

Day 18

5:30 p.m.

It took me a few seconds after seeing Jason in the headlight to comprehend that it was *the* Jason standing there. I then realized that Jesska had absolutely no idea who Jason was or the potential danger we were in. Forget potential. We were in danger. Jason had promised that he would be back, and unfortunately, it looked like he kept his promises. Just my luck.

“Who the hell?” Jesska asked, glancing at me nervously. The headlight was the only source of light available in the warehouse, and I was determined to keep it shining bright.

“Jesska,” I whispered. “I need you to stay in the car. And whatever you do, don’t let the headlight go dark. Okay?”

I looked into her eyes and saw confusion, fear, and just a little sass. I knew she would have my back.

“Who *is* Jason? You *know* him?” she muttered frantically.

I nodded. “He was with us in the shelter. We kicked him out because he was a threat. Dangerous. Possibly crazy. It’s a long story.”

I slowly climbed through the passenger side window out onto the concrete

floor. I walked forward, pulling my shoulders back, trying to make myself look as built as possible.

The headlight gave Jason an eerie glow. He looked like a specter. Truly creepy. My heart raced as I realized how unprepared I was for this confrontation. If this was war, my chances were slim to none. We both stared at each other before a slow smirk spread across his face.

“Rrry-aan!” he boomed.

His large pupils seemed dilated in the light, and his speech was slurred. For sure he was high. I crossed my arms over my chest.

Jason moved forward slowly, menacingly, and kept the creepy smirk on his face. His act was almost theatrical.

“I knew we’d be meeting again,” he stated, wobbling slightly. He was definitely messed up on something. Could be beneficial, I thought. But also totally dangerous.

I cleared my throat and deepened my voice. “So you say,” I replied.

I heard Jesska snort behind me. Ha-ha! Only she would make fun of me during a life or death situation. I decided to lose the deep voice.

“What do you want, Jason?” I asked.

“I don’t want anything, kid,” Jason replied firmly, standing straighter. “But you piss me off. And I don’t like it when people piss me off.”

Great, just great. I had a trashed a-hole ready to kill me and no 9-1-1 to call. I was completely alone.

I dropped my shoulders, knowing that nothing I pretended to do would stop this man from hurting me if he really wanted to.

“Who’s your friend?” Jason asked, leering at Jesska. He raised his eyes and turned to wink at her. He actually winked at her.

“What the—” Jesska stated.

I lunged toward Jason and shoved him with as much force as I could. The fact that I was angry helped, and Jason grunted, surprised, and fell back. He landed with a thud and angrily turned his head up toward me.

“You just made a big mistake, kid.”

He shook his fist at me as he struggled to get himself upright. The fact that he was messed up slowed him

down, and I hoped that it would be enough for me to do what I had to do.

“Let’s get him, Ryan,” Jesska said firmly, suddenly by my side. I shook my head. I couldn’t let her get involved in this. She could easily be killed.

“Get back in the truck, Jesska,” I ordered.

She laughed. “There’s nothing you can do to make me get back in the Hummer. Deal with it.” She walked ahead of me over toward Jason, and I knew she was completely right. That girl would not be ordered around.

Jason was standing now, and he looked challengingly at Jesska, who had her arms crossed less than two feet away from him.

“Look, slobbers,” she said calmly. Jason slowly wiped a small line of drool that had begun dripping down his chin. Gross.

“We can do this the easy way, or we can do this the hard way,” she stated flatly.

I couldn't believe the kind of nerve that Jesska had. I watched from farther back, feeling like a wuss.

Jason laughed. His laugh was loud and thick. He reminded me of one of those filthy cowboys you would see in old western films. I had no idea what was about to happen next. My heart raced, and the silence in the room was thick, almost muggy. Jason breathed heavily, and Jesska glared at him.

He seemed thrown off by the idea that Jesska was the one who was confronting him. I wondered if he was still willing to do anything to get his hands on me.

Jason and Jesska were now standing eye to eye. Jesska held her ground firmly and clenched her fists as she stared Jason down. Jason tried his best to maintain a challenging look in his eyes, but every so often they would roll back slightly or his eyelids would begin to close. Whatever he had taken was affecting him more. I just hoped it was enough to give us the advantage.