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Shasta Monohan knows all about playboys. Hell, she got her heart ripped out by the ultimate bad boy—Caleb “Colt” Douglas—three years ago. Word around town is he’s back for one reason—to win her back. No way in hell was that happening. Then again, a no-strings romp might purge him from her system once and for all. Yeah. That’s exactly what she needs—closure.

Colt’s done a lot of crazy shit as front man for Twisted Delirium, but returning home may shove him over the edge. He vowed never to return, but after a whirlwind race to the top of the music scene, he’s figured something out. Fame and fortune can’t replace the one thing he wants more than anything. Shasta. Walking away from her was the biggest mistake he’s ever made. He’ll give her the one night stand with a bad boy she wants. He’ll even pretend it’s the closure they needed. Come morning, though, all bets are off.

Chapter One

Shasta

“Don’t be pissed.”

I froze in the middle of Riverside Drive. Nothing good ever followed those words. Despite possessing questionable fashion sense, my best friend never ceased to shock me when she invoked the don’t-be-pissed rule. The impish fret on her freckled complexion got me. I shifted my backpack purse to the other shoulder and opted to remove myself from the oncoming crush of rush hour traffic in Austin, Texas. As fun as South by Southwest, aka SXSW, might be, the commuting downtown work crowd got a wee bit pissy with the music loving folk. I felt their pain. Though I loved music, every chord made me think of things I swore over too many shots of tequila never to remember.

As I edged my way to the sidewalk to stare at her—while wishing my out of control hair could tumble into a cute pixie cut like her red tresses did—she shoved her purse between her knees and shifted around on her four inch stiletto Jimmy Choos until we were face-to-face. “Double pinky swear.” She thrust her pinkies out, thus activating the secret code we’d constructed under the art table of Mrs. Ward’s second grade classroom fifteen years ago.

“What’s going on, Bets?”

She shook her hands, forcing my attention back to the outstretched pinkies. Fine. Whatever. I rolled my eyes and hooked digits with her. “I, Shasta Monohan, double pinky swear promise to not get pissed at Betsy Calligan for whatever idiocy she’s done this time.”

I'd made the pledge a thousand times over the years we'd known one another, and none ended well. The fact residents of White Bluffs, Texas didn't toss us out during our formative years shocked everyone—including us. To say we got into trouble was an understatement.

Nothing Bets did would obliterate eighteen years of friendship. We were cemented together, our bond tighter than superglue. Our closeness didn't stop the buzzing nervousness of a thousand bees swarming my insides. I couldn't remember when I'd last faced down the serious Bets staring at me now.

"Shas, the last part? Totally uncalled for." She motioned for me to turn so she could, as always, shove her micro purse into my backpack. Why she never did said action in the car always mystified me, but I recognized the stalling tactic for what it was. She didn't want to face me when she made the confession to end all confessions.

I noted the burgeoning crowd spilling into the nearby outdoor venue constructed specifically to handle the larger SXSW acts. A sea of commonality swelled around me, engulfing me until my lungs drowned in disbelief.

"Tell me you didn't." I turned to face her, microchip purse be damned. "Tell me you didn't."

She bit her ruby red lips and scrunched her nose. "Well, I sorta fell into the moment. It's not entirely my fault. See, I tried the triple espresso caramel mocha with extra mocha swirl concoction Pete made at the shop and, well, this sort of happened."

"What?" The question tumbled from me even though I already knew. Deep down, every fiber of my jaded soul knew exactly what sort of happened.

"It's your birthday, Shas. I had to. It's written into the cosmos of best friend obligations. I'd be damned by the fates if I didn't."

"Bets."

"Okay. Look, it's just tickets. We'll go. We'll sing. We'll commiserate. It'll be fun."

"Of all the music festivals and the thousands of bands who roll into this town every year, why this one? Why now?"

"It's your birthday, and God damn, I'm not letting the princess of rock celebrate in some stodgy faux leather booth at a fucking Chili's. It's not happening."

"My birthday's tomorrow, not tonight and it's TGI Friday's, not Chili's." I made the statement to give my mind a moment to process. Tickets to Twisted Delirium. I'd never confessed to anyone—not even Bets—they were my favorite band. How could I? The heartthrob lead singer's uber-sexified voice still shredded my heart into a billion pieces even after he stomped on it seven years ago—on my freaking birthday. I hadn't been woman enough to keep him.

I was over him enough to handle a little show. Hah. Like any Twisted Delirium show could ever be defined as little. They were one of the hottest bands in the world, had been for the past few years. A part of me was thrilled for Caleb. No, wait.

Colt. When he fled White Bluffs to pursue his rock and roll dream he'd taken the stage name Colt, but he'd always be Caleb to me.

Every woman with a pulse wanted to bed him, and every man wanted to be him. Okay, a lot of them wanted to bang him too. My pulse raced as I eyed the gathering crowd. I could do this.

For Bets I'd deal. She'd spent her hard-earned coffee-schlepping-funds on this. I'd hate her tomorrow. I flashed a hesitant smile of gratitude, enough to make her squeal and grab my hand. A few moments later she dragged me through a haze of questionable smokage, past impatient Delirium heads and to the alarmingly close stage.

"This is close enough, Bets."

"Hah. Fat chance." She pushed and shoved her way through the crowd with the gusto of a linebacker—all five foot one of her. "Make way, people. Birthday girl motoring to the stage. Move."

Not good.

Her voice rose over the soft swell of music piercing the boisterous crowd. My pulse raced, my limbs froze when the lighting shifted before us and they were there. I tumbled, chasing each note, each huskily sung word. I rose on tiptoes to see him, to memorize the coal black spikes of his hair and grumbled my displeasure at the dark shades masking his eyes.

God, I'd missed those eyes, the way they sucked the marrow from my spine and turned me into mushy goo. Good girls didn't mush, and they certainly didn't goo. With him I was the exception to every rule because bad boy Caleb eviscerated me.

Clad in snug jeans—not the skinny kind cause those were gross—and a Twisted Delirium T-shirt, he infused my adrenaline with raw, virile need. My breathing ragged, my pulse flailing in time to the drums, I clung to each note, each soul-crushing word as though they were for me. How could I still want him so much after so long?

Time ceased to exist. I saddled and rode the excuse as Bets shook me from the euphoric haze. Maybe I'd inhaled too deeply around the questionable smokage.

"You with me, Shas?"

Fuck, but I loved this woman for always having my back. She'd made a shit play, but it'd been out of love for me. The concern on her face startled me for a moment. I looked around and noted the darkness. Wait. How long had it been?

"Shasta." She snapped her fingers. "You with me?"

"You never use my full name."

"Well, duh. Your parents have shit for brains. What kind of fucked up name is Shasta?" She smirked a second before flashing back to the worried expression I'd seen before. "You zoned."

"I guess I did." The music had stopped. "Thanks for this."

I turned to go, but she grabbed me. "They'll be back. For a couple more songs."

"How do you know?"

"It's what they do, right?"

“I wouldn’t know.” I didn’t attend their shows. Okay, they were twenty-four of my twenty-five most played songs, but I drew the line there. Any other worship at the altar of Twisted Delirium would be, well...twisted. Hah.

Doubting Bets would appreciate my ill-timed humor, I remained silent despite the thickening tension. I’d never been into the Goth scene, but I got them now. Caleb had suckled an undisclosed amount of time from me and I couldn’t wait for more. The anticipatory high kept me on edge. I needed tequila, copious amounts of something to bring me down slow and sweet because what I needed wasn’t on the menu.

Caleb Douglas.

As though he sensed my need I caught him in my peripheral vision as he prowled to the microphone, a beast seeking prey. His shaded gaze swept over the crowd. I heard the collective gasp as the shades were rippled from his face.

“Shit. He never takes them off. Ever. All the fan sites talk about the shades never leaving his face.” Bets grabbed me. “Holy fuck. He’s looking right at you.”

“Hello, Austin.” The crowd screamed. He chuckled, a husky rumble I felt in my belly. “We just came off a long world tour, and I have to say nothing beats being home.”

Home. Last I heard he’d been playing house with a svelte Swedish blonde in California. Then again, when you were Caleb “Colt” Douglas of Twisted Delirium you could afford more than one home—and way more than one blonde.

Too bad I was a brunette.

No. No. Any thought road involving his sex life was full of heart-stopping potholes I couldn’t navigate.

“We’re doing these next few minutes different.” He turned from the microphone, leaned down and grabbed a guitar. I closed my eyes, unable to focus on anything beyond my thready pulse and the banging of drumsticks together, barely audible over the crowd’s screams.

“No. He wouldn’t.” Bets shook her head in disbelief. “I swear, Shas. I didn’t know.”

I believed in slamming doors on the past. Some things belonged in locked vaults, never to be revisited. I’d triple vaulted the song and added the extra precaution of making Bets put it at the top of her never play list. The latter caused a few contentious moments in our friendship because the older than dirt song was a classic within our crew. Keeping the eighties hair metal craze we missed going as long as we breathed was our thing.

The outlawing of Bon Jovi’s Living on A Prayer cut deep—almost deeper than Caleb walking away. The visceral reaction to the song still opened my soul and bled my heart. Pulse spiking and eyes teary, I zombied out while the crowd crooned off-key karaoke loud enough to choke me in the impossibility of surviving the next few minutes.

Bets shook me, but my gaze was locked on the stage. The last of my resolve melted beneath the intense stare from the man I’d vowed to never see again. No matter what my BFF declared, tonight was about more than a concert. The moment the first note clutched my fractured heart, the locked vault on Caleb Douglas popped open.

And God help me I didn’t want it slammed shut. Not yet.

* * *

Caleb

Shasta Monohan. Fuck. I banged my fist into the wall and leaned my forehead against the smooth surface.

I hadn't been ready to see her. The masochistic son of a bitch buried in me memorized every curl in her long chocolate hair. And those lips.

Hell, my twisted fantasies about her sultry lips kept me company in the shower moments ago. But I needed more. The real deal was here. Same town, same fucking building. And probably making tracks away from me.

Talk about an epic cluster fuck. I'd pushed everyone into this gig, even though we were crawling out of our skins and sick of each other. The guys didn't need my emotional garbage, yet I'd dragged every scrap on stage with us tonight.

The moment the lights swept the audience and I saw those sexy as fuck lips moving in tandem to mine I was gone. Her long curls had bounced around her luscious frame as she parroted my every word as though I was a god and only she and I existed. I couldn't remember a single thing beyond her. I swear to fuck I smelled her in the soft breeze sweeping the stage.

Finishing shredded me. Almost more than the last song undid her. The flash of shock in her eyes mingled with the festering wound in my chest. If I was a decent man I'd bury the tune so far in the ground they'd declare it their theme song in hell. I was definitely going there for singing the mother fucker tonight.

It'd been ours. Hers. The last thing we'd shared before I'd pulled the bastard card and carved her into pieces—walked away like she meant nothing.

She'd been my everything.

Now I wanted to hurl my heart on the floor so someone could stomp on it and put me out of my misery.

Pathetic.

"Dude, what the hell?" Dodge thumped me on the back hard enough to take the edge off my thoughts. "A little heads up next time."

Yeah. Right. I hadn't planned to purge my soul to a sold-out crowd of strangers, all so she'd maybe read between the lines and hear what I'd longed to scream.

I'm sorry.

Fuck.

"Dude?"

Dodger kicked ass behind his kit, but had shit for brains half the time. I ignored him for a moment before surrendering to the beating waiting for me behind the dressing room door. Dressing room was a kind word for where we'd been shoved. The restroom door swung open and the stench of smoke enveloped me. I coughed and sputtered my way into the confining space and glared at Ace.

"Not smart to give me shit, man." He flicked the cigarette into a sink and aimed the last puff at me. Fucker. "You want to talk about it?"

“Not particularly.”

Ace stayed several miles ahead of everyone when it came to sorting his shit. Aside from his penchant for sucking his future happiness out one drag at a time, he was the brains of Twisted Delirium. He and his brother Chaz had been with me from the beginning, so he got what went down tonight.

“Should’ve expected this, man. You sent Psycho the tickets.”

I chuckled at the nickname he’d pinned on Betsy during their sophomore year. “Better not call her Psycho to her face, man.”

“Dude, she fucking chased me down Main Street with an axe.”

“You popped her sister and bragged about it. What the hell did you expect?”

Ace glared at Chaz, who burst into a fit of laughter. He tumbled off the small sofa and to the floor. “Aw, man. I’d forgotten, such classic Psycho Betsy. I’ve missed her.”

“Fucker.”

Twin shit always mystified me. The silent battle between them was a tangible bomb waiting to detonate, but I kept my mouth shut. Dodge and I learned long ago to stay out of their shit.

“You going to pull your head outta your dick before they hit the backstage?” Chaz asked. “I’m thinking Psycho’s making tracks this direction real quick based on the look on her face.”

“Yeah, you may be dodging more than an axe tonight.”

“I’ve upgraded to a Sig Sauer. Wanna see?”

The entire room jumped at the soft, but pissed voice coming from the open door. The fact she reached into her backpack made me twitch. Fire blue eyes tracked Chaz and landed with the force of a nuclear bomb on Ace.

“Seriously? Psycho? After all this time?” All one hundred pounds of her clacked her way toward him. Ace’s gaze remained locked to the four-inch heels straight from a wet dream. She paused halfway there and whirled on me. “You! I should poleaxe your stupid ass for what you pulled out there. What the hell? It’s her birthday, you stupid oaf!”

Fuck. Days bled into one another on the road. Indifference was the only defense in me. Shrugging, I locked gazes with Shasta as she wandered into the room in a cloud of shocked hesitation.

Her wide expressive eyes landed on me and didn’t move. My dick throbbed. While Betsy walked around in fuck-me heels, Shasta wore goddess sandals. My gaze chased the wraparounds from her ankles to below her knees and I swallowed. Mile long legs meant to wrap around a man and hold him hostage flowed into lush hips snuggled into a skirt flirting with indecency. I’d offer my left nut as sacrifice to flip the front flap of the leather skirt up and lick the treasures hidden beneath.

My current obsession shifted enough to draw my gaze upward, noting the gauzy red lace across her mid drift. The thin material stretched, hugging squeezable mounds larger than I remembered. The sexy material posing as a top ended a couple inches too soon, leaving a generous amount of cleavage meant for a man to hunker down and worship for a century. Maybe two.

Jesus, I need to get laid.

Eye fucking Shas proved time changed nothing. Her full pouty lips painted in red darkened the thoughts from earlier. The cinnamon gaze locked on him reflected the agony burning what bits of his soul still existed.

“Give us a minute.”

“Dude, seriously? Where should we go?”

“Don’t know. Don’t care.”

“Hooters!” Dodger shouted.

“Seriously?” Betsy turned her ire on him. Her short red hair swished, her face contorted in revulsion. “Of all the places you could eat, you want Hooters?”

“Chica, it ain’t safe to diss the wings,” he warned.

“She’s a foodie,” Shasta replied.

Betsy shook a finger at Dodger, then Chaz and Ace. “If I see even one grope—with hands or eyes—of boobage or ass, we’re out of there.”

“So I can lick?” Ace taunted. “I’m a tonguing god. I can give references...or a test drive if you’d prefer.”

The slap reverberated through the room. I winced and pointed toward the door. “Head out before I help her find an axe.”

She whirled, her blue eyes firing daggers my direction. “Et tu?”

“Pick your battles, pixie. Cut him some slack. The tour left us edgy and my man over there’s got a short leash as it is.” I forced my gaze on Betsy, but my words were for Shas. “We aren’t here to stir up the past. We’re here to rest and fix shit we fucked up.”

“Fine.” She opened the backpack she’d been carrying and pulled out a small purse. Shouldering it and setting the backpack down, she tip-tapped her way toward the door, turning halfway there when she realized she didn’t have shadows. “Let’s get our grub on, pervs.”

“You’re leaving?” Shasta’s shock echoed mine.

Two things held true in White Bluffs. Football reigned king on Friday nights and the Pinky Sisters were a packaged set. Where one went, you found the other. Never separated, impossible to forget.

“You’re leaving?”

I swiped my hands through my hair and forced myself to remain still. Betsy jetted to her sidekick and tugged her into an embrace. Hushed whispers ran between them a moment before she severed the embrace and headed through the door, her fingers swiping her cheeks.

Shasta took several steps backward when I approached. “This isn’t a good idea. I should go.”

“Don’t run. Give me a moment, please.”

“You had your moment on stage. I’ve given you enough, Caleb. There’s nothing left for you to take.”

Excerpt:

Questions fired off in my brain as I slammed my hand down on the makeshift bar and glared at the sexy man behind it. “Tequila. Double.”

He set salt beside me and a few wedges of lemon. I didn’t need either. Reunions with exes called for a naked tequila night. I slammed the double shot down and motioned for another. His eyes widened, but he complied with a smirk. Yeah, he got my need to be numb.

“Shas, what the hell?”

“You ask me what the hell after he...and you...arg!” I shook my head and downed my second double. “I can’t believe I thought my Caleb was still buried under all the Colt rocker crap. I guess he died in White Bluffs.”

His eyes narrowed. “Your Caleb, huh?”

Damn. Tequila couldn’t kill possessiveness I hadn’t realized existed. I reached for my empty shot glass, turning my back on the first oops of the night—no doubt the first of many. Tequila did a bang up job numbing me, but with a piss poor side effect—my tongue didn’t wait for permission to say what tumbled across it. No filter. Zero desire to give a fuck.

Precisely the feeling I needed to deal with Caleb.

“Come on, my sexy babbler. Let’s get some fresh air.”

Ha. Nothing would bleach out the whole do-me-a-favor bullshit we’d waded through. Grudgingly tromping through the thickening crowd of SXSW revelers, I slowed Caleb’s hastened tug with all hundred thirty something pounds of myself and memorized the squish of denim adhering itself to the snug curve of his ass cheeks. The thick material snuggled against his thighs and accentuated the firm swell before disappearing along his waist.

Damn.

It’d once been my ass to grip, dig my fingers into and urge forward as he surged into me. I missed the heat of his body against mine, the way he settled against me so perfectly, as though some divine power had created us with a pre-destined plan to fuse together.

Chemistry.

A slow burn ran down my chest and pooled between my legs. I’d blame the tequila, but I knew better. This was all Caleb.

Pathetic much?

Self-anger sped my progression as we hit the balcony and he dragged us into the far upper corner. The small nook was a snug fit, but the firm press of his hardened length when he settled against my back proved he didn’t want personal space any more than I did. My hussy wanted to violate every scant millimeter.

His hands settled on my hips as hot breath fanned my pulse. Winding my fingers with his, I took a few deep breaths and regarded the lights of Austin sprawled before us. My head spun. Whether from the four shots or the musky heat enveloping me, it didn’t matter.

I’d lost my mind. Bring on the cute, white jacket with the shiny buckles in the back. Maybe a few months of self-hugs and padded rooms would knock sense into me. Seven years and I still reacted like he was the sun in my universe. My damned, traitorous body refused to loosen its grip on what’d once been.

Whatever rash judgment call I’d made to land myself on the highest balcony in Austin with Caleb holding me undid every step away from the past. The decision had little to do with exorcising the demons I’d battled and everything to do with the grand what-if my inner dreamer refused to let die.

What if he hadn’t left me? What if I’d fought to remain at his side?

The old me didn't fight, scrabble for what was hers. She toed the line and remained unnoticed. Uncomplicated. What a fucking stupid bitch.

"You're scrunching your nose," he accused with a chuckle. "What are you thinking about so intensely?"

I stilled under the implication. He remembered my tells? Answering meant going down the serious road. Tequila-filled Shasta had zero business opening the serious vault. Not when hussy Shasta was primed and ready to carouse.

Tonight. I'd give myself tonight to bask in the chemical imbalance Caleb Douglas created. I'd revel in the delirium and pretend the seven years we'd been separated meant nothing and I somehow stood a chance of competing against the millions of people filling the chasm between the man I loved and who he'd become, a rock sensation capable of having any woman he wanted.

"Why are you here? Why me?"

"It's always been you, Shasta Monohan."