

Chapter Fifty-Three

Recap

As soon as the door locks, Travis pops his head up, looking more ready and alive than his near dead look only seconds ago. When his eyes meet mine, he grimaces and motions for me to help him.

"Come here," He instructs, "I have a knife in the calf pocket of my pants."

Without hesitation, I awkwardly crawl my way over to him, falling over in the process. All the while, my face grows to an even darker shade of red when I think of how everyone is staring at me making a fool of myself.

When I reach him, he rolls over onto his back and crunches up to point to the pocket where the knife is located. "It took every ounce of strength in me to let him hit me."

I almost lose my balance and fall on top of his legs as I lean forward to grab the knife out, but I manage to stay upright. "I bet."

"You punch ten times better than him," He muses before moving his arms away as I attempt to grab them. "I know we've held our grudges, but please don't stab me."

I roll my eyes, "Shut up and let me help you."

He drops his head down on the floor and looks up as I tug his hands towards me again and start to cut through the material as fast as I can.

"You got anything on you?" He asks as I continue to rip through the strings.

"A fully loaded gun." I grunt once the knife successfully breaks the rope apart, "I had two, but that one didn't last."

Travis whistles lowly and murmurs under his breath, "That's my girl."

----- Chapter Fifty-Three -----

"Jesus!"

I yank harder at the rope tied around Wes's feet, regretting my decision to untie his legs with each ticking second.

"I swear, if I hear your voice one more time," Travis growls from behind me, "I will hurt you."

Everyone else had finally been untied, and fortunately enough, Laura was gaining more and more strength by the minute. My head still pounds from the impact—although, at this point, I'm partially convinced my mind has exhausted all its resources and has just about given up for the rest of eternity.

Wes suddenly turns to me with desperate eyes, and I instantly jerk backwards in disgust.

"You don't want to be doing this." He says lowly.

"Oh yeah?" I roll my eyes, "and why is that?"

"If we all work together," he begins, looking around at Dad, Travis, Laura, Layla and me, "we could make it—there are seven of us, if we could just distract them long enough to get out of here, this—"

He's cut off cold with a punch to the jaw.

I jump back and ram right into a fuming Layla. Did she just—

"The nerve," She all but spits out while shaking her hand out, "but over?"

"Wow," Travis muses, "You two really are a family—bad punch technique is clearly a genetic issue."

"Shut up." Both Layla and I snap at the same time.

Travis shrugs and holds his hands up while mumbling something incoherent.

"Alright everyone listen," Dad speaks for the first time since Travis stumbled in, "As much as I hate the kid, Wes is right—we all have to work together."

Laura tenses beside him and scoots closer, grabbing his arm for comfort. My heart clenches with guilt once more, knowing full well that I got my family into this mess.

I owe it to them to get them out of it.

It's the least I can do.

"Okay, what do you have in mind?" I grit my teeth in determination.

"We ambush them." Laura pitches in quietly.

"No we can't." Travis brushes up behind me, "we don't know how many of them are out there."

"He's right," Dad agrees, "There's seven—well six of us, but surely if they thought to take out half the police force, they were smart enough to come armed with dozens of people."

By six, he was referring to Wes's limp body on the floor.

Knocked out cold from Layla's punch.

"Alright, what if we take them out one by one," Layla suggests, walking closer towards the door in an attempt to explain her idea. "The next person that walks through the door, we snag."

Travis is shaking his head, but I see some sense in it.

"That might work," Dad agrees with her and solidifies her thoughts.

"No." Travis states bluntly, "No, this isn't going to work."

I can see that his mind is a battlefield right now—his brows furrowed, his forehead creasing. He looks around the room and scans visibly while Layla exhales sharply in frustration.

I remain silent, very silent.

Dad brushes a hand across his mouth in exasperation and breaks free from Laura to pace slightly. He then grabs her hand and starts to speak very softly to her. I look away, feeling as if I would be invading their privacy if I continued to stare.

Travis and I exchange glances, and my eyes narrow.

He's scheming.

Don't you dare

It's the first thought that crosses my mind—Whatever it is, I know I won't like it.

As if he can read my mind, he breaks from his trance and begins walking towards the door with large strides.

My heart races in panic, "Travis!"

I barely recognize my whisper scream as it escapes my lips, but it gets everyone's attention. Despite that, my eyes are fixated on Travis's back, which is still facing me. I take a step closer towards him and reach a hand out slowly, knowing full well he's about to do something stupid.

"Just stop." I grit my teeth, "Stop playing the tough guy."

Travis turns his head to the side, "I don't know what you're talking about."

I use this time to take a couple more steps towards him, as if he were a stray animal ready to pounce.

"So you're not about to walk out that door?" I question dryly. This time, I'm standing right behind him. I put a hand on his shoulder, and he instantly tenses. "Because you and I both know that would be a dumb thing to do..."

"Faye—" he sighs, "This isn't going to end well. It's not going to stop, as long as I live."

A surge of anger washes over me, and I drop my hand from his shoulder. "So, what" I demand, sarcasm seeping into my tone, "You're just going to turn yourself in? Get killed, game over?"

"No one is walking out that door," Dad interrupts, sharply. I almost forgot he was here, "Am I understood?"

I ignore him and continue to dagger the back of Travis's head with my gaze.

"So what's it going to be, Travis?" I taunt him, knowing full well that my fear of losing him might very well be the very outcome of this situation.

A few seconds pass by before he turns around slowly to look at me.

"Do I make myself clear?" Dad repeats himself, stepping forward this time, his voice stern and dominant.

Again, Travis ignores the question, but his eyes are heavy and dull.

"I had a sister, you know" He looks down at the floor, "She died."

This time, I'm the one glaring at the ground. I remember him telling me about Cassie—how could I ever forget the pain and emptiness that flashed across his face when I mentioned her name to him a while back.

I open my mouth to say something, anything but nothing comes out.

"She died because of me." I hear his voice crack, "She had more to live for than I ever did—and by choosing to live my life on the run, I might as well have pulled the trigger that ended her life."

"Listen to me," Dad puts his palms up and takes a step towards him, "You cannot take responsibility for something that you did not do. Don't put this on yourself, please. He takes a quick glance at me before continuing, "Believe me, I have blamed myself for many things, and it has gotten me nowhere. Please, no one has to get hurt—all you have to do is work with us. Help us."

A strangled noise escapes Travis's mouth while a tear drop I didn't even know developed, trickled down my face.

"I am helping you." And with that, he slowly walks to the door.

"No!" I shout and lunge for him, but he pushes me with such force that I stumble backwards, into my father. "Travis!"

My vision becomes blurry, and I begin to feel an enormous weight press down on my chest. As the door closes, I feel my family embrace me, whispering reassuring things that mean nothing to me.

"Dad, I have to go get him." I speak amidst my tears, struggling unsuccessfully to break free, "I have to—I just can't."

"Honey, absolutely not." His grip on my shoulder tightens and he brings me into him, "I lost you once—I will not lose you again."

I cry out in frustration, sadness and defeat, and finally feel my body lie limp in his arms. For what seems like eternity, they all huddle around me as I whimper in agony.

I fear so much, for my life, but moreover, I fear for his.

It's if someone had plunged their hand into my chest and wrenched out the very blood vessels that gave me oxygen. Without it, without him, I am left gasping for air.

I am unequivocally, irreversibly in love with Travis Emmons.

And I would walk through fire for him.

I take a deep breathe, and I feel my lungs shake and shiver as I do so. My body tingles and my arms begin to send jitters all the way down to my toes.

Adrenaline

"Dad," I regain my voice and try to mask the guilt I feel as I do what I know has to be done. I push him back gently and place both my arms on his shoulders, "You never lost me. I love you so much."

Then, looking to Laura and Layla, I smile and say, "You guys have been nothing but warm and welcoming to me, and I love all of you so much."

They wince to face me, and place their hands on top of dad's. My heart clenches, but I savor the moment, for I truly love it—every single word.

In the back of my mind, I take note of the newly available path towards the door. With Laura, Layla and Dad all on the same side, I have the space and ability to now make my move. Without further hesitation, I act quickly on my chance by slipping through their fingers. Before any of them can have the opportunity to stop me, I lunge towards the door, "But I love Travis too, and I can't lose him!"

Author's Note

First of all, to all my loyal readers-- thank you

I cannot even begin to express how appreciative I am for you. To be completely honest, I don't know why I felt that today--of all days--working on completing this novel once and for all was at the top of my to-do list.

I am at the beginning of a new chapter (figuratively and literally) and I couldn't quite figure out why I felt so.

This is why.

Playing With Fire was my baby, and I owe it to you and myself to finish this.

So, with that being said, I hope you enjoyed (and remember) this chapter!

Stay tuned for an update of the **F I N A L** chapter within the next couple of days.