



Dean stood beside an open suitcase holding two white shirts in the air, both on a hanger, both neatly pressed. He lifted one, then the other, as if there was a variance in the whiteness, as if one were more attractive, as if either were any different than the other fifty in his closet. Sue Champion was relaying her spoon-fed saga on the four o'clock news, disaster and doom, death and mayhem, smiling as though someone were tickling her pussy from under the desk.

His phone rang. Dean glanced at the caller ID and answered compassionately, sporting a big smile. "Eee ... cat-daddy ... how are the rehearsals? The numbers are coming in. Tell me you're ready for a splendid tour."

"Dean, I'm in New Orleans, and I'm here to talk to CJ."

"Come again?"

"I just got off the plane and I'm heading to the club. You can't stop me and you can't keep me away from CJ. I understand how you want to try this new concept, Dean, I really do, but what you're doing is wrong. I have to oversee the audio, Dean ... *me!* It's *my* music!"

"You left the group?" Dean paused. "New concept? E ... I can't ... I can't believe ... *keep you away from CJ?* What the...?" Dean put his hand to his forehead. "We've gone through all the necessary steps with tech—including your demands! Have you lost your bloody mind?"

"If I need to fix anything—like CJ's attitude, this is when it happens. It's better I do this now, than halfway into the tour. Don't worry, I just need to make sure CJ understands my vision, my art ... my world. Everything happened so fast in New York. I'm still a little skeptical."

Dean remained quiet.

"Why don't you meet me at the club, Dean. Once you see how I do things, you'll understand."

“Dammit, E! You gave me your word you’d follow the bloody itinerary. What if you’d been scheduled for press? No, E, I don’t approve! What’s next, you’ve flown to Moscow for lunch?”

After a tense moment of silence, Dean let out a sigh. “Give me a few hours, E ... but listen! If you arrive and find the place in shambles, don’t blow a bloody gasket on me. I’m hearing about some building issues and I’m not quite sure about the condition of the club. Whatever we decide, we will decide together. If we don’t get this tour off the ground on a peaceful note, it’s all to pot—do you hear me? We’ll not begin this jaunt with a kick in the teeth. I’ll not have it ... and I’ll not spend the next three months babysitting egos. No more than usual, that is.”

“Don’t worry, Dean. I won’t hurt the kid.”

Dean lowered his phone. “It’s not the kid I’m worried about.”