

Chapter Forty-Six

Recap

I shut the door behind me and lock it securely before traveling the center of the living room where Travis is seated on the couch a few inches away from the curtains.

"This could all be solved if they just let you in." Travis nearly growls, a scowl conquering his features.

I take a seat on the arm chair beside the window and nod my head in agreement. "Seriously. And at least I would've known if they were on the right track at least—I mean what if none of those guys are it."

"That's a good possibility, considering James is most likely behind this." Travis points out angrily, "He's good at being bad—I'll give him credit for that."

As he speaks, I hear the sound of a dying engine followed by two distinct voices and slamming doors. Both of our heads snap in the direction of the window.

My heart begins to race as I recognize the familiar tapping heels and thumping business shoes. It seems as if all these years of never hearing them, I've grown more familiar to them.

The sound of Dad's burgundy leather business shoes pounding on the ragged cement.

My eyes widen and I instantly leap towards the window. I gently brush aside one of the covers of the curtain to get a better look. I don't recognize the car—it's a rental—a very cheap rental accord.

Then I catch sight of Laura, dashing around the vehicle, only to meet Dad on the other side.

I throw the curtains forward and spin around to face Travis with an unleashed force of panic. He seems just as concerned, and just as aware of the entire situation before I state it.

"My parents are home."

Chapter Forty Six

"Oh God," I repeat for the millionth time, pacing near the door as their steps approach the other side. "Should we pretend we're not home?"

Travis exhales sharply, his shoulders expanding as he does so. "We can't. The Impala is parked out there."

I take a quick glance and internally groan, "Right."

Reluctantly, I reach for the lock and pull it open. Before I can muster a hello, Dad rushes forward, grabs my arm and pulls my body into his for a warm embrace. Despite the inner battle churning in my gut, screaming in protest at their presence, I sigh and relish the innocently secure aura that surrounds us.

With my head on his shoulder, I glance up at Laura, who has a small smile plastered on her features as she watches us. I extend my hand out to her from the side of Dad's torso and she interlaces them with a pleased expression.

She stares at me, her eyes full of uncertainty and question, while I stare back, willing myself to keep my features void of any negativity. As Dad pulls back, I give Laura's hand a reassuring squeeze before letting go and stepping away myself.

"Faye are you okay?" Dad glances down at me, concern and beyond evident in his glassy gaze. His eyes wander, somehow trying to confirm that I am physically fine—it's now more than ever that I am thankful to be wearing a jacket to cover my prospective lie.

"Yeah," I nod, "I'm fine."

"We saw everything on the news—I still can't believe it." Laura pitches in, her voice fading as she shifts to stare at our house across the street.

It doesn't look so bad, now that the caution tape is gone—but it's still unsettling to me.

"It's okay," I quickly regurgitate the statements that had once carried me throughout, "It's not too bad—it's just a heightened misunderstanding."

As I say so, I feel Travis move in his stance behind me. Both Laura and Dad dart their gazes to him, and he stills while they inspect him momentarily. With a light cough, Travis steps forward, his chest nearly touching my back and sending out waves of warmth.

Though unlike the warmth in Dad's embrace, this sensation is different. It's instinctive—raw—and a relief being around Travis for so long, growing accustomed to his lifestyle—it means uncertainty and precaution.

Dad shoots his arm out for a handshake, "Thank you, Travis, for taking care of my family when we couldn't be there."

It goes unnoticed when we both flinch back slightly at his abrupt movement. I drop my posed hand and step aside to look at Travis and my father interact in a civil manner. Travis too had his fists clenched and ready for something, but upon Dad's bold move, he had relaxed slightly.

"My pleasure, Mr. Williams," He reaches out to complete the handshake and also offers Laura a tight but welcoming nod. A hint of an amused smile crosses his features during the interaction, and I mentally roll my eyes at the timing of his humor.

"Alright," Laura begins, clasping her hands gently, "We appreciate all that you've done but don't wish to disturb you and your family any longer—so, we will be on our way."

"Whoa—"

"What?"

Travis and I begin to fumble hesitantly at the same moment in time. Without even glancing at each other, we know that only bad things can happen if they continue to be around us—there's no way I can go with them. We both know it.

Dad looks at me and nods in encouragement, "You're okay now, don't worry—can you get Layla?"

I shake my head both in horror and dread, "I can't—not yet anyways."

"What are you talking about, Faye?" Dad presses firmly.

"Okay." I clasp my hands together, feeling a tight grimace address my features. "Layla is down at the police station—they want her to identify among the possible suspects."

Laura's eyes widen and Dad exhales sharply before looking everywhere but at me.

"Why didn't you call us when this happened?" Dad folds his arms across his chest and readjusts his stance into a rigid one. He's trying to hold it together, but I can tell from the way his forehead lines crease, that he's only hanging by a thread.

"I was going to," I lie easily, "But it just happened—and we all thought you would be coming much later. I just didn't want to get you two all worked up halfway across the states. I'm sorry..."

I glance up at Dad, my neck heavy and my voice utterly sincere. With a resounding sigh, he drops his highly poised shoulders and reaches out to pat my shoulder gently with a small smile.

"Alright Williams," He reassures me, his tone somewhat lighter, "But, in the future, don't even hesitate. Clear?"

I nod and return his smile, "Crystal."

Laura shifts her gaze from Dad to Travis upon witnessing our compromise.

"Well, if she just left, why don't we wait for her there?" She asks, her eyes brightening.

Behind me, Travis stills on the idea, but I find it refreshing and suitable. Rather than wasting moments in danger here with us or in the house, they could be completely safe at the police station.

"I don't—"

"You know what?" I interrupt Travis before he can say anything else, "we were just on our way there."

"Really?" Laura sounds slightly unconvinced. I mentally curse myself when I realize that from her view, we were still nestled in this household—not by the car door.

I quickly nod, "Yeah. When the police came, I tried to get them to take me to, but they wouldn't let me because Layla was the first person they talked to on the scene. So Travis and I figured if they wouldn't take me with them, we'd just go to the station ourselves."

Dad turns around on his heel and Laura nods her head in understanding, "Alright, well that's perfect. Would you mind if we accompanied you there?"

"No, not at all." I reply while making a move to follow a car.

Travis grabs my arm in an instant and spins me around to face him. He glares down at me furiously, his emerald green eyes spewing incredulity.

"We can't go down there with them!" He hisses while jerking his head in their direction.

I tug my hand from his grip and shake my head calmly, "I know it sounds crazy—"

"It doesn't just sound crazy." Travis fires lowly, narrowing his brows.

I roll my eyes, "Okay, look. It's the best option we've got. They can either put themselves in danger by being anywhere in this proximity—near us—or they can be perfectly safe down at the station."

"What about the car ride there?" He presses, brushing a hand through his hair.

I shrug, "James is a clever man. He won't run the risk of going anywhere near police property."

"He's dauntless." Travis shakes his head, "He dominates the police."

"Well not this one," I argue, "Because if he did, then there wouldn't even be a Miami county news report on a house robbery and gym shooting."

Travis pauses momentarily while pulling his inner lip under his upper teeth. With a reluctant huff, he releases his now white skin before making up his mind.

"Let me get my keys." He states gruffly.

As he vanishes into the house to get them, I spin on my heel feeling gloatingly triumphant once again. Win. Though, somewhere in the back of mind, I know it should concern me that I'm getting very good at this.

Laura and Dad stand by Travis's impala with strange expressions on their faces.

I raise an eyebrow, "What?"

"Are you two in a relationship?" Laura wonders aloud, her gaze shifting towards the vacant area where we were just standing.

I open my mouth to blatantly deny it, or try to, but the sound of Travis shutting the door blatantly joggles us up to our waiting bittersweet has us all in silence when he approaches.

Both Dad and Laura settle down in the back seats as soon as Travis unlocks the car doors. While passing by my back and making his way to the driver portion, Travis absent-mindedly slips a flat, rectangular shaped plastic bottle in my pocket.

I know the feeling well enough to understand that the bottle is a portable supply of pepper spray. Despite the serious reasons behind the spray, I feel a small smirk lift the corners of my lips.

As Travis starts the engine and I round the impala for the passenger seat, I think of an answer to Laura's earlier inquiry:

Something like that.

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Holy cheeseballs.

I have been so busy these past few weeks—it's crazy. I get dizzy just thinking about it. Anyways, I guess this confirms that I have a life after all, huh? (:

I'm so excited that I have found time to update this story again and I would like to let you know that there are only three chapters left. I think. It totally sucks to talk about the end of PWF, but I've already got another exciting journey lined up, so it's bittersweet. For future reference, I will be picking up on *Rebellious Roots* after PWF.

I feel kind of evil saying this, but from reading all your comments, I'm so proud of the fact that I have literally made you guys doubt everyONE and everyTHING in this story. It makes me feel so great (: Oh, I know I still haven't responded to comments—I will. I haven't forgotten y'all.

With that said, QOB: What has been your favorite moment of the book so far? For sake of memories (:

Can I get 50 comments?

VOMMENT.

xxSummerxx