

# **Fallen Down Angels**

## **by: Heather and Kristy**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

“Taylor, honestly...how many of these do you think you’re gonna need?” Bailey Caldwell held up one of the several packs of plain white T-shirts piled on her boyfriend’s bed and gave him a smirk that she was notorious for.

“Hey,” he replied sharply, snatching it away from her playfully and pecking her on the lips. “The ladies love it when I start sweating in my white T-shirt.”

“I think the ladies would love it if you performed in a clown suit,” she laughed, packing the T-shirts into a separate piece of luggage. “Actually, if you really want to give them what they love, you should just perform naked.”

Raising an eyebrow suggestively, Taylor pulled her thin frame into his arms and began whispering heavily in her ear, “Well, maybe later you and I could-”

An exaggeratedly loud knock on Taylor’s open bedroom door caused them both to jump and turn towards the sound of the noise. “As much as I’d love to think of you playing piano naked, I have something I need to talk to you about,” Taylor’s younger brother Zac said from the doorway.

Bailey laughed at Zac and kissed Taylor’s cheek before making her way to the door. Taylor’s eyes followed her as she left, taking in the swing of her long, chestnut brown curls and the swish of her hips as though it was the last time he’d ever see her. “Okay, this really better be important,” he said, his eyes lingering on the empty doorway for another second or two before plopping down on the bed and turning his gaze to Zac.

“Well, I’ll just get right to it, then. Do you care if someone else comes on tour with us?” Zac said, nearly all in one breath.

“Someone else like who?” Taylor replied curiously.

Zac sighed and shifted his weight from one foot to the other, knowing he could always count on Taylor to answer a question with more questions. It was precisely the reason he had waited to talk to Taylor last, after their older brother Isaac, and even after their parents, though at twenty years old, he didn’t feel as though he needed his parents’ permission. “This girl I’ve been seeing...Delaney,” he answered.

After a few seconds of silence while Taylor processed the answer, he shrugged. “Zac, I can’t tell you what to do. I never cleared Bailey coming along with you on the last tour, so I’d have to have some balls to tell you I’d have a problem with it. Has anyone in the family even met her, though?”

“Mom and Dad have...” Zac shrugged. When Taylor didn’t say anything for awhile, Zac began moving towards the door, thinking and hoping that the conversation was over.

“Zac, hang on,” Taylor said suddenly, just as Zac was about to step in the hall. Cursing under his breath that if he had just moved a little quicker, he’d have made his escape, he turned back to his brother and

waited for whatever else he had to say. “I’m completely fine with it. I just want to make sure you’re absolutely positive that this is a good idea. I mean, once we get out on the road, it might be different having to see her every day on a bus than it is going out on a few dates, you know?”

“Look...” Zac said with a sigh, leaning against the door frame. “It sucks being the odd one out while Ike’s got Drea and his kids, and you have Bailey. Even though I love having them there because I love them to death, it’s just different. I really like this girl, and I don’t want the fact that I’m going on tour and won’t see her all summer to end this before we have a chance to begin. She might be my Drea or my Bailey, and if I leave now and she dumps me for it, I’ll never know.”

Taylor fell quiet again, letting his brother’s words sink in, realizing he had never really thought of it that way. For the last couple of tours, it had been the same each night after a show. They would shower at the venue, go out to meet the fans, and then get on the bus and not see each other until the next day in the next city. Isaac and Drea would tuck their twins Arielle and Aidan into their beds and close themselves off in the bedroom at the back of the bus for alone time, while Taylor and Bailey laid on the couch wrapped up in a movie or a conversation, or had their own alone time in one or the other’s bunk. It was true, that Zac was usually left to himself, usually retreating off to his bunk to fall asleep to his iPod or watching mindless television alone, but Taylor had never realized that until just then, and he felt like a crappy brother for it. As much as he didn’t think this was a very good idea, there was no way on Earth he was going to take it away from Zac. “Then I can’t wait to meet her, Zac,” Taylor said with a genuine smile.

“Thanks, Tay.” Turning and exiting the doorway, Zac made his way to his own bedroom in the house he and Taylor shared in Tulsa. A smile on his face and a butterfly in his stomach appeared when he reached his room and heard his cell phone ringing, knowing it would be her. His smile widened when he saw Laney flashing on the screen. “Hey, Laney,” he said smoothly once punching the Talk button.

“So what’s the verdict?” her clear, sweet voice said in return to his greeting.

“Unanimous. I hope you spent the night packing, because I’ll expect you here bright and early tomorrow morning,” Zac replied with a grin. It truly astounded him that he could feel like this over someone he barely knew.

They had met almost exactly three weeks before by literally running into each other outside of an antique shop where he was looking to buy something for his mother’s upcoming birthday. It was like a scene that only happened in movies; Zac had barely caught the vase he had just purchased before it hit the ground, and the contents of this strange and beautiful girl’s purse had strewn about their feet. After both of them had apologized profusely to the other, their eyes met as they scrambled to retrieve all of her things and return them to her purse, and Zac could swear he fell in love with her, even though he had always thought love at first sight was complete garbage. Her dark blue eyes sparkled with mystery as her perfectly shaped pink lips turned up in a smile, and he knew this wouldn’t be the last time he saw her if he had any control over it. They had seen each other nearly every evening after that, and though he had picked up through unintentional clues in her conversation that she was a fan of Hanson, she had never said it directly and he had never brought it up. Instead he had spent every moment of their time together trying to find out everything he could about Delaney Reid, however unwilling she was to reveal all of her secrets.

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The next morning was bright and chaotic, a perfect foreshadowing of the summer months to come. Everyone had convened at Walker and Diana's house, being that most of the people and luggage were already located there. Waking up at four thirty in the morning and driving across town to their parents house was not an easy task for Taylor and Zac, but eventually their eyes ceased drooping as they arrived and were greeted by laughter and shouts of, "I can't find my shoes!" or "Did you remember to pack my favorite shirt?" and children running around as though they had just been let loose with a belly full of sugar. Isaac and Drea were nowhere to be found, but the presence of Arielle and Aidan toddling around as quickly as their short legs would carry them in an effort to keep up with their youngest aunts and uncle was evidence that they had arrived.

Bailey arrived minutes after they did, removing only a large suitcase and a duffel bag from her trunk. Taylor rushed outside to greet her, thankful for an excuse to get away from the pandemonium that was beginning to make his eyes swim. Her long curls were twisted up in a messy bun with only her bangs and a few escaped strands dancing around her face in the early morning breeze. She was wearing a black spaghetti-strap tank top with a pair of denim capris, both of which accentuated her figure perfectly. Grabbing her up into a tight hug, he buried his face in her neck and said, "God, I'm so glad to see you. I'm about to go crazy in there."

"How in the world are you going to last all summer if you're already going crazy and we haven't even left yet?" she teased, nudging his face up so that she could plant a firm kiss on his lips. "Besides, you just didn't have me, the expert baby-wrangler, here to help keep everything calm."

"You really are an Angel," he replied, something he often said in reference to her middle name, and something that always made her smile no matter what kind of mood she was in. He brought his hand up to her cheek and guided her closer for a more tender kiss of greeting.

They had no sooner pulled apart when an unfamiliar silver car pulled into the driveway beside Bailey's red Mustang. Both Taylor and Bailey watched with curiosity as the driver's side door swung open and an equally unfamiliar blond with impossibly long and slender legs emerged, her eyes covered by a pair of large Chanel sunglasses and her body covered with a pale blue sundress.

When she saw Taylor and Bailey standing in the driveway and staring at her, she removed the sunglasses and made her way over to them with an enormous smile on her face. "Hi!" she said brightly. "I'm Delaney. Delaney Reid."

"But you can call me Laney." Delaney extended her hand to the couple standing in front of her. Both were slow to respond but she was not surprised. Everyone always went into shock at their first encounter with her. She simply smiled and waited for each hand to meet hers. The first belonged to him. Taylor Hanson, he told her as he introduced himself. Despite all of the years that she'd spent worshipping the boy, it was easy to feign her interest in him. He was a beautiful specimen of human, practically perfect, and Laney considered the fact that a very pretty brunette stood at his side. She shook Laney's hand next and sent her a genuine smile.

"Bailey Caldwell," she said. "It's nice to finally meet you. Zac had been talking about you all night." Laney smiled and slowly lowered her sunglasses over her eyes. She laughed. It was an infectious laugh that she often used to instill desire in the hearts of many, many heart and behind her dark lenses she could see that Taylor was still watching her.

“Laney!” Zac cried and she had barely even turned her head in his direction before he had swept her into his arms and pulled her close to him. She smiled as his lips instantly made contact with hers and she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him. Zac was not afraid of the boundaries of their relationship. She loved that he let things go so fast and he was not afraid to hold back his affections.

“Hey handsome,” she said, as they parted. Zac grinned and slid her hand into his. Together they glanced back to Taylor and Bailey who stood there awkwardly, staring as if they’d just witnessed an unholy act. “I just met your brother and his girlfriend... right?” She turned back to Bailey and the girl scooted closer to Taylor, her fingers slowly finding their way between his.

“Girlfriend, yes,” Bailey said, her tone somewhat defensive.

“You’re lucky, Taylor,” Laney said, her eyes once again finding his. He looked away from her quickly and focused his eyes on Bailey. She looked back at him but her glance was hard. “Bailey’s beautiful.”

“Yeah, she is,” Taylor said, smiling, in an attempt to change Bailey’s expression.

“C’mon Laney,” Zac said, pulling her to the left. “I want you to meet my oldest brother and his family. You’ve met my parents so you’ve almost made it through the entire family.” Laney smiled and nodded.

“Sure, baby. Anything you want,” she said, and stepped after him. She glanced over her shoulder and sent a smile back to Taylor and Bailey. “It was nice meeting you guys.”

Taylor watched her walk away, mesmerized by her entire being. He had never seen a human creature with more elegance or grace. She was so beautiful in a crippling, unordinary way. How Zac had managed to capture a girl like that, Taylor would never know.

A hard slap to his shoulder carried him back to reality.

“Could you be anymore obvious, Taylor?” Bailey asked, angrily. He looked down over her and watched as she picked up her duffel bag. He kneeled over and picked up her suitcase. “It’s as if I failed to exist for five minutes in time.”

“What? That’s not true,” Taylor said, defending himself as they carried the bags towards the bus at the curb. Bailey looked back at him over her shoulder, her brown eyes finding his and he sighed. She had a way of doing that. She weakened him, even with the smallest glance in his direction. He set the suitcase down and rushed after her. He stopped her by sliding his arms around her waist. She dropped the bag and looked back at him, her hands falling against his chest.

“I love you,” he said. “If I failed to assure you of that fact in the last ten minutes, then I deserve to be killed. I swear to God, my beautiful, sexy Bailey Angel... I would never forget your existence, even if you were to die.” His line was cheesy but it worked. She smiled and leaned in to kiss him. He kissed her back affectionately and when they drew apart he smiled.

“Forgiven?” he asked. She nodded and smiled as she slipped out of his arms.

“Forgiven,” she said, and resumed transport of her bag. Taylor did the same and followed after her. Despite the stress of touring, he knew that the most challenging part of the summer would be keeping

Delaney Reid away from him.

## CHAPTER TWO

The first week of the tour was always the roughest. No matter how many tours they had been on, an adjustment period was still required. More recently, it had been the twins who had the toughest time adjusting, waking at every bump in the road at night wailing and waking everyone on the bus, and drifting off to sleep again just in time to be woken by the next bump. Delaney Reid was turning out to have just as hard a time adjusting as anyone, maybe even more so than the twins. Growing up an only child, living with such a large amount of people and being cooped up on a tour bus with them all day was proving to be much more difficult than she anticipated.

It wasn't until the moment that they pulled up in front of the first hotel in the first city that her muscles released all of the tension they had been holding for the entire first day and night of traveling. "This is much more my style," she said to Zac with a grin and a kiss as he dropped her bag inside the hotel room her and Bailey would be sharing for the night.

Bailey rolled her eyes as she maneuvered past them into the room while they continued kissing heavily in front of the doorway and dropped her own bag on the bed with a huff. She found herself wondering why she had refused Taylor's attempts to carry her luggage along with his. It seemed so much more romantic than her having to drag it down the hall herself.

As if he had heard her thoughts, Taylor pushed past the couple still making out and made his way over to her quickly. "You are so damn stubborn," he teased, kissing her temple. "You ran off before I could even get my stuff out of the bus."

"I'll give you the privilege of carrying my stuff in every day for the rest of the summer then," she replied with her famous smirk.

"God, will you really?" he replied with a hint of sarcasm. "Baby, I'm starving. Wanna go get something to eat?"

"Yeah, sure," Bailey shrugged, thankful for the excuse not to have to unpack just yet. She reached up and released the pins holding up her curls, letting them cascade down her back.

"Can we come?"

The voice from across the room startled them both, Bailey because she had moved on to trying to locate her purse and Taylor because he was still in a trance from watching her take her hair down. They both turned to the doorway and found Delaney staring at them expectantly, a confident smile on her face.

"Ummm...sure," Taylor replied first, glancing at Bailey for approval. He could tell she was trying not to look as annoyed as she felt. It actually took him by surprise, because Bailey could usually get along with anyone. He knew that their first encounter with Delaney hadn't sat well with her, and that it was mostly his fault. But he didn't want them all to not get along because of it, especially since the two girls

would be spending a lot of time together. As they started out of the hotel room behind Zac and Laney, Taylor reached out for her hand and squeezed it gently when she accepted. He was thankful when she smiled up at him and squeezed back.

As they made their way down to the lobby in the elevator, they decided to eat at the Los Angeles House of Blues restaurant where they would be playing the next night, joking the whole way about whether or not there would already be girls camping out over 24 hours in advance. They walked the few blocks to the restaurant, Taylor and Bailey walking a few feet ahead of Zac and Laney and whispering quietly to each other. When the four of them were settled in a booth in the back corner, Taylor and Bailey instantly became the topic of conversation, though both them and Zac were all equally uncomfortable with that.

“So how long have you two been together?” Delaney asked, spreading her napkin in her lap to protect her short white skirt that she had chosen to wear because it accentuated her long legs perfectly. She leaned forward on her elbows slightly, smiling as though she was simply trying to make casual conversation. She, however, knew differently.

“Five years,” Bailey replied quickly in a clipped voice.

“Wow, that’s a long time,” Laney said, still looking at Taylor as though he was the one who had answered. “You two must be very happy together to last so long.” Before either of them could think of a way to respond to such a comment, she turned her eyes to Bailey’s and stated smoothly, “Of course, after so long, you’d think you two would be engaged.” She laughed at her own joke, causing the other three occupants of the booth to chuckle politely.

Just then, the waitress appeared with their drinks and took their order, breaking up the tension that had fallen thickly over them. “So...Laney,” Bailey said, forcing a smile. “Zac mentioned you’re in school. What are you studying?” As much as she had already decided she didn’t like this girl or the way she looked at Taylor, she could see how Zac hung on her every word and practically worshipped her. She promised herself to try and drop the uncharacteristic attitude she had picked up and do her best to get along with Delaney, not only for Zac’s sake but also because she knew she had to co-exist with her for the rest of the summer. She felt even better about her attempt to engage Delaney in conversation when Taylor dropped his arm across her shoulders as a silent way of thanking her for the act.

“I’m studying fashion design,” Delaney replied, seeming a little taken aback that Bailey was asking her questions. She had quickly gotten used to having control over the conversation, and wasn’t expecting to lose that position so suddenly.

“I’m sure that’s a lot of fun,” Bailey said. “It must be something you’re very good at.”

“You should see this girl’s closet,” Zac interjected with a laugh. “She’s got enough clothes to dress the entire state of Oklahoma.”

“I could tell by all the luggage she brought,” Taylor commented, sipping on his Dr. Pepper.

Delaney wasn’t sure whether she should be offended or not by his comment, but she laughed as though it was the funniest thing she’d heard all day anyway. If nothing else, she assured herself, at least he had noticed something about her. “Bailey, I bet we’re about the same size. I could loan you some stuff one

night if you want. We can get all dressed up and pretend like we're famous too." She put on her best and brightest smile, knowing that overtly giving Bailey reason to dislike her would hurt more than help her. Delaney relaxed a little when, for the first time since the previous morning in the Hanson driveway, Bailey gave her an honest smile. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer, Delaney reminded herself as conversation continued on around her.

"So, that lunch wasn't so bad," Zac said, after the couples had returned from their outing. The girls had retreated to their hotel room in order to let the boys get ready for a radio show. Taylor hated that he had to share a room with his brother when he would have much rather preferred his girlfriend but his parents would not allow it. When they were younger, their parents were a necessity on tour but now, with all of the boys as adults, they hardly seemed useful. He'd argued the fact but his father had only assured them they liked spending their summers on tour and he couldn't question it any further. Because of his parent's presence, he was forced to hold onto their values of abstinence. Or at least let them believe that he was doing so.

"No," Taylor said, as he pulled a stack of clothes from his suitcase. He separated the t-shirts from the jeans and looked back at his brother. "It went pretty well. The girls seem to be getting along."

"Thank God," Zac said, as he disappeared into the bathroom. Taylor could hear him banging around as he opened and explored the cupboards. He dispersed his clothes into the dresser drawers near his bed and then looked up as Zac re-entered the room. "I thought Bailey was going to start a bitch fight or something with the looks she was sending Laney."

"Bailey?" Taylor asked, raising his eyebrows. He ran his hand through his hair as he emptied the last of his clothes from his suitcase. He set them on his bed and picked up his bag and tossed it onto the floor near the front of the bed. "Well, she has good reason. Laney is fairly intimidating, Zac."

"Intimidating? You think so?" Zac asked, looking up to his brother. He sat back onto his bed and smiled. "She is not."

Taylor laughed and finished transferring his clothes into the dresser. "How long have you been with her?" he asked, changing the subject. Arguing with Zac about his girlfriend would not prove to be successful because when it came to his women, Zac knew everything.

"About a month," Zac said, lying back on his bed.

"And you've invited her on tour knowing that you'll have to spend every day with her for almost four months?" he asked. Zac laced his hands behind his head and closed his eyes. He smiled and nodded.

"Yes," he said. "It will strengthen our relationship."

"Really? You think so?" Taylor asked, as he stepped up to the kitchenette in their room. He opened the fridge and scanned the bottled drinks that were stored inside. "This is Bailey's second tour and in the last five years that we've been together, I've been on... three tours. About three. Being on tour is stressful. Bailey and I have had some of our worst fights during tours, Zac."

"Laney and I don't fight," Zac said, sitting up.

“Oh okay. Well then, what do you do?” Taylor asked, looking at his brother over his shoulder. Zac grinned and laid back on the bed.

“I’ll spare you the details and say that we have a very physical relationship,” he said. Taylor rolled his eyes and laughed.

“Well, with a girl like that, I don’t blame you,” he said. He couldn’t believe that he’d just said those words because he had no guarantee that Zac wouldn’t use them against him later. He mentally slapped himself for his stupidity and pulled a bottle of water from the fridge.

“You think she’s hot, don’t you?” Zac asked, as he pulled himself to his feet.

“No comment,” Taylor said, as he pocketed his wallet. He was not going any further with this conversation. “We were supposed to meet Isaac ten minutes ago in the lobby. C’mon. Let’s go.”

Zac followed him as they exited the room and took the elevator to the first floor. The doors opened and the brothers stepped into the lobby. Isaac was waiting for them near the doors, sitting on a couch with his wife and his children.

“It’s about time you guys showed up,” he said. “Dad’s called me three times. He’s already at the station and he’s wondering why we haven’t even left yet.”

“Hey, Isaac, don’t be so anal,” Zac said, raising his eyebrows as he scooped two year old Aidan into his arms. The toddler grinned and Zac kissed his forehead. Taylor stepped past him as Zac began cooing to his nephew quietly. Isaac’s wife of three years, Drea, was sitting beside her husband on the couch, cradling her sleeping daughter, Aidan’s twin sister, Arielle.

“Well, now that we’re here let’s go,” Taylor said, nodding to the door. Isaac leaned over and kissed his wife and his daughter and then stood up.

“Who’s driving?” Zac asked, as he transferred Aidan to Isaac’s arms. Isaac kissed his son goodbye and then set him on the couch next to his mom.

“No one’s driving, Zac. We don’t have a rental car. We’re taking a taxi,” Isaac said, as he stepped towards the door with Zac. As his brothers argued, Taylor turned to Drea and smiled.

“Are you going to be all right?” he asked, motioning to the circle of children nested around her.

“Oh, Taylor, honey, I’ve been doing this for two years already. I’m a pro,” she said, smiling. “Besides, the girls are on their way down to meet me. We’re going to go out and explore the city and hopefully walk off some of Aidan’s energy.”

Taylor smiled and glanced to the door as Isaac called for him. “All right,” he said, smiling. “Well, have fun.”

“We will, Taylor,” she said, smiling. “Bye.”



“Bye, Drea,” he said. “See you later, Aidan.” He slapped the toddler a high five before he ran after his brothers into the hot California afternoon.

### CHAPTER THREE

Once Bailey and Laney had appeared in the lobby with Zoë in tow, Drea strapped the still sleeping Arielle and the still energetic Aidan into the double stroller and said, “We just need to find a park or something so I can let him run around.” Aidan illustrated her point by trying to jump out of the stroller when they made their way outside and passed a girl walking a black Labrador on the sidewalk.

As soon as the bright, California sun hit her, Laney pulled her Chanel sunglasses from the top of her head to shield her eyes. “I just hope there’s benches,” she said in a completely serious tone. “I don’t want to get grass stains on my skirt.”

Drea, apparently not realizing how serious she was, laughed as though Laney had just cracked a joke. “I’m sure there will be,” she offered. “Are you excited to be on the tour?”

“Oh, of course,” Laney replied a little too enthusiastically. “Besides being able to see all these amazing cities, I don’t know what I would have done if I wasn’t able to spend the whole summer with *my* Zac.”

Zoë, who was walking hand-in-hand with Bailey a few steps behind Drea and Laney, giggled when Laney said “my Zac.” Bailey only looked down at the young girl and giggled knowingly with her.

“I mean, I could tell the minute I met him that we were going to have an amazing time together, but I *never* expected something this incredible so soon,” Laney continued passionately. “And everyone has just been so nice and welcoming, especially Bailey.” Bailey nearly stopped mid-step with surprise when Laney coupled those unexpected words with an even more unexpected smile in her direction.

“Oh, I don’t know what we’d do without Bailey,” Drea laughed. “She manages to keep not only *my* two little angels in check, but she keeps Isaac, Taylor, and Zac in check too. I’ve been with Isaac almost ten years and haven’t been able to straighten them out like she can.”

Blushing, Bailey shook her head and laughed Drea’s words off. “Drea, you always have to embarrass me, don’t you?”

“Oh, you shouldn’t be embarrassed!” Laney interjected, glancing at Bailey over her shoulder again. “You can never get too many compliments!”

When Laney had faced in front of her again, Bailey’s features drew up in confusion. She wasn’t sure where all this sweetness was coming from, but it seemed nothing short of artificial, and she found herself wondering if maybe Laney wasn’t bipolar. She certainly had a different attitude when Taylor and Zac were around.

They arrived at a park nearby, and Drea set the twins off with Zoë, calling out to them to stay where she could see them. Drea, Bailey, and Laney took a seat on a bench near the playground where the three children would be in perfect view. “Sometimes it’s best to just let them run around and get filthy so I can throw them in the tub and then straight to bed,” Drea laughed, watching her children play with a

look of complete adoration on her face.

“They are really beautiful,” Laney said. “They look just like you, Drea.”

“Thank you,” Drea said with an appreciative smile. “They might look like me, but they act just like their daddy.”

“I definitely have to agree with you on that one,” Bailey chuckled. “I’ve never seen a stubborn streak quite like theirs.”

“You’re around kids a lot then, Bailey?” Laney asked, seeming completely interested.

“I...uh...” Bailey felt at a loss for words, completely astounded by this girl named Delaney Reid who had made her way into their lives so quickly. One minute Laney was asking Bailey questions as though she were an FBI agent, and the next it was as if she wanted nothing more than to be the best of friends with her. “I’m a kindergarten teacher, so yeah. I guess you could say I’m around kids a lot.”

“Wow! That’s such an amazing job. It takes such a special person to teach kids that young,” Laney gushed. “How long have you been doing that?”

“I only graduated about a year ago, so this was my first year with my own class,” Bailey replied, trying to make herself relax.

As the three of them continued talking, Bailey wondered if maybe she hadn’t gotten off on the wrong foot with Delaney. She seemed so genuine, if not a little too enthusiastic, now when she was out of the eyes of her boyfriend. Although she still couldn’t make herself be crazy about this new girl who had entered her life, she thought maybe she was taking Laney’s brashness in the wrong way. Maybe this was all just her way of trying to fit in with them. Bailey had been with Taylor for over a year before going on her first tour, so she’d had plenty of time spent getting to know the rest of the Hanson family before being stuck on the road with them for months at a time. Laney hadn’t been given that privilege. She had simply been dropped in without even so much as meeting most of them.

As much as she wanted to believe that was true, Bailey still couldn’t be sure. The flirtatious looks that she had caught Laney casting towards Taylor in the last two days surely weren’t just her way of trying to fit in. But, until she was given reason to believe otherwise, Bailey decided to give Laney the benefit of the doubt. And she hoped she would turn out to be right.

The day passed without any further doubts. Once the girls returned to the hotel, the boys had arrived back and everyone went their separate ways. Isaac took Drea and the twins to the pool, Taylor and Bailey went out to dinner, and Zac and Laney stayed in. Laney was in bed and asleep by the Bailey returned and the girls didn’t have to speak until the next morning.

“Bailey! C’mon!” Laney called, against the closed bathroom door. “I promised Zac I’d go to breakfast with him!” She pounded her fist against the door and sighed dramatically as if Bailey could see through the thick wood.

“You shouldn’t have overslept then!” Bailey called, over the noise of the water. Laney could sense the pretentiousness in Bailey’s voice as if she had some sort of dominance over her just because she’d been

around longer. So Laney wasn't used to the early hour days that touring called for but Bailey didn't need to rub it in her face. Dropping her arms in defeat, Laney sighed and picked up her silk bath robe from the bed. She slipped it over her shoulders and wrapped it around her slender figure. A brilliant idea formed inside of her mind.

"Hey baby," Zac said, as he opened the door. Laney smiled back at him. The trek to his neighboring hotel room had hardly taken her any time. She stepped up to him and wrapped her arms around his neck. "What are you doing here... and in your sexy pajamas too? Is it my birthday?"

Laney laughed and kissed him gently. "Not today but maybe later," she said, brushing her palm across his cheek. "But can I take a shower here?"

"I thought you said that it's not my birthday," Zac grinned.

"Zachary!" Laney said, and slapped his shoulder playfully. "Not with you. Unless... you want to, of course. But Bailey is hogging the bathroom and I've got a breakfast date set with you. I really just need a shower."

Zac stepped aside and let her in. "Sure, baby. You can use our bathroom. I'd love to join you but I've got to meet my dad downstairs. He wants to talk to all of us before the show. God, you'd think we were still kids." He followed Laney into the bathroom. She turned the shower on and looked back at him.

"Okay, well, hurry up because once I'm out of here I'm going to want a full meal," she said. Zac smiled and nodded.

"I'll be back for you, I swear," he said. She smiled and kissed him before he left. She shut the door behind him and once the water was hot enough, she discarded her clothes near the bath tub and stepped into the shower.

She found that Zac and Taylor used Pantene Pro-V which worked to her advantage seeing as it was a more feminine choice of shampoo. She lathered it into her hair, rinsed and then finished the cycle with a thin layer of conditioner. Once she had cleaned with the soap, she turned the water off and pushed the shower curtain aside. She twisted the water from her hair as she reached for a towel. Wrapping it around her body, she secured it at her chest and picked up her night gown and bath robe from the floor.

"Zac, have you seen my wallet? I swear to God that it..."

Laney looked up just as Taylor pushed the door open and stepped inside. Raising her eyebrows, she smiled.

"Well, hello," she said.

Taylor froze in place. He could not believe what was standing in front of him. Delaney Reid, dripping wet and naked save the protection of a very small, very thin hotel towel. Pushing his hair back from his forehead, he tried not to be interested in the situation. He diverted his eyes away from her nervously but she was just standing there smiling at him, as if it were okay for him to see his brother's girlfriend half naked in his own bathroom.

“Uh... hi,” he said. “Are you... why are you here?” His voice cracked and he cleared his throat in order to make his nervous state not so painfully obvious.

“Bailey was in the bathroom and I needed to take a shower,” she said. “Zac said it was okay.” Taylor tried so hard to imagine Bailey standing before him in a towel. He wanted to hate himself for the failure that he was encountering.

“Oh, well, then... okay,” he said. “I’ll just... I’ll leave then. I think I remembered where I left my wallet and it’s not... it’s not in here.” He tried to move his feet backwards but they refused to grant him even that simple request.

“All right,” Laney said, and she laughed. Her towel slipped slightly and she reached up to hold it in place. She watched him with that terribly, endearing smile and she raised her eyebrows. “You’re welcome to leave anytime.”

“Oh... right,” he said, and fumbled backwards. Finally, when his feet communicate with his brain, they work on a delayed schedule. He nearly fell backwards as he left the bathroom and with flushed cheeks, he watched her shut the door.

*Stupid!* He thought as he smashed the heel of his hand into his forehead. He found his wallet near the kitchenette and hurried out of the room. He wasn’t sure where he was going but he didn’t want to face Laney again. Just as Taylor’s anger peaked, Zac waltzed out of the elevator in a rush.

“Zac!” Taylor cried and grabbed his arm in passing. “You let Laney take a shower in our bathroom?!” Zac looked up at him and pulled his arm away.

“Yeah,” he said. “Is she out already? Did you see her?” A certain amount of hope drained from Zac’s eyes and Taylor wished that his brother wasn’t such a horny human being. He was almost positive that it was his brother who he could blame for this whole debacle.

“Uh, yeah, I *saw* her!” he shouted. “And she was practically naked! You don’t leave a girl like that in a shower without putting up a warning sign first!” Zac stepped towards their hotel room and fished in his back pocket for the key.

“Sorry. Next time I’ll alert the media,” he said, as he tried the key. Taylor shook his head and walked towards the elevator angrily. “But come on, Taylor. After that you still don’t think that she’s hot?”

“ZAC!” Taylor yelled angrily as he turned around. Zac laughed and ducked into the room just as the door opened. Taylor imitated his feelings towards his brother by strangling the air and then turned back to the elevator.

*My family is fucking insane*, he thought as he pushed the button for the first floor. If anything, he could wait in the lobby for Bailey to pass through and then tell her he’d been waiting for her. At the beginning of his quest, before he’d lost his wallet, that is what he had been doing. He’d only been slightly distracted in the most monumental way.

## CHAPTER FOUR

“God, some of these girls act like it’s still 1997,” Delaney said later on that afternoon as she wrinkled her nose in distaste at the crowd of fans who had gathered around the tour bus from behind the tinted windows. “Look, they have flowers, and teddy bears...as if they have a chance with one of them.”

Bailey rolled her eyes as she continued digging through the twins’ diaper bags to make sure everything was in there before entering the venue. The less trips she had to make out to the bus, the better the day would be for her. “You can’t blame them for still having a little hope, Laney,” she said, trying to sound as pleasant as possible. “And what are you still doing in here? Jessica and Drea went inside with the merch to set up forty-five minutes ago.”

Tearing her eyes away from the girls, Laney turned them instead to Bailey. “And...?” she said, as if encouraging Bailey to finish her statement.

“*And...* don’t you think you should be helping them set up so you’re ready for tonight?” Bailey replied. “It’s better to help set up because then you know where everything is and it makes it go by quicker.”

“Why do I need to know where everything is?” Laney asked, jutting out one of her razor sharp hip bones and letting her hand settle on it. The way she phrased the question let Bailey know that she knew exactly what the answer was, she was simply daring Bailey to say it out loud.

“What did you think, you were just going to come on tour and watch every show from the VIP seats?” Bailey asked with a tight smile, attempting to remain cordial though she was finding it increasingly difficult to do so. “You’re selling merch, hun.”

“Oh really? And what exactly is it that *you* do?” Laney sneered.

“I watch the kids,” Bailey said with a shrug. “Drea loves meeting the fans, so she chooses to sell merch, and now that Jessica’s older, she does it too. They used to hire another girl to sell, but since they didn’t hire her this tour...well, I just assumed that you knew you’d be helping out.”

“Ugh, whatever,” Laney said, rolling her eyes and snatching up her large gold sequined purse. “Zac really should have prepared me for this shit. I don’t want to have to deal with all these crazy bitches all night.”

“You know, all these ‘crazy bitches’ are the only reason you’re here right now, so I’d do my best to be nice to them if I were you.”

Acting as though she hadn’t heard a word Bailey had said, Laney tied her long blonde hair into a ponytail at the nape of her neck and pulled it over her shoulder. Then she pulled her gigantic Chanel sunglasses, which seemed to be permanently attached to her head, over her eyes and straightened her short blue ruffled skirt. After smoothing lip gloss over her full, pink lips, she glanced over at Bailey. As though they hadn’t just nearly had a full-blown catfight, she smiled. “Are you coming inside too?”

Shaking her head, realizing she would probably never figure this girl out, Bailey sighed. “Yeah, I suppose. Do you mind carrying Aidan for me? I don’t like to let them walk because they usually run at every girl holding out a teddy bear to them.”

“Oh, so *that’s* what the teddy bears are for!” Laney giggled as though she had merely been joking a minute before when she had been making fun of the fans for having them. “Of course I don’t mind taking him! Come here, you little stud,” she said, holding her arms out to the toddler. Aidan accepted her embrace eagerly, and Laney settled him on her hip.

Bailey did the same with Arielle and slung their diaper bag onto her other shoulder. “If the fans try to give them anything, just take it, smile and say thanks, and keep moving. The idea is to let them have as little time to take a picture of them as possible.”

By the time the two girls had made it into the venue through the crowd of girls, each twin was clutching a stuffed animal, and Bailey and Laney were struggling to keep a hold of the several others tucked under their arms. Laney followed Bailey up to the greenroom and deposited Aidan before grudgingly heading back downstairs to help Jessica and Drea arrange the various tour merchandise. Once she was out of view, Bailey realized that defeating Laney felt surprisingly good.

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“Ugh, this is so *heavy*,” Laney said, dropping a box of tank tops on the table with a loud bang that echoed in the nearly empty music hall. “How do you guys do this and still have nails left?”

Drea laughed, not realizing how completely serious Laney was being. “You won’t be complaining when you have ridiculously toned arms at the end of the summer!”

Delaney had to withhold the disgusted look that threatened to come over her face at the thought of having big, gross muscles. “Ah, I bet,” she said with a forced smile, gingerly cutting the box tape with a pair of scissors and halfheartedly folding and stacking them behind the table. “Do you really enjoy doing this?” she asked Jessica skeptically when Drea ran off to find a missing box of necklaces.

Jessica looked up from organizing hoodies with surprise. “Um, yeah,” she said with a bright smile that showed off her perfectly white teeth. Her long blonde braid fell over her shoulder, and she tossed it back with a shake of her head. “It’s almost always an interesting experience.”

“If you say so,” Laney sighed, returning to her work.

By the time the doors opened and girls began streaming into the venue, Delaney had already decided this was not something she was going to enjoy doing nearly every day of the entire summer. She was sitting in a chair behind the merch table, filing her several chipped nails, when the first mob came. It seemed like suddenly there were over a million girls, pushing and shoving their way to the front of the merch table, all trying to buy up everything before the show started. Delaney glanced up carelessly, and returned to her nails as Jessica and Drea began grabbing up the items that the girls were shouting out that they wanted and taking wads of cash in return. “We could use a little help here,” Jessica said, trying to be polite as possible while bending over next to Delaney’s chair to locate an extra small hoodie.

With a huff, Delaney stood and went over to the side of the table where a heavysset girl was standing, looking too timid to ask Jessica or Drea for anything. “Can I help you?” Delaney asked in a bored tone, barely making eye contact with the girl.

“Um...yeah...I just want one of the T-shirts,” the girl practically whispered. “A medium.”

When Delaney took notice of her shirt, which was obviously homemade with the words, “MARRY ME ZAC!!” written across the front in black Sharpie, she narrowed her eyes a little but forced a smile. “A medium? Are you sure you won’t need a large?”

The girl’s eyes widened with surprise, and her mouth opened as though she was going to say something, but quickly snapped shut again before any words passed her lips.

“Never mind,” Delaney said with a roll of her eyes. She grabbed the shirt up from the pile behind her and shoved it towards the girl, taking her \$25 in exchange.

The stream of girls remained steady until that all too familiar rise in noise met her ears and she knew the boys were on stage. She longed to be out there, on the side of the stage watching them and knowing that the hundreds upon hundreds of girls out in the crowd were horribly jealous of her. She wanted them all to see her hovering just beyond the curtain, clapping and singing and having a great time, and she wanted them to all wish they were her. Instead, she was trapped behind the merchandise table straining to hear the songs over the sounds of screams and claps. “God, this is so boring,” she said, plopping down in her chair again when she knew Jessica and Drea didn’t need her help anymore.

Drea smiled at her, but it was a little more wary and much less genuine this time. “You’ll get used to it, Laney, don’t worry. I know it’d be a lot more fun to be out there, but everyone’s got a job, you know?”

A few songs into the set, Delaney and her moodiness were forgotten when Bailey brought Arielle and Aidan down from the greenroom and they ran around in the merch area, playing with Zoë, Mackenzie and Avery. Every now and then a girl or two would wander past them on their way to the bathroom, pointing and whispering to each other. Some of them actually approached the family, chatting with them and expressing their praises of the band, hoping to hear Bailey or Drea say, “Why don’t you come meet them after the show?” and walking off disappointed when instead they were simply told, “Well, that’s great! Thanks for coming to the show. It was nice meeting you!”

“I’m going to get something to drink,” Delaney said loudly when it was obvious that none of the fans were paying her any attention since they didn’t know who she was yet. Before any of them could say anything back, she hurried off in the direction of the bar on the balcony above the stage. After purchasing a diet Coke, she gently pushed her way through the crowd of fans only a few rows deep to the edge of the balcony where she had a completely unobstructed view of the band. As gorgeous as Zac looked with sweat pouring from his forehead and a grin on his face, the show stealer was always Taylor. He instantly caught her attention, and as she danced along to *Crazy Beautiful*, she thought of the redness that had come upon his cheeks when he had walked in on her that morning and the way he had been stumbling all over himself. She loved that she had such an amazing ability to make Taylor Hanson squirm.

It wasn’t until the show was nearly over that Delaney returned to the merch area. Bailey and the kids had disappeared, and only slightly annoyed looking Drea and Jessica remained stationed behind the table, awaiting the inevitable rush that would hit them at the show’s end. “Were did you run off to?” Drea asked, forcing a smile.

“I’m really, *really* sorry, I went to the bar and then I couldn’t figure out how to get back over here, and

then I got stuck in the crowd and the girls wouldn't move, and-

"Don't worry about it," Drea interrupted. "The point is, you're back. We just got a bit worried about you, is all."

"Sorry!" Delaney apologized, slipping behind the table with a smirk, the ease with which the lies flowed from her mouth amazing even herself.

By the time the chaos of the show had ended and she was on the bus, she collapsed across the couch with a huff. "That was exhausting!"

"I'll bet," Bailey said with a hint of sarcasm carrying a sleeping Aidan up the stairs of the bus. Outside the screams and shrieks of the girls waiting outside could be heard as Isaac, Taylor, and Zac signed autographs and took pictures.

Eventually Isaac came up the steps, followed shortly by Taylor, who took a seat next to Bailey in the booth and kissed her, then his sleeping nephew, and finally Zac trickled in last.

## CHAPTER FIVE

"What took you so long?" Laney whined as Zac dropped onto the couch beside her. Bailey rolled her eyes dramatically and pushed Laney and Zac's conversation aside as Taylor began speaking excitedly of the first show of the summer. "You're too nice to those girls. One day they're going to take advantage of you."

"That's the idea, isn't it?" Zac asked, with a grin. Laney shook her head and sent him a playful smile.

"My idea," she said, as she shifted her weight and straddled Zac's waist. He ran his hands around her small waist and kissed her lips eagerly. She brought her hands to his cheeks and kissed him back.

"So, tell me. How was your first show?" he asked, licking his lips. He shifted beneath her and rested his weight against the back of the couch. She leaned her chest and torso against him and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"It was good," she said, kissing his neck softly. She smiled and faced him again. "They put me on merchandise though. I make clothes, Zac. I don't sell them. Find something new for me to do." She brought her lips to the opposite side of his neck and kissed his skin softly. He would not be able to resist her.

"Like what?" he asked, breathlessly. She smiled against his skin and kissed his ear lobe gently.

"Something fun," she said. "Where I can show off my VIP necklace thingy."

"You can do that at the merch table, baby," he said, pushing his hands under her shirt. She kissed his lips and smiled.

"Yeah but then I have to talk to all of these terrible girls," she said. "I met this girl today who thought



you would marry her. She wasn't even worth being compared to me, baby. They're really not my favorite crowd. Maybe I could help Bailey with the twins. There *are* two of them."

At the mention of her name, Bailey looked up from Taylor and glanced over his shoulder. Zac and Laney were practically dry humping.

"Are you even wearing underwear?" Zac asked, moving his hand down to her ass. Laney reached behind her and pulled Zac's hand away from her skirt. He could have easily exposed her.

"A thong, yes, and are you even listening to me?" she asked. "I want to help Bailey with the twins."

Bailey's eyes narrowed and she nudged Taylor.

"I can't work with her," she whispered to him.

"Who?" he asked, looking down at his girlfriend. Bailey pointed over his shoulder in Laney's direction. She realized very quickly that it wasn't exactly a scene she wanted Taylor to see. He still upset her with the way that he looked at Laney from the corner of his eyes and how he went out of his way to avoid her as if he knew that she would distract him.

"Oh," Taylor said, and Bailey watched his eyes look over the couple precariously. He looked back at Bailey but his expression was questioning. His cheeks had reddened significantly. "Laney? You can't work with her? You don't though, baby."

"I know but she's asking Zac if he can arrange for her to help with the twins," Bailey whispered, pulling Taylor closer to her. "I will go crazy if she's around me that much." Taylor looked over Bailey's face and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's really not up to me," he said. "It's Ike and Drea's choice."

"You're not even going to try to convince them to keep her away?" Bailey asked dejectedly.

"Bailey, baby, I really don't see a problem," he said. "It's not like she's going to take the twins and run away with them. Maybe if you guys spend some more time together, you'll accept each other's differences and reconcile."

Bailey wanted to punch him. She was just angry now. Licking her lips, she shifted away from her boyfriend and looked over her shoulder.

"Would you guys mind?" she called. "There are children on this bus." Both Zac and Laney parted lips and looked in Bailey's direction. Laney giggled quietly and leaned in to kiss Zac once more before she crawled off his lap. Satisfied, Bailey turned forward. "Thank you!"

"Bailey..." Taylor chided. She looked at him angrily.

"Don't you even start," she said, her Oklahoma accent peeking through her speech.

“What?” Taylor asked, throwing his hands up in defense.

“You’ve had your eyes on her since the day that she showed up in your driveway! You’re supposed to be on *my* side, Taylor. Not hers,” she said, angrily. She didn’t care that Zac and Laney had just appeared at their side, Zac’s arms wrapped around Laney’s waist and his chin resting on her shoulder. She smiled down at them sweetly as if it were normal for her name to be featured in arguments.

“Yeah, he’s seen about as much of Laney as I have,” Zac laughed. Laney elbowed him in the stomach and rolled her eyes playfully.

“Zac, don’t bring that up. He’s already embarrassed enough as it is,” Laney said, shooting Taylor her winning smile. Taylor didn’t respond. He was burning red and staring at the table in front of him. Bailey’s eyes were burning into the side of his head, her glare strong enough to kill a small army.

“What are they talking about, *Taylor*?” she asked, bolding the sound of his name in order to accentuate her frustration with him. He sighed and sent a sideways glance to his brother.

“Taylor, walked into the bathroom while I was getting out of the shower this morning,” Laney said. “But it was a harmless situation, I assure you. Fortunately, I’d already wrapped my towel around everything that didn’t need to be seen.”

Bailey swallowed the scream that threatened to escape and she pushed Taylor aside. He slipped out of the booth and nearly knocked into Zac and Laney.

“Well, it’s good to know that my boyfriend is such an honest storyteller,” she said, remembering Taylor’s story about his morning. He’d told her that he’d been waiting for her in the lobby for almost an hour. She’d commented on his dedication and he’d kissed her and she believed every word. She left the booth and shoved past Taylor.

The three of them watched her disappear behind the curtain that concealed the four bunk beds. Zac and Laney were far too unwilling to care about their involvement and Taylor was too ashamed to make any further movements.

“Zac...” he said, and turned around to face his brother. Zac looked up to him with raised eyebrows.

“Yeah?” he asked.

“You’re an ass,” he said. “Thank you for ruining my life.” Taylor turned around and slowly trudged after Bailey, apologies slowly churning inside of his mind.

“You’re welcome,” Zac called, with a smile and Laney laughed as she slapped him.

“You’re so bad!” she said. He turned her around his arms and grinned.

“Only for you, baby.”

Taylor caught up with Bailey just as she was sharply flicking the red curtain of her bunk shut. “Bailey...baby, open the curtain and talk to me...please?” When it became obvious that she was

making no move to let him in, he pushed the curtain open himself with extreme caution, preparing himself for a fist to come flying at him. Instead, all he found was her back facing him. “Bailey...” He reached out and touched her shoulder, urging her gently to turn over and look at him. She jerked her arm roughly from his touch as if it had been white hot metal instead of his fingers. Sighing in defeat, he shut the curtain and crawled into the bunk above hers. Amid the sounds of Zac and Laney laughing and talking loudly in the front of the bus, he laid awake listening to the sound of Bailey’s quiet tears.

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“Bailey, *please* just listen to me!” Taylor called, practically running after Bailey as she weaved quickly through the hotel lobby carrying her luggage. They had just arrived in the next city, and Bailey still hadn’t lost the mask of anger she had been last seen with the night before. “Bailey!” He watched helplessly as he reached the elevator just as the doors were sliding closed, her finger holding down the button to close them so hard that her fingertip had blanched. “Fucking Zac, I swear to God...” he muttered, punching the up button to call the elevator until the light above the next one dinged and the doors opened.

When he reached her door, it was just about to close behind her, but he managed to get his foot in just before it shut, pinching his toes painfully. “Ugh, *fuck!*” he yelled, pulling the door open and hobbling into the room. Bailey was tossing clothes carelessly out of her suitcase, still not bringing her eyes to his. “Bailey, just let me talk to you-”

“Fine!” she yelled, whirling on her heel to face him. “What the fuck could you possibly have to say for yourself that I’d be interested in?”

“I swear to you, Bailey, *nothing* happened. It was nothing...” Now that he had begged her to listen to him all morning, he found himself at a complete loss for words. “It was just...”

“Explain this to me, Taylor,” she spat harshly. “If it was nothing, as you claim, why didn’t you just tell me? Why did you stand there and lie to my face if it was really nothing? Maybe it was just me, Taylor, but in the last five years, I could never bring myself to stand there, look you in the eyes, and completely lie to you the way you did to me.”

“I don’t know!” he said, the volume of his voice rising drastically. “Maybe because I knew you’d react like *this* even though *nothing happened!*”

Bailey crossed her arms over her chest, narrowing her eyes. “How the hell would you feel if my sister started bringing around this drop-dead gorgeous guy, and all I could do was stare at him and drool over him and take his side in everything? How would that make you feel, Taylor?”

“Bailey, Brooke’s only seventeen years old, that’s a little young, even for-”

“This is not a joke to me, Taylor!” Bailey yelled, throwing up her hands in complete exasperation. “The point is not whether or not it would happen, the point is, how would it make you *feel*? Can’t you even think about this like a fucking *adult* or do you have to try to joke your way out of everything?! God, I’m getting so *sick* of this!”

“Getting sick of what?” he asked, pushing his hand back through his hair.

“Of the way you act around her and look at her like...like...” Bailey groaned and fell heavily to the bed.

“Like what?” he asked softly, urging her to continue. He sat beside her gingerly, hoping she wouldn’t push him away physically as she was pushing him away emotionally.

She lifted her eyes from the thick carpet and turned them to his, staring at him dead on. “Like you used to look at me.”

“Bailey...” He reached out carefully and put his hand on her knee, squeezing it softly. “I could never look at her the same way I still look at you...” When her gigantic brown eyes glazed over with tears, he continued, a tiny smile coming over his face. “Baby, I can’t let you leave a room without watching you until you disappear. I can’t watch you let your hair down without my head becoming completely empty. I can’t...I couldn’t ever feel this way about anyone else but you.”

“Then why are you acting this way?” she asked, tears finding their way down her cheeks. “Why do you stare at her and blush when she comes around? I mean, are you attracted to her or something?”

“Baby, why would you think that?” he asked, moving closer and pulling her into his arms. He kissed the top of her head softly, deeply inhaling her familiar scent.

“Taylor, you haven’t even tried to have sex with me since we left your house...” she groaned.

Taylor touched her chin, tilting her face up to his so she could see his devilish grin. “I think I can definitely do something about that...” He brought his lips to hers, kissing her tenderly. It took her a second to respond, but as soon as she did, she responded as eager as ever.

No sooner had he guided her on her back, pushing her piles of clothes away carelessly, when the door clicked open and Laney burst in with a smile plastered across her face. “What are you guys-” Laney stopped short when she saw them on the bed, completely absorbed in each other.

“Laney?” Taylor called, detaching himself from Bailey’s lips and looking over his shoulder towards her.

“Yeah?” she asked, her face contorting with confusion.

“Get out.”

As Taylor turned back to Bailey, who was grinning mischievously beneath him, Laney huffed and pulled the door shut with herself on the other side of it. Her steps were quick and sharp as she stalked off down the hall to the room Zac and Taylor were sharing. “Zac!” she yelled, banging loudly on the door until he pulled it open. As soon as he did, she pushed past him and inside without another word, and plopped down on the bed with another loud huff.

“Laney?” he said cautiously, letting the door swing closed and taking a seat beside her. “What’s the matter?”

“Your brother and Bailey are having sex in my room,” she said, her face wrinkled with disgust. Zac

naturally assumed it was disgust simply because of what was going on, but what made Laney ill was the fact that she wasn't the one in Taylor's arms. As much as she truly liked Zac, there was something so addicting about imagining herself with Taylor and wanting to be the one he loved. "I can't believe the nerve of them."

"Laney, I'm pretty sure we've had sex plenty of places that other people would be not so excited about..." he said with a laugh. "In fact..." Zac tucked her hair back behind her ear and let his lips touch her neck seductively. "We could do our own nervy activities in here while they're busy in there..."

Groaning, Laney put her hands on his chest and pushed him away. "Ugh, Zac...not now. I'm not in the mood."

"Fine," Zac sighed, letting his forehead fall to her shoulder dejectedly. "If you change your mind, please let me know."

Delaney forced a smile at his joke, and then tuned out his voice as he continued talking to her while unpacking his clothes. After a few minutes of thinking, she jumped to her feet and said, "I'll be right back."

Zac looked over at her startled, a little wounded that she had obviously not been paying him an ounce of attention as he talked about all of the activities they had upcoming in the next few days. "Oh...okay, baby. I'll come get you later and we can go get something to eat."

"Yeah, sure," Delaney said, practically waving him off as she hurried out of the room and down the hall to the room Isaac and Drea inhabited. Putting on her best smile, she knocked sharply on the door and waited for someone to answer. When it swung open and revealed Isaac, she said cheerfully, "Hey, Ike! Is Drea in here? I want to talk to her about a little change in my job description."

## CHAPTER SIX

"Dre, Laney wants to talk to you. She's at the door," Isaac said, as he reentered the bathroom. "Why she thought we'd be up at this hour, I have no idea."

Drea looked up from the bathtub where she was scrubbing her children and blew a strand of her long blonde hair from her eyes. She smiled at her husband's less than thrilled expression. As a result of Arielle's latest ailment and Zac and Laney's interesting ability to stay awake all night, he'd slept no more than three hours and Drea knew better than anyone that Isaac was useless unless he'd had a full night's rest.

"Well, let her in," Drea said, and laughed. "I'll be out in just a minute." She turned her back as he returned to the room and quickly but carefully, she finished washing the twins. One at a time she lifted them out of the tub, dried them with a towel and let them run naked. Pushing her hair into a ponytail, she followed.

"Oh my God! They're so adorable!" Laney cooed and she laughed as Aidan and Arielle ran circles in the nude. Isaac sighed and simply snatched up his son as he chased after his sister. Drea smiled to Laney and passed her husband as he wrangled Arielle.

“They definitely have their moments,” Drea responded as she stepped up to her. Laney smiled and pushed her hair behind her ear. She smiled and rested her hands on her hips. “So, what’s up?”

“Oh right. I have a proposition for you,” Laney said and she smiled as she explained her newfound revelation. The girl really was very beautiful. Of course, it was inevitable with the way Zac chose his girlfriends. He really was rather shallow but Laney was not like any of the others that had filtered through Zac’s hands. She had an honest-to-God, genuine smile that set her apart from the pinched, stuck up girls of Zac’s past. Drea noticed, of course, that the girl only chose to send this smile to anyone with Hanson attached to their first name and occasionally to those who were attached to a Hanson family hand. After her first, professional experience with her, Drea had taken a few points away after Laney had spent the entire night bitching and moaning. Drea was not one to hold a grudge but she wasn’t quite sure that she could spend another three months listening to Laney complain about the smell of new t-shirts and how the posters gave her paper cuts. Laney’s proposal to help Bailey with the kids was perfect.

“Sure. That sounds like a really good idea and I’m sure that Bailey would love some help,” she said. “I’ll have Avery cover for you behind the table so, if you feel comfortable, you can start tonight.”

Laney grinned and threw her arms around Drea. “Thank you!” she screeched and Drea laughed as she returned the hug. Over her shoulder she could see Isaac watching skeptically as he finished diapering the second child.

“Of course, honey,” Drea said as they drew apart. She pushed a fly away strand from her eyes and smiled. “I’ll let Bailey know of the arrangement and she’ll fill you in with the details of the job. They’re not hard children to look after. Aidan, maybe sometimes but Arielle is a dream come true.”

Laney thanked her five times more and then Drea sent her out of the room using Isaac’s need for sleep as an excuse. Excited about her new job prospect, Laney hurried back to Zac’s door. She knocked excessively and Zac threw the door open, his eyebrows raised.

“What do you want, woman?!” he shouted and Laney swooped under his arm and into the room. She smiled back at him as he shut the door.

“Guess what?” she asked, as she backed towards the bed. Zac shook his head and stepped after her.

“You’ve seduced the house keeper and you’re leaving me to be with her?” he asked, a playful smile crossing his face. Laney laughed and shook her head as she sat down.

“No, definitely not,” she said, and grinned as Zac sat on the bed and leaned over her. He brought his hand to her cheek and kissed her gently.

“Then what? I really have no idea,” he said, smiling. She brushed the back of her hand against his cheek and then rested it against her outer thigh gently.

“I don’t have to work with the merchandise anymore,” she said. “I’m going to be helping Bailey with the kids. No more sweaty, smelly girls depending on me.”

“Oh, so you prefer to have smelly children needing you then?” he asked. She laughed and kissed him.

She rubbed her hand against his leg and smiled against his lips.

“I’m your girlfriend aren’t I?” she asked. Zac laughed and kissed her again.

“When you insult me, it only turns me on,” he said, pushing her back onto the bed. She had no choice but to comply. She rested one hand against his side and the other at his neck. She shook her head and kissed him gently.

“I told you that I’m not having sex with you right now,” she said. Zac kissed her again and smiled against her lips.

“Why not?” he asked. Laney pushed him off of her and he rolled over onto the bed at her side. She sat up and looked down at him. She rested her hand on his stomach and leaned over to kiss him.

“Because I don’t want to,” she said. There really was no fun in sex if no one else knew that is was happening. “Save your energy, baby. We’ve got plenty of time.”

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Pulling a comb through her dark hair, Bailey ignored Laney as she waltzed into their hotel room. She was quiet, which surprised Bailey because only three hours ago she had kicked Laney out of the room so that she could have sex with her boyfriend. Surely Laney would have one or two, maybe even ten, words to say about the incident. But as Bailey watched Laney in the mirror, she didn’t even glance in her direction. She flittered about, discarding shopping bags on her bed and sifting through the closet. Just as Bailey opened her mouth to say hello, Laney turned towards her with a smile. Embarrassed to be caught watching her, Bailey turned her eyes back to her own reflection and stared at herself as her cheeks flushed a bright shade of red.

“Bailey, I’m so glad that you’re in here,” Laney said, pushing a strand of her blonde hair behind her ear. Now that she’d acknowledged her, Bailey turned her eyes back to the girl. She was standing at the foot of her bed, with one hand on her hip and the other brushing through her hair. With her fashion designer jeans and rich tan, she looked as if she’d just stepped out of the page of a magazine.

“You *are*?” Bailey asked, turning in her chair. She faced Laney, curious as to why she was suddenly so interested in her presence. Laney nodded and moved closer to her. She sat at the foot of Bailey’s bed and crossed one long leg over the other.

“Yes,” Laney said, smiling. “I’ve been dying to talk to you all day.”

“You *have*?” Bailey responded, skeptical.

“Yes!” Laney said, laughing. “Why is that so hard to believe?” Bailey refused to answer her question and just sent her half of a smile. Laney took it as an answer and reached her hands out to Bailey’s knees.

“We’re going to be working together!” she said. “I talked to Drea this morning and she’s agreed to let me help you with the kids. I don’t have what it takes to sell merchandise but I know that I will have so much fun with the twins.” Bailey raised an eyebrow and tried not to look too disappointed. How was

she supposed to spend the next three months with Laney at her side the entire time?

“Really?” Bailey asked, feigning interest. “That’s really... really cool. Have you worked with kids before? I mean, do you have experience in babysitting or any kind of child care?”

“Well, yeah, I’m not completely retarded,” she said. “I did a lot of babysitting in junior high and I do have cousins. It’s not my abilities that I’m worried about.”

“Oh? What *are* you worried about?” she asked, carefully.

“All of the time that we’ll spending together,” Laney said. “I mean, we’ll be together every show because really, you can’t have one twin without the other.” Bailey was confused as to where Laney was taking this conversation. She seemed excited but at the same, she was addressing her fears. Girls like Laney were not afraid of anything.

“I want to apologize to you before we go into this,” Laney said, a smile still playing on her lips. Bailey had not expected those words to leave her mouth. She raised her eyebrows and took a deep breath.

“Apologize? For what?” Bailey asked.

“Well, I can’t help but feel like I’m at blame for what happened between you and Taylor last night,” she said. “Obviously, the two of you worked it out on your own but I don’t want you guys to feel like you have to make up every time that I’m around.”

“Oh... well...” Bailey stuttered, embarrassed that Laney actually brought up her knowledge of Bailey’s previous engagement with Taylor. “Laney, don’t blame yourself for our problems. Really. Taylor and I have been together a long time and we have arguments that... that really happen for no reason at all. When you’ve been with Zac for a while longer, you’ll know what I mean.”

She was trying so hard not to draw attention to the real problem. She could not tell Laney that she was ruining her time here on the tour. She could not tell Laney that she was unwelcome because she had the perfect body, a clear complexion, and a gorgeous smile. She couldn’t tell Laney that she disliked her because of the way that her boyfriend looked at Laney when he thought Bailey wasn’t watching. He’d redeemed himself fully this morning but Bailey couldn’t ignore the fact that the fear still resided in the back of her mind.

“No, Bailey, I feel terrible about what happened yesterday,” she said. “As far as the whole shower incident is concerned, I didn’t say anything to you about it because I didn’t see it as a problem. Taylor did not see anything that he wasn’t supposed to see and I made sure of that. If I had known that he looked at it as something you would’ve disapproved of, I would have said something to you as soon I as returned to the room.”

Bailey was surprised. Laney’s apology seemed genuine and true. Was she genuinely sorry? She sounded true but could Bailey trust her? Would life be easier if she accepted the apology or would she regret it later? Perhaps Laney was simply trying to work her charms to get on Bailey’s good side. As the days progressed, would Bailey only disappoint her again? Would she continue to ruin Bailey’s love life or would she leave it alone?



“What boy wouldn’t falter at the sight of a half naked girl?” Bailey asked, with a laugh. She figured it would be best to take Laney as a friend. If she were going to spend the next three months with the girl, she wanted to believe that she was not a threat. “It really wasn’t a problem. The night had been long and everyone was tired. It’s really hard to adjust to a tour. There has to be an allowance for a few arguments... even between friends.” She sent Laney a smile and the girl grinned back at her.

“Then you’re accepting my apology?” she asked, pushing her hair behind her ear.

“Yeah, I guess that I am,” she said. Laney reached forward and hugged Bailey tightly. Laughing, Bailey returned the hug and smiled as they drew apart.

“I’m glad because I have something for you,” she said, and stood up quickly. Bailey watched as Laney hurried to her closet and began sifting through the clothes that she’d just recently deposited. Bailey stood up and stepped towards her. She stood on her tip toes and looked over Laney’s shoulder, curious as to what she was planning.

Spinning on her heel, Laney smiled as she outstretched her hands to Bailey. In each hand she held an article of clothing that Bailey had only seen in the pages of the fashion magazines. Attached to one hanger was a short, black leather miniskirt and on the other rested a dark green, silk halter blouse with a dangerously low neckline. The straps faded from green to black and came together into a twisted braid that stretched to the bottom of the blouse and wrapped around the front of the shirt.

“Tonight, we’re going out and you’re wearing this,” she said. With eyes wide, Bailey laughed and shook her head.

“No, I’m not,” she said, reaching out to take the shirt. The fabric was soft and cool to the touch. “As beautiful as this is, Laney, I’m not wearing it. I can’t wear this. Or that.” She pointed to the skirt and Laney smiled.

“Oh come on. I wear stuff like this all the time,” she said. “It’s just one night and it’s never been worn. I jeopardized my finals to make that shirt, Bailey. You have to wear it.”

“You made this?” Bailey gasped, glancing to the shirt again. It was so intricate and perfect and she could hardly believe that someone as impatient and confusing as Laney could make something so incredible. Laney set the skirt onto the bed and stepped forward. She took the shirt from Bailey and smiled.

“Yeah,” she said. “Aside from my jeans, I make almost all of my clothes. This is my latest creation and I want you to wear it. Taylor won’t know what hit him when he sees you in this. We can do up your hair and put on some make-up. We’ll just have a girl’s night out. It will be fun.”

Bailey turned her eyes to Laney. She was smiling at her, her eyes emblazoned with hope in Bailey’s answer. There was so much about the girl that Bailey still needed to know. Who was she? No one really knew. Zac hadn’t given them any information about her except that she was his new girlfriend. No one knew what her parents did or how her life was growing up. Maybe if Bailey succumbed to this strange, accommodating side of Laney, she could find the answers to these questions and figure out who Delaney Reid really is.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Taylor found himself grinning happily when Bailey divulged her plans that night to spend it with Delaney. “Aw, baby, I’m glad you two are finally getting along,” he said, pulling her into his arms and rocking her back and forth.

“I swear, it’s like she’s got a million different personalities sometimes,” Bailey laughed, turning her face into his chest. “Hopefully this one sticks around for awhile, at least. I nearly had a heart attack when she walked in here and straight apologized...it was *very* unexpected.”

“Maybe you just misinterpreted her actions...” Taylor suggested softly.

“I hope that’s what it is. Because I definitely like this Laney a *lot* better.”

Meanwhile, as Laney was disclosing their plans for the night in Taylor and Zac’s room, Zac’s expression was not nearly as excited as Taylor’s was. “A whole night without you?” he whined, setting aside his lap top and pulling her into his lap. “What am I supposed to do?”

“I don’t know, hang out with your brothers? Bond with your niece and nephew? Take a nap so you’ll have tons of energy for whatever I decide to do to you when I get back?” Delaney wiggled her eyes suggestively, letting her thick bangs fall coyly over her eyes the way he loved.

“Mmm, I like that last idea,” Zac said, bringing a hand up to her neck and guiding her face to his for a tender kiss.

“What are you doing on the computer?” she asked when they’d broken apart after several intense kisses.

“Just putting up a message on the site for the members,” he shrugged with a loud yawn.

“Do you mind if I check my email and stuff on here?” she asked, sliding off of his lap and onto the bed.

Zac shook his head, stretched his arms over his head, and stood up. “Nah, I’m going to take a shower anyway. Knock yourself out, baby.” He leaned over and kissed her again before grabbing a pair of clean boxers and heading into the bathroom.

Only when she heard the water crank on and the sound of the shower door closing did Delaney put the computer in her lap and begin typing in the address of various Hanson message boards she remembered visiting years ago in hopes of finding some pictures of herself. Bailey had alerted her that the idea was to get inside without the fans being able to take too many pictures of the twins, but she couldn’t help but entertain the idea of how thrilling it would be to find pictures of herself and see what everyone had to say about her.

After a few minutes of searching, she finally found what she was looking for. She found a post someone named taysbaybeegurl had made displaying several pictures of her hurrying into the venue with Aidan on her hip and a few of Bailey and Arielle. Underneath the pictures it said, “whose that gurl holdin aidan?” Most of the replies explained her only as the “new merch girl” and some even included

how rude she had been to them at the merch table the night before. She couldn't help but giggle as she actually recalled some of them, impressed with herself for coming up with such clever things to say to them. But eventually, she got tired of seeing that no one had realized her much more significant role, so she identified herself as a guest and clicked to leave a response to the original message. "it's his gf," she typed in simply and submitted. By the time she had read a few more threads and returned to the message, there were several replies, most of them calling her a liar, but some asking questions and requesting details. She answered them all eagerly, hoping it would get her more attention from the fans for the rest of the tour.

When she heard the water being turned off in the bathroom, she quickly closed the website and deleted it from the history, closing up the laptop just as Zac exited the bathroom in his boxers. "You know, I think I'm going to go ahead and start getting ready for tonight," Delaney said, tucking her long hair behind her ears as she stood up. "I'll come tell you bye before we leave though."

Just as Zac opened his mouth to tell her she could shower in his bathroom, she covered his lips with hers in a quick kiss and hurried out of the door. "Okay, see you then," he mumbled, pulling his hands through his wet hair and wondering what on earth could be making Delaney act so weird.

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It was nearing ten o'clock when the girls were finally near finished getting ready. "Just come out and show us!" Laney was yelling into the bathroom where Bailey refused to come out after going in to change into the clothes Delaney had given her.

"Yeah, come on, baby, I want to see you before you go out," Taylor encouraged.

"I'm *not* coming out in this!" Bailey yelled back. "Taylor, get me a pair of jeans."

"At least come out and get them yourself so we can see you before you change!" Laney answered, winking at Taylor.

"Ugh...Fine!" Bailey groaned. The door opened slowly and she stepped out cautiously, digging her toes into the thick carpet. She had never felt more uncomfortable in her life.

Taylor's eyes popped open at the sight of her. The miniskirt fell in exactly the right place on her slender hips, accentuating her legs in a way he had never seen before with any of her other clothes. The emerald top clung to her breasts perfectly, leaving little to the imagination while still looking tasteful. "Oh my god..." he said slowly, his eyes roaming over her from head to toe once again. "You look *gorgeous*, Bailey."

"I look ridiculous," she said with a sigh. "I'm taking this off."

"Baby, why do you think you look ridiculous?" Taylor said. He crossed over to her and put his hands on her waist, lowering his face so that he could see her eyes. "You look fucking *hot*." His lips curled up in a smile when the corners of her mouth began twitching. "Just go out, have a great time, and you'll never have to wear it again if you don't want to."

Bailey rolled her eyes and sighed. "Fine..."

“Oh, I’m so glad!” Laney exclaimed from behind the couple as they embraced. “Now get your shoes on so we can get out of here.”

After Taylor had kissed Bailey goodbye and Laney had given Zac a hurried farewell, the two girls made their way down to the lobby to wait for the cab they had called.

The night was clear and beautiful with barely a hint of humidity in the air. The inky sky was dotted with bright, silver stars, and the bustling sounds of the city’s nightlife echoed around them. Bailey hugged her arms across her chest, feeling as though every person that passed them in the street was staring at her and seeing everything her outfit covered. Meanwhile Laney was beside her, looking completely comfortable in even less clothing. When the cab finally pulled in front of the hotel and they slid into the back seat, Laney grabbed Bailey’s arm and excitedly shrieked, “Tonight is going to be so much fun!”

A little over two hours later, Bailey was rolling her eyes as she recalled Delaney’s words from the cab. She definitely didn’t consider standing in the middle of a packed club, her head pounding harshly in her head in time with the deafening music, and trying to keep a drunk Laney on her feet so she wouldn’t get trampled, a fun night. Laney had tried unsuccessfully all night to get Bailey to let loose and drink, but watching Laney make a fool out of herself by throwing her arms around random guys and dancing as though every muscle in her body had turned to mush didn’t make getting drunk look very appealing. Bailey wished she had convinced Laney to turn their “girls night out” into a couple’s night, because she was sure she would have had much more fun dancing and drinking with Taylor and leaving a smashed Laney to be Zac’s responsibility than she was having right now.

“Don’t you wanna dance?” Laney asked, her words slurred and her breath rank with alcohol as she wobbled on her feet beside Bailey.

“No, thanks,” Bailey snapped, grabbing for Laney’s elbow as she nearly hit the ground. “Laney, maybe we should go-”

“No fucking way!” Laney yelled with a loud, obnoxious laugh. “I’m having the time of my fucking life. Quit being such a fucking prude, Bailey!” She latched onto the arm of a guy passing and was soon grinding with him on the dance floor.

Bailey sighed heavily in frustration, pushing off another drunk guy who was trying to coax her out onto the floor to dance. It seemed as though every time she decided to give Delaney another chance, she did something else to negate it and make her want nothing to do with her anymore. She had to admit that even though she was annoyed with the way Laney was behaving, she didn’t feel as though she was trying to sabotage her and her relationship with Taylor like she had since the minute Delaney arrived. At least there was a bit of solace in that.

She let Laney continue her wild fun a little while longer before dragging her outside and flagging down a cab. Laney continued to talk incoherently throughout the entire ride back to the hotel, and Bailey had to struggle to keep her from falling as they walked into the building. She flashed the overnight desk clerk an apologetic look as Laney drunkenly yelled and laughed at furniture and people as they made their way through the lobby and up the elevator to the room. No sooner had Bailey slid the card key into the lock and pushed their hotel room door open when Laney moaned, “I think I’m gonna puke,” and clapped her hand over her mouth.

“Not here, you’re not!” Bailey exclaimed, practically dragging the limp girl into the bathroom. Laney made it as far as the sink before she began vomiting heavily. Bailey quickly turned on the faucet to rinse the sink and held her long hair back and out of her face.

When it seemed as though her vomiting had subsided, Laney slid down to the floor, pressing her cheek onto the mercifully cold tile floor. “I feel like shit,” she groaned, hugging her arms around her stomach.

“I would be too, if I drank like I was a 200 pound man,” Bailey said, wetting a washrag and draping it over her forehead. “You certainly can’t hold your alcohol, Delaney Reid.” After helping her brush her teeth and change into pajamas, Bailey assisted Laney into her bed, and the drunk girl was soon fast asleep. Sighing, Bailey pulled her clothes, heavily drenched with the acrid scent of cigarettes and garbage, and tossed them to the floor, eagerly awaiting a hot shower and her comfortable bed. “If I had known I’d be babysitting a twenty-year-old in addition to two toddlers, I’d have asked them to pay me,” she mumbled to herself before stepping into the bathroom and closing the door.

The next morning, she was awoken by the delightful sounds of Delaney puking in the bathroom. Bailey opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling, wishing she had a hardened enough heart not to care about Laney and go back to sleep. But her nurturing nature kicked in, and she rolled out of bed with a sigh, heading into the bathroom to see what she could do to help. After getting Laney a glass of water, Bailey leaned against the counter, crossed her arms over her chest and looked down at her. “I guess I don’t need to ask how you’re feeling this morning...”

“What the *hell* did I do last night?” Laney asked miserably.

“You drank, you grinded on random guys, drank some more, and acted completely obnoxious,” Bailey answered.

“Oh God,” Laney moaned, dropping her face to her hands. “I always get the worst hangovers.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t drink so much then,” Bailey replied wryly.

“I totally fucked up, didn’t I?” Laney uncovered her face and looked up at Bailey, her face drooping visibly with disappointment. “I wanted us to go out and do something fun and have a great time together, and I fucked up by acting like a complete idiot...I’m really sorry, Bailey.”

Two apologies from Delaney Reid in two days were almost enough to make Bailey have a heart attack in surprise. After a few seconds of silence, Bailey shrugged. “It’s no big deal, Laney. You don’t have to be sorry.”

“No, I do. Because I really want us to be friends, and getting drunk and acting like an idiot isn’t the way to go about it...” Laney insisted. “Oh God...” And suddenly she was getting sick again, and all Bailey could do was shake her head and do her best to help her feel better.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Zac slipped Laney’s VIP lanyard over her head and pulled her hair out of its grasp. It cascaded over her drooping shoulders and brushed her shoulder blades gently. Laney looked up at him with sad, pitiful

eyes.

“I know you want to but it’s your first day on the job and you can’t back out of it,” he said, running his hands down her arms. He took her hands into his and lifted them to his shoulders. She stepped into him and he kissed her lips gently.

“I feel like someone took a hammer to my head,” Laney said, as she rested her head on his shoulder and held her arms tightly around his neck. Zac laughed and slipped his arms around her thin waist. At the front of the bus, Drea was parting with Isaac and was handing her children over to Bailey. Zac could hear Drea asking for Laney, wondering why she wasn’t ready to take the hand of one of her twins.

“I know, baby, and that’s what happens when you get hammered,” he said. “You pay for it. Now come on, let’s go.” He turned her around and walked her towards the front of the bus. Drea smiled as they stepped into the room and she lifted Arielle into her arms.

“There you are,” Drea said, as she approached. Laney managed the most pathetic smile Zac had ever seen and he rolled his eyes and laughed as he let her go. Drea transferred Arielle into Laney’s arms. Laney took her reluctantly but Arielle settled easily at her hip. “I’ve got to run. We’re running behind on set up and I’m already late as it is. You guys have fun!” Laney and Zac watched Drea disappear out of the bus as Bailey returned with Aidan attached to her hand.

“Zachary, you’re supposed to be inside!” she chided, as soon as she saw him standing there with Laney. “I thought you’d left already. Soundcheck!” Zac laughed at Bailey’s response to his presence and smiled.

“Well, they can’t have a sound check without me so I guess they’ll have to wait,” he said. Bailey narrowed her eyes and Zac put up his hands in defense. “Another thirty seconds, at least.” He kissed Laney goodbye and quickly exited the bus. The sound of a thousand screams echoed from outside the bus. Laney cringed.

“Oh make it stop,” she muttered and Bailey shook her head as she lifted Aidan into her arms.

“You’re still feeling it?” she asked, as she leaned over the table and collected the diaper bag. She pulled it over her opposite shoulder and glanced back to Laney who’s green tinted face told her everything that she needed to know. “Well, we’ll just make a run for it and get you some water once we’re inside.” Laney nodded and followed Bailey’s lead.

The two girls hurried out of the bus but with the weight of a two year old weighing heavy on her side, Laney found it hard to be quick. What seemed like a hundred smiling faces called out to her, questioning her about her relationship with Zac. Laney ignored them by pulling her sunglasses over her face. By the time they reached the back door into the venue, she was out of breath.

“How do you they know that you’re with Zac?” Bailey asked curiously as they made their way towards the stage. Hardly feeling enthused to stir up any drama, Laney shrugged her shoulders as she replaced her sunglasses on the top of her head.

“Who knows?” she asked. “Maybe they saw us making out.” Ahead of her, Bailey laughed.

“Yeah, well, that will give it away,” she said, as the girls made their way to the green room to settle in.

Two hours, one sound check, and half a concert later, Laney realized that she didn’t mind babysitting so much. She’d never really liked children, especially small ones but Aidan and Arielle were not difficult children to manage. Of course, Laney never had to handle them as a team. She tried to keep her options open but she usually found herself wrangling Arielle into her arms. Bailey seemed happy to take responsibility for Aidan and didn’t complain. The two girls kept the children within the walls of the green room and opted to watch the concert over the TV in the corner of the room. Aidan fell asleep and Arielle followed soon after. Bailey wasn’t surprised when Laney fell asleep soon after.

“She’s been out since MMMBop,” she said to Zac, as he returned from the stage after the end of the show. Isaac had stayed behind, intent on waiting for Drea to finish her sales. Taylor filtered into the room behind his mother and two youngest siblings.

“I’ll get her back to the bus,” Zac said and smiled as he stepped up to Laney. Bailey watched as he tried to rouse her and then turned to Taylor with a smile. She pulled herself off of the couch and stepped up to him.

“Ew, you’re all sweaty,” she said, as she kissed him. Taylor laughed.

“Well, yeah,” he said, smiling. “You try shaking your ass with one hundred other people in the room.” He grabbed a hold of Bailey and together they stepped aside to let Zac pass by with Laney clinging to him, still half asleep.

“You need a shower,” Bailey said, and smiled. Taylor grinned and kissed her gently.

“Well, I think I could convince Zac to keep Laney with him tonight,” he said, with a sly smile and found Bailey’s hand with his. “And you can shower with me.” Her flushed cheeks told Taylor that she would consent with his plan.

Back at the hotel, everything went as planned. Laney stayed with Zac and Taylor went next door to spend the night with Bailey. The remaining family members surrendered to their own rooms and the night carried on as usual. By the next morning, all fourteen members of the Hanson party were rested and ready to carry on with their travels. Walker, Diana, and their four youngest children separated to their own, separate tour bus and the brothers and their various guests and offspring retreated to their own bus. The trip from San Francisco to Sacramento was no more than an hour and a half drive but everyone was more than willing to continue their relaxation period, no matter how short the time period.

“They must have been up all night,” Laney said, as she absently watched Taylor and Bailey’s sleeping forms. They were stretched out over the couch in the lounge, Bailey rested over Taylor’s thin body, her head rested against his chest and turned towards the wall. Taylor had one arm draped over his girlfriend and the other hanging lazily over the side of the couch. Laney sighed softly and wished that it wasn’t so hard to fake interest in the boy. She turned back to Zac just as he rolled his eyes. She shifted her weight in the vintage arm chair that had been pushed up against the wall and stabilized.

“What was that look for?” she asked, raising one eyebrow. Zac was slouching at the far end of the opposite couch, his eyes watching the TV lazily. They had put in one of Taylor’s latest arrivals from Netflix and for a romantic comedy, it was hardly even entertaining.

“What look? I didn’t give you any particular look,” he said, defensively. “Why do you care if they were up all night or not?” She turned her eyes to him, curious as to where his hostile attitude was coming from.

“I was only making an observation, Zac. Chill,” she said, lifting herself up and folding her legs beneath her.

“And I was only asking a question,” he responded. She watched him as he sat there, his eyes only half interested in the movie. She had disappointed him the night before. She’d led him on and made him believe that she would have sex with him and then halfway through the undressing, she’d changed her mind and told him that she’d rather just go back to bed. He’d been bitter with her ever since.

Sighing heavily, Laney pulled herself off of the chair and pushed her hair from her face.

“I’m going to nap in my bunk for the rest of the drive,” she said, with her back to him. She could feel his eyes turn to her. He was watching her go. He didn’t say anything else and as she stepped into the curtained hallway that housed the four individual bed spaces, she could hear Isaac and Drea’s voices drifting quietly from the separate room in the back of the bus. As she crawled into her bunk and pulled the curtain shut over her saddened face, Laney couldn’t help but pout. Nothing was going as she’d wanted it to. Her plans had backfired. One missed step and too many drinks later and Laney had ruined it. Despite all of her many interferences, Taylor and Bailey were obviously closer than Laney wanted them to be. She’d only apologized to Bailey in hopes that she would grow immune to Laney’s trickery. The apology had worked because now Bailey actually liked her but she left no room for Laney to step in and shake things up with Taylor. And not only was Taylor no longer paying attention to her, Zac was at odds with her too. Hopefully, by the time they reached Sacramento, Laney could change their minds and turn a few heads.

## CHAPTER NINE

Laney balanced Aidan on her hip and pushed her opposite hand inside of her purse. Her cell phone rang from within. She’d ignored it the first time but whoever it was that had decided to call her was intent on reaching her. Aidan squirmed in her arms, eager to be set free. The circumstances of the situation were unfortunate. She wanted to put him down but no more than twenty five feet away stood a horde of flash happy fan girls with flushed cheeks and hopeful dreams. They would jump at the chance to snatch a Hanson child from the streets. As she pulled her cell phone free of her purse, she scanned the path ahead of her. She watched as Bailey disappeared behind the stage door, Arielle safe in her arms.

“Fuck,” she muttered, as she adjusted Aidan once more and brought her phone to her ear. She accepted the call and answered anxiously.

“Hello?” she asked irritated.



“Delaney, honey, it’s mom.”

Behind her sunglasses, Laney rolled her eyes and leaned back against the bus. Aside from the desperate squeals and avid chatter, she could hear the shutters of their cameras as they snapped pictures in her direction.

“Mother,” she said. “Can I call you back later?”

“Why, Delaney? You haven’t called me once since you left three weeks ago. I would like to talk to my daughter every once in a while,” she said. “It’s my day off and I would appreciate it if you would give me a moment of your time.”

“You sound like a telemarketer, mom,” she said, and turned her back to the fans. Aidan’s face twisted into an expression of frustration and he attempted to push away from her. She tightened her hold on him and sighed. “Would it be possible for me to give you a moment of my time... tomorrow?”

“Delaney Kayann, no! What on earth could you possibly doing at that... that fashion school that you would not have time to talk to your mother? Answer me that,” she said. At the close of her mothers question, Aidan whined audibly and his face contorted into an expression of discomfort. He screeched in her ear and she sighed.

“We’re working on children’s clothes,” she said, as she lowered Aidan to the ground. She kept a hold of his hand and didn’t let go as he wiggled and squirmed. “Designing and stitching. And we have real life models.”

“They’re making you *baby sit*?” she asked, as if it were the most lowly thing her daughter could have been exposed to. “Good lord, Delaney. You should have taken the internship with Versace. Why you wanted to work for an institute, I’ll never know. How are things going aside from child rearing?”

Delaney tried to remember what she’d told her mother. She’d never introduced her to Zac and she’d been able to keep her relationship with him away from her mother. At Zac’s request for Laney’s presence on the tour, she knew that her mother would never allow her to spend the whole summer sleeping on a bus with rock stars. So she’d simply told her a few lies and she’d been able to convince her parents that she was spending the summer at an elite fashion institute in New York courtesy of a college scholarship. They’d ate up every word and she was able to leave them behind.

“Nothing really,” Delaney said, and stood up straight as Zac came shoveling out of the stage door. Screams erupted from the group of girls and they pushed forward. Security guards working for the venue pushed forward and blocked them from advancing on the couple.

“Laney, what’s going on?” Zac asked, as he rushed in. He scooped Aidan into his arms and looked back at her past a curtain of his shaggy, blonde hair. His face was dripping with sweat and she suspected that he’d just finished the sound check.

“Hold on,” Laney said, into the mouthpiece and covered it with her hand as she pulled it away from her face. She smiled to Zac and tried to ignore the girls as they screamed his name. “I got a phone call and I had to take it. I fell behind. It’s not a big deal really.”

“Bailey was freaking out,” he said. “She thought that the crowd swallowed you alive.”

“Then why didn’t she come back for me?” Laney asked.

“She wanted to but I offered,” he said. “Besides, I haven’t seen you since this morning and I wanted to do a little rescuing.” He grinned and she couldn’t help but roll her eyes and laugh.

“From that?” she asked, looking over her shoulder. “Well, I believe that I have something on them.” Zac raised his eyebrows and shifted Aidan to his right hip, shielding him from their cameras and video.

“Yeah, I guess that you do,” he said. “Should we give them a show?” Laney smiled and stepped closer to him.

“I think that we should,” she said as she brought her hand to his cheek. She leaned in close and kissed him hard. The sound of camera shutters resounded and the girls quieted as the hope died in their hearts. Laney grinned against his lips and then brought her hand to his ass and patted it gently.

“Get inside,” she said, smiling. “I’ll be right behind you.” He smiled and nodded and with Aidan rested on his hip, he hurried back to the stage door and disappeared inside. She watched him go and then brought her phone back to her ear.

“Mom, I’ve got to go. I’ll call you,” she ignored her mother’s protests and pushed the little red button that silenced her mother back to Oklahoma. After turning her phone off completely to avoid another phone call from the monster, she dropped it into her bag and proceeded towards the stage doors. Before stepping inside, she blew a kiss to the girls as they waited outside and as she disappeared behind the door she could have sworn that more than half of them flipped her off.

An hour later, Laney felt ready to leap from the top of the building or stand in the busy streets outside and risk getting hit by a car or do anything that would make her not have to hear Aidan’s incessant screeching anymore. “What’s his problem anyway?” she asked Bailey, who was attempting to soothe the baby by walking him around the greenroom and whispering quietly to him while cradling his head in her neck.

“I don’t think he’s feeling good,” Bailey replied. “I’m just worried Arielle’s gonna start crying soon just because her brother is. Why don’t you take her around the venue or something until they start letting people in? I should have him sleeping in an hour...that gives you plenty of time. Just make sure you don’t go down by the merch. If she sees Drea, there’ll be no getting her away after that.”

“Yeah, sure,” Laney said absently, picking up the calm toddler and a couple of her toys and hurrying from the greenroom, eager to be away from the screaming. “This is definitely not the glamorous summer on tour with Hanson that I imagined,” she said sardonically to Arielle, who only grinned at her and babbled incoherently with a couple of clear words thrown in.

After a couple of circles of the nearly empty venue, they had already encountered Diana, who fawned over the baby before hurrying off to round up her own children, and several roadies who didn’t hide the fact that they were looking Laney up and down as they set up the instruments on stage. Laney quickly grew bored, and decided she needed some excitement for the afternoon. The thought of going to find the guys so that she could get in some attention from Taylor or make out with Zac was quickly

erased when she remembered they were doing a meet and greet with fan club members. Suddenly, a thought occurred to her, and she knew just how to get some attention from people other than the greasy roadies. She grabbed up Arielle, who was climbing up and down the short set of stairs on the side of the stage, and made her way to the back of the venue.

As she had expected, no sooner had she stepped into the sunlight when the clicking of camera shutters began. The same group of fans remained outside between the bus and the building, eagerly awaiting someone – anyone – from the Hanson party to come out so that they could get as many pictures of them as possible. The venue's provided security guards were doing a great job of keeping the girls back, so Laney was confident she wouldn't get tackled. Instead of hurrying to the bus as she normally did, she wandered over to the group of girls, pretending not to notice the outlandish amount of pictures that were being taken of herself and Arielle. She put on her best smile and began asking them questions as though she was truly interested in what they had to say. She laughed with them and took the letters and trinkets that were pushed towards her, the girls holding them out eagerly begging her to make sure the guys got them. "Of course I will!" she exclaimed, stuffing them in her bag. "They absolutely love getting stuff from you guys."

Finally one girl bravely called out, "Are you really Zac's girlfriend?"

Delaney turned towards the sound of the voice, locating its owner quickly. She did her best not to sneer when she took in the girl's baggy jeans and old Hanson T-shirt that was at least three sizes too big and her face which was caked with a thick layer of make-up to hide her obviously plain features. "Sure am," she replied, surprising even herself at how pleasant she could make herself sound when all she wanted to do was school this poor girl on the proper way to dress. She continued talking with the ones who remained after the ones unhappy with her answer rolled their eyes and turned their backs on her, calling her rude names under their breath. Finally, a real smile could take over her lips, because she knew she had met her goal: they were really, truly jealous of her. And it helped that Arielle was eating up the girls' attention too, accepting stuffed animals from them and blowing kisses to the girls calling out her name and snapping pictures of her.

A shrill cry from behind her made the smile slide off her face in surprise. "What the hell are you doing?!" Delaney turned towards the yell, barely recognizing Drea running toward her before Arielle was being snatched out of her arms. "I'm sorry, guys, hope you enjoy the show tonight," Drea continued, calling the words over her shoulder as she hurried to the bus, cradling her daughter protectively.

Laney hurried after her, jumping up the bus steps before Drea could shut the door in her face. "What's the matter? What'd I do?" she asked innocently.

"What's the matter?" Drea repeated incredulously, setting Arielle down on the floor before tossing her hands in the air. "Did you see those girls shoving cameras in her face? We don't want our children's faces plastered all over the Internet, Laney! We're not going so far as to act like Michael Jackson and put blankets over their heads, but we definitely don't just stand there and give them photo ops either! I'm sure Bailey told you about that when we decided to let you help her with the twins."

Laney widened her eyes, perfecting the deer-caught-in-headlights look she had used on her mother many times in her life. "Bailey never told me that!" she said quickly, shaking her head from side to side. "I'm really, really sorry, Drea."

Still obviously very angry, Drea showed no signs of calming or accepting Laney's fabricated excuse. Her tone biting, she replied, "Whether she told you that or not, I'd expect that you'd be smart enough to figure it out on your own." She picked up her daughter and brushed past the open-mouthed Laney, making her way quickly back into the venue without even getting the box of necklaces that she had come outside in search of before her attention was directed elsewhere.

Laney stood there for a minute, wondering how everything had backfired so quickly. All she had wanted was to get some attention from the fans, let them get a few pictures of her. It wasn't her fault Bailey had made her take the baby along and that fans had gotten pictures of her as well. Though she nearly wanted to laugh at the fact that Bailey would ultimately get chewed out as well, her stomach churned at the thought of everyone in the family really and truly hating her after an incident like this. *They could send me home*, she thought, slumping down on the couch. *And if they do that, all of this would have been for nothing*. After several minutes of moping miserably, she stood up, ready to go back inside and, with every ounce of confidence within her, bullshit her way through the entire ordeal. It was, after all, what she did best.

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Laney tried replaying the scene from earlier that afternoon of Bailey trying to defend herself and convince Drea that she had, in fact, told Laney about shielding the twins as she crept onto the bus after the show, hoping that would help relax her mind. It was definitely amusing. And she needed something else to occupy her mind because she was sure that once everyone was together, all hell would break loose.

Bailey had completely ignored her to the point where she'd given up and gone down to watch the show from the balcony again and made her way to the bus before the encore. Bailey entered several minutes after, carrying a sleeping Aidan and followed by Avery, who was carrying a sleeping Arielle. Once the babies were settled in their cribs, Bailey thanked Avery for helping her and Avery scuttled off to the bus the rest of the family shared. And without a word to Laney, Bailey stalked off to her bunk and snapped the curtain shut.

Drea, too, ignored Laney when she came onto the bus, busying herself with emptying the twins' juice cups in the sink and washing them out. Her quick jabs at the cups with a sponge let Laney know that she was still furious with her. Laney cringed, that churning feeling returning, as she was sure word of the incident had already made it to the guys. That suspicion was confirmed when they made their way onto the bus, waving at the fans until they shut the door and turned to the woman of the hour. *I wanted attention, but not this bad*, Laney couldn't help thinking as Isaac glared at her.

"You all need to quit this bullshit," Zac spoke up unexpectedly, surprising everyone on the bus. Even Bailey stuck her head out of the bunk to see what was going on. "She didn't know, okay? You don't all have to act like dicks to her all night."

Laney looked up into his eyes, giving him a tiny smile of appreciation.

"She most certainly did!" Bailey exclaimed, hopping out of her bunk to defend herself once again. "The first day at the first venue, I told her we try not to let them get pictures. And if she's going to deny it, then she's an idiot," Bailey continued heatedly, speaking as though Laney wasn't five feet away from her. "I love those kids like my own niece and nephew, Zac, so don't stand there and act as

though I wouldn't tell her something as important as that!"

"You know what, Bailey? I don't even give a shit what you have to say, because from day one, you've done nothing but be a bitch to her when all she wanted was to be your friend!" Zac yelled.

"Zac, don't fucking talk to her like that," Taylor jumped in, stepping protectively between his brother and his girlfriend.

"These are my *children*, Zac," Isaac spoke up, cutting off Bailey who had opened her mouth to lash back at Zac. "They're your niece and nephew, and Drea and I trusted you when you said that she'd be good with them. Parading them around in front of all the fans and letting them take a million pictures doesn't sound like being good with them to me."

"Look, she made a fucking mistake, okay? She knows not to do it again, so why can't everyone just get the fuck over it?" Zac continued.

"Enough!" Drea shouted, holding her hands in the air to stop everyone whose mouths had just opened to respond from speaking. "Look, even giving Laney the benefit of the doubt and assuming Bailey didn't tell her, which I really doubt, but if that's the case, it was still a pretty big fucking mistake. And I swear to God, Laney..." Laney jumped at the sound of her name, surprised that someone was actually speaking directly to her. "If you pull any other stunt like this that jeopardizes my children's safety, that's it. I'm sick of this, so I'm going to bed. If y'all are gonna continue talking about this, keep it down so you don't wake the babies." And with that, she stalked off to the back of the bus, closing the door to her and Isaac's bedroom firmly.

Isaac gave her one more dirty look before following his wife and closing them off in the back. Laney truly felt as though she might cry. She felt as though everything she had been working for since the day she met Zac was falling apart around her. Not even caring that she would ultimately be the topic of conversation, she whispered words of appreciation to Zac before kissing him and retreating to her bunk to think of a way to fix everything.

Taylor watched her go, and only when he was sure that she was far enough away, he turned to his younger brother and narrowed his eyes. "Zac, I don't know what's gotten into you since she showed up, but you're acting like such an asshole, it's unreal."

"Well how would you feel if, from the minute you introduced Bailey to the family, everyone seemed to be against her?" Zac replied in a harsh whisper to comply with Drea's request to keep their voices down but get his point across at the same time.

"But I didn't ever do the kinds of things she does!" Bailey interjected. "She changes moods every three seconds and she can't be dependable for anything! The first night when she was supposed to be selling merch, she disappeared for almost the entire night, and then when she's supposed to be taking care of the twins she's out flaunting them in front of the fans! She's constantly giving me dirty looks and talking down to me, but then the next minute she's acting like we're best friends. She makes no sense, Zac, and to be completely honest, I don't trust her."

"I do trust her, and I think if everyone would just quit assuming the worst about her automatically, this whole tour would go a lot smoother," Zac replied. "I'm gonna go talk to her." He walked off with a

sigh, anticipating the tearful talk he was about to have with his girlfriend.

“I can’t believe he called me a bitch,” Bailey said, her eyes watching Zac’s retreating back as she plopped down on the couch.

Taylor sat beside her, putting his arm around her and pulling her close. “You know he didn’t mean it,” he said quietly, resting his cheek in her hair. “Zac loves you. He’s just getting defensive because he loves her too.”

“Taylor, I really have tried to give the girl a chance,” Bailey said, looking up at him sadly. “But it just seems impossible when she keeps screwing things up like this and...”

“And what?” he asked, urging her to continue.

“And making me not even want to be here,” she finished with a sigh.

Placing a hand under her chin, Taylor guided her lips to his and kissed her softly. “I don’t ever want you to feel like that again, okay? I need you here.”

“God, how am I supposed to work with her every day after a night like this?” she groaned, dropping her head heavily to his shoulder.

Taylor laughed and grabbed her legs, pulling them over his lap. “You will because you really are an Angel, and you don’t have it in you to be mean to anyone,” he replied, trailing his fingers down her calves.

Looking up at him with a smile, Bailey touched her lips firmly to his. “I really hope you’re right about this one...”

## **CHAPTER TEN**

“Can I come in?” Zac asked. Moving slowly, Laney looked over her shoulder and found her boyfriend’s face peeking in at her through an opening in the curtain.

“We won’t both fit in here,” she said. Zac raised his eyebrows and leaned forward. He began climbing into her bunk.

“I’ll make us fit,” he said. “Scoot over.” Sighing, Laney turned onto the opposite side to face him and she pushed herself against the wall. He climbed in beside and reached over her head and turned the light on. He pulled the curtain shut behind him and then turned to face her.

“Don’t worry about them, Laney,” he said, sliding his hand along her waist. He pushed his palm under her shirt and slid it along to her back. Sliding her arms around his neck, she sighed.

“They hate me,” she said. “Everyone hates me.”

"I don't hate you," he said, trailing his fingertips along her side. "They're not used to having another person on tour. And Isaac and Drea... they're really anal. Drea used to be laid back but she married Isaac and it all went to hell. They like to pretend that they're the first family or something. They'll cool down once Aidan starts screaming again and they need someone to hold him."

"I don't want to be their last resort, Zac," she said, looking over his face. "I want them to... want me just because... they like me." He smiled and kissed lips softly.

"We've only been on tour for a couple weeks, Laney," he said, sliding his hand to her back again. She leaned into his touch and pressed her body close to his. "They'll get used to having you around. They'll learn to compromise with your ways and you'll begin to find your way through theirs. It will take some time. You're only just beginning."

"Well, I'm certainly off to a rough start," she said, a small smile playing at her lips. Zac nodded and brought his hand to her cheek gently. He pulled her face to his and kissed her lips.

"You are," he said. "But no matter what happens, you've got me. I'll be here with you until the end so even if things don't smooth out, we'll still be together. Right?" Laney returned the kiss and pushed her fingers through his hair. She smiled against his lips and slipped her leg between his.

"Right," she said, as she kissed him again. He smiled against her lips and moved his hands to her waist. He lifted her and turned his body so that he was resting beneath her. She pressed her weight against him as she continued kissing him. His fingers found their way under her shirt and his fingertips were warm as they traveled along her sides. It didn't take long for their innocent make-out session to quickly grow serious.

Taylor was not impressed and he was not willing to listen to his brother's sexual escapades any longer. Two hours later at the hotel in Portland, he designated Bailey as his new room mate. Zac stepped up beside him at the counter just as Taylor stepped away. He looked after him.

"Hey, Tay, where's my key?" he asked, pulling his bag over his shoulder. Taylor, who had almost reached Bailey at the elevator, turned around and raised his eyebrows.

"Get a room, Zac," he said. "I want you and Laney to fuck each other's brains out in the privacy of your own hotel room so that we don't have to listen to it in the bus. Get it out of your system."

"What the fuck, Taylor?" Zac asked, narrowing his eyes at his brother. "What crawled up your ass and died?" Taylor glanced past Zac to Laney as she struggled inside with her oversized bags in hand. Zac looked over his shoulder and followed her glance. He turned his eyes back to Taylor and shook his head.

"She's not perfect," Zac said. "Give her a chance. If I wanted a girlfriend like Bailey, then I would steal her from you but I don't. I want my girl to be fun and spontaneous and hell, I'll even take a little bit of irresponsibility. At least then I am reminded of reality. Flaws are to be expected and you may think that you see everything that is wrong with Laney but I don't." Bailey lifted her head at the mention of her name and her face hardened with Zac's words. Taylor glared back at his brother but he had no words. He shook his head and turned his back. He met Bailey at the elevator and as they waited for the doors

to open, he could hear Bailey speaking his name with utmost contempt.

“What’s going on?” Laney asked, as she stepped up to Zac. She pushed a strand of her blonde hair from her face and placed her hand at her hip. Zac turned his face to her and managed a small smile. He was grateful that she hadn’t heard what Taylor had said. He’d had to work hard to make her happy again. He was still tired from the effort.

“We’re room mates,” he said, reaching up and brushing her hair behind her ear before it fell forward. A grin crossed her face and Zac couldn’t help but erase the anger that he felt for his brother. She was genuinely happy with the recent development.

“Really?” she asked. “Bailey’s so mad at me that she doesn’t want to live with me, huh?” Zac shrugged and smiled gently as he stepped up to the front desk.

“Maybe but I think that Taylor just wants some alone time with her,” he said. He smiled to the clerk and requested for his reservation.

“Well, as glad as I am to be roomed with you, I’ll be sad to leave Bailey. It was fun pretending like I was living the college life with a girl friend,” she said, as she stepped up behind him, dragging her bag at her feet.

“Thank you,” Zac said, as he took his set of keys from the clerk. He handed one to Laney and smiled. “Do you want me to carry that for you?”

“Would you?” she asked, with a smile. He nodded and took it from her.

“Sure, baby,” he said, and lifted it carefully. “Let’s go.”

A week passed before Laney was socially acceptable again. Taylor and Bailey continued to share hotel rooms at every stop but Laney wasn’t ready to complain. The more sex that she had with Zac, the more attention he paid her and with everyone else trying to avoid her, she craved his interest in her. Drea refused to let Laney help Bailey with the children so she gave up her place at the merchandise table and took over the job herself. Laney found herself taking Drea’s place selling t-shirts and posters. It wouldn’t have been so bad if every girl who approached her didn’t send her dirty looks and sneers.

“It’s because you snagged the last available Hanson brother,” Jessica said, as she restocked the table with a stack of t-shirts. Laney sighed as she reinforced the corner of the poster onto the display. She stepped down off of the stool and pushed it under the table.

“I didn’t mean to,” she lied. When everyone was mad at her, she felt terrible lying but once everyone was on her side again, it became easier to play her charade. She looked back to Jessica and shrugged. “I suppose that if I were one of those girls, I would hate me too. Besides... they shouldn’t hate me just because I’m beautiful.” She didn’t see Jessica roll her eyes.

Turning around, Laney smoothed her band t-shirt over her stomach and smiled. She’d taken it from the table at the last show and had worn it proudly since she’d seen how good it looked on her after checking the latest picture posts in the fan forums. She had her own category now.



“Well, I’m going to go grab a soda from the bar,” Jessica said. “Since we have a few minutes before the show. Do you want anything?” Laney shook her head.

“No, I’m fine,” she said. Jessica smiled and hopped over the table gracefully. Laney watched as the girl disappeared around the side of the merchandise table, her long hair flowing behind her. Laney sighed and lowered herself onto the metal chair behind the table. She wasn’t looking forward to another night of impatient, over zealous girls so when she saw Drea step out of the shadows and approach the table, hope was instilled in her heart.

“Hey Laney,” she said, sending her a smile. “Where’s Jessica?”

“Hi,” Laney said with a smile. “She went to get something to drink. She won’t be gone too much longer.” Drea smiled and played with her fingers nervously. Laney crossed her arms over her chest and smiled back at her.

“Well... I just... I wanted to see if you wanted to take a break tonight,” she said, stepping up to the side of the table. Laney followed her with her eyes as Drea stepped behind the table. “The kids are sleeping in the bus and Bailey is staying in there with them, watching movies and hanging out. I didn’t really need to be there and I miss working merch so I thought I’d give you a break tonight. You don’t have to help with the kids tonight if you don’t want to.” Laney smiled and slowly stood up.

“Drea, I’d love that. Thank you,” she said, and stepped back to let Drea sit in her place. “I’ve been dying to just watch the show from the sidelines, give Zac his water and towels and stuff.” Drea smiled.

“Ah, I bet you thought that’s what you thought you’d be doing all along,” she said. Laney nodded and laughed.

“Well, yeah, actually,” she said. Drea nodded and reached out to straighten a pile of crooked tour books.

“Don’t worry,” she said. “Me, Bailey, you. We all came into this whole thing disillusioned. I’ve been with Isaac since before the fame so it was something I’d dreamed about for the longest time. When I went on my first tour with him for This Time Around, I was horribly disappointed. His parents had me hauling ass to help with merchandise and loading and unloading. I must have cried every night for the few two weeks or so.” Laney raised her eyebrows.

“Really?” she asked.

“Oh yeah,” she said. “Isaac wasn’t very understanding because he was the one having all of the fun. Eventually, I found my place and I’ve become a pro at this merch thing. And you know what? The first time that we allowed Bailey to watch over the kids, she forgot Arielle on the bus and didn’t realize her mistake until halfway through the show. We were so upset and she cried for almost two weeks. She ended up walking around with both of those kids attached to either side of her, arms wrapped around them so tight.” Surprised to hear this, Laney raised her eyebrows and laughed incredulously.

“It’s hard to believe but it’s a true story,” she said, and smiled. “Everyone’s always a little nervous on tour, Laney, especially Isaac and I. It’s hard to live this kind of life without worrying about your children every second of the day. I’m really sorry that we blew the situation out of proportion but you

have to understand that we're all still adjusting too. I wanted to apologize to you and let you know that you're welcome to resume your position as second babysitter."

Laney was ecstatic to hear that she had her job back. She grinned and threw her arms around Drea's neck and hugged her tightly.

"Drea, thank you!" she cried and parted from the girl with a laugh. "I'm so sorry for what happened and I swear that I'll never be so careless with your children again. It was an honest mistake and it will never happen again." Drea smiled.

"All right," she said. "I believe you and I thank you. Those kids are my life and if Zac trusts you with them then so do I." Laney smiled and stepped away from the table. She waved to Jessica as she returned.

"I really appreciate this. Thank you so much," Laney said, as she backed away. She said goodbye to both Jessica and Drea and hurried away from the merchandise table. She was more than happy to escape and she couldn't help but notice that everything was falling into place again. All that she needed now was to regain her friendship with Bailey and Taylor, the only two people left still angry with her.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

The thought of enjoying another concert from the crowd sounded incredibly appealing as Laney made her way as far away from the merchandise area as possible. There was nothing she'd rather do than spend the night having the ability to watch Taylor sweat without having to worry about Zac noticing her. It was especially appealing, when the alternative consisted of her spending the evening cooped up on the bus watching movies with Bailey. But she remembered why she had told the lies and done the things she'd done to get on tour, and having Taylor angry with her wasn't going to help at all. And if she wanted to be in his good graces again, that meant getting along with Bailey. Besides, she'd already given Drea the impression she was going to spend the show onstage. She figured if she chose to spend the evening helping out with the kids instead, she'd give not only Drea and Isaac, but also Bailey and Taylor, more reason to like and trust her.

Getting a heavy sigh and an exaggerated eye-roll out of her system, Laney headed outside to the bus. When she opened the door and stepped inside, she found Bailey laying across the couch, absorbed in *The Sound of Music*. Her eyes left the screen for a second to see who had entered, but when she saw it was Laney, her eyes snapped back to the television as though they had never left.

"Hey," Laney said cautiously, taking slow steps into the bus and taking a seat across from Bailey. "What are you watching?"

"*Sound of Music*," Bailey mumbled.

"Is it any good?" Laney asked. "I've never seen it."

"It's fine."

Laney wanted to give the sigh and eye-roll another go, but she suppressed the urge. She couldn't

believe what a brat Bailey was being or that she was the absolute last thing standing in the way of gaining Taylor's trust. After a few moments of uncomfortably thick silence, Laney said, "Bailey, can we talk?"

"What about?" Bailey asked, her eyes still fixated on the Von Trapp children performing *So Long, Farewell*.

"About how you hate my guts," Laney replied bluntly. This got the desired reaction, because Bailey turned her face towards Laney, making solid eye contact.

"I don't hate you, Laney," Bailey said. "I never have. I just don't understand...why you do the things you do."

"I don't either," Laney shrugged. "It was hard coming here not knowing anyone but Zac, and even harder when I realized how close everyone else is...I just want everyone to like me, but somehow I always end up screwing things up."

Bailey sat up, surprised to hear Delaney Reid make such a bold statement about herself. "But why lie, Laney? Why say I never told you about the twins instead of just apologizing and admitting you were wrong?"

"Don't you understand?" Laney had to force the corners of her mouth to stop twitching, aching to form a smile as warm saltwater pooled in her eyes on cue. "Drea already thinks of you as a sister-in-law...I knew she wouldn't stay mad at you nearly as long if I said you never told me as she would at me if I said you had told me and I just did it anyway. I just...I wasn't thinking when I did all of that, and I said the first thing that came to mind when she confronted me on it. I'm really sorry, Bailey-" Her voice broke as the tears began sliding down her cheeks.

"Don't cry..." Bailey instantly felt horrible, watching Laney break down in front of her. She had buried her face in her hands and her shoulders were shaking violently. She recalled Taylor's words from a week earlier, telling her she didn't have it in her heart to be mean to anyone. Despite all of the awful things Laney had done since stepping into their lives, things that most people would feel justified in hating her for, Bailey still felt moved with compassion. She moved to the seat beside Laney and pulled her into a comforting hug. "We can start over again, okay? Wipe the slate clean."

"I'd really like that," Laney said, turning her tearful eyes up to Bailey and smiling. "All I've ever wanted was to be your friend."

"I know," Bailey smiled. "You're forgiven."

"Thanks a lot, Bailey. I really appreciate it," Laney said, wiping at her eyes with a Kleenex.

"No problem." Bailey clicked off *The Sound of Music* and ejected the disc from the DVD player. "You can put on whatever you want, I don't care. It's not much fun watching *The Sound of Music* from the middle and having no idea what's going on."

Laney wanted to literally pat herself on the back. She couldn't believe the impossible feat she'd just overcome. She had actually gotten Bailey to forgive her not only for the latest fiasco, but for everything

that had happened since she'd arrived. Suddenly, obtaining Taylor seemed even easier. She knew as long as she kept herself in good with Bailey and did all of her scheming behind her back, she'd have Taylor in no time. Things were definitely looking a lot more optimistic.

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"I said no! Fuck it! I don't want to anymore!" Taylor shouted. He was screaming into his cell phone, his hair tossed lazily across his forehead and his cheeks flushed a bright crimson red. He was pacing back and forth, one hand stationary at his hip. "If you're not going to go through with the fucking deal that you made me *six months* ago then I don't want to sit here and wait for you to change your mind. I don't have anymore time to give to you, Chris!"

Laney watched him from the shadows, her arms crossed over her chest, her body pressed tight against the wall. She had been in search of Zac but had quickly become distracted. The sound of Taylor's angry voice had compelled her into the darkness of an empty corridor. She found him pacing across an empty stage at the back of the venue. It was a dormant auditorium as the seats were filled with dusty boxes and the stage was cluttered with broken instruments and a plethora of unused and outdated items. Why he was here, she did not know. Zac and Isaac remained at the main stage, helping with the dismantling of the set. Bailey had fallen asleep almost an hour before and Laney had grown bored with watching *Dude, Where's My Car?* for the second time.

The scene before her was anything but dull. Who was Taylor talking to? The conversation was definitely risqué as it could be translated to mean a number of different things. Who was Chris? Laney had never heard the name mentioned before by neither Taylor nor any of the other family members.

"You know what? Fuck you! I'm done playing this game with you," he said. "I'll get what I want from someone else." He ended the call with one simple motion and that was Laney's cue to make her presence known.

"Who are you talking to?" she asked, stepping out of the shadows. Taylor jumped back and a sound escaped his throat that closely resembled a frightened scream. He whipped his hair from his face and looked back at her with a harrowing expression.

"What the hell are you doing back here?" he asked, his face contorting into one of anger and disgust. "You scared the shit out of me."

"I was looking for Zac and I heard you yelling expletives," she said, with a smile and a laugh. She reached up and pushed her hair from her face. She had weaved her golden locks into two intricate braids but a few rebel strands always managed to find their way back into her line of vision. "I had no choice but to investigate." Taylor narrowed his eyes at her and shoved his phone into his back pocket.

"You had no choice?" he asked. "You couldn't continue walking forward and ignore me? I'm of no concern to you."

*You'd like to think so*, she thought as she looked back at him, eyebrows raised. She crossed her arms over her chest and smiled.

"Well, Taylor, I *was* concerned," she said. "I've never heard you so speak so angrily before so I thought that maybe you were in trouble or something. I just wanted to make sure that you weren't... punching

Zac's lights out."

"Right because I would really do that," he said, rolling his eyes. He stepped forward but she didn't move from her place at side stage. "Zac and I may have our differences but I'm not about to get physical with him and start beating him up. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Excuse me?" Laney asked, not having expected his response.

"Zac and I have always been at peace with each other. We're brothers and best friends but since you came along, I want to hate him and most of the time... I do," he said. Laney laughed sardonically and brought her hand to her chest.

"You think I'm purposefully trying to rip the two of you apart?" she said. "If I had known that you were so in love with him, I wouldn't have even bothered asking him out. I'm just living my life and doing my thing and I'm learning that I have to compromise with your way of life... with the demands of touring. I'm not doing anything on purpose." She stared back at him, her eyes unwavering. It was amazing how well she could lie.

"Well, you could have fooled me!" he shouted back at her. "I don't trust you, Laney, and I hate that Zac likes you so much."

"Bailey trusts me," Laney said, raising her eyebrows. Taylor looked back at her skeptically.

"No, Laney, I'm pretty sure Bailey hates you. Trust me on this one," he said. Laney smiled back at him.

"I just spent the last two and a half hours on the bus with her," she said. "We're brand new friends, all over again." Taylor hesitated in his response. He licked his lips and Laney couldn't help but find him to incredibly sexy, even when she was trying to break him down.

"Bailey's a pushover," he said. "She'll cater to your every need if you so much as smile at her."

"Maybe so but I'm pretty sure that Bailey's trust in me is regained," she said. "So, I think that if I were to tell her that I overheard a conversation that you had with Chris, she would believe me when I expressed my concern that we are cheating on her and that you are only getting from her what Chris couldn't give to you."

For a moment, Laney truly believed that she had caught Taylor right where she wanted him to be. If she could hold this over his head, she could make him do anything for her. He wouldn't want to hurt Bailey, not even if it were to oust Laney as vindictive and double natured. Taylor surprised her with a laugh. He laughed so hard that it echoed through the empty theater.

"Is that what you think?" he asked, looking back to her. "I guess that I can see how that would be easy to conceive. I am in a dark, dusty and very secretive place talking on the phone to a suspicious character. I would only be doing so for the simple reason that I didn't want to be caught having this certain conversation."

Creasing her eyebrows in confusion, Laney looked back to him and shifted her weight. He shook his head and laughed as he raked his fingers through his hair and pushed his hair away from his forehead.

“Chris is a friend of mine in Tulsa, Laney. A male friend. His mother owns a vintage jewelry business that runs their sales over the internet. Six months ago he promised to set aside a 1920’s vintage amethyst engagement ring for me and when I checked the site last night, I saw that it was marked as sold. Naturally, I would be a little upset with him because I’ve been planning my proposal to Bailey for over a year now and I’ve had my eye on that ring. I wasn’t breaking off a secret love affair, Laney. I was telling Chris to fuck off because he screwed me over,” he said. Laney had definitely overestimated that conversation. Swallowing her embarrassment she shrugged her shoulders and managed a cautious smile.

“Simple mistake,” she said. Taylor nodded.

“Yeah, I’d say,” he responded. “And even if you were right, I can’t believe that you would sell me out like that, Laney. Especially to Bailey. You know that information of that magnitude would break her heart.” Laney knew how to answer this one.

“So you would rather that I not tell her and let you break her heart instead by sneaking around behind her back? You would do that?” she asked, raising her eyebrow. “I only had Bailey’s best interest in mind and I would rather tell her the truth then let you lie to her.”

“This is irrelevant because, obviously, I am not cheating on her,” he said. “And I swear to God, Laney, if you tell her about the engagement ring, I will find a way to ruin your life.” Laney knew what Taylor wanted to hear. She had to give him a reason to trust her.

She smiled and shook her head. “I won’t say a word,” she said. “I wouldn’t take that away from you or from her. She will be ecstatic when you do propose and I want to be there when she comes running to me with the news, her face all smiley and glowing.” She saw a smile curl across his face.

“Promise me,” he said, still smiling. Laney smiled.

“I promise, Taylor,” she said. “I won’t tell her.” He nodded and his body relaxed significantly. She stepped back and to the side and motioned to the hallway at her left. “I think you have a set to untangle.”

Taylor nodded and smiled. He stepped forward and came so close to her that she could smell the sweat on his skin as he passed. He stopped only inches away from her and looked down on her with a smile. She returned the same affection and raised her eyebrows, waiting for him to speak.

“I’m sorry, Laney,” he said. “For under estimating you.” Laney laughed.

“I think you over estimated me, Taylor,” she said. “I would never be able to wreak havoc upon you and Zac. Or anyone. I’m harmless. Really.” Taylor smiled and reached forward. His arms around her surprised Laney but she was happy to oblige nonetheless. She returned the hug warmly and tried not to be so obvious as she took in the scent of his hair and his skin.

“Welcome to the family,” he said, with another smile. She laughed and playfully pushed him forward into the hallway.

"I've been waiting so long for someone to say to me!" she said, as they headed back to the main stage together. As they walked, Laney couldn't help but feel extremely satisfied. She had worked her way onto this tour and into their family and despite all of the trouble that she had faced so far, she was still remarkably successful. It would only be a matter of time before she had everyone right where she wanted them.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

"Five days in Chicago without any obligations," Taylor said, as he pushed open the door of the Starbucks. Zac followed behind him, clutching Laney's frappachino in one hand and his bottle of Dr. Pepper in the other. "I just don't know what to do with myself." Zac knew that his brother was being sarcastic but he couldn't help but interject.

"You can go out with Laney and I tonight," he said, falling in step beside his brother. They hurried down the sidewalk, their destination the five star hotel at the end of the block. Laney had begged Zac to go on a Starbucks run while she got ready for their night out and then Zac begged Taylor to go with him. After Laney had reconciled with everyone who had been angry with her, Zac was automatically in the game again as well. Taylor turned his face to his younger brother and past his sunglasses, Zac saw him raise his eyebrows.

"Yeah?" Taylor asked, as they stopped at the curb to wait for their turn to cross the street. "Where are you guys going to go?" Zac shrugged and stepped off of the curb as the light changed. Taylor followed him and they dodged a group of passing girls who were trying to sneak attack pictures of them with their camera phones. They passed them quickly and stepped up the stairs to the lobby of their hotel.

"Clubbing, I think," Zac said, as he opened the door. Taylor stepped inside and Zac followed him. "It was Laney's idea and I thought, 'what the hell?', right? I haven't been out in a long time. I could use a night on the town. I figured you might like to enjoy the same luxury. With Bailey, of course." The two brothers entered the elevator together and with his free hand, Taylor pushed the button for their floor.

"I think I could enjoy that," Taylor said. "I'll run it by her. I don't see why she would turn it down. She has been getting along with Laney lately and she's always telling me how stressed out and tired she is. Maybe a little letting loose will set her free." Zac laughed at his brother and shook his head as the elevator door opened. They stepped out and onto their floor and walked to the left towards their rooms.

"That's the idea," Zac said as he balanced his soda at his side and reached for his room key. "Call me and let me know what you decide. We'll probably leave in about an hour so if you guys do decide to come and you need some more time to get ready, let me know so that I can keep Laney from drowning herself in hairspray."

"Excuse me but I don't use hairspray," Laney said and Zac turned his face forward and found that she had opened the door and was smiling back at him. "Are you guys coming too?" She opened the door wider at her question and Zac brushed past her. Taylor, stunned by her sudden presence in nothing but a silk bathrobe, smiled back at her awkwardly.

"Yeah, maybe," he said, stepping away from her closer to his room. "We'll see." He turned his back to her and stepped up to his door. As soon as he heard Laney's door shut, he let out a frustrated sigh and

used his key to open the door. He hoped that Laney would stop surprising him with her half naked presence otherwise it would be very hard for him to look at her as his little brother's girlfriend and not an object of lust.

"*Damn, girl,*" Zac gaped as Laney stepped out of the bathroom. He had seen her in a number of sexually desirable outfits but he had never been so turned on by her appearance than he was at that very moment. Her very tight, very black cocktail dress left nothing to the imagination. Her long legs stretched for miles and the hem of the dress touched down high on her thighs. The plunging neckline accentuated almost every inch of her breasts and if Zac wasn't so fond of showing her off as his girlfriend, he'd refused to let her go out in public. The kind of attention she would attract would be the kind of attention only Zac would be allowed to give her. She had let her hair go wild and it fell against her back in waves. Her make-up was bold but beautiful and the necklace that she wore plunged deep into her cleavage.

"You like?" she asked, spinning around for his pleasure. Eyes wide, Zac reached for her and pulled her close to him. He ran his hands around her waist and let his palms travel to her butt. He pushed her close to him and kissed her lips eagerly.

"I love," he said, kissing her neck. She tilted her head to the side and let him touch his lips to her skin affectionately. "But even more, I'd love to see it on the floor and you on that bed." He slapped her ass playfully and she pulled away.

"Zachary, we have to go out because you have to show me off," she said, smiling as she stepped past him. He couldn't help but find satisfaction in her departure because his eyes found her backside to be very appealing. She picked up her clutch purse from the top of the dresser and looked back to him over her shoulder. Her smile caused his pulse to race and he shoved his hands into the pocket of his jeans to hide the fact that he found her incredibly sexy.

"Oh, I will," he said with a smile as he followed after her as she opened the door. "I have no problem doing so either."

Downstairs in the lobby, Taylor and Bailey awaited the arrival of Zac and Laney. Taylor, who had originally decided to wear a pair of jeans and a vintage t-shirt out to the club, had dressed up only after Bailey convinced him that he needed to do so. She had slipped into a pair of impossibly tight jeans and as he tried to redress himself earlier that evening, he'd found it hard to keep his eyes away from her ass as she passed through the room. Wearing only those jeans and a very sexy black bra, she'd attempted to refocus his attention to the closet. Within thirty seconds, she'd managed to pick out his clothes for him and he barely even noticed what she'd chosen. Finally, only after Bailey had slipped on a black, thin strapped tank top, was Taylor able to refocus his attention to dressing himself. Bailey had given him a white button up shirt to wear over a form fitted navy blue t-shirt. He stayed with his choice of jeans and perfected his look with a clutter of necklaces and a few sprays of cologne.

"You look really good, baby," Bailey said, as she leaned against the wall near the front door of the lobby. Taylor leaned into her and rested his hands at her sides. He kissed her gently and smiled.

"I'm blessed with a very talented stylist," he said, with a smile. She returned the smile and kissed him once more. "And if I'm allowed to look, you're very sexy tonight too." She had tossed her hair into a



pile of curls at the top of her head and rebel curls escaped around her neck and cheeks. Her figure was perfectly accented by a pair of blue jeans and a low cut, black tank top. She had covered her shoulders with a dark green Bolero shirt and he really wished that she hadn't.

"Well, I happen to know that you also have a very skilled personal shopper," she said, pushing her fingers through his hair. She smiled and kissed his lips gently. "And after she buys your clothes, it's very easy for her to pick them out and put them on you." Taylor laughed and kissed the tip of her nose gently.

"And thank God for her or I'd be walking around naked," she said. Bailey smiled and slipped her arms around his neck.

"I know about half a million girls who wouldn't mind that so much," she said. Her eyes glanced over his shoulder briefly and he watched as her jaw dropped. "Oh my God..." Curious as to what had caught her attention, Taylor looked over his shoulder. The target of her attention was obvious. Laney and Zac were approaching them, their hands all over each other as they walked. Laney looked impossibly perfect in a very short, very thin black dress and Taylor kept his head turned away from Bailey to hide the flushing of his cheeks.

"Hey guys," Laney said, her smile wide. Zac slipped his arm around her slender waist and pulled Laney close to him. She wrapped her arms around his neck and turned to face him, aiming her back at the couple behind them. Taylor's eyes diverted towards her backside only briefly before he remembered that his girlfriend was behind him. He looked back to her as Laney began making out with Zac.

"Is that even legal?" Bailey hissed, her voice low as she leaned into Taylor. "I wish that I could pull that off." Taylor looked over her and nodded.

"You could," he said. Bailey shook her head and laughed.

"No way," she said, reaching for his hand. She pulled him towards the door, eager to keep him walking ahead of Laney. She glanced over her shoulder as Taylor pushed the door open. "C'mon, you guys. You know where we're going." They managed to part long enough to follow Bailey and Taylor outside.

In the cab, Bailey found herself sandwiched between Taylor and Zac. Taylor's hand was placed modestly inside of hers and was rested in her lap. Zac's hand was placed precariously on Laney's thigh and Bailey wouldn't be surprised if he felt her up in their presence. She couldn't help but notice the perfection of Laney's long legs and she envied the richness of her tan. Laney's feet didn't look at all pinched in her designer high heels and Bailey was envious of the flawlessness of Laney's make-up and hair. She looked like she'd stepped off of the runway. Even as they exited the cab and got comfortable inside of the night club, her jealousy went on. She was graceful and smooth. As she danced with Zac, her body moved with the music as if the rhythm was born inside of her. She laughed and half the entire male population inside of the club turned their eyes to watch her. She was perfect. As much as Bailey wanted to love her, as much as she wanted to be Laney's friend she would never be able to accept the fact that she would never compare to her perfection.

"Oh my God, it's so crazy out there!" Laney cried as she returned to the table with Zac. Zac dropped into his chair beside Taylor and grinned as he wiped the sweat from his forehead. Laney took the seat beside him and crossed one long leg over the other. "You guys should really get out there and bust a

move.”

“Bailey’s not much of a ‘buster’,” Taylor said, with a chuckle. Bailey turned her head to him and raised her eyebrow. She’d been perfectly happy sitting with him at the table, just kissing and talking. He had downed a couple of drinks and she could sense that he was slightly tipsy but she had not expected him to blame their absence on the dance on her.

“What!? You’re kidding me!” Laney cried, with a surprised smile. She reached across the table and placed her hand over Bailey’s. “Oh my god, you have to let me work him out!” Bailey was even more surprised at Laney’s choice of words. She knew that she was simply asking for Bailey’s permission to dance with Taylor but her question was highly sexual. She smiled awkwardly. How could she say no? Laney seemed so excited to give Taylor a dance lesson. But she wanted to say no. After she’d watched Laney’s bump and grind session with Zac, she was afraid for her boyfriend. She glanced to Zac. Surely he would be upset in sending his girlfriend off with his brother.

“Zac, you don’t mind if Laney takes Taylor onto the floor?” Bailey asked, sure that he would pick up on her hint. Zac pulled a long drink from his water glass and set it down on the table. He shook his head and smiled as he turned to his brother.

“No,” he said. “Take her off of my hands for a few minutes and then I can have a chance to catch my breath.” Bailey tried hard to mask her disappointment in Taylor’s answer. Without even asking her for a second approval, Laney jumped up from her chair and reached for Taylor.

“C’mon, Tay,” she cried, wagging her fingers at him. Heart broken, Bailey watched as Taylor used her hand as an anchor and pulled himself to his feet. She knew that their touch was innocent but after all of the jealousy that she’d felt for Laney over the course of the night, she couldn’t help but feel that Taylor was slipping through her fingers.

“You should have said no,” Bailey muttered to Zac after Taylor and Laney disappeared into the crowd. She crossed her arms over her chest and turned her eyes back to them as they joined the dancing near the band at the front of the club. Zac shook his head and reached for Taylor’s drink. He brought it to his lips and finished it quickly.

“Oh, Bailes, she’s harmless,” he said, licking his lips. He set the drink down and raised his eyebrows. “Do you want to buy me a drink?” Bailey turned back to him.

“Not that that’s legal or anything,” she said. Zac grinned.

“*Will* you buy me a drink?” he asked. Sighing Bailey reached for her purse and stood up.

“Fine,” she said. “But if they come back, take Laney back to the floor without Taylor.” Zac nodded and waved her off. She walked away to the bar and after she put in an order for Zac’s drink, she leaned against the bar and glanced back to the floor. She searched the crowd for Laney and Taylor and found them almost instantly. Laney had pulled herself close to him and her arms were snaked around his neck. Taylor had his hands at her waist and he seemed to be enjoying it. Taylor leaned in close to her to speak over the music and Laney laughed at whatever he said. She threw her head back in hysterics and that smile that Bailey loved to see on Taylor’s face crossed his lips. She wanted to be the one making him smile. She wanted to be the one laughing at this jokes. Why was he holding her that way? Sighing

in frustration, Bailey paid for Zac's drink and picked it up off of the counter. She made her way back to him and set the drink on the table in front of him.

"Nice, Zac," she said, thrusting her arm in Laney and Taylor's direction. "Look at that and tell me that you're not worried." Zac picked up his drink and turned his eyes to the dance floor. She sat down in her seat and crossed her arms over her chest angrily. She watched as Zac's eyes found them. His expression changed and he raised his eyebrows.

"What the fuck is that?" he asked. "Jesus, Taylor."

"Taylor?!" Bailey asked, looking at Zac with a skeptical expression. "Laney begs for his hands to touch her just by putting on that dress."

"Whatever," Zac mumbled, slamming the rest of his drink back in one gulp. "I think it's time for you to buy me another drink."

Feeling a little more generous given the state of things, Bailey flagged down a waitress and got another drink for Zac as well as one for herself, plus a couple of tequila shots. As the waitress left to get the drinks, Zac raised his eyebrows at her. "Tequila?"

"I need something to get my mind off of...that," she replied, gesturing angrily to their significant others.

When the waitress returned, Bailey wasted no time licking her hand and sprinkling salt on it, then licking the salt, slamming back the shot, and biting a lime wedge. Drink after drink, Bailey and Zac became more inebriated as Taylor and Laney danced to song after song, apparently forgetting that they had come to the club with anyone but each other. "Bailey..." Zac slurred one too many drinks later. "I'm sorry I called you a bitch."

"That was ages ago, Zac," Bailey replied, downing the last of her Bud Light. "I'm over it already."

"Yeah, but...you're pretty much my sister-in-law, you know?" he continued, his eyes trying to focus on her face. Her features swam before him, making him feel as though she was moving rapidly in front of him. "And I should still apologize. I shouldn't call you a bitch."

"You mean you've never called Drea a bitch?" Bailey asked skeptically, raising her hand to flag down the waitress again.

"Not to her face," Zac laughed.

They were still giggling wildly over that when Taylor and Laney, breathless and sweaty, returned to the table. "What are y'all laughing at?" Laney asked curiously, a grin still across her face. She really had no interest at all, because she was sure nothing could take her mind off of the amazing half an hour she had just spent dancing with Taylor Hanson as though they were the only two people in the bar.

The buoyant mood Bailey had felt sitting at a table and drinking with Zac escaped her the instant Taylor and Laney made their return. The rest of the night, Taylor's own buzz seemed to keep him from realizing that Bailey was doing her best to ignore him as he tried to encourage her to dance with him.

Zac had seemed to forgive Laney quickly, because she was soon on his lap and they were all over each other the rest of the night. Bailey was relieved when they decided to leave, though she wondered if squeezing into a cab once again was really worth it.

“What the fuck’s your problem?” Taylor finally asked when they had made it back to their hotel room. His speech was slurred from the alcohol still in his system, and he had to sit down on the bed to make the room stop spinning around him.

“Why would you think I have a problem?” she yelled back sarcastically. “It’s a lot of fun to sit there and get wasted with your little brother while you’re off with her!”

“You’re so fucking selfish, Bailey! Just because I was having a good time-”

“*Selfish?!?*” she interrupted loudly. “Oh, I’m sorry. I guess I didn’t realize that I was supposed to enjoy watching you dry hump Laney on the dance floor for thirty minutes! How dare I be so fucking selfish!” Her voiced oozed with sarcasm, and her hands flew around her expressively as she struggled to hold herself up on her own two feet.

“It’s called *dancing!*” Taylor retorted angrily. “Maybe if you weren’t so fucking boring and just sit there all night, you wouldn’t be so fucking wound up all the time!”

“Oh, so that’s what this is about? I should be more like *her?!?*” Bailey shouted, pointing angrily at the door where Zac and Laney’s room was just across the hall. “Is that what this has been about this entire time? You only drool over me when I’m dressed in her clothes and looking like a high class hooker, now you want me to act like her...why don’t you save us all some time and just fuck her already because I’m sick to death of watching you two shoot each other flirty looks when you think I’m not looking!” Bailey stormed into the bathroom and slammed the door so loudly that she was sure she woke up half of the hotel’s occupants. She turned on the shower and collapsed on the closed toilet seat, hoping the rushing of the water would keep Taylor from hearing her strangled sobs.

### CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Taylor awoke with a start the next morning to a loud knock on the door. His head was still throbbing, and even the tiny amount of light sneaking around the thick curtains was enough to blind him. Glancing at the bed, he saw the covers tossed back and slept in, but Bailey was nowhere to be found. He had passed out on the couch the night before, too exhausted to wait up for her to emerge from her marathon-length shower. Rubbing his eyes in an attempt to focus them, Taylor went to the door and yanked it open.

Laney’s tear-stained face looked back at him. “Can I come in?” she asked quietly.

Taylor nodded and stepped aside to let her pass in front of him. Laney quickly took a seat on the bed, sniffing and dabbing at her eyes with a Kleenex. “What’s wrong?” he asked, sitting beside her.

“It’s Zac,” she said, dropping her hands into her lap as though defeated. “Last night he was fine, and it’s like all of a sudden this morning he hates me for last night.”

"I know what you mean," Taylor replied wryly. "But I got to hear it all last night."

"I know...I heard you guys yelling," she admitted quietly. What she failed to mention was that she had enjoyed every second of it. Most of the time she hadn't been able to make out what they were saying, but just knowing they were fighting was enough to make her satisfied.

"Sorry about that. I bet a lot of people heard us," he replied with a light chuckle.

"It's okay..." Laney boldly put her hand on his knee and squeezed it gently. "I don't understand what they're so upset about...It was just some innocent dancing."

Taylor's eyes flickered back and forth between her hand and her smiling face as though he was watching a tennis match. "Exactly..." he said quietly. "Completely innocent."

Suddenly Laney's face crumpled and a fresh wave of tears poured down her face. "Zac hates me," she wailed, dropping her cheek to Taylor's shoulder and pressing her face into his neck.

Taylor sat there awkwardly, not sure what he should do. Eventually he put his arms around her in a hug, attempting to comfort her. Unfortunately for him, Bailey chose that moment to push the hotel room door open, a smile on her face and a bag of bagels in her hand. Laney and Taylor turned to the sound of the unexpected entrance just as the smile slid off of Bailey's face and the bagels dropped from her hand to the carpet. "Well," she said tightly. "I guess this is what I get for leaving long enough to get breakfast as an apology. You two just don't waste a single second, do you?"

"Bailey, wait-" The words died on his lips as another wall-shaking door slam made his head feel as though it might split open. Taylor flopped down on his back, digging the heels of his hands into his eyes in frustration. "God, why do I always fuck things up?" he groaned.

"You don't," Laney said quietly, pulling his hands away from his eyes and gazing down at him with a look of concern on her face. "You shouldn't feel bad about anything right now, and she's wrong for making you think that you should."

"No, she isn't," Taylor said resolutely. "I practically ignored her the whole night...I'd hate me too if I was her."

"Have you ever stopped to ask yourself why, after so many years, she doesn't trust you?" Laney pressed on, refusing to give up this perfect opportunity. Taylor was so hurt and so vulnerable, it would be stupid of her not to take advantage. "I mean, do you really want to spend the rest of your life with someone who doesn't trust you? That's a rough way to spend forever, Taylor."

He turned her words over in his mind, wondering if maybe she wasn't just the slightest bit right. After five years together, Bailey should trust him no matter what. But then it occurred to him that maybe he was just looking for an excuse. He might have been drunk the night before, but he remembered every word she had said to him, and he remembered the hurt in her voice. She was jealous of Laney, that much was obvious, and he had done nothing but exacerbate that jealousy by getting carried away at the club. He loved Bailey and everything about her, but it had been nice to be with a girl who didn't mind getting on the floor and dancing and cutting loose with him, something Bailey wasn't comfortable doing. And he loved Bailey's modesty, the way she was so naturally beautiful that she didn't need much

makeup to accent her features, but it was hard not to notice a girl like Laney who dressed up her natural beauty with revealing clothes. He knew he needed to talk to Bailey and make things right with her. Her jealousy wouldn't have grown this much if it hadn't been for the way he'd been acting.

"Look, Laney..." he said finally, sitting up and raking a hand back through his hair. "I appreciate the talk, but I need to find Bailey and make things right with her. You should go do the same with Zac."

"You're right," she conceded, gritting her teeth to keep from revealing her disappointment.

Together, they got to their feet. Taylor grabbed his cell phone from the nightstand and pocketed his wallet before they walked to the door together. "I'll see you later," he said as Laney slipped back into the hotel room that she shared with Zac. He opened his cell phone and speed-dialed Bailey's phone. He held it to his ear and listened to the rings, hoping she'd answer and not ignore the call like she sometimes did when she was angry.

After several rings he had nearly given up. But suddenly came her snappy, "What do you want?" in place of a greeting.

"Bailey..." he said quietly. "Baby, where are you? We need to talk."

"Taylor, I don't want to talk to you right now. I can't even look at you...It's like you're not even the same person anymore."

He stopped his walk down the hallway and leaned against the wall, closing his eyes and pushing his hand through his hair. "I *am* the same person, Bay, I just...I screwed up. I didn't realize that dancing with Laney was going to upset you this much and-"

"Do you honestly think that's *all* that I'm upset about?" she interrupted quickly. "Do you even pay attention when I talk to you anymore?" He could hear her voice shaking as she struggled not to cry, and it did nothing more than intensify the feelings of anger towards himself for making her feel that way.

"Baby...just tell me where you are," he sighed.

Just as he began wondering if she hung up on him, he heard her say, "Ike and Drea's room."

There was a click as she ended the call, and Taylor closed his cell phone as he began walking towards his older brother's hotel room. She answered his knock, the fact that she had been crying evident in her red, tear-stained cheeks. "Will you come with me? So we can talk?" He held out his hand to her, hoping that she would accept it, and smiling gratefully at her when she did. Their steps were slow and silent as they made their way down the hallway towards the elevators.

It wasn't until the doors slid together, enclosing them in the tiny space alone, that she turned to him and looked him in the eyes. "Taylor, I'm sick of all this back and forth we've been doing since the summer started. I need to know right now if you have feelings for Laney."

"I do not have feelings for Laney," he answered honestly.

"Then why do you look at her?" she asked. "Why do you seem to have more fun with her than you ever

have with me?”

The elevator dinged, signaling they had reached the lobby, and they continued their walk, making their way to the front doors and to the busy streets beyond them.

“I look at her because she does things to shock people and get their attention, and it’s worked on me at times. I won’t lie to you about that. Yes, she’s a beautiful girl, but I don’t care about that,” he answered. “I care about you, and I love you. I’m sorry that I upset you last night, but...sometimes it’s fun to just let loose, you know? Even though I had fun dancing with Laney, it’s not because I wish you were her. I spent the whole time wishing she was you, because I want to have that kind of fun with you. But you know...even if the only night I ever get you dancing in public for the rest of our lives is our wedding night...I’m okay with that. And I don’t need to dance with any other girls ever again to know that. I swear to you, I don’t have feelings for Laney.”

“Taylor, I don’t know what it is about her, but even after five years and millions of fans throwing themselves at you, I’ve never been more afraid of losing you than I am right now,” Bailey admitted, looking up at him with teary, brown eyes.

“But you have nothing to be afraid of,” he assured her, letting go of her hand long enough to drop his arm across her shoulders and pull her closer to him. “Absolutely nothing. Because I love you with all my heart, Bailey, and not even a million more Laney’s could change that.”

Bailey closed her eyes, wanting with everything in her to believe him. He had been her life for the past five years, and she wasn’t sure that she knew how to exist without him anymore. She hated that after sticking by him through all these years of fame with millions of fans eager to take her place, Delaney Reid could come into their lives, and in the span of only a few weeks, completely obliterate her ability to believe in him.

“And where the fuck did you go?” Zac yelled. Laney rolled her eyes as she stepped away from the door and walked quickly towards the bed. She pushed her hair back from her eyes and used an elastic from her wrist to fasten her hair into a ponytail.

“I went for a walk,” she said and looked up to him as he stepped out of the bathroom. He was standing there in his boxers and a t-shirt, looking like shit with his hair messed and his face pale. She’d been up since six in the morning listening to him vomit from behind the bathroom door and she was not in the mood to listen to him bitch.

“You went to see Taylor, didn’t you?” he asked, stepping towards her. She sat on the edge of the bed and glanced over her shoulder to him, her eyebrows raised. She crossed her arms over her chest.

“So what if I did?” she asked. “It’s not like I could talk to you about anything... you’re drunk.”

“I’m not drunk, Laney, I’m hung over,” he said. “That means that I was drunk *last* night and do you know *why* I got drunk last night, Laney?” She glared at him.

“Don’t talk to me like I’m five fucking years old, Zac, because I’m not,” she said. He ignored her and stepped closer to her. She looked up at him as he stepped in front of her.

“I got drunk because I didn’t want to be sober while you rubbed up on my *brother!*” he yelled. The force of his voice caused Laney to draw back in surprise. She stood up quickly and pushed away from him.

“I was not *rubbing* up on him, Zac! We were dancing... as friends. I’m finally making friends with your family and you hate me for it! I don’t understand what you want from me,” she answered. She stepped towards the window and stopped at the wall. She turned around to look at him and brought her hand to her hip.

“I want you to pay attention to me the way that you pay attention to *him*, Laney!” he yelled, throwing his hands into the air. She hadn’t expected his answer at all. She had never expected him to pick up on the advances that she’d made toward Taylor. She’d thought that if she kept Zac satisfied, he wouldn’t care about anything else. She didn’t want him to care about anything else.

“What?” she asked, diverting her eyes from his face.

“Don’t ‘what’ me, Laney,” he snapped back. “You know what I’m talking about. You look at Taylor differently than you look at me. Fuck! You think I don’t have a complex about that? I grew up believing that he was always better than me and the last thing that I need is for another girlfriend to think so too. I like you, Laney... a lot. I don’t want to fall in love with you and then find out that you’re not in this relationship for the same reasons.”

Laney didn’t want to feel sympathy for him. She was above sympathy. She always had been. She knew that when she devised this plan, that she would have to deal with Zac’s feelings for her. She hadn’t expected their relationship to be purely physical but she hadn’t thought that he would fall in love with her either. Men didn’t love Laney, they lusted for her. However, she knew what he wanted to hear and she knew how to give him what he needed. Her parents had been married for the last twenty years and she’d watched their relationship carefully. She knew how to fake love and affection.

“I’m not...” she started, and turned her face away from him, giving her eyes time to water. She looked back at him once she had the perfect amount of tears welled in the corner of her eyes. “I’m not interested in Taylor, Zac. I will admit that last night... I might have taken it a little bit too far with Taylor but it was only because I was excited that I’d finally earned his friendship. I regret that I gave you any reason to doubt me. I’m really sorry.”

Zac stepped forward slowly and reached his hand to her. She shook her head.

“I don’t deserve to be here with you,” Laney said, turning her back to him. She knew just how much she had to milk the conversation to get him to trust in her again. “I shouldn’t have come on tour with you. I haven’t done anything important. I don’t even feel useful. I’ve just fucked everything up and I’ve ruined relationships... even ours.” She felt his hand at her shoulder and his breath warm against her neck as he spoke.

“Our relationship isn’t ruined, Laney,” he said, stepping in closer to her. He brought his other hand to her opposite shoulder and slowly turned her to face him. She reached up between his arms and wiped the tears from under her eyes.



“It feels that way to me,” she said. Zac pulled her into his arms and hugged her tightly to him. His arms locked around her back and slowly, she slid her arms around his torso and rested her cheek against his chest.

“We had an issue and we’ve resolved it,” he said. “That is the first step in having a successful relationship, baby. Problem solving. We’re on our way.” She smiled and nodded. It was so easy to play along. She looked up to him and leaned in to kiss him gently.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I promise that I will love you and only you.” He smiled.

“I’m holding you to that,” he said, with a chuckle. She smiled against his lips as she brought her hand to his cheek. He may have forgiven her but she knew that he would need more convincing. For all of the things that she had in mind, she needed to make sure that he was completely oblivious to her faults.

“You still look sick, baby. I think you need a little bit of my hang over remedy,” she said, smiling slyly. He looked down to her and nodded.

“Yeah,” he said. “I think you’re right. Where do I need to be for you to administer this medicine?” She smiled and slipped out of his arms. She pressed her palm to his chest and pushed him back towards the bed.

“On the bed,” she said, smiling. “I give a killer body massage.” As she crawled into bed with Zac, she couldn’t help but feel victorious. It was all too easy, really... manipulating the Hanson family. She was surprised that it hadn’t been done before.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

“Oh, Dre, this one is so cute!” Bailey said as she held up a toddler sized t-shirt. Drea looked up from the display of children’s swim suits and let her eyes find Bailey at her left. She smiled and nodded.

“It’s definitely one of the more adorable outfits that we’ve found today but I think I’ve maxed out my children on new clothes for the day,” she said and continued pushing the stroller through the store. Bailey replaced the t-shirt on the rack and stepped after her. She adjusted her purse on her shoulder and glanced around the store.

“Where’s Laney?” she asked, after she failed to find her browsing the racks of the Baby GAP. Drea reached back and tossed her blonde hair over her shoulder and reached for a pair of pink, Mary Janes.

“You know... I don’t know,” she said. “I think we lost her after Victoria’s Secret. Wouldn’t these be so cute for Arielle?” She held them up to Bailey and she nodded. Drea set them on top of the stroller and steered towards the clerk at the cash register.

“Well, I hope that she comes back,” she said. “I don’t want to walk all around this damn mall looking for her.” Drea set her purchases onto the counter and as she reached for her wallet, she looked back to Bailey.

“Do you still have a beef with her? I thought you guys worked things out,” she said. Bailey shrugged

her shoulders.

“We have... twice. I hate her more than I like her because every time that I think I can believe in her, she does something to break my trust,” she said.

“Oh, the Taylor thing,” Drea said, and she turned back to the register and smiled as she handed her credit card to the clerk.

“Yeah, the Taylor thing,” she said. “I just... I know that Taylor is going to be true to me but how can I be so sure that Laney isn’t going to tempt him? I mean, if I had impossibly long legs and a killer figure like hers, I’d be able to get Taylor in the sack, no problem.” Drea laughed and reached for her bag from the clerk. She shoved it into the bottom of the stroller and gracefully pushed it around the racks and displayed toward the door. Bailey followed.

“You already have Taylor in the sack, hon,” she said. “As far as I’m concerned, you’ve already won.”

“I know,” Bailey said, with an exasperated sigh. “But... God... she’s just...”

“Coming this way,” Drea interjected and smiled widely as Laney approached them at top speed. Bailey followed Drea’s actions but her smile faded when she noticed that Laney was fuming. Her cheeks were flushed red and too much of her hair had escaped from the braid that fell against her back.

“Whoa, Laney, what’s the matter?” Drea asked, as Laney stopped at their side.

“You will not believe this but my parents cancelled my credit cards,” she said. “All of them!”

“How many do you have?” Bailey asked, knowing that it was the wrong question but curious to know. Drea nudged her inconspicuously and turned a concerned expression to Laney.

“Why would they do that?” she asked. Laney threw up her hands in anger.

“I don’t know! Because they’re assholes! I can’t believe this! How am I supposed to get through the next two months? That was all of the money that I had left to my name,” she said. Bailey rolled her eyes.

“Well, honey, I’m sure that Zac will be able to help you until you talk to your parents about the problem,” she said.

“They won’t give them back to me!” Laney cried. Bailey glanced to the left and the right and noticed that the shoppers passing by were turning their eyes to the scene that was unfolding in the middle of the mall.

“And why do you say that?” Drea asked, trying her best to nurture the situation. She was always trying to solve everyone’s problems. At times, Bailey hated that Drea was such a bleeding heart. Especially now when all that Bailey wanted to do was tell Laney to grow up and get a job.

“Because they don’t trust me!” Laney yelled.

“Well, that’s kind of a silly reason to cancel your credit cards,” Drea said with a laugh. “They would need to have a motive and at least give you fair warning of the change.” Laney shook her head and laughed sardonically.

“I’ve only been ignoring my mother’s calls for the last week and a half. God, she is so childish sometimes!” Laney screeched. Bailey raised her eyebrows and turned her attention back to Laney’s and her freak out.

“Why would you ignore her calls? Don’t you want to talk to your mom?” Bailey asked. Laney turned her gaze to Bailey and she could have sworn that she saw fire pass through the girl’s eyes. Drea saved her quickly.

“I’m sure that she’s only worried about you, Laney. You’re far away from home and you’re traveling the country. She’s probably just looking for an update or a simple hello,” she said.

“No,” Laney said, turning her eyes back to Drea. “It’s because I lied to her. She thinks that I’m at a fashion design institute in New York City.” Both Drea and Bailey raised their eyebrows.

“What?” Bailey asked. “Why would she think that?”

“Because I told her that is where I would be this summer,” Laney responded as if Bailey’s was supposed to know the answer. Her dislike for the girl only grew as the plot thickened. Laney reacted to Drea’s confused expression and continued. “She would never approve if I were to tell her that I was going on tour with a bunch of famous rock stars, let alone dating one of them. She would have cancelled my credit cards before I even left!”

“Wait... She doesn’t know that you’re dating Zac?” Bailey asked, skeptically.

“No,” Laney said. “She would have ended that relationship before it even started. God, I hate her! I can’t believe this.” She began a heated search in her purse as she attempted to retrieve her cell phone.

“Neither can I,” Bailey muttered and Drea glanced back to her. She raised her eyebrows.

“Just... let her explain before you pass judgment,” she whispered quietly. “I’m sure that her reasons are legitimate... however, hard that may be to believe. Zac might not even care.” Bailey turned her eyes to her older friend and shrugged.

“Let’s just go back to the hotel so that Zac can deal with it,” she said. Drea nodded.

“Good idea,” she said, replacing her grip on the stroller. Together they headed towards the door and the only assurance that they had of Laney’s presence behind them was the sound of her voice as she left angry messages on her mother’s voicemail.

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Taylor found himself wondering how Drea had managed to convince two brothers who could barely look at each other and two girls who had a hard time being in the same room together to all go out to dinner together as he watched Bailey flitter around the room silently while getting ready. Somehow, she

had done it, and Taylor wasn't so sure that he was happy about it. Even after their talk, things between himself and Bailey hadn't been fixed. She had spent the last two days almost entirely with Drea and the twins, leaving him in the hotel room alone and bored most of the time unless he decided to go out and walk around, also alone. She often didn't come back to their room until after she had already eaten and all that was left for her to do was shower and go to sleep. On the rare occasion that she spoke to him, it seemed forced and only made him feel like they were drifting farther and farther apart.

He knew he still loved Bailey as much as he ever had, so it confused him as to why he couldn't stop messing things up with her. Something about Laney was just so magnetic that he couldn't stay away, even though every warning sign was going off in his head that he should. And it wasn't that he was attracted to her, he was just curious. It was the only word he could come up with to describe his need to look at her and dance with her. She wanted attention, and she most definitely knew how to catch his.

"Are you ready?" Bailey asked, breaking into his thoughts with her question.

Taylor looked up at her, noticing for the first time how completely detached she looked. Her big brown eyes that used to be so full of life and amusement now looked dull and sad. It was gut-wrenching to see her look so miserable and to know that he had caused those feelings within her. She looked so fragile that he worried every time he spoke to her that he would say the wrong thing and break her. "Yeah," he said, rising to his feet and forming a smile. "You look beautiful, Bailey."

Instead of smiling back, she glanced down carelessly at her clothes and shrugged before turning to the door to leave. Biting back a frustrated sigh, Taylor followed her out of the room, the silence between them suffocating and thick.

They were the last ones to join the group at the end of the hallway. Drea was the only one who appeared excited about the triple date. Laney was still fuming about the credit card incident from earlier in the day while Zac looked as though he had heard her complaining about it one hour too many. Bailey looked miserable, and Taylor couldn't stop watching her with sadness paling his blue eyes. "This is going to be great, I just know it," Drea said happily as the elevator doors opened and they all stepped inside. She looked to Isaac as she wound her arm with his, hoping to see the same reaction, but he looked less than thrilled to be part of her "heal the world" mission.

The elevator trip to the hotel restaurant was anything but comfortable, but when the six of them gathered around a table in the dimly lit dining room, the tension seemed to quadruple. Drea tried insistently to start conversation but each one died after two or three exchanges. Finally she gave up as everyone picked up their menu and began looking over the choices.

"I think I'm getting this," Laney said, showing her menu to Zac and pointing out her choice.

"That's the most expensive thing on the menu," he said.

A smiling waitress chose that moment to step up to the table and say, "Hi, I'm Rachael, and I'll be your server tonight. First, is this going to be all on one check or separate?"

"Separate," Taylor and Isaac said simultaneously, glancing over at Zac and Laney.

Zac rolled his eyes and shrugged. "Yeah, whatever. Separate."

"It's been so nice having all this time off, hasn't it?" Drea said with a smile once the waitress had gotten their order and left. "I can't believe it's back to business as usual tomorrow night. This week went by so fast!"

"Not for me," Taylor grumbled. "Three days alone in a hotel room goes by pretty slow."

Bailey glanced over at him uncomfortably, wondering if he was going to publicly blame her for his less than stellar time off. Instead he simply met her eyes and offered her a smile. That smile was the reason she had spent days avoiding letting her eyes settle on him because it could weaken her every time. And it apparently hadn't lost its ability to do so, because before she even realized what had happened, she felt herself returning the smile. He put his hand on her thigh and squeezed it tenderly underneath the tablecloth. She put her hand over his, oblivious as Drea finally engaged Isaac and Zac in conversation.

By the time their meals arrived, things around the table had relaxed considerably, and Drea was quite proud of herself. Zac and Laney had returned to being all over each other, Taylor and Bailey seemed to be enjoying the time together, and even Isaac appeared to be having a good time.

All of that came crashing to a halt when the waitress set the bills on the table.

"I'm sorry I got the most expensive thing," Laney said, poking her lip out as Zac frowned over the bill. "I didn't like anything else! And if my stupid mom hadn't can-

"No more about the credit cards!" he groaned teasingly. He planted a kiss on her cheek and grinned. "You act like you really would have paid for dinner anyway, even if you still had them."

"Besides," Bailey interjected, "how would you explain the charges at the Chicago Hilton anyway, since that fashion institute you told your mom you were at is in New York City?" She smiled as though she was joking, but inside she felt like laughing. Maybe Laney had the right idea. Stirring up trouble like this felt damn good, now that she wasn't on the receiving end of it.

If looks could kill, Bailey's heart would have stopped at that very second. Laney's eyes narrowed, glaring at her harshly from across the table. No one noticed, though, because everyone else's eyes were on Bailey as well. Drea was giving her a look that plainly asked why she had felt the need to bring that up at the end of such a successful dinner and the Hanson boys all looked utterly confused.

"What are you talking about?" Zac asked. He looked over at Laney before adding, "What fashion institute?"

If it wasn't for the fact that Laney didn't get into physical confrontations, she would have loved to jump across the table right then and claw Bailey's condescending eyes out. She couldn't believe Bailey had just called her out like that in front of everyone. After all, she was the one who was supposed to do the calling out, not the other way around. What had started off as such a perfectly constructed plan for the summer was literally falling apart as variables she hadn't expected kept getting in the way. Before turning to Zac, she softened her eyes, hoping it would help her negate the situation before it blew up too badly. "It's nothing, baby..."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Laney...I didn't realize you hadn't told Zac," Bailey continued as Laney struggled to find the right words.

“Didn’t tell me what?” Zac asked, his jaw clenched tightly. “Someone better tell me what the hell is going on.” He looked to his brothers for assistance but they both shook their heads, their faces showing plainly that they were just as confused as he was.

“Maybe you two should talk more about that in private instead of down here,” Drea said, trying to calm the increasingly agitated Zac. She shot Bailey another look, but Bailey just smiled innocently.

“No, I want to know now,” he said gruffly. “Laney, tell me what the hell’s going on.”

Laney said nothing, staring down at her hands. “Zac, this really isn’t the time or the place for this and-”

“If you don’t tell me right now, I’m sure by the look on her face that Bailey would have no problem telling me. But I’d rather hear it from you, so just fucking tell me already.”

“I lied to my parents, okay?!” she snapped, her eyes flashing as she looked up at him. “They think I’m in New York City at a design institute, and they have no idea I’m dating you, okay? Is that what you want to hear?”

“So you’ve been lying to me all this time?” he asked, ignoring the tears that began pooling in her eyes. “This whole summer has been based on this huge lie? What, is it because you’re embarrassed of being with me or something?”

“Not at all,” she answered tearfully, reaching for his hand, but he jerked it away roughly. Laney jumped as he recoiled from her touch. “I didn’t think they’d let me come if I told them I was going on tour with you, so I-”

“That’s no fucking excuse for the entire month that we dated before we left,” he snapped, standing up and tossing his napkin onto the table. “You’d better find your own room for the night, because I don’t even want to look at you right now. Oh, wait, you can’t...your mom cancelled all your credit cards.”

As Laney stared up at him, her mouth hanging open in shock, he opened up his wallet and threw down enough money to cover his bill before stalking out of the restaurant angrily.

As satisfying as it was to give Laney a taste of what she had been dishing out since the tour began, seeing the hurt in Zac’s eyes made Bailey feel sick to her stomach. Suddenly she disliked Laney even more, because it sickened her even further that it didn’t sicken Laney to cause the kind of destruction she had in the past month. A glance around the table made her want to die. Drea, Isaac, and Taylor were all staring at her as though she was a stranger, believing up until then that she was incapable of such actions, and Laney still looked ready to tackle her at any second. “I’m sorry,” she said, jumping to her feet. “I’ll...I’ll go talk to him.”

Bailey grabbed her purse and hurried from the restaurant, catching up to Zac just as he was about to step onto the elevator. She jumped in with him breathlessly. “What do you want?” he snapped at her harshly.

“Zac, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have brought that up in front of everyone. I didn’t mean to embarrass you or-”

“I’m so fucking sick and tired of this shit that is going on between you and Laney!” he said, interrupting her. “Laney may be spiteful and selfish but you are above that, Bailey, and I never expected you to sink to her level.” Surprised that Zac had turned on her, Bailey’s jaw dropped and she shook her head.

“What? This isn’t about me and what I do,” she answered. “I didn’t follow you so that I could push Laney further into the hole she’s buried herself in! I’m attempting to get her out of it! I realize that my part in this conversation was unnecessary and I just apologized for that, didn’t I?”

Zac looked back at her with an unchanging expression. His cheeks were flushed red and his hair hung in front of his angry eyes like a curtain of convenience. If Bailey even had the chance to look him straight in the eyes, she would be afraid of what would be staring back at her. She had never seen Zac in this state before.

“Who the fuck is that girl back there?” Zac shouted as the elevator opened at their floor. They stepped out but neither of them moved in the direction of their hotel rooms. Zac leaned against the wall, dropping his head back with a thud. “I don’t even know who she is! She pisses me off more than she does anything else. It’s one thing after another. But *God*... I just... I don’t know why but I still want to be around her. I’m always thinking about her. She’s always the first thing on my mind when I wake up in the morning. When she does this shit... it breaks me in half. I’m falling in love with her, Bailey, and I don’t... I don’t even know who she is now.”

Bailey wanted for him to take back his feelings for Laney. She wanted to convince him that he was not in love with that girl. How could he be? Laney was strange and complicated and Bailey feared that she would never figure her out. She was hot and then she was cold, friendly and then vindictive and cruel. She was beautiful and alluring and she used it to her advantage. She flaunted it in front of the fans. Whenever Laney passed by the fans outside of every venue, Bailey listened to their sighs and the sounds of their hearts as they broke in the wake of her beauty. Zac couldn’t have picked a more intimidating girlfriend. Bailey even feared for the strength of her own relationship with Taylor whenever the girl was nearby. Taylor was captivated by her and no matter how many words or affections he used to convince Bailey of the opposite, the fear of losing him to her continued to eat away at her heart. Delaney Reid was nothing that any of them had ever encountered before. In the last two months, she had caused more waves within the Hanson family than they had ever experienced in their lifetime together.

Despite all of this, Bailey was standing in front of a boy who genuinely believed in the good in Delaney Reid. He may have walked away from her because she lied to him but Bailey knew that Zac wouldn’t let Laney go without giving her a reason to explain herself. He had threatened her with the extent of his anger but only because he wanted her to come after him, to beg for his forgiveness. Bailey had not been what Zac wanted to see. She hadn’t even given Laney the chance to go after him. Would she have done so anyways? Did she love Zac as much as he wanted her to?

“Look, Zac,” Bailey said, reaching out to him. She rested her hand at his shoulder gently. “I was there with Laney today when she confessed to us that she had been lying to her parents. I think that if her reasons for doing so were not genuine, she wouldn’t have said anything to Drea and I at all. She knows her parents better than anyone. Maybe she knew that if she introduced you to them, they’d stop her from seeing you. No parents want their daughter dating a rock star. Don’t you remember how Taylor and I had to sneak around for the first three months of our relationship because my dad hated him?”

Considering the circumstances she'd thought it to be impossible but Zac smiled and nodded. She imagined that he was remembering how often Bailey had snuck in through their bedroom window at 17. While she made out on the bed with Taylor, Zac played video games and collected twenty bucks a week for keeping his mouth shut about it to his parents. Bailey knew better than anyone what it was like to have protective, overbearing parents and although she could hardly imagine her parents raising Delaney Reid, it was now very easy for Bailey to see why Laney would act out in defiance. She wanted to be with Zac and she would do anything to make sure that she did not have to be without him. She knew the same desperate feeling.

"That was the easiest secret to keep ever," he laughed.

Bailey laughed and leaned against the wall beside him. "I know, you little extortionist. But do you see what I'm saying? There could be a million reasons why Laney kept you a secret."

"I know..." Zac sighed.

"Now are you really going to make her get her own hotel room, or are you going to go down there and find her and give her a chance to explain?" she asked, crossing her arms.

"I think that I'll just call her and have her come upstairs and that way it's not public. Besides if she's upstairs, it'll end easier. Make-up sex is always the best," he joked.

Bailey laughed as she smacked him, causing him to laugh harder. "Well, when you get a hold of her, have her tell Taylor that I'm waiting for him. I think I owe him a little 'making up' myself."

He didn't have to call. The elevator opened and Laney stumbled out of the open doors, her cheeks wet with tears and smudged with her running mascara. Drea followed her, eager to have the problem solved but weary of trying to calm her down. With heavy sighs and a unanimous eye roll, Taylor and Isaac stepped out after her. Isaac reached for Drea's hand and successfully pulled her away from the girl and waved his hand over his head to signal their departure from the group. Bailey turned her head and watched as they disappeared inside of their hotel room. She turned back to the scene and Taylor stepped into her line of vision. It didn't stop her from knowing what was going on. Laney was not about to hide her feelings.

"I'm sorry!" Laney cried, as she threw herself at Zac. "I should have been honest with you and I hate myself for lying to you about the situation. If they knew that I had been seeing you at the start of the summer, I wouldn't be here with you right now, Zac! I wouldn't... I wouldn't have been able to see you at all. I had to lie to them to be with you."

Taylor's hand was at Bailey's arm and he was attempting to steer her away from the couple behind them. She stretched onto her tip toes and looked over his shoulder. Taylor laughed and moved his hands to her waist and forced her to walk away from them.

"Taylor, stop it," she hissed, standing resolute. "I am involved in this now. I have to know that it's going to be okay."

"You'll know in about fifteen minutes when you hear them making up through the walls," he said, quietly. She turned her eyes to him and gave him a crooked smile. In the background, Zac was trying to



console Laney and keep her from crying. He was giving her his understanding but she was not having it. She was resolute on the fact that she had messed up. She was making it harder than it needed to be.

“Do you want to make-up with me?” she asked, her smile broadening. Taylor raised his eyebrows and grinned.

“That’s a rhetorical question, Angel,” he said, as he reached for the key from the back of his pocket. She laughed and together, they dodged into their room. Just as Taylor predicted, Laney and Zac could be heard through the walls but they were not paying attention. They were making-up on their own.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Laney’s eyes followed the shadows as they danced across the ceiling overhead. The night was dark and heavy but the noises of the city outside were ceaseless. She found sleep to be an impossible task. Zac was asleep at her side, his head rested against her chest, his arm draped over her abdomen. His breath, warm against her skin, assured her that she had corrected her mistake.

Hours ago, she’d feared losing him completely and with that, her whole plan would have been foiled. For the first time since she’d arrived, Laney had cried real tears. Even with Taylor sitting at the table across from her, it was Zac that she was crying for this time. If he broke up with her and sent her home, she would have failed. She couldn’t fail. She’d spent years waiting for the moment that she could have Taylor Hanson in her hands. Using Zac to get to him was tedious but she wasn’t completely dissatisfied. Zac was a very sexual human being and it was very easy to please and distract him. Last night, it hadn’t been any different. She’d had to work harder than usual to convince him of her loyalty but in the end, she’d succeeded.

She knew now that she could no longer trust Bailey with anything. That one inch of friendship that she had with Bailey was not enough to give Laney reason to confide in her. Bailey was only in her way. She didn’t need to be nice to Bailey. She’d tried to win her over but every time that she seemed to be on good terms with the girl, her plan somehow faltered and she was forced to sit back and watch while Bailey enjoyed the benefits of having Taylor Hanson in her arms. The more that Bailey hated Laney, the more that it would hurt her to see Taylor falling under Laney’s charms. Once Laney had him where she wanted him to be, Bailey would hate Taylor with everything inside of her for giving himself over to the one person that Bailey hated. Smiling in the dark, Laney knew that she no longer needed to strive to be Bailey’s friend. She was no longer a factor in her game, simply a distraction that Laney could easily overpower. She didn’t have to like her, she just needed her out of the way.

Zac stirred in her arms and muttered something incoherent. Laney broke free from her thoughts and looked down to her boyfriend.

“What did you say?” she asked, reaching up and pushing her fingers through his hair. He slipped away from her and pulled himself onto the bed beside her. She turned her head to him and watched as he laid his head back on his pillow. She turned on her side and pulled herself close to him. He wrapped his arm around her and kissed her forehead gently.

“I *said*... what are you doing awake? You should be tired. I was exhausted after the work out you gave

me,” he said, with a sly smile.

“You didn’t say all of that,” she said, as she pushed her palm over his chest and held herself close to him. He laughed and began rubbing her back gently.

“No, you’re right but that doesn’t mean I wasn’t thinking it,” he said. Laney smiled and closed her eyes. She rested against him gently and took a deep breath. She had to admit that being with Zac was definitely different from any of the other boyfriends that she’d had before. She’d never had a successful relationship that lasted more than one month. Boys liked to turn Laney into their prize and show her off to their friends. They liked to see her naked and have sex with her. When it came to respecting her and treating her like a lady, they always failed. They gave her what she wanted without any questions asked. As long as it meant that she would take her clothes off at the end of the day, they were satisfied. With Zac, she received the same but he gave her those things that all of the others had always refused her. He didn’t just lust for her, he adored her and touched and loved her. She had expected him to be like all of the others but he had surprised her and at times, her conscience got the best of her and she felt bad for using him as she was. But when she thought of Taylor and how much more appealing he was to her, she didn’t feel so bad.

The night passed by quickly and so did the rest of their time off. Learning from experience, the couple refrained from going out as a group and they limited their time to only each other. When the time came to load onto the bus and drive to Indianapolis for the next show, no one was ready to spend time with anyone else. Isaac and Drea took the twins and traveled on the second bus with Walker, Diana, and the younger Hanson siblings. The main bus was left open to Taylor, Bailey, Laney, and Zac.

“You should let me design some of the band shirts,” Laney said, from her place in the arm chair in the corner of the lounge. She was draped over it lazily, her eyes watching the TV absently as she’d already seen everything that the E! Channel had to offer her. Zac was sitting on the couch with his back against the arm rest and his legs propped on the cushions. He had a notebook rested in his lap and a pen in his hand. The only reason Bailey knew was because she was passing through the room on her way back to Taylor from the bunks where she’d retrieved his iPod. Bailey couldn’t help but find Laney’s suggestion to be realistic. She was a very talented artist when it came to clothes and fashion.

“That’s a good idea,” Bailey said, stopping at the entrance to the kitchen area where Taylor was waiting for her. Laney looked away from the TV and her eyes found Bailey’s. Bailey feared the girl’s response before she even opened her mouth. The look in her eyes told Bailey that Laney didn’t want her opinion at all.

“I wasn’t talking to you,” she hissed, her eyes narrowed. Bailey held up her hands in defense and stepped backwards.

“Ooookay,” she said. “I’m sorry to have intruded.” She rolled her eyes as she returned to Taylor. He was sitting at the table with a Dr. Pepper and a pair of Hot Pockets. She slipped into the booth beside him and set his iPod down onto the table. “I think that I officially ruined any chance of ever being friends with her again.”

“And I can see just how heartbreaking that is for you,” Taylor replied sarcastically, grinning at her.

Bailey giggled. “I thought I was doing a pretty good job of hiding it...guess not. I wonder how this

affects the whole ‘working’ deal?”

A glance over at Laney, who was still glowering at the pair of them, made Taylor chuckle lightly. “I’m...pretty much guessing you don’t have any more help with the twins, unless you rope Avery into helping you or something.”

“I had kind of figured that,” Bailey shrugged. “It won’t bother me. It was nice having another set of hands around at times, but I’ve done it by myself every other time. I can handle it. I’m more wondering what *Laney* will be doing now, since Kelsey flew in after Laney’s first merch mishap to fill in. I guess she’ll get to spend the last few shows from the side of the stage like she’s always wanted.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Taylor said, putting his arm around her and running his hand up and down Bailey’s arm. “She might get to watch the shows, but fans will see her, remember how pissed off they are that she snatched up Zac, and hate her even more. Which, by default, makes them like you more.”

“Thanks a lot,” Bailey replied sarcastically, giving him her illustrious smirk. “So you’re saying the only reason they like me is because they don’t like her?”

“Well, duh, what the hell did you think?” Taylor said playfully, rolling his eyes and removing his arm so that he could pick up his lunch. “Your personality or something?”

Bailey nudged him with her elbow and laughed loudly. Laney watched them, anger burning inside of her. While her summer plans had, in the beginning, consisted solely of obtaining Taylor Hanson, recent events had made it about so much more. She still wanted Taylor, there was absolutely no denying that. But now the intense hatred that she felt for Bailey Caldwell outweighed those feelings heavily. She wanted nothing more than to destroy her, destroy everything she had spent the last five years working for, and enjoy the look on her face when her relationship fell to pieces around her. Laney felt it was her duty to teach this girl that you don’t mess with Delaney Reid and come out whole in the end.

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The last couple of weeks of the tour continued on uneventfully. Laney, try as she might, could not make Bailey dislike her any more than she already did. Any of her attempts to anger the other girl through snappish comments and harsh looks or insults were shrugged off, as Bailey had already decided Laney wasn’t worth her time or effort. As Taylor had reminded her all summer, she was a genuinely nice person who truly didn’t have the heart to go out of her way to be mean to someone. Even the incorrigible Delaney Reid was no exception.

But that didn’t mean Laney stopped trying.

The second to last show in Kansas was upon them before they even realized, reminding them all that the summer as well as the tour was nearly over. Bailey had just finished checking over hers and Taylor’s hotel room, making sure they had packed everything before going to check out and head to the venue on the bus. After the show, they would be heading to Tulsa, and Tulsa meant home and that the tour had officially ended. As she pulled the door closed behind her, assured that nothing had been left behind, she heard another door shut down the hall. A glance over her shoulder revealed that her company was none other than Laney, her duffel bag slung across her chest and her ever-present sunglasses atop her head. Bailey rolled her eyes, not looking forward to the elevator ride that was about

to ensue.

Laney didn't say a word to her until they had stepped inside. "Good morning, Bailey."

"Morning, Laney."

"Nice outfit. I think I saw one of the moms in the audience wearing those capris a couple nights ago."

"Oh, really? What a coincidence," Bailey replied, giving the other girl an exaggerated smile.

As the doors slid open to the lobby, Laney shot Bailey a glance over her shoulder and said, "Oh, and you should stay away from all that junk food you've been eating. You're starting to look like you're putting on weight."

Bailey couldn't help but shake her head and laugh, amused at Laney's vain attempts to put her down and make herself feel better in the process. She had never before in her entire life had an enemy, but she was surprised at how well she was able to handle it. It could have been because Laney's comments were so outlandish and blatantly rude, but whatever it was, it did nothing but make Bailey laugh. She was happy she was no longer concerned with trying to be friends with this new girl, and felt confident that Zac would eventually see the Laney everyone else saw and her spell over him would be broken. Until then, Bailey decided, she would simply not let the words of the spiteful girl get to her.

She followed Laney out to the bus at a much slower pace, dreading the fact that the two of them would be the only occupants for now. The guys were at a radio station for an interview on the station's morning show, and Drea had undoubtedly brought the twins onto the bus with the rest of the family to let them play with their aunts and uncle on the short ride to the venue. Several girls crowded the hotel steps, calling out questions to the girls. Laney brushed past them, ignoring any attempts of theirs to catch her attention. Bailey rolled her eyes, wondering how someone who seemed to crave attention so badly could pass up the opportunity to be fawned over by dozens of people at a time.

"Are the guys coming out?" one girl yelled out, pushing her way to the front of the small crowd of girls. She couldn't have been more than thirteen-years-old, and the innocent excitement in her face made Bailey stop and smile at her just as Laney slammed the bus door shut behind her.

"No, sweetie, they're already gone," Bailey said with a sympathetic look. "They're doing a radio interview this morning. I bet if you head down to the station though, you can catch them for some autographs on the way out." The young girl grinned at her and shouted a quick thanks before turning to her mother behind her and squealing, begging her to drive her and her squealing friends down to the station. "Good luck!" she called to the girls before boarding the bus herself.

"I don't understand how you can stand those annoying little brats," Laney said crossly when Bailey entered.

"I think they're sweet," Bailey replied calmly. "I don't find them annoying at all."

Laney rolled her eyes dramatically and clicked the television on as the bus began rolling towards their destination for the night. Bailey simply smiled and shook her head, relieved that all of this time spent

so closely with Delaney Reid would soon be ending.

That night, Laney watched the show from the side of the stage as she had for the last several nights. It was hard to make sure she was always looking at Zac when he glanced her way to wink at her during the set because her eyes always managed to get locked on Taylor. His smile, the way he pushed his hand through his sweaty hair, the way he oozed sex in his voice as he sang, and his slender body drenched in sweat were all like magnets for her eyes, making it nearly impossible to look away from him. She knew the time she had to attain her goal was rapidly disappearing. This time tomorrow, the show would be nearly over and they would be packing up to head to their separate houses instead of a hotel. She knew that before then, something dramatic and completely unexpected had to happen if she was going to make her move. And as her devious mind began turning over idea after idea, she had no clue that the two people who would help make her plan a reality were the last two people on earth she would have expected.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

As the busses pulled up in front of Cain's Ballroom, the relief on the faces of Isaac, Taylor, and Zac was evident. As much as they loved touring and playing shows, it was a draining activity and they longed for a break from all of the commotion. While they went inside for sound check, Bailey remained on the bus with the twins and Zoë, letting them play and hoping they'd get some of their energy out now and fall asleep during the show. When she saw the line of meet and greeters heading inside the building, she knew it was a good time to head inside because the show would be starting in a little over an hour from then.

After packing up the twins' stuff, she slung one on each hip and put Zoë in charge of carrying their diaper bag. She hurried the three youngest Hansons into the venue quickly, stopping only briefly to grab a couple of gifts for the babies that were shoved towards her. In the middle of a game of peek-a-boo with Arielle, the door to the greenroom swung open, and Bailey was surprised when she uncovered her eyes and saw that her unexpected visitors were Taylor and Diana. "Hey, baby, what are you doing up here? Isn't the show supposed to start soon?"

"Yeah, I know," Taylor grinned. "Mom said she'd watch the babies for tonight so you can come watch the show from the stage."

"Oh, you don't have to do that, Mrs. Hanson. I don't mind watching them," Bailey said, unable to hide the surprise at the offer.

"Bailey, come on," Taylor groaned playfully, grabbing her hand and pulling her to her feet. "Have some fun on your last night."

"Um...okay, if you're sure..." she said, glancing at Diana awkwardly.

Diana smiled and pulled her into a tight hug. "It's no problem. Have fun, Bailey."

Confused, Bailey let Taylor pull her out of the greenroom and down to the stage on his side. "Is

everything okay? I could swear your mom was just about to start crying.”

“She’s fine,” Taylor said, waving her off. “I think she’s just sad the tour’s over.”

“Why would she be sad about-”

Taylor cut off her questions with a firm kiss on her lips, catching her just as the house lights went off and the noise from the crowd swelled in anticipation. “I love you,” he said in her ear.

His words sent a chill down her spine. Something felt different, but she wasn’t sure what it was. Before she could say anything, he smiled at her and hurried on stage with his brothers, leaving her confused. Obviously something was up, but she could think of nothing to explain the behavior of her boyfriend or his mother, so she let it escape her mind as they began playing. The energy and excitement of watching them from so close was entirely different from watching them on the screens in the greenroom. Even though she had seen them perform countless numbers of times, it was still thrilling to be there so close, to see Taylor look up at her over the piano as though he was singing directly to her while the words to *I Will Come To You* and *Crazy Beautiful* poured from his lips. Even the death glares she was receiving from Laney from the opposite side of the stage couldn’t put a damper on her mood. As much as Bailey loved watching the twins, she couldn’t help thinking that this position would be an even better way to spend every night on the next tour.

The show ended much too quickly, and Bailey felt sure it had been less than an hour since Taylor had dragged her down there. A glance at her watch proved her wrong, showing that over two and a half hours had passed. They ran off the stage towards her and gulped down water and towed the sweat from their faces, and the girls in the audience began chanting their names in anticipation for an encore. Bailey watched in surprise as Zac and Isaac sat down, making no moves to return to the stage. “What are you guys doing? Isn’t there an encore.”

“Yeah, we’re just not in it,” Isaac replied with a knowing laugh.

“What the hell does that mean?” she asked, looking at Taylor utterly confused. She snuck a glance across the stage at Laney to gauge her reaction, but could tell by the other girl’s expression that she was baffled as well.

Taylor smiled and grabbed her hand, leading her towards the stage. Bailey dug her heels into the ground, but it was useless as her flip flops slid across the slick hardwood. “No, Taylor...what are you doing?” she hissed, trying to dislodge her wrist from his grip.

“Just trust me,” he said, winking at her and continuing to pull her until they were in the middle of the stage, a thousand astounded faces staring back at them. He removed Isaac’s microphone from its stand and brought it to his lips. “Hey, guys, we have an encore coming up, but there’s something I needed to do before we can get to that. A lot of you may recognize this beautiful girl beside me as my girlfriend Bailey, but tonight I wanted to do something special for her.” He turned to Bailey and took her hand in his, his mouth smiling uncontrollably at the perplexed expression on her face. “Bailey, I love you more than anything in this world, and I want nothing more than to spend the rest of my life with you.” He stopped and drew something from his pocket, then fell to one knee and said, “Bailey, will you marry me?”

A collective gasp from the crowd drowned out Bailey's own gasp of shock. Here was the man she loved, kneeling before her and asking her to accept the ring he was offering her, and she couldn't make words come out of her mouth. Tears sprang to her eyes, and her free hand flew up to cover her mouth, which she could feel was still hanging open stupidly, but which she couldn't seem to find the strength to close. Taylor was looking at her expectantly, as were the thousands of pairs of eyes on her from the audience. She suddenly felt sick to her stomach, and with a choked, "I'm sorry," she fled the stage.

Taylor watched her run, his smile fading instantly in confusion. Suddenly he felt like an idiot. Thousands of people had just watched him propose to his girlfriend, and thousands of people had seen her run off in tears without giving him an answer. He dropped the microphone and ran after her, catching up with her as she ducked into a women's bathroom backstage. He could faintly hear Isaac and Zac apologizing from the stage that there would be no encore, and thanking them for coming, but he wasn't concerned with the fans as he pushed the door open and followed her inside.

"Jesus Christ, Taylor, what the fuck *was* that?!" Bailey exclaimed, gesturing angrily in the direction of the stage, tears pouring down her cheeks.

"You're asking *me*?!" he yelled back. "You're not the one who just got made a fool of in front of thousands of people!"

"How not?!" she spat back, swiping angrily at her tears. "I mean, we haven't even so much as *talked* about getting engaged, and you just drag me on stage and ask me during a show without even knowing how I feel about the whole thing?"

"How do you feel?" he demanded gruffly, crossing his arms over his chest. "Since apparently the thought of marrying me makes you want to run away and cry."

"It's not that," she sighed heavily. "I'm just not *ready*, Taylor...I've only just started my career and you're a long way from slowing down. We're not ready to settle down and start a family! I see how difficult it is for Isaac and Drea raising kids on the road all the time, and I don't want to be like them!"

"Getting engaged doesn't mean we have to start conceiving tonight, Bailey," he snapped. "It's just what is it...*engaged*, as in planning to get married eventually. We don't have to get married next week, I just thought it was time to take our relationship to the next level, especially after everything we've been through this summer. But apparently you don't feel the same way."

"Is that what this is, then? An apology for the things that happened this summer?" Bailey retorted harshly. "Do you *really* want to marry me, or do you just hope this will make me forget everything that's happened?"

"I want to fucking marry you, Bailey!" Taylor yelled. "How much clearer could that possibly be?! I love you, and I want to be with you for the rest of my life, and I *thought* you wanted the same thing, otherwise I wouldn't have set all this shit up just to fucking embarrass myself!"

Bailey shut her eyes tightly, wishing this whole nightmare had been nothing more than a figment of her imagination. But when she opened them again, Taylor was still standing before her glaring, his cheeks pinked with anger and his eyes narrowed to slits. "I do want that, Taylor, just not right *now*. I'm not

ready to make that step...not yet.”

“Well when you decide you’re *ready*, give me a fucking call and let me know,” he snapped. He turned and threw the swinging door open, sending it crashing into the wall loudly. Bailey leaned against the wall, sobs racking her body as she watched him leave her in the backstage bathroom all alone. The irony of the situation, the fact that Laney had tried so hard all summer to come between them but that it had been her who had made Taylor turn his back on her, made her feel sick to her stomach. She barely made it to the toilet before the contents of her stomach returned in the most unpleasant of ways.

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“I don’t *want* to be babysitter right now!” Laney cried, as Zac pushed her down the hallway toward the doors. He had shoved a sleeping Aidan into her arms only after Diana had dumped the child onto him and expected him to handle it. Laney had watched Bailey reject Taylor and it was the happiest that she’d felt in months and now, all of a sudden, there was no one available to watch Aidan?

“Laney, please, just be accommodating for once and take Aidan out to the bus, all right? It’s gotten a little hectic around here right now and we ran out of extra arms. If I ever needed to ask something of you and expect you to do it without whining, this would be it,” he said, raising his eyebrows. She wanted to take offense to that but she was too preoccupied with her frustration for it to matter. With an exaggerated huff, Laney rested Aidan against her shoulder and turned on her heel. Stalking away from Zac, she hurried out of the venue and stomped towards the bus. Slamming the door shut behind her, Laney hurried towards the back of the bus where she could lay Aidan down. Just as he pushed into the lounge, she was surprised to see Taylor sitting on the couch, his face in his hands and his body convulsing gently with sobs.

“Oh,” she said, quietly, trying to mask the excitement that boiled through her blood. Of course Taylor would run away and hide following a disappointment as monumental as the one he’d just experienced. She should have known that he would come here. He didn’t have a car available to escape to his house and Laney had watched Bailey disappear into the bathroom inside. He looked up to her, surprised to find that he was not alone. Had he not heard her come in? Was he so distraught that he heard nothing else but the sound of his own heart breaking? Laney hoped so. The more upset that Taylor was about the situation, the better chance she had of executing her plan.

“I didn’t... I didn’t know that you were in here,” she said, advancing into the room slowly. His eyes followed her as she stepped across the room. “I’m just... I’m going to lay Aidan down, okay? Then we can talk.” She was surprised to see him nod but she did as she said and rested Aidan between a pair of pillows on his parent’s bed. She returned to him slowly and with grace and elegance, she sat beside him, smoothing her skirt underneath her as she did so. She placed her hand on his shoulder.

“Are you okay?” she asked. “I saw what happened.” Taylor nodded but didn’t pull away from her touch.

“Or what *didn’t* happen,” he responded. He looked up to her slowly with wet eyes. She looked back at him sympathetically, letting him know that he could confide in her. She knew how vulnerable he was. In only a matter of minutes she could have him right where she wanted him.

“You were there,” Taylor continued. “You saw what she did to me. And in front of all of those people? I



am going to be a joke. God, I can't believe that she would reject me." Laney raised an eyebrow when he looked away and she brought her hand to his back gently, rubbing it slowly.

"Why would she do that?" Laney asked. "You love her."

"Because obviously *she* doesn't love *me*," he said. "At least not as much I thought she did." Laney had practically predicted him to respond with those words. It would be so easy to feed the conversation now.

"You've went through so much for her this summer, Taylor," she said.

"I know! And she thinks that I am proposing to her just to make up for all of the shit that's happened too!" he said, exasperated. "God, sometimes she can be so stupid." Laney nodded and shook her head as he looked back to her.

"Has it been worth all of this, Taylor?" she asked. "I mean, you've practically bent over backwards for her to convince her of your love for her and this is how she repays you?" Taylor nodded and sighed, his eyes flicking over her face.

"This summer has been hard on us," he said. "Maybe it just... it signified the end of our relationship. I hate to say that but how do you recover from something like this? She doesn't even want to be *engaged* to me. I can't see that as anything but a sign that she doesn't want the same things that I do."

Beneath her palm, Laney felt him tense. He was so close to that point. She licked her lips and raised her eyebrows.

"Well, what do you want?" she asked. He looked away from her and focused on the carpet at his feet. He shrugged.

"I thought that I wanted her but it's hard to say that anymore when I don't feel that she loves me the way that I need her to," he said.

"And she doesn't trust you. If she did, she wouldn't have been wary of my presence these last few months," she said, shaking her head. "You don't need someone who doesn't trust you, Taylor, because then every girl who ever enters your life, professionally or socially, will be a threat and you shouldn't have to deal with that."

Slowly, Taylor looked back at her and he seemed to agree with what she was saying. He was vulnerable to Bailey's flaws and Laney needed every reason to convince him that Bailey was not what he wanted. At least not right now.

"You gave her every reason to be jealous," he said, slowly. Laney looked over his face, curious as to why he would say that. Was he angry with her? Was he about to blame her for this whole thing? If he turned this around on her, she would not be able to go through with the plan. In less than an hour, everything would be over for her and she would be stuck with Zac. She needed this to happen tonight.

"And you gave her every reason to suspect your disloyalty," she answered. "You can't tell me that you honestly didn't think about what it would be like to be with me, Taylor. I've seen the way that you've

looked at me. I've seen where your eyes wander when you think that no one is watching you."

Taylor wanted so badly for her to be wrong but she was telling him his own truths. The only reason that he was in this situation with Bailey was because of the way that he'd lusted for Laney. Since the moment that he met her, she'd captivated him in a way that Bailey never had. Bailey was all that Taylor had ever known. As a famous rock star, he'd always seen himself with girls like Laney but it was always Zac who brought them home. She was the epitome of everything that Bailey feared and Taylor had fought every urge to suppress his unspoken desire for Delaney Reid. Bailey had thrown his efforts away and would not even acknowledge the fact that he had chosen her. Bailey didn't want him and despite how much he still wanted to fight for her, he couldn't deny the fact that she didn't believe in him. Taylor had nothing left to lose. That which had pulled the thread and unraveled them was sitting right in front of him. If he didn't find out what it was like to touch Delaney Reid, then it all would have been for nothing.

The logics didn't seem right but Taylor was not ready to think of an alternative. He leaned in to Laney and was not surprised when she brought her hand to his cheek and brought him the rest of the way. Their lips touched once and the feeling of her kiss was so dynamic that Taylor yearned for more. He kissed her again, harder this time and brought his hand to the side of her face. He anchored his lips against hers and he deepened the kiss, opening her lips and pushing his tongue into her mouth. She returned the kiss just as eagerly. She was rough and demanding and unlike Bailey, she used strength and power when she kissed him. They parted briefly and in the few seconds that they were apart, Laney took the initiative to move in closer to him. She shifted her weight and slipped her leg over his waist until she was straddling him.

Taylor knew that everything about the situation was wrong but it felt too good for him to care. He placed his hands on her bare thighs and as she began kissing him again, he pushed his palms against her skin, his fingers finding their way under her skirt. Her ass was bare as he took hold and pushed her closer to him, placing pressure upon the unmistakable throbbing of his groin. Laney pulled her lips away from his and placed them upon his neck. Her tongue played at his skin and it drove him crazy. He tilted his head back and closed his eyes as he moved his hands to her waist. He pushed his hands underneath her blouse and her skin was warm against his palms. She shifted to accommodate him and let him pull her shirt over her head. Seeing so much of her body caused him to sigh and his lips were instantly drawn to her skin. He pushed her bra straps away and kissed her shoulders and her collarbone and once she unclasped and removed her bra, he kissed between her breasts. She followed his actions and eagerly pulled his shirt over his head. His hand found his way to her chest and he massaged her roughly as he kissed back to her lips. She greeted him warmly and pushed her fingers through his hair. She pulled herself closer to him in the process and he dropped his hand away from her, letting her chest press close to his.

Kissing and touching her was the greatest treason Taylor had ever committed but in all of the anger that he felt for Bailey that night, he no longer cared. Laney's intentions may have been deceitful but Taylor needed her to be his distraction tonight.

Outside of the bus, Zac pushed open the stage door with so much force that it flew back and slammed into the wall. He needed Laney back. He had sent her to the bus and Bailey was on her way there, screaming and crying. If Laney even so much as fell into Bailey's line of vision tonight, he feared for her life. He didn't expect Bailey to be angry with Laney but he did expect Laney to give her a reason to lash out if they encountered each other.

He bounded to the bus, ignoring the screams and flashing cameras. In only a matter of seconds, Bailey would come dashing through the same door that he just exited. He reached out and opened the bus door and pulled himself inside. Breathless, he ran his fingers through his hair and proceeded through the bus quickly, intent on rescuing Laney. What he saw when he entered the lounge caused him to stop. Everything stopped. All previous thoughts and actions were cut short. No more than ten feet away from him were Taylor and Laney, sitting half naked in each other's arms, their faces pressed together in some kind of desperate yearning. He didn't know what to say or do. All that he could do was watch in horror.

Bailey stumbled onto the bus and ran straight into him. Zac was so shocked and horrified, that he didn't even flinch. Bailey grabbed onto Zac's arm as an anchor and turned her wet and swollen eyes onto the scene. Neither of them could look at each other because nothing was more surprising than the current state of their significant others.

"What the *fuck* is this?" Bailey cried. With her words, they finally realized that they were no longer alone. Laney pulled her lips away from Taylor as he ripped his head to the side, his eyes finding Bailey and Zac in horror. On instinct, he pushed Laney away from him and she wasn't even embarrassed as she tumbled to the ground, her chest exposed and open to everyone in the room.

"Bailey..." Taylor cried, breathlessly as he pulled himself to his feet. His mouth was red from the force of Laney's lips and an erection was clearly evident through his jeans.

"I come here to apologize to you... to tell you that I am being selfish and stupid and this is what I find? **Fuck you**, Taylor," she screamed. Taylor stumbled forward but he didn't have any words to give back to her. He had been caught and there was nothing he could say to make the situation any better.

On the floor at Taylor's feet, Laney was pulling her tank top over her head. With grace and composure, she pulled herself to her feet and wiped the back of her hand across her mouth. She proceeded to smooth her hands over her clothes. Zac wanted to hate her for everything that she was and everything that he'd failed to notice about her. She wasn't even upset that they had found them there.

"You wanted this to happen!" Bailey yelled, turning her attention to the girl. She stole the thoughts from Zac's mind. She advanced on Laney and before she could even blink, Bailey's hands hit square into Laney's shoulders and she stumbled back into the wall behind her. In her emotional state, Bailey was not strong enough to hold her and Laney shook free of her grasp. She looked back at Bailey and Zac watched in horror as a sly smile crossed her face.

"I did," she said. "And, if I do say so myself, I succeeded in reaching my goal." She placed one hand on her hip and sent a glance in Zac's direction. "You've been good to me, baby, but you were never the one that I wanted. I'm sorry that I have to break your heart but you should have known better than to fall in love with me." She turned her eyes back to Bailey. "And you... you were the only one who saw me, Bailey. You could have ruined my plan so many times but you're just too nice. It's a shame because you've only contributed to your own downfall." Turning to Taylor, Laney smiled. "You took so long to come to me but I'm glad that you did. I knew that you wanted me since the day that you met me and even years before I found my way into your life, I knew that, one day, I would taste you, Taylor Hanson. Unfortunately for Bailey, it turned into more of a vendetta on her life. I'm happy though. Everything went as planned. You all acted accordingly and, standing here right now, I'm satisfied."

As much as Bailey wanted to tear into her and with all of the hate that Taylor felt for her then, it was

Zac who acted first. Out of the pain of a broken heart, he lashed out at her and pushed her hard against the opposite wall. She was not strong enough to outlast his arms. His hold on her was resolute. The attack surprised Laney and despite her desire to stay cool, she stared back at him with wide eyes as he pressed in close to her.

“Fuck you, Delaney,” Zac hissed, his hands pinning her wrists to the wall angrily. “You find satisfaction in the destruction of others? Who the fuck are you? As much as I once thought that I loved you, I hate you three times that amount, Laney and I will be honest and tell you that that is a lot. I want you to get the fuck out of our lives, Laney. Fuck off because you’ve already destroyed everything else. I wish that I could keep you here so that you could see the look Drea’s face when she finds out who you really are, when my mother realizes what you’ve done to her family. But I can’t do that because I don’t ever want to see your face again. You an ugly, selfish, fucked up person.”

Angrily, Zac pulled her wrists away from the wall and pushed her forcibly towards the door. She stumbled forward and extended her hands to keep herself from falling face first onto the floor. Without a word, she pulled herself to her feet, brushed invisible dander from her skirt and then she smiled.

“It’s been fun,” she said, and she pushed open the bus door and stepped onto the pavement outside. Through the windows, the three watched speechlessly as she walked past the crowd, letting them photograph her as she stepped up to the curb. Within five minutes, she had disappeared into the back of a taxi cab and she was gone. All that remained were her forgotten belongings and the irrepressible destruction that she had left behind.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

It took nearly a full minute for the three remaining in the bus to realize what had happened. Delaney Reid had ruined their lives, destroyed each one of them, smiled, and walked away. Finally, Taylor’s daze was broken, and he turned his steely eyes on his brother.

“This is all your fault,” he growled, shoving Zac’s shoulders and making him stumble back in surprise.

“My fault?!” Zac replied loudly, his eyebrows raised.

“You are the one that brought that bitch into our lives!” Taylor yelled, balling his hands into fists at his side. “If it wasn’t for you needing to bring along your little fuck-buddy for the summer, none of this shit would have happened! You ruined my fucking life, Zac!”

“Fuck you, Taylor!” Zac yelled, giving Taylor an even harder shove. Taylor quickly regained his balance, but Zac was already in his face. “I don’t remember seeing your hands tied up when I walked on this bus and saw my fucking girlfriend on your lap! You probably would have fucked her if none of us had walked in! So go ahead and blame me! Blame Laney for all the shit she did. But then if you’re still looking for someone to blame, and I know you will be, why don’t you try blaming your fucking self?”

All of the shouting finally became too much, and Aidan began wailing from the back of the bus. Bailey jumped to her feet instinctively to go to him, but Zac stopped her, surprising her when he pulled her

into a hug. "I'll get him, Bailes...I'm gonna take him on the other bus. You need to stay here."

In all of the excitement, Taylor had nearly forgotten about Bailey. As Zac brushed past him harshly and returned with the screaming toddler, closing the bus door roughly behind him, it all came flooding back to him when he was forced to look at her face. She dropped back down to the sofa, her face blank and expressionless as though all of the life had been drained from within her. He didn't know what to do or say. He waited for her to scream at him, punch him, something, anything. But she just sat there, staring blankly at the wall opposite her.

*Always be there  
Face I live with*

"Bailey..." he spoke softly.

*Abscess memory with broken fingers*

She turned her eyes up to him, fixing her dull stare on him. "How could you?" she whispered, her voice breaking as though she hadn't spoken in days.

"I...I just..." Words failed him, and he sighed in defeat.

*All the fallen down angels  
Raw pain distress*

"How could you just...just throw away everything we've built together for the last five years?" she continued. Her chin shook as tears began sliding down her flushed cheeks. She made no move to wipe them away; she couldn't even feel them. Her skin felt as numb as her soul within her. "I've given up... *everything* for you. I have no friends, because I spend all my time leaving so I can be with you. I...I plan my *life* around you, Taylor. Around us. And this is how I get rewarded? I find you practically having sex with Zac's girlfriend on the bus? I can't...I can't even process this."

*It's all in the way we know that we could have it all*

Taylor sat gingerly beside her. He struggled not to cry; he didn't want her to see how weak and vulnerable he was. He wanted to be strong for her, strong enough to apologize to her for what he'd done, because he couldn't let himself lose her. "I love you...Bailey, I love you so much. And it killed me when you didn't say yes to me tonight. I didn't know what to do, and I-"

"You think that's any excuse?" she said to him incredulously. "What is the *matter* with you, Taylor? First you try to blame Zac for what's happened, and now you want to make somehow *my* fault? You're

twenty-two years old, Taylor! Take some fucking responsibility for your own fucking actions!”

*Some satellites of pain can't always be ignored*

“I know!” he yelled, his voice cracking. He knew his was dangerously close to losing all composure, but he no longer cared. All that mattered was that she was right. Maybe Zac had started the entire chain of events by bringing Laney on the tour. Maybe Laney had been a large part in destroying the relationship of this girl he loved more than even he himself realized. And maybe Bailey had even played a part by rejecting him in the most public and embarrassing of ways. But when it all came down to it, he had no one to hate but himself. He had let himself be captivated by Laney’s outside beauty, leaving him blind to all of the ugliness inside of her. He had let her weave her web of deceit and trap him in it. And in the end, he had let her straddle him and take advantage of his pain. “I know... God, I know. This is all my fault...” He felt the warm saltwater pooling in his eyes, he even felt the teardrops as they began rolling down his cheeks, but he wiped them away angrily. They were selfish tears. “Bailey, please...we can work this out...” He reached out his hand and rested it on her shoulder, but she slapped his hand away roughly.

*War on all sides  
War on all sides*

“Don’t touch me!” she screamed, moving away from him. “Don’t ever touch me again! You think you can fix this? You think I can ever let you touch me again without remember how you touched her with them?! You think I can ever kiss you again without remembering the way I felt when I saw you kissing *her*?! We can’t *fix* this, Taylor! Nothing you could ever say or do could make me forget this pain! I came to you so many times this summer...I showed you every one of my insecurities, and every time, you brushed them off like it was nothing and promised me that you felt nothing for her. So to walk in here and find you all over each other...when I was coming in here to tell you what an idiot I had been, and that I wanted to marry you...You might as well have just taken a knife and put it through my heart, because I think that would have hurt a lot fucking less.”

*Drink life as it comes  
Straight no chaser  
Drink life as it comes  
Straight no chaser*

Taylor couldn’t make his brain function at a level high enough to make appropriate speech. Words were running through his mind, but none of it made sense. He tried to put them together, to make something intelligent come out, because if he was ever going to be able to get her back, it had to happen now. He was frantic; he felt like his tongue had swollen to the size of a watermelon and the ability to speak was gone. “I can’t...I can’t lose you like this, Bailey. I need you...I need you so fucking much. I’m sorry... I’m so sorry for everything I’ve done. I betrayed your trust, and I know that, and I’ll do anything... *anything* that it takes to make you trust me again, even if it takes me until the day I die. Just please... please don’t let it end this way. Can’t we at least try...?”

*Climb inside you  
Away from strangers  
Building a system of alleys and motorways  
It's all in the way that we know we could have it all*

Bailey watched his face as it crumbled with emotion. She had never seen him cry like this, not even at his grandmother's funeral. Taylor always wanted to be strong, he always wanted to be the rock for everyone else. She knew that he was being genuine, that he would do anything it took to make her stay with him. And more than anything, she wanted to forgive him, because she couldn't imagine living her life without him either. He was all she had ever known, and all she ever wanted to know. She knew that she had made a mistake as soon as he left her in that cold and lonely bathroom, realizing herself to be an idiot as she vomited, realizing that she wanted nothing more than to be Taylor Hanson's wife and grow old with him. Now, looking at her pain reflected in his eyes, she tried to force herself to reach out to him, to hold him and accept his apology and tell him that together they could work this out. But her arms wouldn't move. Her body knew better than to listen to her broken heart.

*Some satellites of pain can't always be ignored  
It's all in the face of what we thought we knew before  
War on all sides  
War on all sides  
War on all sides*

"No, Taylor..." she said quietly. "No. We can't try. This can't ever go back to the way it was. I...I can't ever love you the same after something like this." She stood up on shaky legs, hoping they could support her long enough to leave him. "It's over."

Taylor jumped to his feet, grabbing onto her arm as she walked away from him. "Bailey, *please*, don't do this!"

She whirled around at his touch. "*You* did this, Taylor. And I hope you remember that." Wrenching her hand away, she ran from him, not knowing what she was going to do.

As she slammed the bus door behind her, Drea appeared exiting the second bus. The look on her face as her eyes met Bailey's plainly said that she had been informed of everything by Zac. Wordlessly, she made her way to the broken girl before her and pulled her into an embrace, thankful that the fans had given up and gone home so that there were no pictures to be taken of this heartbreak. "It's okay, sweetie..." Drea whispered into her ear, leading her to the steps of the back entrance. "Zac called your mom...she's on her way to get you."

Bailey said nothing. She cried and cried, her face buried in Drea's warm skin as Drea rubbed slow circles over her back. Drea sighed and rocked her gently, knowing nothing she could do would take away Bailey's pain. Only time had that ability.

*Keep on driving*

*Hair left morning wet  
There's nothing like losing you*

Taylor watched them from the otherwise empty bus, his fingers touching the cold glass. He felt empty on the inside, and the void he felt he knew would never be filled. The opening and closing of the bus door scared him, and he turned to see the driver hopping into the driver's seat. "Are we waiting on anyone else?" he asked.

"No..." Taylor said quietly, turning back to the window. "It's just me."

*There's nothing like losing you*

"You must be real glad this shit is over," the driver continued, unaware that lives had been shattered in his absence. "Next stop, home sweet home."

As the bus pulled away from the curb, Taylor watched from behind his tears as Bailey became just another shadow, disappearing from sight as she was from his life. "Home..." he whispered. "I don't think I know what that is anymore..."

*There's nothing like losing you*