



Haiden slammed down the last round of weights with a grunt.

“Pushing hard, man.”

Ignoring Evan, Haiden grabbed his towel and water bottle.

“You got plans for Valentine’s?”

Stopping mid sip, Haiden glared up at a grinning Evan.
“What?”

Evan shrugged. “Just trying to get your attention. You’ve been more than unusually quiet today.”

“Not quiet, just thinking.”

“Like I said, plans?”

Shaking his head, Haiden stood. “Nope.”

“You should.”

Tossing the water bottle on the table, he turned. “Why?”

“That’s what I’d like to know. Why don’t you want to make plans with Danica? She’s friendly, easy to talk to, and pretty. Don’t think I didn’t notice when I started. So, why not?”

Shaking his head, Haiden adjusted the weights on the bar, then lay down on the bench. After pushing out reps, Evan helped him place the bar back on the rack.

Haiden sat up and took a deep breath. “I’m guessing you have plans?”

Evan grinned. “Sure do. Going to be a great Valentine’s Day.”

Haiden huffed and stood from the bench, stretching out his shoulders and ignoring the pull of the recent scars as they strained.

“Your back good?”

Haiden nodded. “Just pulls sometimes.”

Evan snatched up the dumbbells and started on curls. “About that. We never talked about your visitor at the hospital.”

Haiden glared. “Nothing to talk about.”

As Evan dropped the dumbbells in place, he stepped back and put his hands on his hips, his breaths heavy. “Just thought I’d offer. It stays between us if you want to.”

Shaking his head, Haiden set the bench for the leg press.

His dad.

Danica had been there when Haiden woke. The feeling of her up against him, holding him and hugging him as he waited for the doctor to examine his injured back. Her face against his bare chest, her hands gripping his side—it had unnerved him much more than he wanted to admit. Then his father showed up, suddenly, unexpectedly, and unwelcomed.

Haiden let the weight drop as he bent his knees, taking a few deep breaths.

The one time he’d taken off his shirt last year in the weight room, Evan spotted the scarring across his back. All Haiden said was ‘my dad,’ and apparently, Evan hadn’t forgotten.

It was an act of God that allowed Haiden into the Army. He didn’t meet the medical standards, but the recruiter took the paperwork and said, “You’ve got a future with us. I hear you can shoot.” It was a chance at life and proved God was guiding him through the fire, giving him a future.

“Earth to Haiden.”

Haiden cut his eyes to Evan and slid off the bench. “Yeah?”

“Buck wants everyone in the living room ASAP.”

He nodded to Evan and wiped his face and neck down with the towel. "Give me a sec."

Evan left out the door as Haiden leaned his palms to the wall. Letting out a deep breath, he rotated his upper body downward, stretching out his shoulders.

"A future. I have a future and t-that's enough," he whispered.

DANICA'S FACE flushed when Haiden made his way from the weight room to the living room. He pulled a chair from the dining room table and sat behind the couch.

His arms and shoulders bulged from the workout, and she forced her eyes away. Bexley bumped her arm.

"Sure you don't want to have a conversation?" Bexley whispered.

"Shut-up," she mumbled.

Ignoring Bexley's chuckle, Danica leaned back against the couch, propping her head up on the arm. Attraction was one of those things she couldn't just drop. He had some major walls built up, and that should be enough to make her want to ignore all lingering feelings.

But it would not make the attraction disappear. At least it wouldn't for her.

"I had a talk with Captain DeSalis. He informed me that the officers being detained today wouldn't happen again. However, even if it does, we have to be prepared like we were for whatever the scene holds."

"That's it? No actual explanation for what happened?" Jeff leaned forward on his knees.

"If he's got internal issues, I trust he'll figure it out. It's not my business. So, starting tomorrow, we'll be going through tactical training and hitting the range. Hard. We've got a new member training with us, and we need to place her into position so everyone can adjust."

“Thanks, Bex,” Danica muttered, and Bexley elbowed her again.

“Get your rest in today. You’ll need it for tomorrow.”

As Buck left, Danica closed her eyes and leaned her head back. Between Bexley’s revelation about her owing Haiden and seeing him like that, she was in trouble.

Why in the world was she still so hung up on Haiden Blake?