

Prologue

Brianna Wilcox struggled to make good choices when she was a kid. Perhaps it was because back then she had left so many decisions up to her brother and her now-ex-boyfriend. So she frequently found herself embroiled in some mess that she hadn't chosen to be a part of. All of that was supposed to change when she freed herself from both of them.

Growing up with junkie parents had been tough, but Gary, her brother, got her through the difficult times at home. As soon as he went to high school and met Blaser Warner her life had been changed forever.

She didn't put up much of a fight once Blaser made his interest in her known and for months they had snuck around grabbing clandestine moments together, both worried of what Gary would do when he found out that they were together.

It had been on a dark night when the rain was pouring and the wind was howling, that they had been caught. The noise of the weather, and of their own raging hormones, hid the sound of Gary's approach. The first they'd been aware of him was the rush of cold air after Gary had ripped open the back door of Blaser's car. There was no way they could dispute what was going on. Both of them had been topless, Blaser's jeans were open and his hand was up her skirt. Yeah, they were definitely caught red-handed.

The men fought, physically fought, which left her in tears and Gary needing stitches. Watching the two men she loved fighting had torn her apart, but in the months that followed, the feuding increased as had the conflict within her. She had really believed that it would come down to a choice between the two of them and it was a choice that she didn't want to make.

But everything had come together when Blaser discovered a secret she'd been keeping. To get by after her parents took off with all of the family's capital, Bri had started dancing in clubs for money. She loved the dancing but didn't always love the patrons, especially those who tried to touch or waited for her outside of the club.

It didn't help that the places she had to dance in were the ones who turned a blind eye to her age. If management was happy to ignore the fact that she was only seventeen, they were also happy to feign ignorance when the men paid the dancers more for intimate services.

Blaser caught her coming home from work one night and the second he saw her apparel he flew off the handle. Except he wasn't angry at her, it was Gary he went after for letting her sell herself. Once again the men were at each other's throats.

She hadn't been present for the meeting a few days later where they called a truce. The first she knew about them getting along was when she witnessed them together outside her family home. Blaser pulled up in his car to drop Gary off, the men talked for a few minutes, then Gary came in and that's when she got the story. Blaser was chopping the cars that Gary was stealing. They were going to look after her and she would never have to work again.

Bri was horrified and after that she did everything that she could to talk the men out of their illegal business venture, but nothing would stop them and so the alliance was formed. Eventually, the men became the best of friends again and they all settled into life together. Blaser and Gary did what they needed to in order to support her. But it was more than that, both of them seemed to like the money and the credibility that they had with others in their line of work.

Everything had muddled along for almost a decade until Blaser was arrested. She hadn't been present for the crime, but she had been present when the cops took him out of her bed, cuffed him, and took him to the station. From there he pled guilty and was sent to prison where she promised to wait for him. Except he called her into visiting after a few weeks and ended their relationship.

At the time, she was devastated and tried to talk him out of it, but he hadn't budged. He told her to get out of town, away from her brother, and everyone in their lives. He told her to start over. And that's exactly what she ended up doing.

Picking Jersey, she'd packed what she needed and left without telling a soul. She got a job and an apartment and for a long time she lived like she was just another Josie in the street, nothing special. Only she knew that a part of her was missing.

So five years after the relationship was over, she did the unthinkable, she emailed Blaser. Much to her surprise, he emailed back and communication began to flow. They moved onto phone calls and she was delighted to hear that he had straightened himself out and that he owned two legitimate businesses now.

After almost six months of emails and phone calls, they'd agreed to meet. Blaser was actually going to travel up to take her out for dinner. Bri was beyond caring if it was smart for them to open this can of worms again, the idea of seeing Blaser delighted her too much.

So here she was, in the restaurant in Jersey where they'd agreed to meet. She had spent hours getting ready and although she had bought a new dress for the occasion, she still tried on at least five others before settling on the new blue one that she'd spent too much money on.

She had arrived at the restaurant early, not deliberately, but it was in Atlantic City, which was a little bit out of her way. So she had left her apartment early because she didn't want to be late and she wasn't sure how long the journey would take. With Blaser staying at the Waterside Hotel, it made sense for her to go to him, especially since he'd travelled all the way from North Carolina just to make this happen.

Except it was twenty minutes after their date was supposed to start and he still hadn't appeared. Bri worried that maybe he had changed his mind, but quickly shook off that thought because he wasn't the type to leave her sitting here all night without explanation.

Fearful that something terrible may have happened, she slid out of the booth that the maître d' had put her in and made her way outside into the cool evening air. Her coat was still at the table, so if Blaser got into the restaurant another way she hoped that he would assume she was just in the ladies room or something.

Her clutch wasn't very large, just big enough for the essentials, so she found her phone quickly. Striding away from the traffic on the street, she walked down a service lane to get away from the noise and passing foot traffic. Bowing her head close to the phone to read her contacts, she scrolled through looking for Blaser's number. She had just pressed send when something hot and moist closed over her mouth.

Another two thick arms circled her waist and she was hoisted off the ground, so two of them had a hold of her now. Her phone skittered out of her grasp as she tried to wrench the hand away from her mouth and punch back. Flailing her legs did nothing because the man who had grabbed her waist lifted her off the ground and clamped her knees together against him. Before she could count how many assailants there were in total, she was tossed into a van. Metal grated on metal signalling that the door had been closed, and screeching tyres heralded movement.

Although she tried to get up from the cold metal floor, which was so dirty that grime smudged across her cheek, it was no good. A heavy foot landed on her ribcage and something that felt like rope was wound around her ankles and wrists. The man with his foot on her chest leaned down and stuck a strip of duct tape over her mouth.

Widening her eyes, she tried to scream when she caught sight of the mask concealing his face. Glancing past him she managed to glimpse another masked man toward the back of the van, who must have been the one to bind her. Two of them were in the back with her, but she couldn't see how many were in the front, the top of her head was squashed against the back base of the front seats.

The man standing on her chest increased his pressure then moved his foot away to sit on a seat that folded down from the van wall. He whipped off his mask to show ice-blue eyes glistening above a confident smile.

'Don't you worry yourself, beautiful,' he said. 'I'm John, and I bet you're wondering what the fuck this is about?'

She mumbled because she couldn't talk and her attempts to force out a scream were burning the back of her throat. Makeup blurred in her eyes and streams of it ran in hot rivers down her temples, some dripping into the shells of her ears.

'You did nothing wrong, but a lot of girls I pick up for the boss done nothing wrong.'

She couldn't ask any questions, but a million of them zinged through her. This wasn't a standard street attack. The men hadn't mugged her; they hadn't tried to grope her. They had grabbed her, bound her, and now she lay here in the back of this van helpless, on the road to god knew where.

Risk It All

'I work for a guy called, Victor, does that mean anything to you?' She managed to shake her head, which freed more tears. 'Doesn't surprise me, but see, someone you know did something to piss Victor off. And when people do that, he sends me out to pick up something valuable of theirs. So you're valuable... you're valuable to a guy who is valuable to Victor.'

Trying to think of who she could be associated with who would be connected to something like this, her mind came up blank. Gary and Blaser were the only two people she knew who were connected to anything illegal and it had been years since she had been a part of that world. Unless... could the fact that she was talking to Blaser now make her valuable to him in a way that might upset this Victor guy. She couldn't believe it because Blaser had promised that he was legitimate now. He was a business owner mending bridges with his brothers, a real respectable guy now.

'What you come up with?' The guy bent lower and his grin made her wince, she couldn't believe that he was grinning. It wasn't enjoyment that she gleaned, he seemed indifferent to his own words, yet his grin was smug. 'I'll give you a clue,' he said and she held her breath in anticipation, hoping that she could put all of this down to a misunderstanding. 'Does the name Warner mean anything to you?' Her hope sank. 'Ruger Warner?'

Shock struck her immobile because he was Blaser's younger brother. He'd always been the secretive type, but no one suspected Ruger of any type of illegal activity. Yet here she was, bound and gagged because Blaser's little brother had pissed off a crime boss. No misunderstanding, she knew Ruger, and he'd just delivered her into something far more sinister than anything she, Blaser, or Gary had ever been a part of. She had no idea how this would end.