SOCIAL EFFECT / GHOSTWRITTEN

Keep That

OPENING CHAPTER · FREE SAMPLE

Book Two opening. Read after Resurface. Complete Chapter One, unchanged from the corrected shared source.



BROWNSVILLE BOOKS / SOCIAL EFFECT: BOOK TWO

KEEP THAT

Keep That

Glass knew Rae was nervous because she kept apologizing for things he hadn't asked her to fix.

"Sorry, that breath is loud."

He glanced up from the screen. "There are six breaths before the second line."

Rae stared at him from inside the booth until she realized he was messing with her.

She lifted one headphone cup off her ear. "You're annoying."

"Good. Do it again."

Rae rolled her eyes, but the corner of her mouth moved. She reset herself in front of the mic.

The room went quiet. Morning light cut through the narrow window above the console and caught the dust over the rack.

A studio was never truly silent. The computer fan. The low electrical hum from the rack. Somebody walking in the hall outside. Rae's shoe shifting once against the floor in the booth.

Then she sang.

The line came out rougher this time.

Better.

Glass didn't reach for anything.

Rae stopped after the phrase and looked through the glass at him. "That was worse."

"No."

"It cracked."

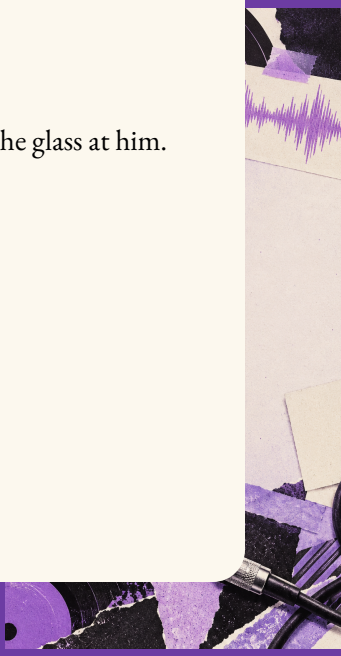
"Yeah."

"So—"

"Keep that."

She frowned.

Glass tapped the space bar and played it back.



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The crack hit halfway through the word. Not enough to make it sound like she couldn't sing. Enough to make it sound like she'd almost changed her mind about saying the thing at all.

Rae listened with both headphones off now.

"Again," she said.

"You already got it."

"I can do it cleaner."

"I know."

She looked at him.

Glass leaned back in the chair. "Do you want cleaner?"

Rae opened her mouth, then closed it.

That was the question he'd been waiting for since she arrived.

She'd shown up twenty minutes early with her laptop, two folders, a portable drive, three alternate versions of the same chorus, and enough preparation to make the preparation itself look nervous.

The song itself wasn't the problem. The song was good.

It had one strange little turn in the melody that pulled against the beat instead of sitting politely on top of it. Every demo Rae had brought changed that part.

The first version rushed it.

The second fixed it.

The third made it bigger.

The fourth made it normal.

Glass liked the first one.

He spun back toward the screen and dragged the cracked take onto the working track.

Rae came out of the booth. "You're seriously using that?"

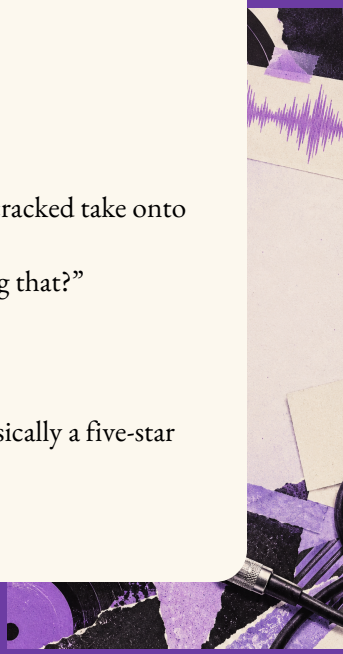
"For now."

"That means yes."

"It means I'm not deleting it."

She dropped into the chair beside him. "That's basically a five-star review from you."

Glass ignored that and played the section again.



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Rae listened.

This time she didn't talk over the crack.

Good.

That was useful about working with Rae: give her enough time and she could hear past the version she thought she was supposed to want.

He'd asked the same question the first time they met, after Rae told him she needed the song to feel bigger.

Everybody said bigger.

Glass had asked what she refused to lose.

Rae had looked at him like he'd switched languages.

Then she'd said, "The part where it sounds like I might not say it."

That had been enough.

Now he pointed at the waveform. "That."

"The ugly breath?"

"The almost."

Rae stopped looking at the waveform.

"Oh," she said.

Glass nodded.

She looked back through the glass at the empty booth.

For the first time all morning, she stopped apologizing.

He let the track run from the top.

The production was still thin in places. The drums weren't settled. The low end needed work. There was a section after the second chorus where nothing had decided what it wanted to be yet.

But the song had a center.

That mattered more.

Rae tapped her fingers against her knee.

"You know why I asked you, right?"

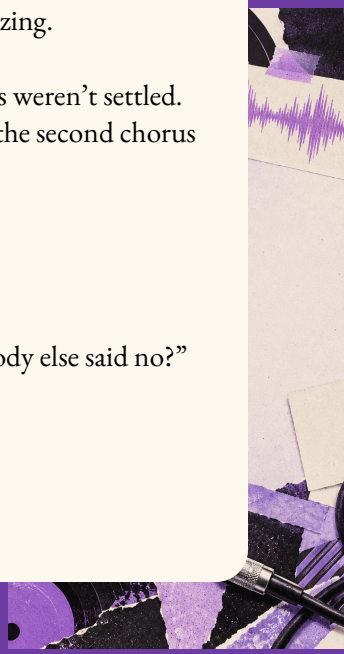
Glass kept his eyes on the screen. "Because everybody else said no?"

"They didn't."

"Then I like my version better."

"I'm serious."

He moved one vocal clip half a beat.



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Rae waited him out.

Glass hated when people waited him out.

Finally he said, “You liked the track.”

Rae meant the Social Effect record people kept attaching to him now—the one that had moved him, somehow, from the guy who made the beats to the guy people outside the group actually called a producer.

He still didn’t know exactly when that happened.

One week he was carrying gear into rooms where nobody looked at him twice.

Then people started asking who built the record.

Then they started remembering the answer.

Rae leaned toward the speakers. “That record. The one that made the scene start saying your name.”

“I liked what you didn’t do to it.”

“You didn’t bury the weird part.”

He almost laughed. “That’s why you hired me?”

“That’s why I trusted you.”

Glass nodded once.

He looked back at the session.

On the screen, he could hear the choices he’d made around Rae’s vocal, but Rae was still the first thing you heard.

Good.

His phone buzzed beside the keyboard.

Rae glanced at it. “You’re popular.”

“No.”

“Your phone disagrees.”

Glass flipped it facedown, but the second buzz made him check.

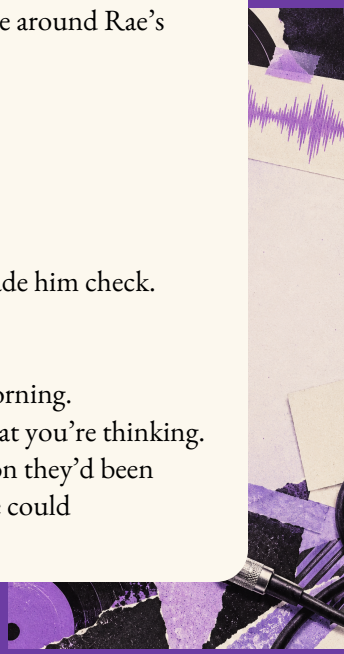
Home.

You still good for tonight?

Underneath it sat the message from earlier that morning.

Not trying to pressure you. Just want to know what you’re thinking.

Tonight meant the same kitchen-table conversation they’d been circling for weeks. Glass locked the screen before Rae could



accidentally read any of it.

He had asked for time to see whether music could become more than the thing everybody politely allowed him to be good at before asking what he was actually going to do. No one at home had told him to quit, which almost made the pressure worse. They asked reasonable questions: how many paid sessions did he have lined up, what happened if next month was quieter, what was the backup if this never turned into what he thought it could?

Rae's session was the best answer he had so far. Two nights ago at Palmer, Social Effect had owned a room together; this was smaller and somehow harder to dismiss. The money mattered, but not as much as the fact that Rae had chosen him for work that had nothing to do with the group. One outside commission did not settle the argument at home, but it bought him something close to permission to keep trying.

Glass put the phone down.

Rae had gone back to the chorus on her laptop.

"You changed that line again," he said.

She froze.

"No."

"You did."

"It's one word."

"It's three syllables."

"That's basically one word emotionally."

Glass reached for her laptop.

She pulled it away.

"Absolutely not."

"You brought me four versions."

"I brought you options."

"You brought me evidence."

"Of what?"

"That you keep fixing the part you like."

Rae stared at him.

Then at her screen.



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Then back at him.

"You do this to everybody?"

"Only people paying me."

"That's comforting."

"It should be."

She laughed once.

Glass waited.

Rae turned the laptop toward him.

The original line was still there in the first demo.

He played it.

The phrasing was uneven. The last word arrived late. The melody did that strange little climb again, the one none of the cleaner versions kept.

Rae made a face.

Glass played it again.

"Don't," she said. Then, quieter: "If I keep fixing it, I'm going to fix the whole reason I wrote it out of the song."

"You're doing this because you enjoy suffering."

"No. I enjoy being right."

"That sounded worse."

"It sounded accurate."

She tapped the back of his chair with two fingers.

Glass grinned and isolated the phrase.

Then he started building underneath it.

Not much.

A change in the drum pocket. Space where he'd had too much. A lower note that made Rae's late word feel chosen instead of mistaken.

He worked without explaining.

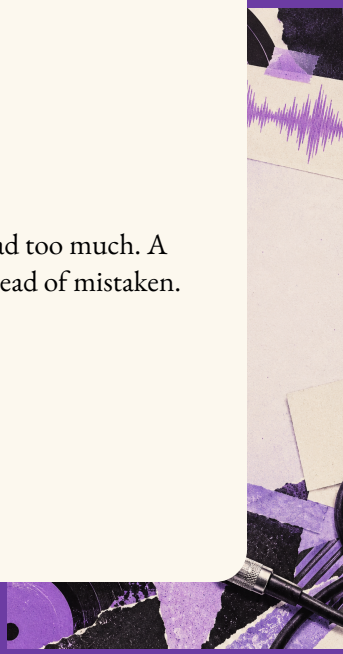
Rae stopped asking.

That was when sessions got good.

Not when nobody talked.

When nobody had to.

A few minutes later, he played the new section.



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Rae went still.
Glass let the playback finish before checking her reaction.
The song reached the crooked phrase.
It leaned.
The production leaned with it.
Then everything snapped back into place.
Rae said, very quietly, “Again.”
Glass played it again.
This time she smiled before the phrase even arrived.
“There,” she said.
Glass nodded.
There.
His phone buzzed again.
He didn’t check it.
Rae looked toward the booth.
“How much time do we actually have?”
“For today?”
“For the filmed live-session feature.”
“Twelve days.”
Her smile disappeared.
“Don’t say it like that.”
“You asked.”
“Twelve sounds bad.”
“It’s not bad.”
“It sounds like a hostage situation.”
“We have a song.”
“We have forty-seven percent of a song.”
“Forty-eight.”
“That’s not how numbers work.”
“It’s better for morale.”
“You’re impossible.”
Glass laughed.
Rae stood and grabbed her headphones.



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At the booth door, she stopped.

"The crack?"

"Still keeping it."

"The breath?"

"Especially the breath."

She pointed at him. "If I hate it tomorrow, I'm blaming you."

"That's what the invoice is for."

Rae disappeared back into the booth.

Glass turned to the session.

For once, the future in front of him looked almost measurable.

Twelve days to Rae's feature.

One paid commission.

One song becoming itself because somebody had trusted him not to sand off the thing that made it hers.

His phone stayed facedown beside the keyboard.

Glass pressed record.

