

Chapter 4

1994

Joe

This is not a date, I reminded myself as I ambled up to Danny's front porch and rang the bell. Still, I smoothed the front of my t-shirt and ran a hand through my hair, still damp from my shower, hoping the curls would remain somewhat tame. I stood for only a moment when the door swung open. Danny stood in front of me, somewhat surprised to see me.

"Hey, Joe, how's it goin'?" He had a towel draped across the back of his neck, and the front of his t-shirt was soaked through with sweat.

"Good, man." I nodded. "You been lifting?"

Danny looked down at his clothes and smiled. "No, me and D hit the hoops. I was just about to shower and change. Did you want to come in? I won't be long."

"Oh, naw thanks, man. Actually, I'm here to pick up Raven, we're gonna go grab some lunch." I glanced over his shoulder when I heard some movement in the kitchen, thinking Raven would be walking through. When she didn't appear and I returned my eyes to Danny a second later, I was taken aback by the flash of anger I saw in his face. *What the...* His jaw flexed before it relaxed.

"She's at my parents'," he answered brusquely.

"Of course! Sahry man, she said she was staying with you; it didn't occur to me she meant yah old place."

"No problem," Danny's answers were still short, and he was gripping the towel around his neck tightly with both hands. Raven's tear-stained face from earlier flashed in my mind, and I wondered if it had anything to do with the way Danny was acting now.

I looked at my watch. "Well, I bettah go; I'm supposed to be there in five minutes." I turned slightly to make my way back to my car. "I'll catch ya later."

"Yeah. See you." Danny all but shut the door in my face. I stepped down the stairs slowly, frowning, and wondering what to make of the situation.

Danny

I stormed into the kitchen, no longer hungry, and unknowingly began to pace the linoleum surface.

"You okay, man? Who was that?" Donnie asked, a plate of food in one hand and a beer in the other.

This was his fault. I should be the one with her, not Joe. And when had she talked to him, anyway? She hadn't mentioned anything to us this morning; then again, we hadn't really given her the chance. I looked up at Donnie in what must have come close to a glare.

"Was that Raven?" his tone implying I was being overly dramatic. I ignored it.

"No, it was Joe, on his way to pick up Raven."

Donnie rolled his eyes, then dropped his head back, staring at the ceiling. "Fuck, man, seriously? Just let it go." He was frustrated and already bored with the topic. As far as he was concerned, once he had his say about something, it should be over with. Not this time. Not with me. Not about her.

"Let it go?" I knew I was being irrational, but I couldn't help it. Something had happened between Raven and I; something I was terrified to admit, and even more terrified to let go of. Whether we could be together or not, I couldn't just act like she meant nothing to me. Suddenly, she had come to mean nearly everything to me.

But what did I mean to her? She was a teenager, after all. Would her feelings subside once she was back home? Or once her attention was drawn to someone else- Joe, perhaps? I swallowed back the anger like a knife in my throat. What had I done? What was I going to do?

Donnie stood watching me for a few minutes, staying silent while I got myself under control. He reached into the fridge and popped the top off a second bottle of beer, then handed it to me. I took it without complaint. "C'mon," he nodded in the direction of the living room. "Let's go blow some shit up."

We settled in front of the tv and the new PlayStation test unit I had. Donnie kicked my ass; I simply couldn't focus on anything other than Raven- and what she was possibly doing with Joe.

Raven

I combed my hair for the upteenth time, pulled it in front of my shoulders, then flipped it back again. My spiral perm was relaxing into waves, and I spritzed some more scrunch spray onto my tresses, then shaped them with my fingers. I bit my lip contemplating whether to pull half of it up into a clip, or just leave it down. Half up, I decided. It was lunch, not a night out- and certainly not a date. I felt a pull in my stomach and shook my head, shaking away the feeling, as well.

I had no idea why I was thinking so hard about this lunch with Joe. It was lunch. With Joe. I couldn't tell you how many times we had all dined together. *That* was it, it had to be- it wasn't all of us together. It had nothing to do with the way he had looked at me earlier, the way his fingers felt against my skin to steady me. Nope, not that.

I let out a breath and looked in the mirror once more. My outfit had been fairly easy to decide on- it wasn't too difficult when you only had a handful to choose from. A white button-down midriff top, short sleeved with small lace ruffles across the front, and red stretch jeans- tight-rolled, of course- and red canvas flats to complete the ensemble. I hadn't gone through a 'wear-more-makeup-to-look-older' phase; I hated the way foundation felt, and my face was bare except for translucent powder, tan eyeshadow, brown mascara, and coral lip gloss. Simple silver hoops complimented my ears, and the only other piece of jewelry I wore was a sterling silver tiara ring my mom bought me when I was eight. It was my first real piece of jewelry and no longer fit my ring finger, but I wore it above the first knuckle of my right forefinger.

I turned from the mirror and got my purse off the dresser. I wondered what Danny would think of me going out with Joe. Nothing, I quickly told myself. He was the one that blew *me* off today. Still, I couldn't help but to feel a little like I was doing something that I knew would upset him.

The doorbell rang then, pulling me out of my head. "I'll get it!" I called as I bounced down the stairs. I came to a stop as I flung the door open and looked up at Joe's smiling face. "Hi," I beamed.