand pressing against to a spot on Claire's arm.

"Are you going to be okay?" I asked, looking down at my bloody hand before looking back up.

"Yeah, but I don't know if my baby will be," Claire said pressing her hand on her stomach, her eyes heavy. "This is too much stress," she said so quietly I almost didn't hear her. Claire's eyes were fresh with tears.

"What the hell are you doing?" I snapped when I looked up to see Keith ripping off his shirt. He rolled up the black shirt and tied it tight onto the wound, causing her to cry out in pain.

"We don't have time for me to fix them all up. Is Riley still awake? Make sure she stays awake," Keith said, looking back at me, his eyes landing on hers that were half opened.

"At this rate, Riley will be dead in an hour if we do nothing," I said, looking at the blood pooling out from her side along with the blood pouring out from her leg. "Her stitches opened up."

"I–I'm fine. Let's go," Riley said, trying to move, the movement causing her to wince and squeeze her eyes shut.

"You're going to have to carry her," I said, pressing Riley's hand harder against the wound as a signal for her to press down harder. I stood up and walked over to Keith.

"Fuck," Keith muttered as he walked over. He lifted Riley up and cradled her in his arms. "Let's go," he said, leading the way. Claire and I followed him, her biting on her lip, trying to stop herself from crying out from pain.

"Riley, how the hell did you go on with that shot to your side? I'm over here crying from a fucking bullet wound in the arm. You're shot twice, yet you're still conscious and everything. I'm highly impressed," Claire said with a small smile. Riley let out a weak chuckle before it was interrupted by her own coughing.

“I’ve been shot 14 times before today. I did serious missions back in the days. Joey and I would often have to go to different countries to get specific items from other people for the European Union. The number of times I’ve had to pretend to be someone undercover is too high to count. Although the longest had to be when I was undercover in high school for Jesse’s case,” Riley explained, her eyes closed the whole time.

My eyes squinted as we entered into a new room much darker than the ones before. I quickly noticed the large room was the one I was tied up in when I first met Lisa. Four men ran in from the door across the room, the same door we were making our way towards.

“Stop right there,” a man yelled as all of them pointed their guns toward us. “Hands up.”

None of us moved beside Keith who gently placed Riley on the ground in front of him. “Guys, it’s okay, I’m taking them to Jesse,” Keith explained simply, his voice smooth and confident.

The men didn’t lower their guns.

“Really? Then why are you heading towards the exit?” another man questioned. I watched as Keith’s eyes examined the men before he sent a quick kick, causing the gun to fly out of the man’s hand. He set a nice punch directly into his face, the impact making the man land on his back on the ground.

“Don’t move,” the two men ordered as they placed the barrel of their guns against Keith. One on his arm and one against the side of his forehead. I glanced at Claire who stood frozen next to me.

“We have some shit luck,” she whispered, causing me to almost snort.

“I’d say so,” I said, just as quietly.

“Boys. You should never try to fight those with higher rank,” Keith said, his voice expressing his arrogance. Before they could respond, Keith elbowed the one in the left of him in the stomach and twisted the gun out of his hand all while kicking his right leg out into the other man’s ankle. Keith sent a quick kick to the man’s groin, causing him to fall to the ground. Immediately he was once again with the advantage.

“Now, anything else you boys want to try?” he asked, sounding genuinely curious. My breath caught in my throat as I saw a fourth man appear.

“Keith, look to the left!” I yelled, causing his head to snap to the left.

“No, no!” Claire yelled, rushing toward the man. “He’s with us. He’s an agent,” she said, her eyes lit up at the sight of the man.

The man moved closer, his body under the light, and I quickly recognized him as that guy Liam.

“Need some help?” he asked, tossing Keith some spray.

Keith easily caught it with his free hand, the one that wasn’t twisting a man’s wrist. He looked at the bottle and nodded in approvement before spraying it in the man’s face. I watched with curiosity as the man fell straight to the ground. Instead of using it on the other two who weren’t completely unconscious, he sent a hard kick to their heads, making even me cringe as they fell back on the ground.

Liam finally took a closer look at Claire and his eyes widened at the sight of her injured arm. “Claire,” he breathed out, rushing over to her. “I’m so sorry,” he whispered, looking over her appearance, his hands holding tightly onto her waist.

“Shush, I’m fine. I was worried sick about you. You shouldn’t even be here right now. When did you wake up?” she scolded slightly, although her eyes showed relief.

Something about the concern the two shared made me think there was something more going on, but the thought quickly disappeared when I remembered her relationship with Caiden. Yeah, nothing can interfere with that. I mean their relationship is like that sword that men try to take out of the rock, but it never comes out for anyone besides that one man.

Did I really just quote that stupid show Andrew always watches? The one with King Arthur? I shook my head with a small smile playing on my lips. I really love that man. My smile slipped as I remembered the current situation.

I hope he’s okay.

“What happened to your arm?” Liam asked her, making my eyes snap back up to their conversation once again.

“I was shot. No biggie. I’m living,” she said shrugging. Liam’s eyes scanned over her figure once again before pulling back as a few more bodies entered the room. I watched as Keith and Liam rushed over to them, easily fighting them off, only taking a few damaging hits. Ignoring the fight, I walked over to where Claire now was, sitting with Riley’s head in her lap. She stroked her blonde hair causing Riley to open her eyes.

“I never thought I would die as a blonde,” Riley said weakly, attempting at a joke.

“You’re not going to die,” Claire replied with a frown.

“Bullshit. If I wasn’t dying then I would be over there kicking some ass with them and not relying on Keith to save my life,” she said, gasping slightly for another breath, yet still trying to hide her difficulty breathing.

“Suck it up, Riles. From the stories I’ve heard, you've been through a hell of a lot worse, so man up and keep on breathing. You’re the one who taught us to fight with everything we’ve got. I don’t know if Claire agrees or not, but hell, you’ve had us using some weird ass skills these past few month, skills that I never expected to use after high school. You’re one kick ass agent and now is not the time to forget that,” I lectured, squeezing her hand.

“You know you were such a bitch when I first met you,” Claire said, causing Riley to laugh.

“I think we can all agree we all were,” Riley said.

“Clover’s right. You made us new people. I became obsessed with work to the point where I forgot how to live. Now I’m over here with a baby, an engagement ring, a bullet, and some more great friends,” Claire said with a sincere smile, ignoring the few tears that slipped from her eyes. “You’ve got a soon-to-be husband, and let me tell you, you’re not giving up that man for some stupid bullets.”

Riley let a smile crawl on her face, something that contrasted to her usual frown. “Your speeches suck,” she said, causing us both to laugh. Tears formed in my own eyes as I heard her weak voice.

I didn’t want her to die.

“But I’ll fight as hard as I can,” Riley told us.

“That’s all we want,” Claire told her before switching spots with me, moving Riley’s head to my lap.

“Listen, I need a minute. I’m going to talk to Liam,” Claire said, her voice shaky.

I nodded.

“Go ahead, I got her,” I said softly before focusing back on the dying woman in front of me.

Life truly sucked.

Chapter 25

Keith's Point of View

I stared at the final body that hit the ground. I wasn't sure how Jesse was figuring everything out, but the only solution had to be Lisa. The fucking woman's like a billion years old and a psychopath.

"I don't know when you changed sides, and I don't care much if you're taking care of them, but I need to go find Joey. He's the one that we got the lead from," Liam said, already walking towards the door.

"Liam!" Claire yelled, making all eyes snap towards her. "It's Riley, she's d–dying." Her voice cracked, causing Liam to focus on her and then the body laying in front of her.

"You need to keep her alive. Whatever you do you can't leave her. I'm going to get Joey a–and—" Liam cut off his sentence, trying to control the shakiness of his own voice. "And she's going to be alive when I come back with him. Keep her alive and keep them safe. You're a doctor, right? Then find a way to stitch her up."

I thought back to the small sewing kit I kept in my coat pocket for emergencies and frowned knowing I had used up all of the cheap thread. I decided not to comment on the fact and only nodded.

"Liam, I'm coming with you," Claire said rushing over. Her dress was almost covered in blood and it was clear she was shaken up as well.

"I don't have time to look out for you. I need to get to everyone as fast as possible," Liam said seriously.

"I can't just sit here and do nothing. I need to see that Caiden's okay and I have this."

She pulled out a gun from her back waistband. Liam looked at me with accusing eyes, and I shrugged. I didn't know where she got that.

"You probably have never shot anyone before," Liam said, trying to take the weapon from her hand. But she quickly pulled away, keeping it away from him.

"You're right, but there's a first for everything. I can be your backup. Now, let's go, we're wasting time," she said heading towards the door, not bothering to look back. He let out a sigh and looked at me carefully.

"Take care of her," he said before running after Claire. Once they were both out of the room, I went over and locked the door and pushed an old desk in front of it. I shook my head in disgust

when I saw a bunch of special tools laying in a case on the table. They were tools the gang would use to torture their victims. My eyes caught sight of an iPhone in a pink case laying on the table. I grabbed it and clicked the home button. I saw a picture of Clover kissing a man on the cheek while two kids sat in front of them making faces at the camera.

"I take it this is yours?" I asked Clover, walking over to her and handing her the iPhone. She quickly took it and wiped off the dirty screen.

"Where'd you find it?" she asked.

I shrugged.

"It was laying on the table. Jesse probably took it off you when you were first brought in here," I said.

"I'm going to call for some help. Will you hold her?" she asked.

I nodded. I switched spots with her and held on to Riley. The movement caused her to open her brown eyes. She didn't say anything and only watched me as my own eyes skimmed her face.

Her eyes held something deep. I wasn't sure if she knew her life was almost over or if she was thinking about all of the things in life she had yet to do. Or maybe she was thinking of Joey. I wonder if he was the love of her life. I had that once. It was something that was truly special. At the sight of the person, your heart rate increases, your arms fill with goosebumps as the small hairs on your arms stand up, and your thoughts come to a complete stop as you focus on only them; your body heats up as they move closer, one step at a time, and once their body touches yours you feel a sense of completeness.

You only get it once in your life.

Or maybe you get it multiple times.

I still wasn't sure.

Love. It's a strange thing. It comes out of nowhere, hitting you so hard that it takes the breath out of you. Love grasps your heart and refuses to let go. It tangles its fingers into your heart and doesn't ever release until you accept it and let it stay apart of you. The special thing about love is that it can be deadly.

Hatred. Now, hatred is a funny thing. It consumes your whole body and masks you with nothing but the sight of red fury. Hatred goes a long way as it fills your body with a speed faster than lightning. Your body doesn't get the choice to stop that pinch of anger once it's been started, once the fire's been lit. Soon you'll find yourself with enough anger to kill.

Death. Death was an interesting thing. It's just like love and makes you succumb to its every demand. Death takes your heart and crushes it. Leaving nothing but ashes and dust. As love, it takes you in, but as death, it forces you to leave. You can never recover from that darkness and you can never get that part of your heart back. Suddenly you'll find yourself laying there in hell and next, you'll find yourself never returning.

Ah, now let's mix them together. Love can turn into hatred once the heart has been broken and ripped out of your chest. It causes a pain that can't be fixed right away. That hatred leads you to do things that you shouldn't. It leads you to become a monster at times. Why? I wasn't sure, but part of me was sure it had to do with the fact that the love is still there. The love in your heart never actually leaves, and you hate yourself for that. This is why we do those stupid things. This is why we hurt the ones we love the most, not physically of course, no, emotionally. We can't control the path our heart creates with our brain. We can't stop the unexpected love. Just like we can't stop death.

Blood. That was something I always found quite compelling. It releases from your body just by a simple scratch. Your body had plenty of the stuff, and if you lose some it doesn't take much to regenerate it. But for some, blood was disgusting. They would throw up or pass out because they can't handle the thought of the liquid leaking out of someone's body drip by drip, pint by pint, quart by quart. Some were in love with the liquid. They would lick their wounds and others would donate it often because they truly enjoyed the feeling it gave them as it left their bodies. It was like a high.

Now, I didn't ever have a problem with blood. I wasn't the type to throw up or pass out, and I wasn't the type to lick it either. I mean that's just disgusting. But I didn't ever mind donating blood every so often either because it was for a good cause, yet here I sit. Blood dripping onto the concrete one drop by one. The red liquid was drowning me. I was sitting in a pool of it and barely staying afloat as it continued to try to pull me under. It was on my lips, my cheeks, my nose, my forehead, my hands, my arms, and my clothes. It just kept appearing.

Every time I see blood I always think of him – him being the man that Jesse blew to fucking pieces all to prove a point. Jack Carson, he was the reason I ever took this job again. I was supposed to bring this agency down piece by piece, so he could have an out. Everyone knows the only way to leave a gang is by death. Therefore, that was our only option, but when Riley came in I knew that we actually had a chance. I was grateful, until Jesse did that thing none of expected. When he decided to blow up his own club. $even was around for years, so imagine all of our surprises when a bomb was placed in there and blew up 126 men, one of those men being Jack.

He was a great asset for the gang. He spiked drinks. He got Jesse's targets exactly how he needed them, yet the heartless man still didn't care. He still killed them all and made everything I did

pointless. I suddenly didn't find a reason to continue on. I couldn't remember the reason to take down the gang as I smoked and drank until I couldn't even remember my name. It was a strange feeling, a feeling that I'll never go back to. Now, I remember my purpose – I remember that Jesse is a murderer and deserves to rot in hell.

A cough interrupted my thoughts, making me focus on the woman halfway in my lap. "Shh, you're going to be okay," I whispered, holding her body in my arms closer. "Just close your eyes," I said, tucking her blonde hair behind her ear. "It will all be over soon."

"I'm scared," she whispered, her eyes never leaving mine as her body shook. I was surprised by the confession but didn't show it as I lightly moved a piece of her hair away from her face.

"Don't be. It was inevitable," I said just as softly.

"This was bigger than all of us," she said coughing, blood sputtering all over my face. I didn't move to wipe it and only continued to stare down at her as I held her in my arms. "No one is strong enough to take on a case like this."

I didn't reply as I felt the tears surfacing. She didn't know how true her words really were.

Don't cry. Don't cry. Once you start you won't be able to stop.

My heart clenched at my inner thoughts. It was true: if I started to cry I wouldn't stop. I didn't even cry when Jack died.

Fuck, I seriously need a drink

"I'm so cold," she mumbled.

I only held her body tighter against me to supply her some warmth.

"I know. Just close your eyes," I told her once more. I bit my lip to keep a sob from escaping. How could this be happening? We did everything we were supposed to. I was silently taking downside missions while she and Claire were distracting Jesse with other things.

"I feel like I'm leaving things incomplete," she said, opening her eyes again.

"You are a hero. Your name will go around the world and hear what you did. I promise you," I responded shakily. She would be an agent that would go down in the books. Bringing a gang down wasn't a big thing anymore, but Jesse's gang was a different story. His gang is as deep as one can possibly go. They're all psychopaths and they all are serial killers.

"I need you to tell him something for me," the blonde said, squeezing my bloody hands with hers. I immediately knew she was referring to Joey.

"Anything."

"Just t–tell him that I'm s–sorry," she stuttered as she coughed up more blood. "No, tell him I love him."

"Of course," I promised.

In response, a small, sad smile appeared on her face. She closed her eyes again and part of me feared that this was the last time I was going to see those eyes. Her breathing got even slower, and I knew that this was it. It was happening. How is it that we were all healthy and alive even a few months ago. We were all too serious for our own good over these past months, and although we started as strangers we were ending as best friends. Leaving as best friends. Dying as best friends.

No, she and I weren't ending as best friends. Her, Clover, and Claire were. Riley and I would be ending as partners.

I needed a cigarette.

I needed my head clear. Old thoughts and old memories were resurfacing and I wasn't sure I could deal with them. The part that sucks is that I thought I could move on, that is until I realized Clover Thompson was using me as a ploy.

Going undercover is stupid as fuck.

I took a pack of Marlboro lights out of my coat pocket and lit up a stick of poison with my lighter. The feeling of the white stick in between my lips already started to relieve my need and take away the anxiety that was constantly clawing at my chest.

The smell of a cigarette is an interesting thing. As it's lit, you watch as the end turns into a red ember. You bring the white stick to your lips and inhale the poison. The white smoke leaves your lips shortly after, before a new wave eventually returns once again as the white stick of addiction is brought back. Every time you inhale the poison your lungs die a little each time. It's saddening really.

"She's dying," Clover's voice whispered, interrupting my thoughts. She now stood next to me looking down at the figure in my lap.

"Yes," I said just as softly, running my hands through Riley's hair.

"How are we going to tell Joey?" she asked, kneeling down next to me.

"I don't know, but he won't forgive us. Liam won't either," I said gently as I exhaled a large amount of smoke.

"We need to get out of here," she told me, but I couldn't get myself to move.

"We're not leaving her here! She deserves better than this," I snapped, feeling my blood start to boil. She just wanted to leave her to either die or be finished off with a bullet in the head when someone else finds her in her dying state.

"We'll come back for her. Take her ring. He's going to want proof. I can't see him believing us without it," she told me.

I shakily moved my bloody hand to clutch hers. I slid the beautiful diamond ring off her finger and clutched it into my right hand. I can't lose this.

"I'm so sorry," I whispered in her ear as I lightly set her body down on the concrete and then wiped off tears on my face. Now wasn't the time to mourn. Now was not the time to think about Jack either.

"Listen, she became one of my good friends. I love her too; remember, you're doing the right thing."

"She's not completely dead yet. By leaving her here we are killing her," I snapped. She still had a pulse, she was still alive, so why was she so ready to just leave her here to die.

"Since when have you had a problem with killing?" Clover said, rolling her eyes. "I mean this is partly your fault. You joined this all by yourself."

I felt my fists clench knowing she was right.

No, she was only partly right. I joined this gang so I could cause its destruction from the inside.

I shook my head, ready to make a retort, but she cut in again. "You see, it's funny how you try so hard to make yourself seem like a savior right now, yet here you are. Blood coating every inch of you; all the once-black clothes are now red. You're a killer," she snapped while pointing a finger at me.

"Jesse is a killer and he won't stop until you all are dead!" I hissed back.

"Until we're all dead," Sse repeated as she nodded her head slowly, tears slowly welling up in her eyes. "I don't know if you've realized it, but he has that mission about halfway completed."

"Wait, she's not the first one of you three to die?" I asked, looking down at the elegant ring in my hand. How can Jesse actually be succeeding?

She shook her head.

"No one is officially dead, but this is the second one that's just on the brink, and I don't mean out of the three of us. I mean I called the cops and after some convincing, they informed me that they are

already on their way, but I heard them in the back talking. They got a call that a blonde got shot," Clover informed me.

I felt my breath hitch in my throat.

"There are three well-known blondes here. Well, technically two since Riley's really a brunette I think," she said with a thoughtful look on her face.

"I didn't mean for this all to happen," I said, shaking my head. We were supposed to go from the vents straight through here and out through the crawl space. It was a simple plan.

"I need to see her. I owe her, and if she does die I don't know what I'll do," I said, shaking my head.

Clover looked around the room.

"We don't have time for this. If we want to get out of here alive, then we need to get going."

Her phone rang throughout the room.

"Hello?" she said into the phone, wiping her forehead with her other hand, causing more blood to smear all over it. "Yeah, I'm on my way," she said, glancing down at her hands.

"Listen, we should really talk about this in person. I'll hopefully see you in a few."

Clover looked back at me and acknowledged my presence again.

"Keith, Are you coming? I don't have all day."

"Who's on the phone?" I asked, slipping the cigarette in between my lips and lightly setting Riley's head on the concrete. I slipped off my jacket and laid her head on it for some support.

I looked down at the engagement ring still in the palm of my bloodied hand. She didn't even get a chance to get married.

"Liam. He said that he'll meet us with the others at a door in the computer wing in five minutes, so we just need to make it there. I'm guessing you know where that is," Clover said.

I slowly took the cigarette out of my mouth and stepped on what was left of the stick.

"Fine, but we're not leaving here without her. I don't give a fuck if I'm carrying her the whole way there. We're not leaving someone who worked her fucking ass off to keep you completely breathing and alive here to die. So if you want to run off now, then go ahead, but I'll take as much time as needed to bring her out of this place," I snapped. Clover stared at me with wide ideas, her mouth opening and closing a few times, unsure of what to say.

"Okay then. Get her up and let's go," she said, and I did exactly that. I slipped the ring back onto Riley's finger before lifting her up.

If she's going to die, it sure as hell won't be in here.

Claire's Point of View

I ran over to the room where I saw a familiar face trying to look through the small window. My heart felt relieved when I saw Caiden's hazel eyes lock with my blues. His eyes turned from stone to immediate relief as well.

"Got a bobby pin?" Liam asked.

I nodded, reaching up to my hair. When the usual pin wasn't there, I felt myself freeze. I already gave it up.

"No, Riley used it earlier," I said, trying to move the locked handle.

"We would need something stronger anyways," he said, digging through his pocket. He pulled out a pen and unscrewed it. I was slightly surprised to see it was a small drill. He worked quickly to undo the small screws in the door handle. My eyes caught sight of a man moving around the corner looking slightly panicked.

"Liam," I whispered, nudging him slightly as the man with the gun walked down the hall towards us, the smirk on his face clearly showing that he knew we're here.

"Hold on, I almost got it," he said, focusing on the door handle. The man paused two feet away and held up his gun, pointing it towards me.

"You're dead," he mouthed, making me bite the inside of my cheek.

Okay, you've seen that one move a hundred times on TV. Do it.

Stupid things on TV never work.

It's either you man up and grow a pair or I'll personally see to it that you really don't make it out of here alive.

But—

Fuck, just do it.

I swung my leg up in the air and hit his wrist, expecting the gun to go flying out of his hand.

Snap.

The man let out a yell and clutched onto his wrist.

Did I break his wrist?

Hell yeah. Finally, you did something right.

I mentally scowled at my conscious all the while staring wide-eyed at the man. Liam finally noticed the man and handed me the drill. He ran over, sending an immediate punch to the man's face who quickly dodged it and sent a punch with his good hand. The unexpected punch caught Liam off guard as the impact making him stumble into the wall.

Liam quickly recovered and slammed his boot into the man's chest before jumping up and slamming it into the man's head. The guy's nose had to be broken as it poured out blood, yet the guy still moved to send a kick to Liam's leg. Liam stumbled back but regained himself immediately as he brought his fist straight into the man's groin. He then brought his knee up and hit the man in the face three times. I watched in amazement as the man fell back, his eyes rolling to the back of his head.

"Damn," I muttered, handing him the drill back. He didn't respond and only continued until the door knob came off. Caiden didn't hesitate to rush over to me. His lips slammed against mine and I pressed back with the same amount of force. My body was slammed against the wall roughly. His hands slid down the sides of my body, and I brought my hands to the back of his neck. A sharp pain came into my arm, reminding me of my wound. Caiden pulled away, looking down at my wound.

"Baby doll," he whispered, not pulling his eyes away from the blood. He pulled back, his hands clenching into fists. He closed his eyes tightly and pressed his clenched hands to his forehead. It took thirty seconds before he slammed his fist into the wall repeatedly.

"Caiden," I said, grabbing his shoulder. "Caiden, stop!" I yelled, pulling harder. He took a deep breath and stopped.

"Listen, as much as I'd love to watch your dramatics, we need to go," Liam said, looking down at his phone.

"Well, that's going to be hard because we have company," Andrew said, causing us to look at the few men heading our way. When they noticed we saw them, they started shooting. Bullets started flying towards us causing Caiden to quickly pull me behind into the nearby hallway, shielding my body the whole way. Once we were in the clear, I checked his body for injuries.

"Are you okay?" I asked, placing my hand lightly on his chest and looking at him carefully.

"I'm fine," he said, shrugging me off. He looked over the corner to the hallway, obviously hearing the guns stop.

"Is everyone okay?" I yelled.

"Yeah, we're fine. They're taken care of," Joey said, looking over at our heads peeking around the corner. I didn't want to be the one to run from danger, but when you have two specially trained agents with you it's better to not get in their way and get shot once again.

“Andrew, c’mon we gotta go,” Joey said, ushering him out of the room he was hiding in. Andrew walked out and followed behind him. We let Joey take the lead, bringing us to whatever meeting point was set. I couldn’t help but wonder if I should tell Joey about what happened.

“It hurts like a bitch, huh?” Caiden whispered in my ear from beside me.

“What?” I asked looking up at him curiously, unsure of what he was talking about.

“Your arm?”

“Oh, yeah. I kind of forget about the pain when I’m distracted, but every time I move it I feel like someone’s twisting a knife into my arm,” I told him honestly. All I wanted to do was lay down in the safety of our bed and never move.

“You’re still wearing your ring?” he asked, sounding surprised. My eyebrows furrowed as I looked up at him.

“Of course. Why would I take it off?” I asked, ignoring the silence from the others, which clearly showed they were listening to our conversation.

Caiden noticed as well and talked in an even quieter voice. “Because I got you all involved in this shit,” he said, sounding angry with himself.

I stopped and placed my hand on his arm, stopping him from moving as well. “Hey, I got into all of this myself. I met Jesse by myself and made the stupid decision to become friends with him. Plus, I signed that contract that really had me in all of this,” I said, but he didn’t seem convinced. I moved my hands to his cheeks and pressed my lips against his. I didn’t give him time to respond as I quickly pulled away.

“I love you, okay?” I said seriously as I looked directly into his eyes and nowhere else.

“I love you,” he said back, placing his hands over mine before letting go. Realizing the group was already at the end of the hallway, we jogged down there and caught up with them.

“Glad to see you two love birds remembered that we aren’t in fantasy land right now,” Liam snapped, quickly noticing our presence again.

“Shut the fuck up,” Caiden snapped back in the same tone.

“Guys, guys. Let’s all take a chill pill and just worry about getting out of here,” Andrew suggested, placing his arms over both of their shoulders.

“Remove your arm before I break the fucking thing in half.”

I’m sure it wouldn’t be hard to guess who said that.

Who else uses the word 'fuck' in every sentence.

"I agree. We need to focus on the mission," Joey said glancing at all of us before stopping at a door. He tested the door knob and it easily opened. He flicked on the lights, and the sight froze him.

"Riley," he said, his voice almost cracking at the sight of his fiancé.

"She was shot twice," Keith said.

Joey let out an inhuman noise.

"You son of a—"

Joey attacked Keith and slammed his fist into his face. I winced at the impact.

"He's good. He helped us out. He saved them," Liam tried to explain, pulling Joey back.

"A little help here please," Liam muttered.

Andrew grabbed Joey's other arm and pulled him back.

"He's not lying. We wouldn't have gotten this far without him, and Riley would already be dead without him, so stop acting stupid and go spend your last few minutes you have with her before she's dead," I snapped, causing him to pause. He stopped fighting and that's when I realized he was crying.

I felt my heart break at the sight.

"I–I should have been here," he whispered, pulling her into his lap. He moved his hand through her hair multiple times before pressing his lips on her forehead.

"I'm sorry, Riles. I'm so sorry," he whispered as he brushed a stray strand from her face, showing the shakiness of his hands. "I love you. P–please don't leave me, Riles. Please."

Shattered.

That's what my heart did because of his words. It completely shattered.

Chapter 26

Riley's Point of View

You know dying is different from what most people think. Yes, you sit there and you think about everything in your life that you should've done and stuff that you should've changed. You think about how incomplete your life is for being so young still. You find that you continue to keep pushing yourself to open your eyes one last time, but there's just a wall there that refuses to let you.

All you wanted was to say was your goodbyes.

Was that really too much to ask?

The darkness wasn't something I was ever afraid of. Even as a child, I'd just brush it off because I knew my parents would always be there for me if something went wrong. They were like superheroes in a twelve-year-old's eyes, yet they died so I wasn't sure why these images, this scene, was all coming back to me as I die.

Maybe it's because my supposed fate that night never actually happened. I was supposed to die.

Yet I didn't.

Boom.

I watched as my twelve-year-old self slowly slipped out of bed and headed to the door. She slowly opened the wooden door and peeked her head out.

Boom.

The sound came again, causing her to jump. I felt the hairs on my arms stand up as I remembered how the fear filled my body. For once in my life, I felt truly scared.

"Mommy? Daddy?" I whispered, running over to my parent's bedroom door. I opened it to see the untouched bed. I quietly went down the stairs, ignoring the usual creaking sound it made.

I reached the end of the stairs and saw the scene slowly unfolding. My dad slammed his elbow into a man's throat, causing him to hit a wall from the force. Before he could even react, ten more men rushed into the house, all in black suits and masks. My mom went back to back with my dad, and I felt myself wanting to go save them.

They always saved me from everything, yet I couldn't return the favor as my feet stayed planted on the ground.

I watched with tear-filled eyes as they did their best to fight off the men, but they couldn't stop them as one shot hit my father in the head. I placed my hand to my mouth, my body almost collapsing as I fell, grabbing onto the rail on the stairs to help me. My twelve-year-old self just watched with confused eyes as my mom went to help my dad. She soon was shot too. Her body fell on top of his, both of them creating a pool of blood. A man noticed my presence and nudged the other guy, whispering something to him in Russian.

"No, wait, she's not your target. Only they were. They broke the rules," an unknown man at the time said walking into the house, his hands up in surrender. I turned my head to the side curiously at his words. I never remembered that there was this many men, and I never remembered Cole's words until now.

"What are you going to do with her?" the man with his gun out in the open asked as he took off his mask.

"I'll train her. She'll be the best this agency will ever see," Cole said, walking over to my twelve-year-old self who was still frozen on the stairs. "You all are dismissed," he ordered. The men filed out of the house.

He bent down in front of me, going to my eye level. "Hi, sweetie. I'm Cole, I'm going to take care of you from now on."

"What happened to my mom and dad?" I said, flinching as he went to grab my hand.

"Someone bad got them. Don't worry, I'll take care of them," he said, lying through his teeth. I watched as my younger self only nodded and walked off with him.

The room went black and suddenly I was standing there by myself. A sharp pain ripped through my leg and then another on my side. Right, I was shot. I'm bleeding out. I'm dying. Why are my parents my dying thoughts? Was it because of Cole?

Yes.

It had to be. After my parents died, I didn't remember much about what happened due to something called confabulation. Any time I would ask Cole to remind me what happened, he would go through the basics, the lies. "Your parents were shot by a robber," he would say. But that's not what happened, so why would he lie?

"They broke the rules."

What rules was he talking about? Why couldn't I get the answers I needed?

"Riles, please."

I heard Joey's voice in the background suddenly making me more aware of my surroundings.

"Jesse should've found us by now. I know this building is big, but it doesn't make sense," Keith said quietly to someone else.

Why couldn't I open my mouth and talk? Why couldn't I find the oxygen in the room?

Is this the true torture of death? You're stuck listening to your loved ones crying and stuck listening to them beg for you to come back. If so, someone needs to just slit my throat now. Sorry for the dramatics, but this is worse than the pain.

"I think someone's coming. Turn off the lights," a male voice said.

I felt the disturbing light that's been trying to enter my eyes disappear. The heat suddenly dissolved and let a cool breeze fill the room. The cool breeze relaxed my body completely. Is this a sign that I can rest in peace? Is this a sign that I'm free?

No, I have to stay alive. I have to.

Why? I'm not sure anymore. Was whatever the reason worth it anymore?

Sleep sounded good right now, so why should I deny the overbearing demand?

Claire's Point of View

"How are we going to get out of here?" I whispered to Keith, ignoring Caiden's penetrating glare through the dark as we stayed low to the ground.

"There's a door nearby. If we can get to that, then I can lead us through the hidden escape tunnel Jesse had for emergencies," he explained. I whispered an, 'okay.'

"Funny how you're the so-called 'good guy' now," Caiden sneered at him, causing me to look at him with surprise.

"I've never been the bad one."

"You're the reason I got involved in the first place."

"Jackson didn't know about me when I was younger. Jesse let me leave the gang, but then you did the whole running off thing, and it fucked everything up. He gave me an option and that was to watch over you and make sure you didn't say a word about the gang. I did the job and now we're here."

"If you did the job, then why didn't you walk out if you're free?" Caiden's tone showed his suspicion.

"Because, believe it or not, I fell in love with someone in the gang and my job was to get him out," Keith said.

My eyes bulged at his words.

“You’re gay?” I whispered-yelled. Yes, I’m engaged and I love Caiden very much, but I can appreciate a male;s attractiveness, and Keith definitely fit in the ‘attractive male’ category.

It’s always the pretty boys that turn out to be gay.

No kidding.

“I’m bi,” Keith said with a slightly sour tone.

I only nodded, unsure of what to say.

“Great. Well, how about that escape plan, now?” I asked.

He nodded.

“It’s Yellowbird calling in, do you copy?” Joey said suddenly.

I looked at him curiously. I noticed his hand dropped from his ear, and I caught sight of something silver before his hair completely covered his ear again.

“Great, we’re heading out now. We’ve got two injured, and I’m not sure of the location yet. Can you follow the lead of Clover’s cellphone?”

“Perfect. See you soon,” Joey said before reaching up and touching the piece on his ear again.

“Let’s go,” Joey said, standing up, his voice and face devoid of emotion. I watched as he picked up Riley and started heading towards the door. Keith quickly went after him and started leading the way with Liam, Clover, and Andrew directly behind.

Caiden helped me stand up from the ground and in return, I sent him a thankful smile before we quickly caught up with the group. “I need to tell you something,” Caiden mumbled to me as we went into a new hallway, stopping at the second door on the right. Keith pulled out a key and unlocked the door. He turned on the lights and ushered us all in.

“Can it wait till later?” I asked softly. “I think our main focus right now needs to be getting out of here,” I quickly explained.

“Of course,” he said, pressing his lips to my temple. I leaned against his body for a minute as I watched Keith take a picture frame off the wall. There was a large hole there. I noticed the broken paint along the edges and looked at the ground underneath. There laid pieces of beige wallpaper.

“Damn it,” Keith muttered. “Jesse escaped. This is usually covered with wallpaper.”

“Can we still leave through here?” Liam asked impatiently.

"It's our only option. I'm not sure who's still in here," Keith said before grabbing a flashlight from a cabinet. He pushed the desk against the wall and stepped up. "See you guys outside," he said before placing the end of the flashlight in his mouth. He stepped up into the tunnel first and started crawling. Liam went after and then Andrew. Being the gentlemen, Andrew grabbed Clover's hand and helped her up.

"You guys go. It's gonna be a while with me taking Riley," Joey said as he grabbed a jacket that was hanging off the back of the black chair.

I felt my stomach tighten as I noticed the look of sadness and exhaustion on his face. Caiden tugged on my wrist slightly and nodded for me to go. He helped me step in the tunnel and I started into the darkness.

I hated the scraping feeling of my knees, and we crawled through the old metal tunnel. It took what felt like forever, but actually it took ten minutes to get to the end of it.

No sun waited for us at the end. Nothing but cloudy skies and rain welcomed us. I used my hand as a shield from the wind for my eyes as I stepped out of the tunnel. A huge field of grass and a helicopter waited there almost directly in the middle.

"That's our queue," Liam said as he started jogging towards it.

We all followed after him and surprisingly the helicopter was big enough and could fit all of us. "This thing is nice," I yelled to no one in particular.

Matt looked back at us.

"Kazan Ka-62," Matt yelled back with a smirk on his face that showed he liked the agency perks. The smirk fell off his face as Joey and Riley were the last ones to get in.

"You failed to mention our boss is the one who was down," Matt said with worry in his eyes. He signaled for the pilot to head out and he did exactly that as the helicopter door was shut.

"Would it have made a difference?" Joey asked dryly. "Either way, two people are injured and need medical attention immediately."

"Who's the other?" Matt asked curiously. I raised an eyebrow, thinking it was obvious, that is until I caught sight of how we all looked. Clover was covered in blood, I was covered in blood, Keith is cover as well. And, Riley was just completely drenched in blood along with Joey. Thanks to me Caiden wasn't lacking the red either. The only one who looked perfectly fine was Liam.

"I am," I said, gesturing with my hand to my arm. Matt nodded and gave me a thumbs up as a signal he heard me over the loud helicopter noise.

“Hang in there, guys. You did well. We’re about done here,” he said, pointing out the window. As we flew over the scene I noticed dozens of police cars. What surprised me was instead of Jesse getting dragged out by the police Jackson was. Did he set his brother up?

“He let everyone take the blame,” Keith said with disgust. I felt the disgust as well. Yes, Taylor, Chris, Jacob, and all the others deserved some prison time, but it didn’t compare to what Jesse deserved. He’s a killer, a murderer, and no one could sleep until he was locked up or even dead. That man I once knew had turned into someone else in just a short period of a year.

“At least they’re caught. I mean it’s finally happening. The gang is going down,” Liam said, not letting his eyes shift from the scene. “Hey, did you guys kill anybody?” he asked curiously.

I peeked out the window again to see a body being carried out in a black bag on a stretcher.

Everyone mumbled a no and shook their heads. I frowned, wondering who died. Did Jesse kill someone else?

“It’s Jasmin,” Clover said suddenly. All eyes snapped to her.

“What do you mean it’s Jasmin?” Andrew asked her, squeezing her hand for support.

“Lisa made her kill herself. I don’t know what happened before that and what she said to get in her brain, but it was awful. It was so so awful,” Clover said, shaking her head. I felt sympathetic as her good friends death just started to hit her as the shock started wearing off.

“Lisa.” Caiden let out a dark chuckle as he repeated her name. His fists were clenched and his face had a look like I’d never seen.

“I thought I saw her when they took you.”

“Who exactly is she? I’ve never heard of her and we’ve dealt with this gang for years,” Joey questioned. I stared at Caiden. I wasn’t sure if he was going to tell them or not.

“She’s a cold woman. She takes children as her prey and she treats them as slaves. She turns them into her own personal dolls. It doesn’t take long for someone to get caught up in everything she tells them. She turns every one of her preys into a new person, someone who even they don’t recognize.” His voice was taut as he almost shook in his seat from anger.

“Hey,” I said in what I hoped was the opposite and modulated. “You’re okay. You’re not that little boy anymore. You’re a strong and handsome man, okay?” I said with both hands holding his face, making sure he didn’t look away. He only gave me a curt nod and moved his head, letting my hands drop. I ignored the pain caused because of the small movement and focused on him. He needed me.

“They’ll get her and Jesse.”

"I just don't understand. The cops told my parents that she was found dead. They said that I killed her," he snapped, getting angry again.

"If she's with Jesse now, then she probably had some connection with him then. It probably wasn't hard to pay off a few cops to lie and say she's dead," I said honestly. He sneered.

"That fucking bitch. I hope she burns in fucking hell alone," he hissed.

I frowned as I watched his fists start to turn white as he leaned his clenched hands against his forehead. I leaned towards him and pressed a gentle kiss on his shoulder, not caring that his t-shirt covered his skin. I then moved and pressed a kiss against his jaw. I moved my lips up and pressed one feather like kiss on each of his closed fists in a spot that wasn't covered with small scars and open skin from slamming them into concrete walls.

"I love you."I let my lips graze against his ear as I whispered the words. No, I wasn't going for seduction. That wasn't my goal in a situation like this, my goal was to calm him down before he hurt himself.

I glanced at the others around us and only saw Andrew comforting Clover and Joey whispering to the unconscious Riley, trying to wipe the tears from his eyes before anyone noticed his true pain. Liam was texting someone on his cell phone. The only one who seemed to be watching Caiden and I was Keith.

Our eyes locked, and he gave me a sad smile. I didn't say anything in response and only looked away. I placed my hand on Caiden's and didn't comment on how he intertwined our fingers. I felt his lips pressed against my fingers, and I turned to give me a small smile.

I glanced out the window and realized we were going down. Thirty seconds later we were on top of a hospital. A stretcher waited there along with multiple doctors.

"Alert the police that we've got two GSW victims. She's going to need to go straight to the OR."

I watched as they started assessing all of Riley's wounds and yelling out words to each other that I didn't understand.

Joey stepped next to Caiden in the elevator and answered all the questions in the best way he could without saying too much. As soon as the elevator opened, they rolled Riley out while another doctor brought me to a private room to remove the bullet from my arm.

***

Clover's Point of View

I sat on the bed patiently as a doctor examined me for injuries. "For the third time, I'm not hurt. This isn't my blood," I snapped, getting irritated with all the touching and prodding.

"Clover?" West said with confusion as he rushed over to me. I smiled at my cousin who stood there proudly with his white coat and green scrubs on. "Are you okay?" he asked after waving off the other doctor and started looking for the source of the blood.

"Yeah, I'm fine. My friend got hurt and I just so happened to be there. It got a little messy," I told him, pushing him away.

"You sure? You look like you've been crying."

I waved him off.

"It was just a bit emotional. She's in surgery now, so I'm just waiting to see how it all goes."

"What are you still doing here anyways? Weren't you done with Seattle months ago? I thought it was just a few photoshoots and that was it?" he asked, pulling up a chair.

I almost snorted. If only he knew the hell I've been going through. "Yeah, but we loved it so much that we decided to stay longer. Plus the kids are on summer break, so it wasn't a big deal," I said, lying through my teeth.

"Where are those two anyways?" he asked.

I rolled my eyes.

"West, stop," I said, shaking my head in amusement.

"What?"

"You're like drilling me with questions. Listen, we can get some lunch sometime soon and catch up. I'm just really exhausted right now."

"Thompson, we have incoming. Let's go," another doctor yelled, causing him to stand up immediately.

"Sounds good. Love you, Clove. I would hug you, but you're a little bloody," he said, pressing a kiss to a clean spot on my cheek.

I let out a small laugh.

"Bye, West," I said with a small smile as I watched him eagerly head out.

"Hey, here's your water," Andrew said, handing me the clear bottle. I opened up the drink and swallowed down half of it before coming up for air.

"Thank you," I said, squeezing his hand to show my appreciation. "I feel like I haven't had anything to drink in days."

Andrew frowned.

"You haven't. You were in that place for almost two days, Clo."

I stared at him with confusion. Two days? That couldn't be right. I mean it didn't take us long to escape. "Are you sure? I mean it only felt like a couple of hours," I said, my eyebrows furrowing.

"Yeah, I'm positive. I can't forget constantly pacing and not sleeping because we couldn't find you guys," he said.

I pouted.

"Awe, I'm sorry! I guess we now have a lesson to teach our kids, though," I said standing up and wrapping my arms around his neck.

"What lesson?" he asked curiously.

I couldn't help but chuckle.

"Don't ever make friends with people in jail," I said.

He only shook his head, a smile sliding on his own face.

"I love you, Clover," he said, pressing his lips to mine. I embraced the feeling and pulled him tighter against me, needing to feel the warmth of my husband.

I pulled away after a minute and sat back on the bed, feeling the exhaustion hit me again. "Do you ever just think how strange it is that we ended up together? I mean you were just so cocky and annoying," I said, making room so he could sit next to me.

"C'mon, you didn't actually ever hate me. Let's be honest, you liked me from the start. I mean why else would you have told me your secret almost right away?"

"Hey, in my defense, Mary didn't give me much of a choice. And part of me was just ready for everyone to know. I kept that secret for years and it was senior year, so who really cared if one more person knew?" I said, lightly bumping my shoulder with his.

"I'm glad you told me. It was much better than finding out the hard way," he said.

I nodded in agreement.

"You know, when I look at Caiden and Claire's relationship it makes me wonder how they get through it all. I mean when I was with him and Joey he was just a complete ass to everyone. Comparing their relationship to ours, ours was just a breeze."

I smiled because it was true. We did have an easy relationship. We never got into serious fights, and this Jesse thing has been our biggest problem yet. "I like it like that. You were one of the simple

things in my life, and you became one of the best things in my life," I said, lightly playing with the end of his shirt as I leaned my head against his shoulder.

"Your life was never simple, Clove," he said, shaking his head. "You were a model that went undercover as a nerd. I don't think you can ever say your life was simple. "

I lightly smacked his arm. "Compared to all this, I would say that was nothing," I argued and he nodded.

"Hey, if you think about it, Claire was just a regular girl that went undercover as a boy, and Riley is an agent who has been undercover as probably anything you can think of. I'd say your life has never been simple and neither were your friends. It's not a bad thing. It's pretty great actually. I mean you've met some life-long friends here because of you all having that unsimple life," Andrew said, rubbing his thumb down my cheek.

"Hey, we're going to pick up some food from the cafeteria. You guys want to come?" Claire asked interrupting, and I jumped, surprised by her sudden appearance. I got off the bed and nodded.

"Yeah, I could die for some coffee," I said, feeling my stomach jump in excitement just from the thought of getting some caffeine in me.

"By the way, how did you guys get caught anyways?" I asked, looking at Andrew.

"Jackson surprisingly. He and his members just came out of nowhere. Eventually, we were just surrounded," he explained.

"Oh, so that's how he was there. Do you think Jesse set him up?" Claire questioned.

"Probably. Jackson got out of prison early somehow, so I'm sure the cops would have been happy to find him," Caiden agreed.

"Claire, can we talk?" he asked suddenly. She frowned but nodded.

"You guys walk ahead," she told us, and I shared a look with Andrew and did exactly that. I couldn't help but listen as I heard them whispering quietly to each other.

"Keith is your brother," Claire repeated after him. From the corner of my eye I saw him nod. "Well, I'm not surprised. I mean it makes sense. You both got the brown hair from your dad, and you both have one hell of a personality. Plus, I expected something was there. You two acted strangely around each other."

I looked at Andrew who was already looking at me. He just shook his head at me and placed his finger to his lips, signaling for me not to say anything.

"You handled that better than I expected," Caiden grumbled, not sounding happy about that.

"You're Caiden Anderson. I'm used to your crap at this point. Really nothing surprises me anymore," Claire said.

I heard the sound of a quick kiss.

"Don't be such a Debbie downer," she said, lightly patting his cheek before catching up with us.

"You guys are horrible at eavesdropping by the way," Claire whispered to me, and I felt my cheeks start to tinge with embarrassment.

"You know, I have major respect for you, Claire. You're one interesting person," I said nodding.

"Thank ya," she said winking and pretending to tip a hat. She placed her uninjured arm around my shoulder and looked at me.

"Just so you know, you're coming back here for my wedding."

I raised an eyebrow in amusement. "I didn't know I was invited?"

She pursed her lips together and nodded as she pretended to rub her chin. "Yeah, I mean who wouldn't want the famous Lucky as a bridesmaid," Claire said, giving me a 'duh' look.

I shook my head and couldn't help but let out a loud laugh throughout the elevator. "You suck," I said.

She nodded.

"Yeah, I'm pretty good at it too. Ask Caiden," she said, pointing a thumb at him. I watched as his eyes widened, and he gave her a look that said, 'Please tell me you didn't just say that.'

"Love you too," she said, lightly patting his cheek again with a cheeky smile. "But seriously, though. Do you want to be one of my bridesmaids?"

I nodded eagerly. "Are you designing the dresses?" I asked.

She smiled.

"I've had the dresses designed for years. Just wait till this is all over. You'll love them."

Claire's excitement for her wedding was clear and just the talk of it brought a new feeling in the room – a feeling of happiness.

"I'll look forward to it," I said with my own soft smile. I felt truly content with life at this moment. If Riley could get better and Jesse could get caught and I could see my kids again then everything would truly be the elucidation of perfection.

Chapter 27

Clover's Point of View

"We can't find Jesse," Rachel whispered to Joey. My eyes narrowed as I didn't bother hiding the fact that I was listening in on the conversation.

"Clover's not safe until he's caught. I need that police report to find out who got arrested. If what Keith told us is accurate, then Katy didn't pay Jesse, and she wasn't going to until the job was completed and clearly it's not completed. Therefore, if Katy got arrested, then that means the job won't ever be completed, and she'll be safe to go home," Joey explained.

"I'll get the report," she said before walking out of the room. I felt my heart rate speed up. Am I really this close to being free? To seeing my kids?

I looked at Andrew who sat next to me, staring intently at his lap. "What's wrong?" I asked softly, placing my hand on his thigh. He looked up at me with sad eyes.

"Chris has kids at home. He has a wife at home. He was supposed to go on a little vacation trip to Seattle. He wasn't supposed to die here." He almost yelled, not bothering to hide his anger.

"I know," I whispered softly, running my thumb up and down the stubble on his cheek. "He and Jasmin may have gotten involved in the wrong stuff, but they never did deserve all the stuff that happened to them. You would have been disgusted if you saw Jasmin. She was like a puppet and Lisa was the holder. It gave me nightmares, Andrew. It was like watching a horror movie. Both her husband and his wife won't understand. How do we even explain this?" I said shaking my head, trying to ignore the stinging in my eyes as tears started to fill them.

"You don't," Liam said suddenly, his voice devoid of any real emotion. "The bodies will be recovered and all we will know is that they were murdered by a man named Jesse Farone. By that point in time, Farone will be in custody and all that will be left is time to mourn. No one needs to know about the gang and the background information about you getting caught and almost dying. That is something that stays with our group and that's it."

He didn't wait for a response and walked away. I stared at his figure in silence before burying my head in Andrew's chest. "We'll do it together. We'll tell them and we'll be there for their funeral as well," Andrew said firmly.

I could only get myself to nod.

Two knocks sounded on the door, and I didn't make any attempt to move toward it as Caiden headed to the door of their house and opened it.

“Nick? What are you doing here?” he asked suddenly, his own surprise evident in his voice.

“I needed to make sure you weren’t in some jail or something,” he said, pushing past Caiden and entering the house. I snorted, if only he knew. “Oh, hey, so you’re having a party and didn’t tell me about that either. Great. Just fan-fucking-tastic.”

“If there’s no alcohol, then I wouldn’t count it as a party,” Caiden grumbled just as Claire walked down stairs.

“Nick!” she said excitingly as she rushed over, giving him a one-armed hug.

“How’s my little fiancé doing?” he asked, releasing her with a small smile on his face. “You’re starting to look huge,” he said, lightly placing his hand on her stomach.

I looked at Caiden, waiting for some reaction about the motion. “For someone who is so overprotective, you’d think he wouldn’t be okay with him touching her,” I whispered to Andrew and he nodded.

“Must be really close if he’s allowing it.”

Claire’s smiled. “Awe, Nick, I’ve missed you. Everything’s been good,” she said. He frowned.

“What happened to your arm?” he asked, referring to the spring on her arm.

She glanced at me and I sent her a look that said, ‘good luck, girl’ and she only rolled her eyes.

“I slipped, but I’m all good and so is the baby. How’s everything with you?” she asked him, sitting on the step.

“Nick’s got a new chick,” Caiden said suddenly.

Her jaw dropped.

“You did not,” she said with a wide smile.

Nick sent a quick glare at Caiden.

“Hey, it’s nothing serious yet. We’re only talking.”

“Yeah, they’re only talking after they fuck all night,” Caiden said.

“Caiden,” Claire scowled.

He shrugged.

“Don’t act like you don’t constantly have those raging hormones now,” Caiden retorted.

“That son of yours is going to grow up with a mouth of a trucker,” Nick said, shaking his head.

I snorted – what an understatement. The noise caused Nick to look over.

"Who's the babe?" he asked, winking at me.

Andrew cleared his throat.

"Clover. You met her at the beach a few months ago," Claire said.

Nick's eyes lit up with recognition.

"Oh, right! You both were complete bitches to each other. I can't believe I didn't notice you before," he said.

I simply shrugged. "How'd you guys become friends?"

"Mutual acquaintances."

"Jesse, right?" he asked.

I almost choked on my own spit.

"You know Jesse?" Andrew asked, speaking my own thoughts

"I know a bit about him. My friend's in his gang."

"Jax got arrested," Claire suddenly said.

Caiden chuckled.

"It's truly a disappointment," her fiancé said sarcastically.

Nick only leaned against the wall and didn't say anything for a minute, his face showing he was thinking things over.

"I should've known he'd get caught. I mean it was going to happened eventually," he said as he shoved his hands in his pocket.

"Good riddance," Caiden muttered. I glanced at Claire to see that even she looked happy about the fact as well.

"He warned me that it would all end terribly. Someone would end up dead. He promised me that," Claire said with a small frown.

Nick nodded, "I remember."

"Multiple people ended up dead. I mean think about all the innocents. Think about Jasmin and Chris," I snapped, standing up.

"It was bound to happen," Caiden said, rolling his eyes. "May they rest in peace and all, but it's the life of the gang. Anyone involved loses something."

"What did you lose?" Andrew questioned.

I felt everyone in the room freeze. I snuck a side glance at my husband who only kept his questioning gaze on his face, clearly standing his ground.

"I lost my innocence, my childhood. Claire lost her normal life. Keith lost his boyfriend. You lost your friends," Caiden listed off with a sneer. "Like I said, we've all lost something."

The room stayed silent, everyone unsure of what to say to fill the now tension-filled silence.

Knock. Knock.

Claire stood up and opened the door. In walked a man who quickly embraced her.

"Fuck, Claire. Do you know what picking up your cell phone means?" the guy said, carefully pulling away from her. "Hell, even mom and dad thought something happened to you," he snapped.

She smiled, pulling him into her and wrapping her arms around him again.

"Jeffery," she said with a wide smile. "I'm glad you're well. How's mom and dad?"

"Fine now. Dad came down with some strange illness, had to go to the hospital even, but he's okay and home now," the guy, Jeffery, who I assumed was a sibling of hers, explained. "Now, what about you? What'd you do to your arm?"

"I slipped, that's all," Claire said, waving him off as well.

"Jeff, it's been a while. How ya doin', little man?" Nick asked, ruffling his hair which only caused him to scowl.

"I'm not little. I'm only a few years younger than you," he said before sending a look to his sister. "I thought you'd stop hanging out with this douche."

Once again the conversation in the room was interrupted as the ringtone from Joey's phone blasted through the room. He sent us all an awkward smile and picked it up.

"Hello?" he answered immediately. After a few words were exchanged he quickly hung up and stood up.

"She's awake."

***

Riley's Point of View

"I didn't expect you to be at my bedside when I woke up," I said coldly, not caring about my slightly groggy voice.

"Why wouldn't I be? You almost died out there," Cole snapped, his forehead creased with permanent worry lines.

"Yeah, well, I'm surprised since you didn't seem to care about Liam when he almost died."

"Liam isn't like a son to me."

"Yeah, and I'm supposedly like a daughter?" I let out a sarcastic laugh as I moved to sit up, completely masking the pain I felt from the movement. "You wanna know something? In that slight moment and feeling of almost death, I remembered my parents' death."

The look of nervousness crossed his face, but it was gone too fast for any normal person to notice.

But I'm not normal. I'm one kick ass agent and I definitely saw it.

"You remember," he stated. I nodded even though he wasn't asking it. He knew I remembered – the anger was clear in my voice. Heck, even in my body language.

"How could you?" I demanded the answer. The figure I grew up with, the one who I always looked up to was the reason my parents were dead.

"They broke the rules, Riley," he said with a sigh, clearly not wanting to discuss it.

"Oh, did they? What rule resulted in death? Did one of them cheat with someone outside the agency?" I asked sarcastically.

"Your parents told a friend about what they did."

I stared at him blankly.

"From what I remember, we were allowed to tell people, but we just couldn't tell them what we do on our missions," I responded.

"Yeah, but your parents were sharing things that they weren't allowed to. Pieces of information that sent them to their death," Cole said before standing up.

"So my parents are traitors then?" I asked, sucking in my bottom lip and nodding slowly in acceptance. I didn't care what information they were sharing. They've been dead for over a decade now.

Nothing could change that.

"They knew it was coming, Riley. They already gave up their badges a day before I was supposed to arrive," Cole said while lightly sending my hand a squeeze before completely releasing it. I didn't comment as he slid on his coat and prepared himself to leave.

"I must say, I am proud of you, Riley Scott. I left that agency in good hands, and I will forever be impressed by the way it's continuing to grow and the lengths you still go as an agent. I gave up on missions once the title was handed down to me. But you – you kept going," he said with a smile. "Good luck with Farone, Scott. I'll see you for your wedding," he said before pressing a kiss to my forehead.

I watched as he exited the room and instead was replaced by a nurse who did a check up on me. After I was told that everything was already healing correctly and I would be okay, I let myself finally relax. "Riles?" a voice said quietly. My eyes immediately popped open, landing on the muscular figure of my fiancé.

He didn't say anything else as he pressed his lips directly against mine. The light, feather-like kiss only lasted a minute, his lips moving slowly against mine in a way that felt like he was almost afraid to touch me.

"I'm so happy you're okay," he whispered against my lips, his eyes still closed from the kiss. "I love you so much."

I grinned, something I haven't had much time to do. "I love you too."

"My biggest fear was that you'd never get to hear me say those words again," Joey said, interlinking his hand with mine.

"I didn't think I'd hear them again either. I felt death. It was cold and lonely. If I could never feel those feelings like that again, then I could say my life is perfect. Everyone can joke about death and they can talk about it so freely, but no one understands the seriousness of it and the unforgettable feeling until they are almost death itself," I said with a faraway look in my eyes as I remembered the darkness.

"I'm so sorry that I wasn't there for you," he said, and I placed my hand lightly on his cheek.

"Don't be," I said with a slight shake of my head. "You did what you could."

"Speaking of, how did we get out? Who's dead? And is Jesse caught?" I questioned suddenly.

"Keith helped us. Turns out he was the real agent undercover, not just you. Taylor was just a fake. And, Jasmin was the only death," he said while stepping back, knowing the conversation turned serious again, and there was no time for the lovey-dovey moments.

The information surprised me. I truly thought Keith was just some alcoholic, always completely wasted. “It makes sense. If there was one thing I noticed out of his drunken self is that he’s smart,” I said after a moment. “What happened to Jesse?”

“He escaped. Although his gang location was revealed after Jax, Leon, Jacob, and even Jackson were captured. Everyone was caught besides Jesse and Lisa. Rach has a lead on Lisa, so that’s our only head start so far.”

I swore aloud. Of course, Jesse got away.

“He can’t go far this time. He won’t. He’ll want to keep an eye on Claire still,” Joey said and I nodded.

“How is she?” I asked curiously, remembering how she got shot in the arm.

“She’s fine, already back at work even. Everyone wanted to come see you but I told them tomorrow would be a better day. How are you feeling?” Joey asked as he sat in the chair beside my bed.

“Sore, but that’s the worst of it, for now, thanks to the pain meds,” I told him. He nodded.

“Cole stopped by,” I said suddenly. His brow furrowed.

“He’s in Seattle? Why?” Joey asked suspiciously.

“He was worried. I guess Matt told him parts about what went down,” I said as I sipped the cup of water placed delicately in my hand

“Hmm, well that must have been nice then,” Joey commented and I shrugged.

“He was the one who killed my parents. Well, not him exactly, but he sent the guys who did. They broke the agency’s rules and it resulted in their death, a death they expected,” I told him, causing him to stand up and lean closer to me, squeezing my hand lightly.

“Wow, I’m so sorry, Riles. That must be awful to find out. I can’t believe he would do that,” he said, shaking his head.

I gave him a small smile.

“It’s okay. I mean it’s been years. We can’t go back and change it now, and if they broke the rules then they broke them. His rules were different before we became in charge, but still, if someone shared extremely private and crucial information then we’d have to do the same. That’s one rule that stuck,” I said.

He frowned at just the thought of having to kill an agent, one of our own.

“It just sucks, you know? It’s almost like we could never have friends that weren’t a part of our agency. I mean we wouldn’t be able to tell them anything,” he said.

I smiled, placing my hand on his cheek.

“Hey, that’s not true,” I said sternly. “We have Clover, Andrew, Claire and maybe even Caiden, and we still have all of our agent friends. How much more do we need? I mean is there a certain girl you’ve taken an interest in outside of the agency?” I played off casually, causing him to smile.

“Yeah, she’s a real beauty. Usually brunette and quite sexy when she’s mad,” Joey joked, moving his head closer to mine. “She’s pretty badass too. She once kicked this guy’s ass just for attempting to steal a wallet from a man.”

I grinned back. “Huh, sounds like one heck of a woman.”

“She truly is,” he said, connecting our lips for one long minute before pulling back only a few centimeters. “That’s why I’m proud to call her my fiance.”

Claire’s Point of View

I stared at all the paperwork in front of me and groaned. I didn’t realize how much this stuff had piled up already.

Elena knocked before entering my office. “Hey, I just wanted to know before I go for the night that Mr. Franklin called. He backed out of the deal. He said he was working with Jackson, whoever that is. But he said that he has no need to continue on anymore,” she said, causing me to look up. So he was just another part of their plan? They had me surrounded with gang members. From home, work, the doctor’s office, it was all too strange.

“Oh, that’s okay. Thank you for letting me know,” I said, watching as a look of surprise appeared on her face before she nodded.

“Have a great night,” she said softly and I smiled.

“You too, Elena.” The wood doors were slowly shut before I was left alone in the building. It wasn’t until an hour into paper work that the doors opened again.

“Did you forget something, Elena?” I asked, not bothering to look up as I bent down, putting my shipment orders together in my drawer.

There was no reply, causing me to go on edge. I grabbed the pepper spray that was taped to the top of my drawer and pushed back my chair, jumping up. I pointed the small bottle at the intruder.

“Listen, I just want to talk,” Jesse said.

I scoffed.

"Was that before or after I got shot by one of your men?" I asked.

His eyes went to my arm.

He frowned. "I didn't know that was going to happen. Everyone had strict orders to keep you alive," he said.

I gave him a look of disbelief.

"Really? So you were willing to kill all of my friends? Claire and even Riley? Caiden?" I questioned and he looked away. "Actually, tell me one more thing as well: was it you who sent those anonymous letters or was it, Lisa?"

"You already know the answer to that – Lisa sent the letters."

I shook my head, disgust evident on my face. "I don't hate people often, Jesse, but the place in my heart that you once filled has broken off and burned. Don't visit me again. You are a monster, one that deserves to rot behind bars," I said, sitting down in my chair before I started writing again.

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

I didn't respond. Nothing he has done is okay – it never will be.

"You should be. You should be sorry to the people you've killed, to the people's families who are mourning over their lost son, daughter, brother, sister, and even parents," I snapped before finally looking into his eyes again. "You are a killer, a murderer, and a monster. Next time you stand in front of me I will call Riley and I hope they take your ass to prison. Now leave before I call security," I said. He gave me a sad smile.

"Goodbye, Claire," he whispered.

I didn't watch as he left, fear of the tears forming in my eyes. "I love you." The doors shut, and I completely broke down, tears streaming down my face as water does in a river.

He was gone. Jesse Farone was forever gone.

You wonder in you life time how someone that you care for so deeply can just change in an instant. How they can become a whole different person. People could get the answer in many different ways from many different specialists, but no one actually knew. No one could figure out the brain of Jesse Farone. He was a mystery, one that would forever stay that way.

I should've called Joey, I know that, but he's Jesse Farone, part of me knew he had nothing left. Therefore, he wasn't going to kill again. He had no reason to.

"I love you."

His words would have held a part of my heart if it wasn't for the blood that forever stained his hands. He couldn't truly love someone. His brain had something in it that others did not have. It held a disease. It held the killer.

***

"Claire?" Mia whispered once she opened the front door. I didn't say anything at first and only wrapped my arms around her.

"I've missed you," I said just as softly.

"I've missed you too, and I'm so sorry about everything I said. I was upset and I didn't realize what I was saying," she said, pulling away. "I love Nathan. I couldn't leave him even if I tried," she said. I laughed, wiping at some of my tears.

Yeah, I was a bit more emotional these days. Blame the hormones.

"I know," I said giving her another hug.

"Who's here?" Nathan asked sleepily, rubbing his eyes. I couldn't care less that he stood there in nothing but his boxers as I ran over, wrapping my arms around him.

"I'm so sorry about you getting arrested and going through all of that shit. You didn't deserve to be put in all that," I apologized. "Thank you for helping with that beautiful proposal," I said.

He pulled back a little with a smile on his face.

"You're fine. Joey explained to me what he could so I understand, and I'm glad you're all okay. I'm going to visit Riley today to see how she's doing," he said.

I gave him a sad smile.

"You know Caiden asked me to be one of his groomsmen," he said.

I gasped, slapping his chest lightly.

"You're kidding?" I said. I couldn't even picture that man asking anyone besides Nick that.

"No, he was incredibly awkward about it, but he did ask," Nathan said, causing me to chuckle. I turned back to face my other friend and smile slightly.

"Speaking of that, I'm going to need your help picking out a dress and the colors and all of that stuff. I mean I can't do it all without my maid of honor," I said.

She grinned, running over to me.

"Thanks, hoe,"

"Anytime, you whore," I said before sitting down and catching her up on how it all happened and everything she's missed so far, making sure not to mention the whole Jesse situation.

I listened as she filled me in on everything that happened with her, but my mind went astray and I couldn't help but smile when it did. My life was going back to normal, back to how it was supposed to be.

Jax was wrong. This life wasn't worth running from. People have been through much worse, and I could've been through much worse, but I'm okay – by me making the decision to stay I got better. My life is on track, I have a baby boy in my stomach, I have a fiance who loves me, I have my own company forever standing before me, and I have great friends who are always there for me. Everything is getting better. Perfect almost.

Beep. Beep.

I glanced down at my phone and saw a single text from Caiden that left my blood running cold.

They caught Lisa. Found her hiding in an abandoned warehouse. Jesse's the only one left.

I smile, feeling my heart start to beat faster from the text. How did we make it this far? This point, this feeling is something I've never felt before.

We're completely safe.

We're happy.

We're free.

Chapter 28: Epilogue

I stood outside the large doors and took a deep breath. Two men from the hotel waited to open the door as I stood there nervously.

“Claire, you’ve been fine all day. Don’t get cold feet now,” Nathan said.

I smiled at him.

“I know, I know. I’m ready,” I said before taking another deep breath. The oxygen was really starting to feel low in here.

“Uh, you guys can open the doors now,” Nathan said when they had made no movement. The two guys shared a look, one I didn’t understand.

“What? What’s wrong?” I demanded, already feeling my heart beating faster from the anxiety.

“I’m sorry, Miss, but I think you may want to wait a minute longer. The groom isn’t ready yet,” one told me and I felt myself freeze.

“What do you mean? Is he not ready or is he not there?” I asked.

He gave his friend a hesitant look.

It doesn’t take long to throw on a tux and put some gel in your hair.

“He’s uh, not there yet. I’m sure he’s just running late, though,” he ensured.

I gave my bouquet to Nathan. I lifted up the ends of my dress and walked over peeking through the little glass window. All of our friends and family were there and everyone was in their places except there was no Caiden. The empty spot and the front of the room only meant one thing.

“Ten years,” I whispered.

“What?” Nathan asked, looking confused.

I stood there trying not to cry. I backed up from the window and sat down in a chair across from the doors. It was next to a brown table that held a vase with the flowers we chose, daisies. They weren’t your typical flowers for a wedding, but they meant something to both of us. They held memories.

“A daisy represents innocence, purity, and your childhood.”

I placed my hand on my chest as I felt it clench at the memories that flooded through my brain.

“Ten years together and he left me on the day of our wedding. I waited and waited for him. Hell, we have a baby boy who is sitting in the arms of my mother and he left not only me but him,” I said, putting my hands so they were crowning my face. “This was so so stupid,” I said shaking my head.

“Claire, he has to be coming. He has to. He loves you more than anything. Anyone can see it. I mean you put emotion into the guy. He use to be as dead as a brick,” Nathan said.

I shook my head.

“We all knew from the start it wasn’t going to work,” I said.

He shook his head.

“I’m going to find him right now. I’ll prove it to you,” Nathan said, setting the flowers on the table.

“Nate, just let it be. He’s gone.”

“Who is?” a familiar voice asked from my right.

I looked up to see the devil himself.

“You son of a—” Nathan said.

“Nathan, can you give us a minute. Can you all just give a minute?” I asked, looking at the two guys too. They all walked away, most likely just standing around the corner.

I stood up and face my supposed to be fiancé – almost husband.

“What are you doing? If you don’t want to go through with this anymore, that’s fine. Just do me a favor for both me and your son and just—“ I was cut off when he pressed his lips to mine. He pulled back and looked at me directly in my eyes and grabbed my hands.

“Do you love me?” he interrupted.

I stared at him confused.

“Do you, Claire Martez, really love me?” he repeated.

I stared at him appalled that he would even ask that question right now.

“Of course. I wouldn’t be standing here dressed like a fucking princess if I didn’t,” I said gesturing to my face and my dress.

“Thank you," Caiden said.

I stared at him confused.

"What?"

"I–I jus—"

He stumbled over his words again before stopping and taking a deep breath. "Just thank you."

I stared at him as he dropped my hands and walked away. He walked right through the tall brown doors, shutting them directly behind him. I stared at the doors in shock before the two men came back with Nathan following.

"He's ready," one said smiling.

I still stared in their direction in confusion.

"Close your mouth before you catch flies, Claire-bear," Nathan said, smiling as he handed me my bouquet of flowers back.

"I don't understand," I said, shaking my head.

"It's the Caiden Anderson. Of course, you don't understand," a voice said now from my left.

I looked over and saw the one and only Jesse Farone standing there.

"What are you doing here?" I hissed. "I told you to not bother me again. Riley is right inside, and she won't hesitate to take your ass to prison."

"I know, why else do you think I chose now to show up? I just wanted to see you before I turn myself in and get locked up for rest of my life," Jesse told me and I felt my heart clench. Even though he put us all through so much part of me felt bad for him. He really had no one. I wasn't sure where he'd been staying his past year, but it must have been a decent hiding spot since no one had found him.

"Maybe I'll come and visit someday," I said, placing my arms in my father's just as I heard the music start up, causing everyone to stop chatting inside.

"Someday," he repeated, giving me a sad smile.

I nodded standing up taller.

"Goodbye, Jesse," I said before turning straight. I watched as Mia walked down the aisle with Nick and as Clover walked down with Andrew and Riley with Joey and finally Nathan squeezed in just before his turn and went down the aisle with Elena. A smile slid onto my lips as I nodded at the guys when the music started.

"Goodbye, Claire."

The doors opened and everyone stood up. I saw my mom's eyes fill with tears as she stood there holding my baby boy in her arms.

Don't trip.

I couldn't help the laugh that almost escaped.

Thanks, friend.

I finally looked at the handsome man I would soon call my husband. He stared at me with a look I've surprisingly never seen before. It was filled with complete love and adoration with a little thing extra, hope. I didn't realize I had already stopped as my father handed me off and my bouquet was out of my hands until I heard the man start talking.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today in the presence of these witnesses, to join Claire Martez and Caiden Anderson in matrimony commended to be honorable among all; and therefore—"

I listened to each word carefully. My blue eyes never left the hazel ones right in front of me. Even when we poured the unity sand I still brought my eyes right back to his directly after.

The hope in Caiden's eyes is what kept me breathing. He believes in a future with me. He had hope that we would last and he wasn't running. No, he was making a commitment.

"—Just two people working out what they want, what they believe, what they hope for each other. All these common things, and more, are the real process of a wedding. The symbolic vows that you are about to make are a way of saying to one another, 'You know all those things we've promised and hoped and dreamed – well, I meant it all, every word.'

Look at one another and remember this moment in time. Before this moment, you have been many things to one another – a boy, a girl, an acquaintance, a friend, companion, lover, and even a teacher, for you have learned much from one another in these last few year.

You have learned that good company and friendship count for more than wealth, good looks or position. And you've learned that marriage is a maze into which we wander – a maze that is best with a great companion. Now you shall say a few words that take you across a threshold of life, and things will never quite be the same between you.

For after these vows you shall say to the world, Caiden is my husband, Claire is my wife."

Caiden stared at me as I was given permission to start my vows. It wasn't the most traditional order, but I was the most emotional one. I mean I cried in almost every episode of Grey's Anatomy. Caiden didn't look even a little bit nervous as he stared down at me with a dimpled smile. Amusement was still twinkling in his eyes from the introduction to the vows.

Taking a deep breath I began, "Caiden Anderson, a cliche bad boy, a total player, and a cocky asshole," I said loudly watching the smirk appear on his face. "Pardon me, but this man has been with more woman than the number in this state," I said, looking at our friends and family. Some looked stuck between awe and disappointment, but our friends standing by our sides were grinning like madmen knowing exactly how true my words are.

I took another deep breath before looking back at my husband to be, ready to start again. "Caiden Anderson, a real human being that has feelings and emotions like the rest of us." I paused when I caught the emotion that flickered in his eyes.

"Today, I stand here with my hands joined with his. My blue eyes locked with his hazel ones, and we both share smiles on our faces, and it just makes me think to myself, how did we get here?

You are the man that told me you don't do girlfriends, you won't ever marry me, yet we dated for nine years, and now we're here standing in an altar getting married. It's almost unbelievable, a dream maybe, but then I look into your eyes again, and I remember how we really did get here. You gave yourself a part of me every time you opened yourself up to me. You saw a therapist for me, you held me as I cried so so many times. You looked at and after me as if I was already your wife, which is why I didn't hesitate to say yes when you asked.

Caiden Anderson, I thank you for giving me our beautiful son, and I thank you for agreeing to stand here in front of all of our friends, family, and co-workers and become my husband. I love you," I said honestly. He stared at me for a moment before pressing his lips against mine before a throat was cleared.

"Not yet," John, the officiant whispered, and Caiden only smirked at me. I guess he was never the rule follower. Caiden was next and he looked confident as he let out a small breath, preparing himself.

"Claire, I hated you," Caiden started off loud and clearly. Some appalled gasps and whispers went throughout the room, but he still continued. "You were a boy, my roommate, my best friend's girlfriend, and my enemy, yet somehow through all of that we still find ourselves standing here today, ten years later with our hands joined, our eyes locked, and our smiles wide. We've lived together through the end of your college years to now and we have fought more times than I could ever count. I've found myself almost walking out on you out of fear of commitment many times. We've almost lost each other by death, and we've been through hell and back, yet once again we find ourselves standing here, hands joined, eyes locked, smiles wide.

When we stand here we don't just promise to stay together. No, forget promises. We show that we don't just love each other. We show that we need each other. I can't live in a world where Claire Martez, no, Claire Anderson doesn't breathe the same air as I.

I stand here today to share vows that tell how much I love you with everyone in this room, yet I look at you and can't find myself to do that. Claire, you already know that I love you more than I love myself, but what you don't know is when that love first started." He paused and wiped the few tears that fell from my eyes with his thumb. He smiled and grabbed my hands once again.

"I fell in love with you when you stood there and hugged me in the park. When you spoke to me as a friend and not someone you pity. I called you horrible things, yet you still tried to only help me and accept me. On that Halloween, you stayed with me and let me cry to you without any judgment. At my apartment, you listened to me talk to you about part of my past. It all added up, but Halloween was it. I knew from the moment you hugged me that I was screwed. I fell in love with you from the second you started talking to me that day, which is why as we stand here today, hands joined, eyes locked, and smiles on our faces. I can't help but look forward to continuing our journey and spending the rest of our days together with our son by our sides."

I couldn't hold back the tears that fell. Caiden smiled and wiped my tears once again. Thank goodness for waterproof makeup. "I love you," he whispered in my ear, and I bit my lip to hold back a sob. My vows didn't even compare to his, and by the look in his eyes, he truly meant every single word.

After getting handed the rings from Nick who, of course, sent me a wink, we slid them on each other's fingers before looking into each other's eyes again as the officiant talked about what these symbolize before we started to repeat the words he said. Caiden smiled at me as he knew what came next, and I returned it.

"Claire Martez and Caiden Anderson, you have professed your love by exchanging your vows. You have symbolized your commitment by exchanging rings. And you have expressed the end of your individual lives by the pouring of the unity sand. With all of this, there is just one more question I need each of you to answer and then we're off to the reception to celebrate."

I smiled at him before looking back at Caiden.

"Claire Martez – do you take Caiden Anderson to be your husband, to live together in the covenant of marriage? Do you promise to love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

I smiled my eyes still filled with tears, "I do."

"Caiden Anderson – do you take Claire Martez to be your wife; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Do you promise to love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?"

I held my breath as I waited patiently for his answer. "I do."

The officiant John smiled at us, but Caiden didn't wait for him to continue as he pressed his lips on mine fiercely. He placed his hand on my back like in the movies and brought me back.

"By the power vested in me by the state of Washington, I now pronounce you husband and wife. Caiden, as you have already done you may now kiss your bride," he said smiling.

Caiden pulled us up a few seconds later, keeping his hand on the bottom of my back. "It's my great honor and privilege to be the first to present to you, Mr. and Mrs. Caiden Anderson," Joe announced.

Everyone stood up clapping. I looked at Caiden who was already looking down at me.

"Damn, I really like the sound of that," he whispered in my ear before nuzzling my neck with his nose.

"Hey, you should have warned me your vows were going to be so freaking emotional," I said, lightly slapping his chest as everyone started leaving the room and heading towards the reception.

"That came from the heart just for you, baby doll," he said.

I couldn't help but shake my head still smiling. I pressed my lips directly against his, ignoring the flashes from the cameras. I pulled away just in time to see my mom walked over.

"Claire Anderson," she said, wiping tears from her eyes with her free hand. "You'll still always have that Martez charm," she told me.

I smiled before taking our baby from her.

"I know, Mom. I know," I said before looking down at our baby boy dressed in a little tuxedo.

"Hi, Elijah," I said in a high-pitched voice. He opened his eyes and just stared back at me with his blue eyes. "Mommy and Daddy got married. One day you'll be here too with the love of your life," I said before pressing a kiss on his cheek.

"I'll take him home with me in about an hour or two," my mom said smiling at me, the wrinkles clear on her face.

"Thank you in advance for agreeing to look after him during our honeymoon," I said.

She nodded.

"It's been far too long since I've had a little one in the house," she said before giving me a sad smile.

"I'm so proud of you, Claire," my dad said.

I smiled.

"I know, Dad."

"Take care of my daughter, Caiden," my mom said with narrowed eyes, and he only smiled at her before looking down at me again.

"I can't imagine spending my life doing anything else."

After getting a few family pictures, I decided it was time to get changed into dancing clothes. I headed into the room and opened the bag that held my dress. I put on the white and gold dress with sparkly high heels.

Those aren't dancing shoes.

I smiled. I know, but I still have to look nice.

I looked in the mirror and smiled at the glow that surrounded me. I was beautiful, I was happy, I was free, and I have to admit, I was happy as hell to be skinny again. I walked out of the room and into the reception area where I was immediately greeted by friends and family congratulating me.

"You know I must say yours and Caiden's vows were actually adorable," Riley said honestly.

"Awe thanks!" I said, embracing her before pulling away. "I can't believe you're going back to London again tomorrow," I said sadly.

She frowned as well, pushing away a stray piece of her natural brown hair out of her face. "Yeah, my agency needs me. Those few months away was hard on them. They started to fall behind in training and all that," she said. I nodded, knowing they needed her.

"I'll come visit," I promised.

"You don't really have a choice. It's my turn for the wedding next month, and this time I get to dress you up in some puffy dress," she said. I snorted.

"Yeah right. You probably went with the long, silk-like dresses," I said.

She shrugged, taking a sip of her wine.

"Maybe I did, maybe I didn't." She winked and I laughed lightly, loving the carefree atmosphere in the air.

"There's my beautiful wife," Caiden whispered from behind me in my ear, his hand wrapping around my waist. I looked back and up at him and smiled.

"I love you," I whispered, pecking his lips.

He smirked.

"I know," he said, biting at my ear before pulling away. "You'll love me even more later."

I smacked his chest and shook my head. "You know most old men don't flirt as much as you," I said.

He pouted.

"Yeah, but I'm not old. I can show you if you need a reminder," he teased.

I held back a smile.

"Awe, look at the cute couple. Seeing a manwhore as always still," Mia joked.

"I have to get more kids out of her somehow," he said.

My eyes widened.

"Nick, what on Earth did you give him?" I asked as Nick walked over, joining us.

"Just a shot or two," he responded with a smirk.

"You're lucky I handle my liquor well because that boy gave me more than a few shots," Caiden said.

I scrunched up my nose.

"Uh-huh," I said lightly, patting his cheek.

"You look stunning by the way," Nick complimented.

I thanked him.

"Girl, you make me want to get married again," Clover said, walking over with a drink in her hand and with Andrew trailing behind her.

"Can we dance now?" Mia asked, handing me a drink.

I shrugged. "Um, hell yeah," I said, throwing my arms up in the air as I swayed my hips side to side as we walked over to where people were dancing. Everyone else soon joined and it didn't take long for us all to be singing along to the songs and dancing together.

About an hour into the reception all the big events were about done, including the sharing of the cake and the father-daughter dance. All I had to do was throw the bouquet and then I'd be done and ready to get completely wasted.

"Wait, wait, wait," I said suddenly, about to turn around, but Mia stopped me.

"Hoe, you have five seconds to throw the damn flowers before I do," she yelled. I threw the flowers behind me. I quickly turned to see who caught them and smiled when I saw it was Elena. She went

to walk over for a picture with me, but West bumped into her, and I swear I saw the sparks between them immediately.

"Don't do it," Caiden said.

I looked up at him.

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

He gave me a knowing look.

"You're going to try to set them up," he said.

"Maybe I don't need to," I said looking at the two who were easily hitting it off.

"We'll take those pictures later," I told the photographer before Caiden and I headed over to bar.

"You're happy," I said smiling. He held my face with his hands, the largeness covering my cheeks. I thought back to the first time I met Caiden and grinned even larger.

Sliding my key card I opened the door and headed in, the sight that greeted me wasn't too pleasant.

"Baby!" the girl moaned, making me quickly turn around.

"Sorry!" I said, closing my eyes trying to block out the image of the naked girl. The sound of someone hitting their head and yelling a 'hey' made me almost open my eyes. Almost.

"Who are you?" the guy asked, making me open my eyes. I realized he was still wearing no clothes, and I made sure to keep my eyes from wandering while he just stood there with his arms crossed in all of his naked glory. Great, my roommate is freaking hot as hell and is a sex god, I thought as I took in his features. He had hazel eyes and dirty blonde hair that almost looked brown.

"Jason Lockwood, I'm your new roommate," I told him, rubbing my hand on the back of my neck awkwardly.

"Baby, I thought you said you didn't have a roommate," The girl said.

I noticed she was now only wearing a long guys t-shirt, which I was guessing was his.

"Why are you wearing my shirt?" the guy said coldly, also glaring at her and the girl frowned. "And I said I usually don't get one and when I do the guy always ends up switching rooms."

"Sorry," she mumbled and started taking it off. I removed my eyes from the girl as she slid on her own clothes and left the rom. I heard a door closing and knew that was the signal the girl was gone.

"I thought this was an all boys university..." I said, trailing off awkwardly.

"It is and you won't tell anyone about my little guest or else we'll have a problem," he told me while sliding up his jeans.

"Yeah, I won't tell, my lips are sealed," I told him, pretending to lock my lips and throw out the key.

"Great, I have a loser as a roommate," he said, not bothering to hide what he thinks if me. "The name is Caiden Anderson. Stay out of my way and we'll be fine."

I saw the look of pure happiness on his face that was much different to the hatred that used to lay there. I decided to repeat the statement, "You're happy." He raised an eyebrow curiously.

"Yes, just as happy as you if not more," he commented back. I hugged hug him tightly before pulling back a little and looking into his eyes that always stole my attention.

"We're happy," I said softly.

Caiden pressed a long, lingering kiss on my lips. "We're happy together."

***

Clover's Point of View (Long Beach, 48 hours after the wedding)

We walked into our house and I felt my eyes tear up as my kids came running into my arms. I squeezed them both tightly, as did Andrew, being careful not to hurt them.

"I love you both so so much," I said, squeezing them one more time before letting them go.

"We love you too," they said in sync, making me smile. I stood up and rushed over to Tori who was standing in the doorway watching the scene play out.

"Thank you so much," I said softly.

She nodded.

"Hey, it's cool. I'm glad everything is all worked out now. I can't believe someone stole all of your money in the first place," she said, shaking her head.

I shared a look with Andrew before nodding.

"Yeah, apparently our bank account was messed up because all the money was there, it just wasn't showing right," I said, not lying. When I confronted Riley about the money situation she told me that she checked it all out and it was still in my account all this time. Whatever Taylor did was a ploy for Jesse all along and was a way to keep us from leaving Seattle.

"That's crazy," she said.

I agreed.

"How about later we go out for drinks and catch up?" I suggested.

She agreed.

"See you at seven?" Tori asked, grabbing her purse and car keys.

"At seven," I repeated with a nod before saying our goodbyes.

"It's weird to be home," Andrew said, looking around the large house that was much bigger than the size we became familiar with at Claire and Caiden's.

"Yeah, I almost feel out of place," I said honestly as I looked around the place I have forever called home.

"I missed it," Andrew said.

I looked at him, pressing my lips against his cheek. I remembered the first time I met him and almost couldn't believe how much he's changed. His brown hair was now short instead of floppy and his once raggedy leather jacked was replaced with nice suits. I smiled at the memory of first meeting him.

Andrew seemed to notice my presence and smirked, turning his chair around, so the back was facing me. He sat on it and rested his arms on the top of the chair. "Heya, boys. Look what we have here, Stacey's new conquest of the week is here," Andrew said. I didn't hold back the roll of my eyes. "You're the so-called freak that messed with her this morning, right?"

I unnoticeably gulped. Okay, so I really didn't want to be beaten to a pulp by this so-called delinquent, Andrew Carter. "Awe, babes, did Stace cut off your tongue too?" he asked, standing up and moving directly beside me.

I couldn't help but smell the whiffs of cologne coming off of him, giving him the smell slightly of citrus and cigarettes and something else I couldn't put my name on. "Can you please just leave me alone?" I asked. He ran his hand down the side of my face before stumbling slightly, almost falling over the side of my desk.

"Ah, does the freak have a name?" he asked curiously, reaching to grab the glasses off my face. I quick turned my head to the side and pushed his hand out of my face.

I stood up and moved to the next seat over. "Baby, no need to get all mad. I mean I'm on your side," Andrew said. I scrunched up my nose in disgust as he stumbled over to the seat near his friends. "Stacey's a slut."

I snorted. "It's like you two are made for each other then." I said before quickly covering my mouth.

Okay, that was definitely the wrong thing to say.

I grinned, remembering how Andrew once told me that it was my smart attitude that got him interested in me. He liked that I argued with him, that I didn't let him walk over me back then.

I looked up at my husband and felt my cheeks start to hurt from all the smiling I was doing. "So did I," I replied. "But we won't ever have to miss it again," I said, leaning against his shoulder as we watched our kids start to argue over their toy.

"Never again," he agreed, pressing his lips to my temple before finally interrupting the argument. The beautiful children didn't listen at first, but after some convincing with ice cream they agreed to let the toy go and share.

"You're a sucker," I said, shaking my head.

He smirked.

"A sucker for you."

***

Riley's Point of View (London, 48 hours after the wedding)

I sat at my desk with Joey, going through the piles of paperwork as we tried to find the perfect agents for a new case in Manchester. "I think he'll work," I said, handing my fiance the folder.

He looked it over before nodding.

"He has a good partner too. I think it will work out."

"Great, then it's settled," I said just before the door opened to my office. Emily walked in with her laptop and set it on my desk. I raised an eyebrow and she gave me a half smile.

"Another police report in Seattle. You're going to want to see this," she said.

I covered my face.

"I swear if I have to go back to America for another stupid Jesse Farone case then I'm going to scream," I snapped.

She didn't respond, only pressing the play button on the screen.

I read the words that kept crossing the bottom of the screen on the news channel.

"**Mass murderer has been caught.**"

I looked up at Emily with disbelief, and she only pressed her finger to her lips and pointed at the screen, a sign to just watch. "Jesse Farone, age twenty-eight has admitted to being the mass murderer and the killer in all the recent deaths in Seattle. Since he has been caught there has been no murders, which I'd say is a great sign that the streets are safe once again here in Seattle. Isn't that right, Jake?" she asked.

He nodded.

"I'd say so, Karen."

I paused it, not caring to hear any more.

I leaned back on my chair and covered my face with my hands. "He turned himself in," I said completely amazed. He'll go to prison for the rest of his life if they don't choose the death penalty.

Joey stood up and walked over to a cabinet. He went through multiple files before pulling out the only black one among all of the green files. He handed it to me and I didn't have to look inside of it to know what was located in there. I thought back to the time I remembered most with Jesse Farone.

My view of the scene was interrupted by a tall figure standing in front of me. I put my hand up to my forehead to use it as a shelter from the sun as I looked up.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, making it obvious I was already annoyed.

"I'm just taking a stroll through the park," Jesse said. I rolled my eyes.

"Yeah, sure you are," I scoffed. "Are you here to throw me against a wall again or maybe, this time, a tree?" I asked sarcastically.

He just smirked and sat next to me on the bench.

"No, I'm honestly just enjoying this nice day by strolling through the park," Jesse said.

I laughed a sarcastic laugh.

"Are there going to be men surrounding me with guns while you are on your fine 'stroll?'" I asked, making quotes with my fingers as I said 'stroll.' I didn't bother to whisper that since we were sitting on a bench that was more towards the small forest in a park. I liked this spot since it had a nice tree above us keeping it nice and cool, hiding me from the hot blazing sun that was peaking through the branches of the tree.

"Nah, not today," he said smirking.

I rolled my eyes. We both went into a surprisingly comfortable silence as we sat on the bench.

"You know I was enjoying sitting on this lovely bench and you ruin it at this point. Now, can you leave?" I asked.

He chuckled at my bluntness.

I really didn't mind his company, but part of me felt awkward sitting next to the guy I was meant to arrest in the near future.

"You know Scott, you're rather blunt about things today. I think I like you better now than the stuck up Riley and the attention seeking April," Jesse said, shrugging.

My eyebrows furrowed as I frowned.

"I'm not stuck up and 'April' wasn't trying to seek attention. She was trying to simply figure out about your illegal gang which she succeeded at," I said, crossing my arms as I leaned back on the bench amd closing my eyes as I enjoyed the feeling of the wind that was slowly blowing through the park.

"You talk about April as if she was a different person," Jesse said amused.

"That's because April Waters is all made up. It's a role I played, which usually people like you are not allowed to find out about until you're sitting in prison," I said, not bothering to open my eyes as I continued to relax.

"If I wasn't supposed to find out then why let Calum tell me? What's your plan?" Jesse asked.

I peeked one eye open.

"If you honestly think I'm that much of an idiot to tell you our plan, then please do me a favor and go find your little group and shoo," I said, ushering him away with my hands, before my eyes once again.

It was silent for a few minutes so I thought he actually left, but I was proven wrong when I opened my eyes to see him still sitting there. I sighed and sat up and turned my body to face him.

"Okay, Mr .Farone. What do you possibly want? You know I'm not telling you my plan, and I don't see anyone with guns which means I'm not getting killed, so please enlighten me with what the hell is going on and why are you sitting next to me? Do you want a heart to heart or something?" I demanded.

"Nothing," he said shrugging.

I groaned.

"Bullshit. I know you didn't just come here to walk through the park and look at some damn roses and daisies."

"Nothing," he repeated.

"For some reason, I don't believe you," I said. He raised an eyebrow.

"Why?" Jesse asked me.

I stared at him for a moment seeing if he was joking; when I found no signs of humor I sighed.

"It could be the fact that you're a leader to a gang that makes and sells drugs illegally or it could be the fact that there is a guy walking up behind me with a gun," I said.

His eyes widened.

"How did you—" he started to say. I cut him off holding up my hand.

"Because Farone, I am head agent along the side of Joey. We're both very smart and I can tell when some stupid arse is walking up behind me with a gun pointed straight at my head," I said with all seriousness before continuing.

"Now, I would arrest you and you stupid friend if it wasn't for the fact that I forgot my handcuffs at home," I said, standing up and wiping off my pants. I walked to the guy who was now shaking. I grabbed a hold of the front of the gun and pushed it to the side so it wasn't pointing straight at me. I didn't bother to take out any of the few weapons I had on me and continued to walk towards the guy. When he realized I was walking towards him he started to move backward.

"Stay back! I've got a gun," the guy yelled.

"And I have two," I said, rolling my eyes. He looked around nervously through the corners of his eyes, and I knew he was going to run. I stepped my right foot forward and he immediately ran. I didn't go after him because I honestly had no need to. I crossed my arms and looked at Jesse who was watching the scene on the bench.

"Jesse, You don't know who you're dealing with. We are all high ranked agents from the EA. If you keep playing games, you will find yourself dead or in prison. Remember this, none of your gang members can handle us," I said, looking him straight into the eyes. Jesse just leaned his arm on the back of the bench and put his head on his hand.

"Is that a threat Scott?" Jesse asked, looking bored as he also looked me in the eye.

"No, that's a promise," I said before walking off to my car.

That promise I did keep. I thought to myself.

I called in Rachel, Matt, Liam, and Lex into my office to join us. I looked at them each directly in the eye and smiled, taking a deep breath and pausing.

"Jesse Farone's case is done," I spoke out loud, making it official before I ripped the folder in half and let the scraps fall to the ground.

"So that's it? We're completely done? Done with the fighting them and done with going undercover?" Matt said.

I chuckled, nodding my head.

"Yeah, we're done."