

## Chapter Fourteen

Surprise!

Like I said; I've got a handle of how this book is going to go and I couldn't be more excited! I apologize in advance for any mistakes.

Happy reading.

Can I get more comments than votes?

COMMENT.

### Recap

Ashley looks utterly confused, but she does the same. I lean forward and try to think of the right words—to cushion the bomb for my brain and Ashley's sake.

"Faye..." Ashley warns me, her voice now coming out uncertain and guarded.

"Okay," I state a little after her small voice, "Just—promise not to say anything until I'm done?"

"You're scaring me." She ignores my previous statement.

"Promise me first." I press, my voice turning higher a notch.

She looks at me hesitantly for a moment longer before sighing and bobbing her head up and down. "I promise."

My shoulders relax slightly as she says that and I move backwards slightly. As she waits I manage to come up with the most subtle way to say what I need to.

"Travis has a gun."

### Chapter Fourteen

You know that feeling where you feel there is something wrong with someone when they don't respond the way you expect them to? It's as if someone tells a person they are secretly a garlic repulsed bloodsucker and the person just laughs and goes in for a hug.

Clear denial—Yet, it's only really scary when that person is your friend.

"Why aren't you shocked?" I demand, confusion thoroughly laced in my voice.

"Honestly," Ashley shrugs, throwing me into an abyss of deeper frustration, "It doesn't surprise me."

I feel my jaw drop slightly as I continue to stare.

"What?" I start sarcastically, "The fact that he has a gun or the fact that he used it?"

"Both." She states, clicking her tongue, "As unpredictable as he is, he's pretty predictable."

I shake my head, "That makes absolutely no sense."

"It basically is my way of saying that people are so used to his unpredictability that it has become a habit." She explains, weighing the outcomes professionally in her hands.

I continue to stare at her incredulously, scrutinizing every detail of her face to justify her actions. There is seriously something wrong with her

"Can you not stare at me like I'm some sort of freak?" Ashley interrupts, raising an eyebrow pointedly.

"I—I," I relax my squinty eyes and slump, trying to piece this together, "How are you okay with this?"

Ashley tucks a strand of hair behind her ear, "Of course I'm not okay with it."

"Why am I having a hell of a hard time believing that?" I state bluntly, feeling my temper rise at her statement. Part of me feels terrible for raising my voice at her, but the other half is yearning for acceptance—for someone to understand the way I'm feeling, the anxiety and nail crunching situation I'm in.

For the first time since I told her, I see something other than conformity cross her features. I'm beginning to think she's finally snapping out of her previous state. However, as I continue to watch, I see doubt, uncertainty, and...a burning curiosity?

Ashley looks up at me with a refreshing and piercing look, "I'm intrigued."

"You're intrigued?" I repeat dumbly, trying to make sense in my head, yet failing miserably.

She places her hands on the floor and lifts herself up so she is sitting tall and excited—similar to the way her face shows the confidence of her posture. I observe and watch in regretful agony as she prepares her words which are waiting to cascade either gracefully or catastrophically from her lips.

"Are you not?" She challenges lowly, her mouth forming a small smirk, "You can't tell me there isn't some part of you that is just dying to know the truth."

I think back to the man—Bill—that he was fighting a week ago. He was the definition of power. Travis Emmons wreaked authority and dominance. However, all at once, I remember the glimmer of doubt that flashed in his depths as he was threatened.

"That the reason behind all of his trouble—it's not just fun and games," Ashley continues, "There's something more. He wouldn't just tell the whole school for no reason—would he?"

Despite my aching desire to leave him and his problems alone, I find some truth in Ashley's words. It's as if her words are the poison that is hidden behind the enchantment of a snake.

"Okay!" I speak abruptly, looking into Ashley's gruelingly mischief-filled eyes, "I get it—but my point still remains."

"But I don't think you get my point." She adds, starting to stack up the papers I've been working on.

"No," I agree cautiously, "But you are so creeping me out right now."

"Look," Ashley starts with her normal voice again, "All I'm saying is that why don't we have fun before we play 'cops?'"

I freeze in my position and gawk, "Are you serious right now?"

"If we tell them now, then hypothetically they'll arrest him, close the case, and keep things confidential." Ashley insists, counting the list on her fingers, "Don't you want to uncover his secrets before the cops bury them?"

I give her a flat look, "Not really, no; that hasn't really made it to my list of things to do"

"What if I told you Travis is truly innocent?" Ashley presses, her voice so soft as honey.

I whip my head in her direction, "Then I'd say you're delusional and need sleep."

"And if I told you that I've been looking into him?" She implores, wiggling her eyebrows.

"Then you're officially a creep—" I shoot her an odd look, "And why would you do that!"

"I think the more important question is 'what have you found?'" She corrects me matter-of-factly.

"No..." I assure her, "I'm pretty sure it's more like how did you get access to his information."

"I have my ways," She winks, "You're interested aren't you?"

"I'm pretty sure your ways are illegal." I state, choosing to ignore her question. Truth be told, my brain, of all things, is burning with agitation and curiosity.

Just as she opens her mouth to speak, the bell rings for the end of class. In a relieved hurry, I grab my belongings and quickly throw my backpack over my shoulder. Ashley darts up and runs over to her backpack, probably hoping to catch up with me.

As I make it out the door, she calls my name. Guilt washes over me as I consider leaving her, so I reluctantly stop and wait. The rest of the class files out of the building, anxious to get on the campus.

When Ashley finally catches up to me, we fall into a silent walk towards the public parking lot in the front of the school.

My thoughts are still running from everything she just told me. Starting from when I told her, I had expected incredulity, anger—not eagerness and intrigue. I'm thoroughly opposed to her view, to look into Travis for signs of innocence—mainly because I feel I'm not willing to believe he is. I know what I saw, there is no other way to explain it. And then my heart tears at the very first proclamation I made when I saw him; to fix him is to fix myself.

A loud honk startles us both, as I soon observe, and I feel my heart nearly lurch out of my chest. A car rolling in the parking lot is currently honking at a tiny girl trying to cross the lot with her ears covered. I shake my head just as Ashley sighs in relief and I take one look around, sweeping the ground at any chance of spotting Layla.

My eyes dart their way around and then freeze as they take in a familiar figure. Not Layla, but Travis the devil himself. As I observe him walking across the backs of cars, a phone attached to his ear, he grudgingly readjusts the leather jacket on his body. I start to flush at the thought of him tapping into the conversation Ashley and I had today, until I remember the reality of this entire situation. He didn't show up to school for the past week—and he's been here the entire time.

I grit my teeth, willing myself to go over my fear, and look over at Ashley who is looking at Travis too. When she notices me staring, she jots her head in his direction and smirks.

"Speak of the devil," She comments, raising an eyebrow and folding her arms, "Looks like he ding dong ditched you."

I scoot and turn my back in Travis's direction, aiming to walk backwards while taking to Ashley.

She calls out, "If you change your mind—"

"—Which I won't—" I assure her before she can even complete her sentence.

"Come find me." She concludes that statement with a cheeky grin.

I shake my head visibly in her direction before whirling around and searching for my wrath victim.