

Chapter Six

Although we got back to our room and were in our jammies by 2 am, we were both so wired. Natalie and I sat on the bed chatting until almost 4 am. We finally went to sleep. I was so grateful that my body let me sleep. I was notorious for waking up by 8am; regardless of what time I went to sleep. I did not wake up until almost noon. I let Nat sleep and I took a really long shower. It wasn't until I was out of the shower and blow-drying my hair, did I finally hear Natalie getting up. She knocked on the door, needing the shower. I took the dryer out into the room and let her take the shower.

Two hours later, we were looking our best and heading over to the venue. We walk the eight blocks to the concert hall. It was early enough in the day that the evening traffic hadn't started yet. It was much easier to find where we needed to go than I thought it would be. We saw the buses and big rigs with all the gear. I had looked on line before we left to see what Earl looked like. He was a big black guy that looked both as sweet as a teddy bear and as mean as a grizzly. I walked right up to him, with Natalie in tow.

"Excuse me," I said, as he was walking past the fence, like a sentry. "Are you Earl? We were told to find him." He turned and looked at us and a hint of a smile crept in the corner of his mouth as he took in our clothing.

"Donnie wasn't joking about your, um, attire. He did say two classy women, but I thought he was being sarcastic. I need your names to verify."

I turned to look at Natalie to confirm I would be the one speaking. Without saying a word, she knew what I was asking. She just nodded and I turned back to Earl.

"I'm Adrianna, and this is Natalie," I said with a smile on my face. Earl moved a portion of the barrier out of the way and allowed us past. He started walking towards to the door to the venue. We both just stood there, not sure what to do. I looked to Nat and she shrugged her shoulders. Earl opened a door and turned back to us.

"Are you coming or did you plan to stand out here all night?" I could tell he was teasing but we both scurried up to him as fast as we could in heels and dresses.

As we entered the building, the cold air from the air conditioner flowed over us. My bare shoulders were instantly covered in goosebumps. I chose my dress because I knew I would get hot, but the thin halter like straps of the peach sateen dress I wore didn't help keep me from being cold in that moment.

I turned to Natalie to see that she was experiencing the same thing. Her dress also had thin straps, but the back was cut down almost to the top of her bra. The Seabreeze dress was turquoise and white and accentuated her full bust.

We followed Earl in silence as he walked us through the venue. We could hear the activity going on down on the floor of the arena. Earl stopped at the entrance to section 105. He pulled something out of his back pocket. It was two lanyards with tags that were just a bit bigger than a credit card, hanging from them. The tag was dark and I realized it had "The Package Tour" promo picture on it. Below the image, in bold red letters it said "All Access". Earl looked at the back of one and handed it to Natalie. Then he handed the other to me. As I put it around my neck I noticed that on the back was a white sticker that said my name and VIP. I didn't know what it meant but it put knots in stomach.

I thought Earl would take us all the way down but he simply said, "Just head down there. Anton will show you where to go."

He turned and headed back the way he had come from, leaving us standing there. I turned to look at the stage down below. There were people on the stage setting it up. We started to head down the steps when the sound system was turned on. The cavernous room instantly filled with sound. As we got down to the very bottom, another large black man approached us. He didn't say anything at first. He just looked at our tags and tossed his head to the side, as if to direct us where to go. On the floor, there was the large center stage. There were chairs set up in five different sections, with a piece of the stage in between each section, like petals on a flower. Three of the sections had people in them. But the security guy had motioned for us to go to an empty one.

We sat down in the seats in the front, not knowing what to do next. I hadn't even had a chance to say anything to Natalie when the girls in the section to our right started screaming. I looked up to the main stage, expecting to see the guys of NKOTB, but instead, I faced three black men. Boyz II Men were about to sing.

They did bits and pieces to a few songs, and then they moved to the round stage in the center of the floor and did a full one. "I'll Make Love To You" filled the arena. You could tell the sound guys were tweaking things as the guys sang and moved around the stage. When the song ended, a stagehand came to take their mics. The guys moved to stand at the end of the stage to chat with the girls in the section to our right. Natalie and I had stayed seated, so they didn't come over to us.

I noticed as B2M conversed with the girls, that the band was changing things around a little. Different guitars were brought out and the bass player, Ethan came on the stage. I turned

my attention back to the three men on stage and the fans they were talking with. Natalie tapped me on the shoulder, bringing my attention back to her. She rolled her eyes as she leaned in close to me.

"Maybe we should have tried to be later," she said cryptically. I raised my eyebrows, letting her know I didn't understand. She looked up to the stage. It was then that I saw him. Well, them actually. Nick, Jeff, Drew, and Justin were standing by the drummer, microphones in hand and their backs to us. It looked like they were all discussing something. Nick glanced over his shoulder then, as if he felt my eyes on him. He looked in my direction and a smile was starting to spread across his face. He turned back and brought the mic to his mouth.

"Testing. Testing. Okay Ryan, now can you hear me?" We could hear Ryan acknowledge Nick. I turned to look at Natalie to ask her if she wanted to "go to the ladies room" so we could miss 98 Degrees sound check. But as I opened my mouth to speak, Nick's sultry voice filled the air and my thoughts of leaving quickly faded.

"Ryan, we are going to change our full song from 'One Night' to 'Invisible'."

"Alright. But should I ask why your deviating from the schedule?" A phantom voice called out. Nick held the mic up again and replied.

"Someone here needs to hear it," was all he said. I turned to look at Natalie.

"Invisible?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Maybe it's from the new album? We haven't heard any of it yet."

We didn't get to discuss it any further. 98 Degrees started playing their set. Just like B2M, they did an assortment of songs on the main stage. We did know some of the songs, and because

of our dislike towards Nick and Jeff, we had to catch ourselves when we began to sing along.

The compilation of songs ended and they moved to the center stage and onto the four petals branching off, spaced out with Drew and Justin on our far right and of course, Jeff and Nick to the left and right on either side of us. Nick took to my right, even though I was on the left. The guys were criss crossed with us. I know they prearranged staging, but it felt like they did it so that Natalie and I couldn't look away from them without it being obvious. Natalie and I were facing each other so we could chat, and now they were facing us. The music started and Nick stepped even closer to the edge of the stage.

"Oh oh oh... You can hardly wait to tell all your friends how his kisses taste sweet like wine. And how he always makes your heart skips a beat every time he walks by."

Nick was looking right at me as he sang and his words hit me in the chest. I reached for Natalie's hand. She looked at me with tears starting in her eyes. I could see in her face that she too recognized this song. Jeff began to sing turned away from Nat to look at Jeff sing. He was looking right at Natalie, curling his finger to try and bring her to him. I turned to her and watched her take in a deep breath. I touched her arm and could see her fighting with her emotions. She shook her head no to him, and his head lowered like he was defeated.

"And if your feeling down he'll pick you up. He'll Hold you close when you're making love. He's everything you've been dreaming of. Oh baby."

I watched as the four guys reunited back in the center of the stage; Nick had his back to

me until they all were together. I think Nick wanted my attention again because as they sang the chorus, his voice was even more overpowering than before. I couldn't help but to lock eyes with him. I felt so bad for him in that moment. In his voice I felt the words he sang.

"I wish you'd look at me that way, your beautiful eyes looking deep into mine. Telling me more than any words could say. But you don't even know who I am. Baby to you all I am... Is the invisible man."

I glanced briefly at the other guys and I noticed that Natalie was having a similar situation. Jeff was focused only on her. Justin was playing to some of the girls to the right of us, but Drew was glancing our way. Because of his facial expressions, I wished in that brief moment to know what he was thinking. But I looked away and tried to focus on the group as a whole.

As they sang and moved around the center together, it was apparent that they were supposed to rotate and each focus on a different section as they stepped to the right in a circle. Since we were the only ones in our section, Justin was smiling at me and Drew was looking at Natalie. I was uncomfortable with the way Justin was smiling, like he was trying to flirt with me, so I looked towards Nick, expecting him to be turned away from me. But both Jeff and Nick were looking over their shoulders, keeping their eyes in only one section. Ours.

The song ended and I turned to Natalie. She spoke before I did.

"Did you feel like we were the 'someone' Nick was talking about?"

"Yeah. But I don't know why. I don't like playing games and I am not gonna let him hurt me again."

Just like B2M, the guys passed their microphones to stage hands. I got a moment of relief, thinking we were done with them, as Drew and Justin headed towards the main stage, Nick and Jeff right behind them. But it quickly changed to knots in my stomach as I watch Nick turn left at the bottom of the stairs and head in our direction, Jeff right behind him. I turned to Natalie and laughed at the look on her face. She groaned and then spoke.

"Uh. Please don't let them come over here."

"Maybe they will pass us and head over to those girls."

"Yeah right."

Natalie was right. We stood as they came up to our section. They walked along the row of chairs, stopping right at the first chair in our row. Neither one of them moved any closer. They just stood there looking at us. Finally, Jeff spoke as he put his hand on the back of the first chair.

"Could we speak with you for a moment?" His voice was soft, yet loud enough for us to hear five chairs away. Natalie and I looked at each other. We had no interest in talking to them. But then Jeff said "please" and I could see his voice melt Natalie. She took a few steps towards them and I let out a groan. I rushed up behind her, trying my best to keep my face and voice monotone.

"We have nothing to talk about," I said directly to Jeff, before he could smooth talk Nat.

"I beg to differ," said Nick, taking two steps closer to us, closing the distance between us a little more. Natalie put her hand on my arm. Her voice was kind but not necessarily friendly.

"Let's hear them out," she said. "Its the proper thing to do." I sighed in frustration. Nat

and her etiquette. I would have been happy to yell at them or completely ignore them instead. But she was right, again. We both turned to look at them.

"What happened?" Even though Jeff had asked us to speak with them, it was Nick that asked this question.

"I'm not sure what you're talking about," I said.

"The last time we saw you; at that little bar in Wichita," Nick prompted. "We were having a good time, and then you two girls just disappeared." His words seriously pissed me off.

"We came back from the bathroom to find the two blonde chicks were hanging all over you guys. And you couldn't help but kiss one of them back. That kind of made me feel like you had no interest in me anymore, so why would I want to hang around and watch you work your way through the other girls in the bar!" Nick and Jeff looked at each other, total confusion on their faces.

Natalie had found her voice, and it was clear that she was hurt.

"You shouldn't lead a girl on if you have no intention of following through. You made me feel like I was on cloud nine for a while, like I was the prettiest woman in the world. And then you slapped me in the face with that. And you wonder why we don't ever want to see you again?"

It took them a moment, but then Nick made a face that made me realize he knew exactly what we were talking about. But before he had a chance to say anything my anger boiled over.

"Wow. Thanks for just pouring salt over that wound. You can't even remember what happened because you hook up with so many girls. I think I feel worse for the blonde chicks than us. At least you kind of sort of remembered us."

Both guys started talking at once. But the band on stage began goofing off and playing riffs, probably to impress the girls in the other sections. It was loud enough that we couldn't understand them other than Jeff saying something about how we've got it all wrong. To top it all off, a big black guy came up behind them and put a hand on both guys shoulders. He spoke in Jeff's ear, then Nick's. They nodded to whatever the man said to them. Then Nick looked back at us and raised his voice to make sure we could hear him over the band.

"We really need to finish this, but Jeff and I have to head back." He glanced down at the tag on my lanyard. "You do have access backstage, so please, can we finish this after the show?" I was so angry at him, but felt my tough resolve melting away as his blue eyes locked with mine, tearing my heart in two. He was so sincere. I just nodded and we watched them walk away.

New Kids came on to do their warm up. I tried so hard to focus on Joe but I couldn't. It didn't help that he wasn't really focused on me either. Unlike Nick and Jeff, Joe and Donnie were trying to give attention to everyone in attendance. It should have made me happy, as a fan, that they did that. But as a woman, I was irritated. Why was it that Nick could sing to me, and only me, and we hadn't really interacted with each other in years. But Joe hardly even glanced my way.

They finished their set and came over to the edge of the stage petals to chat with the fans. Donnie and Joe came over to our side first, which after the way the sound check went, I was surprised.

"I'm glad to two could make it, "Joe said. "We only have a few seconds, we need to go say hi to the other fans as well. But you should come backstage after the show. We have a after party going on tonight."

His words slapped me in the face, was I just another fan? All I could do was nod my head and watch him walk away to go talk with the girls in the other section. Donnie hung out with us just a moment longer. He reached out to Natalie but the girls in the other section were chanting for him so he stood up, winked at Natalie and reiterated what Joe said about coming backstage afterwards.

Natalie and I sat down in silent shock. Although I'm sure they didn't mean it, I felt seriously dismissed. Less than 18 hours ago they had made us feel so important and beautiful, and now we felt like we were just another set of fans. We glanced to the other girls in the section beside us and watched as Donnie and Joe and Danny flirted outrageously with them. Donnie and Joe hadn't intentionally hurt us, they just didn't realize that what they had said had cut deep.

They eventually retreated backstage, we assumed to head out to the meet and greet. The show didn't start for two hours, and they wouldn't begin to let people in for another hour. We weren't entirely sure what to do with ourselves. Did we need to go back outside? Could we stay indoors? We both agreed we needed to go to the ladies room and freshen up.

"Maybe we should go back outside," Natalie suggested as we reapplied our lipstick.

"Nick did say that we had full access passes. Lets take advantage of it. The worst they would do is tell us we're in the wrong place and turn us around."

It took a little while longer to convince Natalie, but she finally gave in, knowing that it wasn't worth the fight.

We left the bathroom and headed back into the arena, seeing that the last group of girls were being ushered out by four security guys. We hung back for just a moment waiting until they were all the way up the stairs to level one. It was really weird to stand in a large arena with very few people in there, just a few of the crew members.

I tugged on Natalie's arm and started walking towards the far right side of the stage area. You could see black curtains were open that led to the back section. She shook her head back and forth in the silent no, but I kept walking so she ran to catch up with me.

There was no one there to stop us as we walked past the railing and through the black curtains. The hallway split in two, like a T. We looked both left and right, not sure which way to go. For what little activity was going on in the arena, the back corridor area was full of craziness. A few people glanced our way but when they saw the lanyards around our necks they stopped anything they were about to say.

We had decided to take the right corridor. I knew we were on the side with the bands when I saw a door open and Drew Lachey step out. He looked like he was on a mission, glancing back-and-forth before deciding which way to take. Wherever he was off to must have been the way we had just come from. But when he got closer to us and nodded his head hello, he did a double take and stopped in his tracks. He had clearly been thinking about something and not paying attention.

He looked right at Natalie and was caught in her eyes. Drew shook his head back and forth, breaking eye contact. He turned and stared at my face, studying me.

"You're that girl," he said. I wasn't sure if it was a question or a statement.

"What girl," I replied.

"The one my brother has been hung up on for years. The one he met at some tiny bar during the Heat It Up tour. I saw him watching you during sound check. It has to be you."

My heart began thundering in my chest. Was Drew saying what I think he was saying? Had we misunderstood something that night? Did Nick really like me?

"I... I..." I didn't even know what to say. Everything I had thought about what had

happened years ago had just been shattered in this one encounter with Drew.

"I got to go, but you damn well better take the time to talk to my brother tonight so that he can move on. " Drew stepped around us and stormed down the hall, leaving us stunned in his wake.

Natalie let out a sad sigh. I turned to look at her. Her eyes were wet, holding back unshed tears.

"Nat? What's wrong?" I asked. Sure, Drew had just bitched me out, but that was no reason for her to be mad.

"He didn't even mention Jeff."

"No. But Nick is his brother. He would defend him."

"But Jeff is kinda like a brother too."

She had a point.

"Well, maybe we should find out what's going on."