



She's a slave to the **mania**.
They're the truth she **can't deny**.

LILAC

B.B. REID

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For Tijuana Turner.

She dragged me kicking and screaming to the finish line.

She had not known the weight until she felt the freedom.—Nathaniel
Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

ALSO BY B.B. REID

Broken Love Series

[*Fear Me*](#)

[*Fear You*](#)

[*Fear Us*](#)

[*Breaking Love*](#)

[*Fearless*](#)

Stolen Duet

[*The Bandit*](#)

[*The Knight*](#)

When Rivals Play Series

[*The Peer and the Puppet*](#)

[*The Moth and the Flame*](#)

[*Evermore*](#) (novella)

[*The Punk and the Plaything*](#)

[*The Prince and the Pawn*](#)

Standalones

Lilac

PLAYLIST

Lose Yourself—Eminem

Monsters—Shinedown

Dear God—XTC

Down with the Sickness—Disturbed

Love and War—Fleurie

Headstrong—Trapt

I Want It That Way—Backstreet Boys

Sober—Tool

Angels Fall—Breaking Benjamin

Black is the Soul—Korn

Polyamorous—Breaking Benjamin

Best Thing I Never Had—Beyoncé

Bed of Lies—Nicki Minaj ft Skylar Grey

Apologize—Timbaland ft OneRepublic

Spastik—Plastikman

Basiel—Amelie Lens

Oh Bondage! Up Yours!—X Ray Spex

Open Your Eyes—Disturbed

Bring Me to Life—Evanescence

So What—Pink

Light My Fire—The Doors

THE WORLD MOURNS A TRAGIC LOSS

October 20 2017 / 4:36 PM / America's Daily News

Calvin Everill, the lead guitarist of Bound, was found dead yesterday morning from a drug overdose. At twenty-seven, the not-yet proclaimed legend is survived by his bandmates who could not be reached for a statement. While mourning, fans are anxious to learn about the fate of the upcoming world tour and who Bound's front man, rumored to be meticulous, will deem worthy of filling Everill's shoes.

ONE



The news was reporting the same story.

No one would suspect the government had shut down, and parts of the country were still suffering from last year's hurricanes. There had been ten mass shootings this month alone, but reports had taken a back seat for one tragedy in particular.

Every channel and their avid audiences were tuned in to the death of Calvin Everill.

After three months, there was nothing new to report, no suspicion of foul play.

The rock star had simply overdosed on cocaine.

My gaze remained glued to the screen of the mounted TV across from me while the smell of brine filled my nose. I couldn't stop my leg from bouncing or the umpteenth shift in the hard plastic chair. The receptionist who'd greeted me when I arrived was oblivious to my distress as her desk phone rang nonstop.

The offices of Savant Records were thirty floors up with the Los Angeles sun shining through the windows and highlighting the modern industrial space. More phones were ringing somewhere, accompanied by the clicking of computer keys and the hurried footsteps of a low-level employee and confident stride of an executive.

Everyone seemed to be in a frenzy today, which meant something big must be happening while I awaited my fate.

I blamed myself for arriving late even though my sister had puked all over my clothes, leaving me no choice but to borrow something from her closet. Each choice had been more god-awful than the last.

With shaking hands, I smoothed down the dress I'd chosen, a corduroy ankle-length tarp with wide shoulder straps. Since it was January, I'd paired it with a white long-sleeve shirt. The only things I wore that were mine were my thong, second-hand Docs, and the black choker around my neck with a gold crescent moon hanging from the center.

No, this one was all on me.

I'd known going home before the most important meeting of my life was irresponsible. It's just that Amelia Fawn, nearly six hundred miles away, still ruled me with an iron fist.

When the news story changed, my interest in what was airing became very real. I couldn't look away. Like the rest of the world, I was hoping for a glimpse of them—Houston Morrow, Loren James, and Jericho Noble.

The remaining members of Bound.

Most celebrities would have tweeted how sad they were by now. In the age of social media, you weren't angry or grieving unless you posted about it online. Our instincts dictated we run to strangers on the internet the moment we experience pain, to tell the world how deeply gutted we are over the loss of our loved ones—as if the multitude of absentminded apologies and offers of prayers would actually mend the rip. Calvin Everill's bandmates, on the other hand, had no comment.

Not a single goddamn word.

And so the world forgot their grief for intrigue.

Just like that.

The once adoring fans' favorite target of the three was Bound's front man and lead vocalist. The latest asinine theory was that Houston Morrow murdered his guitarist.

Even I had to admit that it wasn't *entirely* baseless.

Morrow and Everill had kept the voracious blogs busy for the past year with their open hatred for one another. The world was now divided between people who believed Morrow murdered Everill and those who couldn't care less for the same reason the talented guitarist had gotten away with being a junkie.

Houston Morrow was revered.

Even more so than Calvin. While the guitarist had been on the road to legendary, Houston had already blazed that trail.

A clip of the band's last performance together flashed across the screen as they played one of their biggest hits, "Fatal Fever."

Hearing the lyrics, I was more anxious than ever. It was impossible that Bound had written them specifically for me, but that's what it felt like. Even though I'd shown up for this meeting and filled my lungs with hope, I was still pretending to be normal, still pretending I wanted to be cured.

Sweeping the red strands of my hair off my nape, I piled them high into as neat a bun as I could manage without pins or a mirror and only my black, almond-shaped nails. It was hardly professional, but neither was sweating profusely.

I tasted the syrupy sweetness of cherries on my tongue, even though I hadn't eaten since last night, as I watched Houston Morrow shift between crooning and screaming into the microphone he clutched as if it had personally wronged him. The camera zoomed in on the raging storm and the thick strands of dark brown hair and his eyes, which reminded me of evergreens—an entire forest of them. Each droplet of his sweat seemed perfectly timed with the arousal pooling between my thighs. I didn't bother pressing them together. I already knew it wouldn't help.

Neither would soothing the ache—unless he had all night.

On cue, the camera moved to the most ostentatious display of arrogance and sex. Loren James stood on the stage behind Morrow, but he performed as if he were front and center. My hands clutching the arms of the chair and the rest of me clinging to control had two distinct reactions. As one grip tightened, the other loosened. The stage lights bounced off the silver medallion hanging from the bassist's neck. The chain swayed over pectorals exposed underneath his unbuttoned black shirt while the glinting metal of the trinket called attention to his nipples. His shirt was so dark and delicate that the material made his tan skin and elaborate coif of dark-blond hair

appear pale. He flirted with the crowd, the music, and the camera with a smile I could feel in my *bones*.

I sighed with want for something I could never have just as the camera panned again. Furthest from the front of the stage, but still somehow a relentless beacon, sat Jericho Noble. The true heart of Bound. He drove the beat and tempo that kept the crowd on their feet and their hands in the air as he hammered the drum kit and kept time. He always looked as if he'd been caught in the rain with his inky black hair falling over his eyes and curling around his ears as he twisted and bounced his head in perfect rhythm. I knew that when he inevitably looked up to tease the crowd, I'd find silver eyes flecked with gold and a black spiral piercing at the corner of his bottom lip.

At last, the camera settled on the scruffy beard and shoulder-length blond hair of Calvin Everill as he provided Houston with backup vocals. I felt the heat warming my freckled cheeks fade as sorrow took hold. Despite his shady personal life, he had a gift no one could replicate, though I'd been his pupil for years. Eventually, I learned to trust myself as a guitarist and even preferred my own style.

Still, there was this stirring in my gut that began the moment I learned of his death, and it wouldn't abate. Conceitedly, it felt like the weight of the world had settled on my shoulders. I was trapped inside a well of confusion, wondering why I couldn't shake the feeling that I was all that remained of Calvin Everill's legacy.

Like all the times before, I brushed aside what was undoubtedly a fantasy rather than a warning of destiny. I was pretty certain every guitarist who fancied themselves a student of Calvin's felt the same. Besides, there had been nothing admirable or worth idolizing about Everill beyond his skill with a guitar—or any of Bound's surviving members.

Was it coincidence or fate being cheeky that Morrow, James, and Noble were the ones who'd founded Bound and were now the only ones left?

"There you are!"

I finally tore my gaze away from the television just as some girl with brown braided pigtails and a colorfully striped sweater rushed into the waiting area. She had stars in her eyes, and I wondered who put them there. I stared at her, making sure I was who she was looking for even though no one besides the receptionist and me was around.

“Sorry, I’m late,” I greeted while standing and holding out my hand. “Braxton.”

“Casey. I’m Oni’s assistant. If you’ll just follow me. Everyone’s already waiting in the conference room. I’m afraid the meeting started without you.”

I inwardly cringed.

That meant all eyes would be on me when I walked into the room, and I wouldn’t be able to hide or play off my tardiness.

Casey rushed off, and I tried to keep up while thinking of an excuse to give Oni. The artists and repertoire rep wasn’t known for her welcoming personality. She was a bit of a hard-ass, but I’d been raised by the worst of them, so I told myself I could handle anything she threw at me.

I just hoped it wasn’t the door.

I wasn’t like the other musicians who’d clawed and scraped for this moment, this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Did I earn it? Yes. But it had never been my intention. Now, I couldn’t blow it, and it wasn’t because Oni had made it clear this would be my only shot.

I almost groaned out loud when “Lose Yourself” by Eminem began playing in my head.

Great.

I didn’t pay much attention to my surroundings as Casey led me to a conference room, but I couldn’t ignore the drastic change in atmosphere when I stepped inside the large room.

My gaze fell on Oni Sridhar first.

Brown skin, black hair, and even darker expression, the A&R rep looked understandably pissed as she sat at the long conference table. The apology I rehearsed was on the tip of my tongue when my nervous gaze shifted to the other occupants in the room.

Genuine surprise tasted tart like ripe, green apples—crisp, sour, sometimes sweet, and while mostly refreshing, this wasn’t one of those times.

The power running my brain flickered uncontrollably until blinking out completely—a total fucking blackout. When the backup generator finally kicked in, my first thought was that Casey had made a huge mistake. This was the wrong room, the wrong meeting.

It had to be.

And there wasn’t just one reason.

There were *three*.

The first leaned against the floor-to-ceiling windows. Bundled in a white hoodie with long arms folded, his gray gaze shone like silver, and the gold in them rivaled the center of our solar system beaming through the windows behind him. As that sun touched his black hair, I was tempted to run my fingers through the messy strands. His hair was so dark that the white cotton of his hoodie appeared starker than freshly fallen snow, his pierced lips a tempting pink like strawberry icing on a cupcake.

God, I wanted a taste.

The second lounged carelessly in a high-backed chair, his blond hair gelled and pushed off his forehead and tucked behind his ears. While he lazily chewed a stick of gum, I ran my gaze over his torso, unsurprised that the dress shirt he wore was splayed open, despite him being in the middle of a business meeting. He flaunted and seduced as if it were second nature. The strong column of his neck even sported the medallion he never seemed to be without. I'd never been close enough to see what was on it, but I was told it was his family's crest. He'd been the only one of the three to come from money.

The final earth-shattering reason stood at the head of the conference table. His gray T-shirt was fitted enough to show off his impressive chest without making it obvious he wanted everyone else to notice too.

You know the type.

I admired his arms and the corded veins until my gaze reached his large hands planted on the table surface. When his finger tapped the wood impatiently, my gaze shot up to his styled brown hair, though not as thoroughly as his bassist, before finally meeting his gaze. Instantly, I was drowning in a forest of green. Instantly, he hated me.

Hester, give me strength.

My eyes had to be deceiving me.

What was unfolding...couldn't possibly be.

The only flaw in my logic was that no one could ever mistake Houston Morrow, Loren James, and Jericho Noble.

It was them.

Bound.