

## Chapter Five

As we stood by the elevator, waiting for the doors to open, I glanced down at my hand, which was entwined with Joe's. I still couldn't believe I was standing next to him. I glanced over at Natalie, and the look on her face said she was thinking the same thing.

The doors opened and I was surprised when the guys followed us in, not dropping our hands. The knots in my stomach tightened as I thought about what could happen if they followed all the way upstairs. I let out a sigh of content and excitement as the doors began to close. But it quickly changed to a groan when a black boot protruded in between the metal doors, causing them to slid open. It was bad enough that we were no longer alone but why did it have to be them?

"Hey, Nick, Jeff," Donnie said before he turned to Natalie. "Natalie? This is Jeff and Nick from 98 Degrees."

"Yeah, I know." She replied.

I could hear the contempt in her voice. I dared to glance at them. Both guys looked like her words had stung them. Hopefully they now knew how we had felt.

Nick looked right at me as he moved to stand by the elevator buttons.

"What floor?" he asked politely. I almost didn't answer. As he pressed the button for the eighth floor, I felt a bit relieved. He wasn't going to get off on the same floor as us. I just didn't want to be near him any longer than I had to.

"Twelve, please." My voice was barely a whisper. Our eyes were locked and for a brief moment my heart thundered in my chest. As much as I hated to admit it, I still found him unbelievably attractive.

Donnie completely overlooked Natalie's rude comment to Jeff as he went over what we needed to do to attend the sound check.

"You're gonna be at sound check?" Jeff asked her. Natalie just nodded. I saw a little smile peek in the corner of Jeff's mouth. I tried not to groan. The elevator doors opened and Nick and Jeff stepped out. I swear the air in the elevator seemed easier to breathe once all the tension was gone.

We reached our floor far too fast. The doors opened and we moved forward. Joe had never relinquished my hand and for that I was grateful. He gently squeezed my hand when we stopped at our hotel room door. I had to let go of him so I could get the key card out of my bra. He laughed as I reached my hand into the forbidden zone and pulled out the card.

Before I had a chance to unlock the door, Joe pulled me into his arms. He turned me ever so slightly and I was able to see Natalie and Donnie standing closer to the elevator than our room. They were wrapped in each other's arms. Joe gently touched my cheek, bringing me back to him.

"Thank you for tonight," he whispered against my lips before he kissed me tenderly. "It was nice to just be Joe for once." I felt myself melting into him. I could have stayed there all night. I think he felt the same way because he let out a deep sigh and kissed me once a little roughly before he pulled away.

"We better get going before Jon sends the cavalry. It's amazing how he still plays the big brother, even though we are not kids anymore."

I laughed as I could totally see Jon doing that. Joe took my hand again and we walked back to Donnie and Natalie, still hanging out by the elevator.

"So around 2 pm you guys need to be over by the buses so Earl can find you and get your passes to join us for the sound check. Don't be late. He won't wait for long." Natalie was captivated by the sound of Donnie's voice as he gave us instructions. Joe pushed the down button and as the doors opened we were both given kisses goodnight.