



INELIGIBLE RECEIVER

JERICA MACMILLAN

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Marycliff Press

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CHAPTER ONE

Sadie

“I STILL CAN’T BELIEVE YOU HAVEN’T BEEN TO A PARTY LIKE THIS BEFORE,” Jenna calls from the bathroom where she’s fussing with her hair.

“And when would I have had the opportunity?” I fire back, looking at my own reflection in the full-length mirror on the back of the door to the hallway. I nudge a box out of the way with my foot so I can step back and see my whole outfit, running my hands over the bare strip of skin showing above the low waistband of my new cutoffs. New as in today years old ... Jenna informed me that my shorts selection was too junior high, dragged me to a thrift store to find a pair of jeans, then cut them off to her satisfaction. Well, almost. She wanted to make them so short my ass would’ve been hanging out. I held out for an extra inch of fabric.

Coming out of the bathroom, she slaps my hands away. “Stop that! You look hot. Quit being so self-conscious.”

“But I *am* self-conscious,” I object.

Rolling her eyes, she steps up next to me, batting her freshly-mascaraed eyelashes and blowing our reflections a kiss from her glossy bubblegum-pink lips. “You don’t need to be. Flaunt what the good lord gave you!” Smacking my ass—and making me jump—she turns to pick up her phone and keys, hooking the latter onto a loop she’s sewn into her pocket, and holding the other in her hand. “Ready?”

At my nod, she flicks her honey blond hair over her shoulder, opens the door to the hall with a flourish, and gestures me through. “And it’s not that I don’t realize you basically lived in lockdown last year —”

“Try for my whole life,” I butt in.

Hooking her arm through mine and walking toward the stairs, she gives me a smirk. “Noted. The point is, I sometimes forget you’ve led such a sheltered existence. You make sex jokes. You have a collection of toys. You *know* things. You don’t sound like a virgin at all.”

Laughing, I shush her. “I don’t need you announcing that where everyone can hear you,” I whisper-yell. In a more normal voice, I continue. “I just wasn’t allowed at parties where there would be alcohol in high school. And while I was technically in college last year, it didn’t exactly feel like it since my parents insisted on me still living at home.”

Jenna makes a face. “Yeah, I remember.”

We met last year at freshman orientation and bonded when we got paired up to do a scavenger hunt. We’re both fiercely competitive in the right circumstances, and hunting down Marycliff-related objects around town then running a three-legged race to the finish line were apparently just those circumstances. We didn’t win—much to our eternal chagrin—but we did still come in third, which landed us each a five dollar gift card to the campus coffee shop. Not exactly the holy grail, but free coffee’s always nice. Spending our first semester in the same University 101 course—basically a super boring seminar on how to make the academic transition from high

school to college, including an entire unit on study skills—cemented our friendship. When I mentioned wanting to live on campus at the end of last year, she leaped at the chance to have me as her roommate.

Her last roommate was a piece of work. She'd wake up at six every morning just to get ready for her eight o'clock class, including blow drying her hair daily in their tiny shared freshman dorm room and waking Jenna up at seven regardless of the fact that Jenna's first class didn't start until ten. While Jenna likes getting dolled up for a party or a night out, her usual class attire consists of a hoodie, joggers, and a messy bun, so she couldn't relate to her roommate's need for daily physical perfection at all. Plus, she stole some of the snacks Jenna's mom sent her in a care package. Jenna might've been able to get over the early morning wake-ups, but snack theft was a bridge too far.

While I might complain about my parents insisting I live at home last year, if the choice was between someone like Jenna's old snack-stealing roommate and having my own room with a comfy bed and plenty of privacy ... it was a tough call.

That's not an issue in the sophomore dorms, though. For one, Jenna and I have established clear boundaries on snack sharing, or lack thereof, as well as preferred wake-up times. I usually let my stick straight chin-length bob air dry anyway, so the hair dryer thing won't be an issue. And for another, we have separate bedrooms and a small shared common area and bathroom. And while we just moved in yesterday, our shared space is already fully furnished, thanks to my mom insisting on renting a truck and taking us thrift shopping as soon as Jenna arrived yesterday. We have a couch, coffee table, a TV that Jenna brought atop a small bookshelf, a mini fridge, and a variety of artwork we still need to hang. We've only lived together for all of twenty-four hours at this point, but I'm optimistic about the year and our friendship. Privacy plus boundaries seems like we're off to a good start.

"Will it be weird going to your first college party at your brother's house?" she asks as we climb into her car. We technically could walk, but he's a few blocks from the other end of campus, and that would take us at least twenty minutes and Jenna offered to drive.

I shake my head. "No. Devon's cool." My brother's only a year ahead of me in school, though he likes to remind everyone that he's almost two years

older than me. Really it's a year and a half, but for those six months, our ages are two digits apart, and that's enough for him. His birthday is next month, and he'll be twenty-one, so he'll definitely be lording that over me until I turn twenty in the spring. The jerkface.

Jenna glances at me out of the corner of her eye. "Don't you call him Jerkface more often than not?"

Laughing at how closely she inadvertently echoed my thoughts, I nod. "Yeah, but I say it with love. Besides, he calls me Dogbreath."

She lets out an incredulous laugh. "Dogbreath?" At my nod, she asks, "Why? Did you have bad breath as a kid or something?"

"No," I snort. "He just needed to pick something mean to call me, so ..." I spread my hands palms up in front of me. "Dogbreath. Though if you ask him, he'd spin some story about a time I ate garlic bread and had bad breath for hours."

She quirks an eyebrow. "Is that true?"

I spread my hands again in an exaggerated shrug. "Maybe? Who knows? *I* don't remember chasing him around to breathe stinky garlic breath in his face, but stranger things have happened."

"But dogs don't eat garlic, do they?"

Laughing at how literally she's taking this, I shake my head. "How should I know? Probably some do. Again, it's just an insulting nickname."

"Said with love," she deadpans.

"Exactly."

After casting another sidelong glance my way, Jenna shakes her head. "Siblings are weird," she mutters, cursed to be a lonely only.

I shrug again, not knowing what else to say.

We pass my brother's house, the street already full of parked cars, and circle around to the next block to find a spot. Jenna throws the car in park, kills the ignition, and turns to me. "Okay, virgin." I so regret admitting that fact to her.

She offers me a sweet as pie smile in response to my glare. “Since this is your first party, we need some ground rules.” Holding up a finger, she prepares to launch into a lecture that I have no interest in hearing.

“No accepting open drinks from strangers,” I start for her. “Check in with you every ten minutes.”

“Ten minutes!” she yelps.

Grinning, I shake my head. “Okay, never leave your side without express permission?”

Brown eyes narrowed, she gives a nod. “For tonight? Absolutely.”

Laughing, I shake my head and reach for the handle. “I know I’m a virgin and inexperienced, but I’m not an ignoramus.”

“Throwing out words like that, it’s no wonder you scared all the guys off.”

Scoffing, I climb out of the car. “I didn’t scare the guys off,” I protest. “I didn’t need to. My brother was Mr. Popularity. Everyone was either already his friend or dying to be, and so none of them would pretend to be more than my friend. Being *friends* with me could get them access to the great Devon Marsinko —”

“AKA Jerkface,” Jenna puts in.

Grinning, I nod and fall in step with her as we head toward Devon’s house that he shares with three other guys and the location of the football team’s afterparty for their first game of the season. Classes start on Monday, but apparently the football season gets started a little early.

“But you don’t bang your friend’s little sister. And as we all know, dating leads to banging, and while it seems like Spokane is big enough that I should have a wider pool to choose from ...” Trailing off, I shake my head.

Jenna looks like she’s trying not to laugh. “Poor baby,” she says in faux-sympathy, looking at me with her lower lip poking out. “No, but seriously, you couldn’t find *anyone* to date? Your brother held that much sway? And if he’s such a clam-jam, how come you still like him?”

“He didn’t do it on purpose.” She gives me a look that says she doesn’t

believe me at all. “He didn’t!” I protest. “He’s just a nice guy and everyone wants to be his friend. And he’s protective.”

“That part right there,” she says, pointing a finger at me and pulling me to a stop. “He ‘protected’ you right out of a normal teenage dating experience. I still don’t quite understand how it even lasted after he graduated, but here we are. Don’t let him do it to you in college.”

I shift on my feet, uncomfortable with the point she’s driving home. I agree it’s strange that it lasted postgraduation, but it’s because he was still *here*. Not at the same school anymore, obviously, but he’d come around and visit his friends and me and come to homecoming and school dances. He even went to prom with a friend of mine senior year.

Shaking my head, I hold up my hands. “Oh, trust me, I have no plan to let that happen.”

“And yet”—she makes an expansive gesture with one hand toward the row of houses, including my brother’s—“you’re making your college party debut at your brother’s house?”

“*With* the entire football team,” I point out, dragging her along. “I’ll check in with Devon, because he’s my brother and I actually do like him, despite whether you think I should or not. You’ll like him too when you meet him, you’ll see.” I get where she’s coming from, I do. And it’s not unfounded. The difference between high school and now, though, is that *I* want a different experience. I wasn’t too worried about dating in high school, more concerned with grades and extracurriculars, making a name for myself in speech club and theatre, and doing my best to grow away from the long shadow cast by my brother.

I succeeded, for the most part. It’s just that speech and drama guys are ... not my type, unfortunately. And for a lot of them, I wasn’t their type either, since I lack certain requisite anatomy for their tastes. Meaning a dick, of course, since nearly all of those guys were gay.

But little does Jenna—or Devon, for that matter—know, my virginal days are nearly over. I’m not saying I’m definitely giving it up tonight—I have to find a likely candidate first, after all—but I’m on the hunt.

As Devon Marsinko's bookish little sister, I've read my fair share of romance novels, which is where a lot of the knowledge Jenna referenced comes from. And tonight I'm channeling the most brazen heroines from those books and looking for a hook-up. A one-night stand.

I'm not telling him my name, either. Not when I'm trying to hook up with a guy in my brother's house. There's no way he'd go through with it if he knew who I was.

So tonight, I'm just a mystery woman—a hottie in a crop top and cut offs, per Jenna. And I'm turning in my V card once and for all.

The party is already well underway by the time Jenna and I get inside, people spilling out into the warm August night and into the backyard. Her arm still hooked through mine, we make a lap, taking in the groups of people in the living room where the furniture is pushed off to the side and out of the way, into what's probably supposed to be a dining room but has a ping pong table set up and a raucous group playing beer pong, into the kitchen where a few couples loiter against the cabinets and near the fridge, heads bent close as they talk, and into the backyard, where there's a keg set up and a table loaded with snacks.

Jenna stops and we survey the rectangle of half brown grass, scorched by the late summer heat and left to the dubious care of college football players. My dad would be muttering and shaking his head about the state of the lawn if he were here. That thought makes me smile. Clearly his lawn care principles didn't rub off on my brother.

Speak of the devil ...

Arms wide, red Solo cup in one hand, an expansive grin on his face, he comes at me from the other side of the patio. "Sis! You made it!"

Laughing, I step into his exuberant embrace. "Hey, Dev. I told you I'd be here."

"Did you see the game? Did you see my interception? I was on fire!"

I pat his back and step away. “You were awesome. I’m sure Mom and Dad have already congratulated you.”

He nods, eyeing Jenna behind me as he answers. “Yup. They stuck around and greeted me outside the locker room before heading home. Did you sit in the student section? And who’s your friend?”

Rolling my eyes as he nudges me aside to reach for Jenna’s hand, his eyes twinkling with his usual flirtatiousness, I cross my arms and shoot Jenna a look that I’m hoping communicates, *Don’t fall for his charm*. It’s not that it’s bullshit or anything. I’m just tired of all my friends becoming more interested in my brother than me.

“This is Jenna,” I answer, arms crossed. “And yes, we sat in the student section.”

“Welcome, Jenna,” he says, practically bowing over her hand instead of just shaking it like a normal person.

“Ugh. Cut it out,” I gripe, interrupting this before it can go further by hip checking him and knocking him off balance enough to get him to drop Jenna’s hand.

He glares at me. “Rude, Dogbreath.”

“You deserved it, Jerkface.”

Jenna’s biting her lips to try to fight back her smile. “It’s nice to meet you,” she says to Devon, her voice full of suppressed laughter. “Thanks for inviting us to your afterparty.”

“Course!” He slings an arm over my shoulder, pulling me close. “I’ve gotta help Dogbreath here get her bearings for college life. It’s my brotherly duty to make sure she knows who to watch out for.”

Jenna nods sagely, her eyes darting to me. “You’re a good brother. And don’t worry, I’ll be here to help her out too.”

Devon holds out his cup like he’s toasting her. “Awesome. Welcome to the team.”

“You guys, I’m right here,” I mutter. “I can hear you.”

Unfazed, Devon shrugs, taking his arm off me, his face brightening. “Oh! You don’t have drinks yet. Let me hook you up. That way you know it’s safe.” Leaning closer and lowering his voice, he adds, “Not that we’re known for people getting roofied. We try to keep it safe around here, but you can never be too careful.” He gives us a sage nod before disappearing without giving us a chance to respond.

Stepping to my side, Jenna and I turn and watch his progress, which isn’t far, because he gets stopped by another group and pulled into a conversation.

“Do you think he’ll actually get us drinks?” Jenna asks, her voice amused and curious.

I tilt my head to the side, screwing up my mouth in thought. “Maybe? Eventually? But riding the high of that interception and in his element here ...” I shake my head. “Could be a while.”

She looks at me. “Should we just get our own drinks then?”

Laughing, I nod. “Probably easiest. And I know you’re going to laugh at me, but I think I’m just going to stick to water or soda tonight.” Hooking my arm through hers, I steer her toward the coolers set up next to the keg. I noticed another cooler in the kitchen, so if these don’t turn up anything, we can check there.

Jenna nods. “Probably smart. Get used to being at this kind of thing before you impair your judgment.”

“Plus we’re underage,” I mutter, which is the thing that actually makes her laugh.

We fish a couple of sodas out of the cooler and crack them open, turning to survey the place again. “Now what?” I ask.

But whatever Jenna might’ve said is interrupted by a shorter—well, short for the giants we’re mostly surrounded by—guy with broad shoulders in a Taylor Swift T-shirt strolling up to us with a wide grin stretching his lips, his short, medium brown hair styled to messy perfection.

“Ladies,” he says, tipping his cup toward us. “I don’t believe I’ve seen you before.”

“We’re new,” I blurt out.

His eyebrows raise. “Transfers or freshmen?”

Jenna chuckles and shakes her head. “Neither. We’re sophomores, but —“

“This is my first year living on campus,” I butt in, not wanting Jenna to divulge my name. Not yet.

Maybe I should’ve told her I’m looking for a hookup but not planning on telling anyone my name ...

The problem is, I didn’t solidly land on that plan until we were almost here. I’ve been toying with the idea ever since Devon told me about the party last week, but wasn’t sure I’d have the courage to follow through, especially if I told Jenna and she teased me about it.

Now that we’re here, there’s no time to fill her in.

“A Swiftie?” Jenna asks, gesturing at the guy’s shirt with her can.

He lays a hand over his heart in a dramatic gesture. “The truest Swiftie who ever lived!” he declares, making us both laugh. Grinning, he shrugs. “I took my little sister to a concert a few years ago, and you can’t go to a concert and not get a shirt.”

“For sure,” Jenna agrees, moving fractionally closer.

I take a half step back, sipping my drink and watching them talk, noting the way Jenna’s all lit up talking to this guy. He’s cute and funny. I can see the appeal. But he’s obviously out for my purposes, because he and Jenna have more of a connection.

As I watch them, a black bubble of doubt grows in the back of my mind. Can I really go through with this? Can I find a guy, flirt with him without coming across like a desperate weirdo, then go have sex with him in a bathroom or open bedroom?

I glance around the party, not sure if I’m looking for a likely candidate or an escape route—a little of both, if I’m honest.

My eyes catch on a shirtless guy with dark hair doing goofy bodybuilder

poses off to the side. He's all lean, compact muscle, and while he's obviously just having fun with the poses, they definitely show off his physique. I find myself smiling as he laughs with his friends, releasing his latest pose and glancing my way, his eyes meeting mine. Electricity sparks between us, potent and heady. His lips hitch up in a sexy smirk, and he nods at me, then beckons me over.

Yeah. Yeah, I can do this. And I think I just found my guy.

CHAPTER TWO

Andrew

“WATCH, WATCH,” LIAM SAYS TO THE CHICK NEXT TO HIM, SMACKING DYLAN on his other side. “He worked out with a bunch of amateur bodybuilders over the summer and learned their poses. Check it out.”

Laughing, I pull a face and flex my biceps, fists pointed out.

“Boo,” shouts Charity, Dylan’s girlfriend who’s sitting on the backyard bench, leaning into his side. She gets extra feisty after a few drinks, and I know Dylan got the high volume hard cider for her, so it takes even less to get her going. “We can’t see anything with your shirt on!”

Surprised, Dylan glances at her. “You trying to get Maloney to strip?” he asks.

Flapping her free hand, she makes a derisive noise. “Not for like, sexy reasons. We just need to get the full effect. If he were in one of those tank tops that are torn down to the waist,”—she gestures at her side to illustrate what she means—“that’d be good enough. But in a polo?” Another noise, her red hair flying as she shakes her head. “Nope. No sir. He needs to lose the shirt, or else how will we see his muscles?” She turns to face Dylan, lowering her voice. “If you’re jealous, you could take your shirt off and join him.”

“Maybe at home,” he murmurs, leaning in to kiss her.

If he’d hoped that’d distract her, he hoped wrong, because as soon as he pulls away, she sets down her can and starts clapping in time with her chant. “Take. It. Off! Take. It. Off!”

A couple of the other girls in our group join in and Liam lets out a whoop.

“Fine, Charity, you win,” I say, standing with a put-upon sigh and unbuttoning my polo as far as it goes before pulling it over my head. I might act like I’m doing this at Charity’s demand, but we all know it’s for the benefit of the new girls gathered around—the number growing as soon as Charity started demanding I take my shirt off.

She glances around at the crowd, leaning in and whispering something to Dylan as I strike my first pose—the same bicep flex from earlier, but now that I’m standing, I pop one leg out to the side and flex my quad as well, not that it’s very visible in my khaki shorts. At least she didn’t demand I strip those off as well. Not that I wouldn’t with the right encouragement, I just typically prefer a more private audience for that.

Cheers greet my first pose, and I quickly move to another, taking in the growing number of female onlookers. Thanks to Charity, I’ll have my pick of women tonight. I couldn’t ask for a better wingman.

Turning, I give them my back and flare my lats, another round of whoops and applause stroking my ego in the best way. And when I look up, my eyes clash with a girl I don’t recognize, eyes wide, the bare strip of skin showing between her cherry red crop top and denim shorts glistening in the twilight and the flickering light cast by the tiki torches lining the back patio. The torches were my idea, and I have to say, I appreciate the effect even more in reality than in my imagination.

I give her a slow smile, enjoying the way she's looking at me. When she doesn't break eye contact, I let my smile grow and beckon her over. To my delight, she smiles and heads my way, silver soda can in hand.

I manage one more pose before Liam tosses my shirt in my face. "Alright, alright, we get the idea."

"Hey, man." I pull the shirt out of my face. "You were the one who wanted me to pose for everyone." Holding my shirt in one hand, I spread my arms wide. "You wanted to get a good look, so look your fill."

He waves a hand in front of his face as though trying to block the sight of my shirtless torso. "I didn't want you half naked, though!"

Laughing, I drape my shirt over my shoulder, not ready to put it back on yet. Not when there's a cutie looking like she wants to eat me up. Not when there's a solid chance remaining shirtless will just save time in the bedroom later.

I saunter over to the crop top with chin-length brown hair clipped back on one side with something sparkly. I like it. She's this combo of girl next door with the wide eyes and wholesome face—and soda still in its can like she's not trying to impress anyone by pretending to drink alcohol—and seductress with her bling, crop top, and short shorts. She looks like trouble and fun all rolled into one sexy package.

Her eyes never leave mine, and that kind of brazenness is exactly what I'm looking for. That's the look of a chick who knows the score, who isn't looking for more than some fun—and fun is what I do best.

"Hey, baby," I say as I get closer, letting my lids grow heavy as I look her up and down and bite my lower lip. "You must be new around here."

She giggles into her soda can, her lips curling in a pleased smile as she takes a sip. "Something like that," she volleys back, her voice slightly husky in a way that would sound amazing in the bedroom.

Stepping closer, I brush an imaginary hair out of her face, using it as an excuse to touch her. She doesn't flinch or step back. Instead, she smiles up at me, her eyes dancing with amusement. "What's your name?" I ask. The nice thing about being outside is that even though everyone is plenty loud—

including the neighbors, who are also college students and invited because that's the best way to keep them from making noise complaints out of spite—it's not so loud that I have to shout to be heard.

Instead of answering me, she shakes her head. "No names. I don't need yours. And you don't need mine." Her hand hovers in the air, a half second of hesitation, before she lays it on my bare chest, her fingers cool even in the warm, late summer evening.

My eyebrows climb my forehead, and my hand covers hers on instinct, holding it in place over my escalating heartbeat. "No names?"

"Exactly," she replies, voice breathy, her eyes tracking down my shoulders and chest before rising back to mine, her chin tipping up like she's responding to a challenge. "You seem like the kind of guy who knows how to show a girl a good time, and that's all I'm looking for."

I rub my free hand over my jaw, glancing around to make sure that no one's waiting and laughing, because this seems too good to be true. Did my buddies find someone to pull this shit just to wind me up?

But no. No one seems to be paying much attention to us.

Returning my gaze to the girl looking for a good time in front of me, I drop my hand and let my smile widen. "I see my reputation precedes me. Do you want to dance first, or should we head upstairs and start having fun?"

She giggles again, and I have to admit, it's pretty adorable. It works for her. "Wouldn't dancing be fun too?"

Taking my hand off hers and running it up her arm then down to her hip, reveling in the softness of her exposed skin, I step close, dropping my lips to her neck. "It would be. But getting you all to myself would be even more fun," I whisper just below her ear, nipping her earlobe, and kissing the gratifying wave of goosebumps that ripple over her skin.

She swallows hard, her body nearly sagging against mine. "Upstairs, then," she practically whispers, like she can't manage more than that.

Yeah, I definitely still have my touch. With my hand still on her hip, I guide her in front of me, turning us toward the house. Once we're inside, I slip past

her, grabbing her free hand with mine and leading her through the crowd and up the stairs, down the hall to my room.

Once inside, I claim the can of soda from her, taking a sip just to make sure it's only soda. She's not acting drunk, but I want to be certain. Fizzy cola and nothing else. While I don't mind if a girl's had a few and is still obviously in charge of her faculties, I don't fuck with drunk chicks.

"Just soda all night, huh?" I ask. "No liquid courage?"

She shakes her head, crossing her arms over her chest as she looks around my room. "Nope." She pops the P. "I thought I had enough courage of my own."

She's standing and looking at the wall holding the bulletin board I use to keep track of important things—practice and workout schedules, my class schedule for tomorrow, scraps of paper with phone numbers and notes to myself. I step up behind her, skimming a hand down one of her arms. "Are you less certain about your level of courage now?"

She turns to face me, her brown eyes uncertain, but then her chin tips up again, her shoulders straightening as she drops her arms. "No. My courage is just fine," she whispers, then she presses up on her toes, her hands going to my arms to steady herself, and she kisses my jaw.

With a soft grunt, I bend and capture her mouth, giving her what she wants, what she was brave enough to try to claim for herself. If I hadn't been so surprised—she doesn't look like the typical girl who makes the first move—I would've met her halfway.

She's so brazen for someone who looks like the girl next door. If she'd acted in a more typically flirtatious way, I never would've given her a second look, assuming she'd be interested in more than, how'd she put it? A guy who knows how to show a girl a good time.

I certainly meet that description. But most girl-next-door types are looking for a guy to take home to meet their parents. I've made the mistake of hooking up with chicks who want more than fun. It always leads to hurt feelings—theirs—and frustrations—mine. Oh, sure, they *claim* that's all they want, but there are tells that show they're hoping they can hook me and reel me in. The way they text, the way they carry themselves, the look in their

eyes ... I've learned through bitter experience how to read those things. Sometimes I overlook my better judgment, and it always ends badly.

The most notable lapse in judgment nearly had me estranged from my friend group when I hooked up with Dylan's girlfriend's former roommate. She'd been throwing herself in my path for weeks, and I knew—I *knew*—she wanted more than she claimed. So while I flirted with her, because that's what I do—fun, remember?—I never promised her anything more than that until Dylan roped me into a double date with his kinky-roleplaying girlfriend and her best friend. We had a nice time, she and I ended up back at her place, and when I didn't want to keep hanging out afterward, she got hurt.

Honestly, I'm not sure if my friendship with Dylan has fully recovered, and it's been months. Some of that's on me, though, because I figure his girl probably hates my guts too since her best friend does. Though I've seen the best friend palling around tonight with Caden, so maybe she's moved on. Thank Christ if she has. And maybe that's why Charity's acting as my wingman tonight. An olive branch of sorts to show there are no hard feelings.

Or maybe she's just tipsy.

Either way, the wholesome seductress in front of me doesn't have any of the signs of trying to snare me into a relationship going on. Girls who want you to meet their moms don't refuse to tell you their name or learn yours—though, to be fair, most of them already know my name. I'm not sure if this little minx actually does and is just playing coy, or if she genuinely doesn't know—and doesn't care—who I am, just what I can do for her.

As our kisses turn more passionate, I slip my fingers under the hem of her top, finding her bra band right away. She makes an urgent noise low in her throat, her hands kneading my muscles along my shoulders, like she's trying to pull me closer.

Reaching behind my neck, I gently grasp her hands and untangle them from me. "Whoa, babe. We've got all the time we need. I promise it'll be worth your while."

Dropping back on flat feet, she gives me an almost shy smile, which is so at odds with her forwardness. "You promise, huh?" She shakes her hair out of her face, her eyes raking down my torso, and I flex my pecs in response. That

has a grin taking over, all shyness gone now as she steps forward and places her hand on my chest again. Only this time she doesn't just leave it there, she runs it across my pecs and down my flat stomach, petting the happy trail below my belly button, her breath hitching. As her hand gets lower, her eyes following her progress, my cock perks up even more. Kissing and caressing her bare skin had it getting ideas, but her touching me like that? Those ideas are turning—ahem—concrete.

I hold still, hoping she'll continue her southern progress, but she doesn't. She raises her eyes to mine like she's suddenly unsure what to do next.

Is this her first time initiating sex? She looks young, and while clearly she's no virgin, she could've been a late bloomer. Or her boyfriend always put the moves on her and now she doesn't know how to take the next step.

I don't mind at all helping her out and showing her the way. Stepping closer, which has the added benefit of causing her hand to move lower, snagging on my waistband and nudging it down, I cup the back of her neck and pull her into another kiss, maneuvering us around so I can back her up to the bed.

I had the foresight of making my bed earlier, reasonably confident I'd be getting some action at the party, so I put on a fresh set of sheets this morning—my favorite white ones—pulling up my navy blue comforter and folding down the top so it looks fresh and neat, welcoming any young ladies who happen to find themselves in my den of sin.

Once her legs bump into the bed, I stop, not wanting her to lie down yet. Instead, I reach for the bottom of her crop top, lifting it slowly, giving her plenty of time to back out if she's suddenly overcome by nerves or changed her mind.

But she doesn't, instead lifting her arms so I can remove her top entirely and treating me to a view of her simple baby blue T-shirt bra. It's fitting, and she makes it sexy in her wholesome, effortless way. Grinning, I toss her shirt aside carelessly and run a finger over the edge of her bra, another wave of goosebumps rising and a shiver running through her. "Nice," I say. "Love the color."

"You're a boy, so blue's your favorite of course."

Lopsided grin in place, I shrug. “Sure, but I generally prefer darker shades. This one’s perfect for you, though.”

Her mouth hooks to the side, and she brings up a hand to rub her nose. “Thanks?” I’m not sure why she makes it a question, but she’s smiling, so it can’t be bad.

“I think I’d like it better on the floor, though,” I tell her as I reach around and unhook the back.

She laughs, and I like making her laugh. I like that she’s lighthearted about sex. It makes it all more fun, and that’s what I’m all about.

Once she’s topless, her laughter dies when my hands cup her tits, kneading them gently then bending to curl my tongue around each nipple in turn. That makes her gasp, her hands clasping my head, her fingers tunneling into my hair.

Yeah, babe, I think. Who’s laughing now?

When I nudge her back, she climbs onto the bed, and she looks perfect against my comforter in her cutoff shorts, hair fanning around her head, chest rising and falling with her rapid breaths, perfect nipples hard and waiting for me.

With one hand, I pop open the button on my shorts, shoving them down so I’m just in my black boxer briefs as I climb onto the bed. My girl’s eyes grow wide as they fasten onto my dick bulging behind the stretchy cotton, and I can’t help grinning at the sight. Guess I’m packing more heat than whoever she’s been with before. From the looks of her, I’d say high school boyfriend that she dated long distance through freshman year before breaking up over the summer. After months of celibacy, she’s ready for action, and she’s come to the right place.

Reaching down, I stroke myself through my underwear as I crawl on my knees up the bed. She watches me, her arms splayed, her fingers twitching into the comforter like she’s not sure whether to hold onto it or not.

Oh, babe. I’ll have you clutching at the sheets soon enough, I think, hoping the promise shines through my eyes.

Releasing my grip on myself, I prop myself over her, dropping my head to kiss her again, making my way down her neck and chest—pausing to give her tits the attention they deserve, or course—then settling between her thighs. Holding her eyes with mine, I reach up and pop the button on her shorts, the sound of the zipper drawing down loud in the quiet room, the sound of the party below barely audible in the little bubble we’ve created.

Her breath hitches as I tug her shorts and panties—a lacy peach thong—down and off, leaving her bare and waiting for me. She lets out a stuttering exhale as I slide my fingers through her neatly trimmed curls, finding her juicy and ready for me.

With a small smile, I resettle between her thighs, my face an inch from her pussy, when she crunches up, propping herself on her elbows, eyes wide. “Wait. What are you doing?”

Laughing, I give a tiny shake of my head. “What does it look like I’m doing? I’m gonna eat your pussy. You’re here for a hookup, right?”

She looks doubtful, but nods. “Yeah, I mean ... yeah.”

“Okay, well, this is how we’re starting.” I quirk an eyebrow. “Your usual hookups don’t eat you out?”

Flopping back on the bed, her body shakes with a suppressed laugh. “No. My usual hookups definitely don’t do that.”

The way she says it, the laughter vibrating through her voice, confirms my earlier suspicions—she doesn’t normally do hookups. It’s possible this is her first one. And given that, it’s my responsibility to fuckboys everywhere to make sure she has a good time so she’s not put off them forever.

But if she doesn’t want it ...

“I don’t have to, if you’re uncomfortable,” I tell her, though I haven’t changed position.

“No,” she breathes, waving a hand like a queen giving an order. “I’m ... good. This is good. I was just surprised.”

If that’s all it takes to surprise her, then I plan on blowing her mind.

CHAPTER THREE

Sadie

WHEN HIS TONGUE TOUCHES ME, I'M LOST. SURE, I'VE MADE MYSELF FEEL good plenty of times before—I'm a virgin, not a prude—but it's never felt quite like *this*. Warm and wet, slow licks up my center like he knows I won't enjoy direct stimulation of my clitoris at this point.

Maybe he does know. Surely I can't be the only person in the world—or even in his likely vast experience—to want a warm up first.

I don't even know his name, and he has his tongue in my vagina. The thought floats into my head, entirely unwelcome, and I clamp a hand over my mouth to stifle a giggle. I may not have much experience—or, well, any—but I know that laughing right now would *not* be a good thing.

Shut up, stupid brain, I tell myself, hoping that'll stifle the errant thoughts that do not help the situation at all. I shouldn't be worried about names—not when someone's going down on me for the first time.

I try to focus on the sensations, I really do, but I'm way too in my head to maintain it for long. *I'm naked. With a guy. For the first time ever.*

I might be freaking out a little.

He's not naked. Not all the way. He still has underwear on. Why does he still have underwear on? Should I have taken his underwear off?

Glancing down at him, I find him watching me intently, and somehow that's even more unsettling. *Am I doing something wrong? What if I'm doing something wrong? I mean, I don't think I am, but what do I know? In the books, don't the women like undulate and moan and stuff? I'm not doing any of that, so maybe he thinks I don't like this.*

Do I like this?

It feels nice, but I'm nowhere close, and the initial shock has kinda worn off now, so ...

He lifts his face, his lips and chin shiny with juices—*my* juices, oh my god—but he stops looking at my face, at least, instead focusing on my privates.

Which ... is somehow both better and worse. What if my vulva looks weird? I mean, I don't think it does, but it's the only one I've ever really paid any attention to, so like ... again, what do I know?

His thumb draws circles around my clit, and oh ... “That feels good,” I murmur. There. I said something. That's good, right?

His eyes flick up to mine, a small smile claiming his lips, and then he refocuses between my legs. He slides a finger inside me, and I let out a soft grunt at the intrusion. Again, I've used toys—including dildos—but I've always been the one in control of what goes inside me, when, and at what speed. Having someone else do it to me is ... strange. Not bad, just ... very different.

Which is what you wanted, I remind myself sternly. This is, in fact, the whole

point. To see what this is like. To get out from the suffocating protection of your family and start living life for yourself. You're doing it! This is good!

His lips and tongue get back in on the action, his fingers pumping, and while it feels nice enough, he's just not quite getting me where or how I need, and I don't even know what to tell him to help him out.

Eventually he gets tired or bored or ... I dunno, in any case, he pulls away, and the sudden lack of sensation makes me wish for it again, and I make a soft sound of protest.

He stands, smirking as he wipes his mouth with his hand. "Don't worry, I'm coming back. Just gotta grab a condom." As he pushes down his underwear, he fishes in the little drawer of his nightstand and comes up with a square packet. While he rips it open, I have time to marvel at him in all his glory. There's no denying it, the boy's hot, his body trim and compact, elegantly muscled but not in that overdone, steroid-induced way despite his clowning with bodybuilder poses earlier. He even has that V thing, framing the thick, hard cock that's jutting in my direction.

He gives himself a few pumps with his fist, and when I glance up at his face, I see he's watching me, still smirking. "Ready?"

Biting my lower lip, I look back at the dick at eye level. *This is why I'm here, I remind myself. Sure, he's bigger than your favorite dildo, but you'll be okay. Plenty of women have been here, done this, and lived to tell the tale, right?*

I mean, I assume so, anyway, based on his earlier bravado. I suppose he could be full of shit, but he didn't seem like it.

With a definitive nod, I murmur, "Yes."

At my clear assent, he rolls the condom on, giving himself a few more pulls as he climbs back on the bed, kneeling between my legs once more. He props himself over me on one hand, his other guiding his dick as he rubs it all around on me, the latex of the condom smooth and slick as he glides it over my clit a few times before slipping it down to my opening and nudging himself inside.

He starts to press forward, and my legs lift on instinct, my hand reaching for

his hip. “Slow,” I whisper. “Slow and easy.”

With a jerk of his chin to acknowledge my command, he does as I ask, inching his way inside me little by little until his hips are flush with mine.

Oh my god, I’m having sex with a guy I don’t even know, I think, caught somewhere between panic and elation—but mostly elation. I’m officially not a virgin anymore.

He pauses, resting on his elbows, his face above mine, and I can’t help marveling at the flecks of gold and green in his warm brown eyes. From farther away, they just look brown, but up close like this? There are swirls of color feathering out from his pupils. It’s beautiful.

His perfect, lush lips claim mine again, and he moves inside me slowly, dragging himself out then inching his way back in. He keeps up this pace for what feels like hours, though I’m sure it’s a time more easily measured in seconds, possibly minutes, but it’s so slow, and it’s nowhere near enough friction to give me what I need.

I push my hips up to meet his, hoping to wordlessly encourage him to speed up, but he clamps a hand on my hip, holding me in place so he can torture me with long, measured thrusts of his gorgeous cock.

When I can’t take it anymore, I turn my head to the side, breaking away from the kiss where he’s mimicking the motion of his hips with lazy thrusts of his tongue into my mouth. “More,” I manage to plead, my voice barely more than a whisper. “Please.”

With a wicked grin, he shoves one hand under my ass, palming it as he angles my hips differently, picking up the pace at last. “Better, baby?”

I nod, unable to do more than that at this point, because with the way he’s tilted my hips, he’s hitting my G-spot on each thrust. I plant my feet on the bed, helping him keep me in position, because damn, this feels good. Better than with a toy, because he’s warm and alive and I like the way he holds me.

Sitting back on his heels, he drags me up his thighs, and holding my gaze, he licks his thumb and brings it down to rub my clitoris.

But it’s no good. He’s not doing it right, and now the angle that was making

me feel so good is lost.

I must give something away that broadcasts the change for me, because he pulls out, tapping me on the hip. “Flip over. Let me get you from behind.”

I do as he says, my skin prickling with heat when he spreads my butt cheeks, because *OMG he’s looking at my asshole*, but then his dick is nudging its way inside me again, one of his hands pressing on my spine just above my tailbone to get me to arch so he can enter, and then he’s gripping my hips, fucking me in earnest now.

He reaches around with one hand, his fingers fumbling over my clit, but again, he’s not doing it the way I need. Batting his hand away, I take over, going down on my elbow to make it easier to brace myself one handed while I rub my clit and this guy fucks me like our lives depend on it.

Gone is his insistence on a tragically slow pace. His fingertips dig into my hips—not painfully, just enough that I can really feel them—his dick finds my G-spot again with this new change of position, and my fingers work magic on my clit now that I can give myself what I need.

My inner narrator is thankfully quiet and I can finally focus on what’s happening in my body, the way all the pleasure starts to coalesce in my center, my breathing growing more ragged as my orgasm approaches. He doesn’t stop, maintaining his pace like a machine, sending me closer and closer until my back rounds, my abs involuntarily contracting as I come with a ragged shout, shuddering and twitching through my orgasm, my guy pounding through the whole thing.

His grip on me tightens as he fucks me even harder, then his hips lose their rhythm, barely moving as he groans, his dick twitching inside me.

After he finishes, he pulls out and flops to the side. I sort of melt into a puddle, my limbs spreading out now that they no longer need to support me, landing on my belly, my face buried in the bedding, hair in my face, and I’m not quite ready to move it out of the way and face what I’ve done.

Who I’ve done.

I bite my lip against a giggle at my thoughts.

Welp, Jenna can't make fun of me for being a virgin anymore.

After a moment, I feel him get off the bed, and I turn my head to see him grabbing a handful of tissues to deal with the condom and wipe off the residue. After tossing the wad in the trash, he looks around for his underwear, and I take that as my cue to get dressed as well.

We get dressed in relative silence aside from the occasional murmur to move around each other to collect the clothes strewn about in our haste to get naked just a few minutes ago. Okay, maybe it was longer than a *few* minutes, but still. For such a momentous thing, the aftermath is a bit of a letdown.

He moves to the door, hand on the knob as I finish arranging my top, making sure my bra straps are tucked in and slipping my feet back into my sandals. When I'm done, I take a deep breath and look at him.

"Ready?" he asks.

At my nod, he opens the door, pokes his head out, then turns back to me with a grin. "Bathroom's just down on the right, if you need it."

"Thanks," I murmur, pausing in front of him, uncertain if I should say or do something before leaving. But when he raises his eyebrows in question, like he didn't really expect me to do or say anything else, I drop my gaze to his chest, give a jerky nod, and mumble, "Thanks," again before slipping out the door.

'Thanks?' I mouth to myself once I'm in the hall. *Did I just thank him for having sex with me?* Apparently so. Welp. No one ever accused me of being cool. And if he thought I was, I've officially disabused him of that notion.

I head to the bathroom, more for something to do than because I really need to, but once I get through the door I think I remember something about peeing after sex to prevent UTIs? Probably smart. And then I can also make sure I don't have sex hair. No need to broadcast what I've been up to, after all. Though I'm sure Jenna will figure it out from the whole disappearing with a boy at a party for half an hour and then reappearing all flushed. Because looking in the mirror, yup, flushed. Cheeks and chest extra pink, lips swollen ... And my hair, while not too crazy, is a bit off kilter. I fuss with it in the mirror, smoothing it out and making sure it lays right, no flyaways

sticking out anywhere. There's not much I can do about anything else, so I use the bathroom quickly and get out once I wash my hands. I'm surprised there's not a line, but maybe the upstairs is off limits to people who don't live here? The guy must be good friends with whoever's room we used. That or he gives no fucks about using someone else's room for hookups.

Poking my head into the hall like I saw ... him do earlier—the lack of names is more challenging than I first anticipated. I don't know what to call him!—I see that the coast is clear and slip down the stairs at the end of the hall, trying to be nonchalant as I make my way back into the crowd. Would it be terrible if I found Jenna and told her I was ready to leave?

CHAPTER FOUR

Andrew

I CAMP OUT JUST INSIDE THE KITCHEN, BLENDING IN WITH THE PEOPLE WHO'VE congregated there, acting like I'm part of the group, but really I'm watching for my mystery girl to come down.

I don't know what's wrong with me. Normally I don't try to catch a glimpse of a hookup after the fact. But something about her makes me want to keep an eye on her. Find out her name, at least. It rankles that she wouldn't tell me, even though at first I thought it was hot.

Hell, it *was* hot. Everything about that encounter was hot, makes me want to see if I can get a second round out of her, even though that's not usually my style. But maybe if we hang out at the party for the evening, I can convince

her to come back up, maybe stay the night ... Tomorrow's Sunday, so it's not like she'd have to do the walk of shame the morning of the first day of classes or anything.

And if she stays, she can tell me her name.

I see her walk quickly past the kitchen, head down, shoulders hunched. Did something happen between her heading into the bathroom and now?

It shouldn't have. No one was up there. And no one has gone up there since I came down. And even if someone did go up, it'd be one of my roommates with their own hookup. Why would they care if a chick was up there using the bathroom? She could just tell them she was there with me.

Except she doesn't know my name either.

Which makes it all the more imperative that I find her before she leaves. How will I make sure we get a chance at a repeat if I don't even know who she is?

After a few beats, I slip away from the group I'm standing with, following Mystery Girl outside. But when I get onto the back porch and look around, I don't see her. It's a decent sized backyard, sure, but it's not like there are that many places to hide.

"Hey! Maloney! Come settle a bet!" yells Liam Gardner. A crooked grin on his face, he waves me over to where he sits on the bench off to the side just where I left him, only now with a retinue of girls. The sun is all but gone now, just a dull glow on the western horizon, stars popping out above us, but the porch lights and Edison bulbs and torches provide plenty of light to see everywhere but the darkest corners at the back of the fence.

Still scanning the back for my Mystery Girl, I make my way over to Gardner.

"These girls don't believe that I can do more push-ups than you," Gardner says, climbing to his feet.

"Aw, man. We both know you can't," I tell him, smacking him lightly on the shoulder and falling into the expected wingman role. Apparently he didn't see me head upstairs with a chick, because this is his usual MO to land us both a hookup. That or his solo ideas weren't working.

Either way, I'm actually a little annoyed to have to do this right now, but I keep my smirk firmly in place and play along.

Liam stands, puffing out his chest, his chin lifted in challenge. "I guess we'll just have to see."

I stifle a groan—it was a game day, and I'm tired. The last thing I want to do is a push-up competition. Because even though I already know I'm gonna let him win, I have to do enough to make it look like I'm at least trying. But I lift my chin and puff out my chest too. "Guess we will."

Liam reaches behind his neck and yanks his T-shirt over his head, much to the enjoyment of the girls on the bench who titter and giggle at his show. I just drop to the grass and plant my hands.

"You leaving your shirt on?" Liam asks, surprise clear in his voice.

"I'm feeling a little chilly." Hopefully that'll forestall any further questions.

But my hope is in vain. "Aww, c'mon, Andrew," croons one of the girls, a bottle blond with heavy makeup on, and now that I actually look at her, I realize we hooked up a couple weeks ago during the first week of our pre-season practices. She made a big deal of kissing my sore muscles, giving me a massage—partly with her hands and partly with her tits—then riding me until I came. It was pretty fun, but I'm not really interested in a repeat.

"Yeah, Andrew," chimes in her friend with mermaid hair. "Take it off. You'll warm up real fast once you start doing push ups."

She's not wrong, but I still don't want to take off my shirt. But when everyone starts chanting and clapping, "Take it off. Take it off. Take it off," like a weird *deja vu* moment from earlier, it's difficult to resist without looking like a total asshole. And I might be a fuckboy, but I'm not an asshole.

Rueful grin on my face, I sit back on my heels and pull my shirt off, tossing it at the girls, being sure it doesn't land on the girl I hooked up with before. Don't want to give her any ideas. "Happy?"

They clap and cheer, mermaid hair and the blond play fighting—though it might be more real than play, despite the pretense—over who gets to hang onto my shirt. At the rate they're going, I'll be lucky to get it back in one

piece.

Liam tosses his shirt to the chick on the end—a brunette with a spiky pixie cut that works well with her pixie-like features—and sets up on the ground next to me. “Count ‘em out, ladies!”

We start together as the girls count our pushups. How many is enough to make it look good? I mean, I know what it’d take if I were trying to impress my teammates, but for these girls, is a hundred enough? One twenty-five? How soon can I be done?

The thing is, Gardner’s tired too. He’s still second-string, losing the starting spot to a talented sophomore, but said sophomore was being an asshole to the coach and was forced to sit the bench most of the game as punishment for his behavior leading up to the game. Which means Gardner played most of the game tonight. So by the time we pass the hundred mark, we’re both starting to slow down. That or he’s putting on an act like me so this doesn’t get drawn out for too long. Impressing chicks with feats of strength is one thing. Killing yourself doing it is quite another.

“One ten!” they chant. “One eleven!”

I slow down. Liam does too. At one seventeen, I drop my knees and tap the ground. “That’s it. I’m done. Besides, Coach says we should be resting until Monday.”

Cackling, Liam hops his feet forward and stands, brushing off his hands and reaching down to help me up. “Toldja,” he crows. “Good effort, though, man. But after that, I’m thirsty. Anyone else need a refill?”

The pixie hops up, pressing her tits against Liam’s arm. “I’ll help.”

Liam smacks me lightly on the arm with the back of his hand. “Stay here and keep the other ladies company. We’ll be back soon.” He holds out one hand and wags it back and forth. “Ish.”

“Take your time,” I call after them, even though they both already have their backs to me, their attention all for each other. I don’t think anyone’s fooled about how soon they’ll be back with drinks. For one thing, they’re not even headed in the direction of the keg. For another ... they’re obviously heading to Liam’s room to bang. I’m sure he thinks he’s done me a favor by leaving

me here with two attractive young women. He probably thinks he's setting me up for a threesome. Any other time, I'd jump at the chance, even if one of them is a repeat, but fresh off my encounter with Mystery Girl, I'm not at all in the mood. Their flirting and tittering and giggling at everything I do and say rings hollow. Far different from the openness Mystery Girl had.

Still. I have a reputation as a good-time guy that I need to uphold, even if I'm currently satisfied in the sex department.

Turning back to the women, I give them a confident grin. "We all know they won't be back with drinks anytime soon, so if we're thirsty, we'll have to help ourselves. Who needs?"

The blond stands, her hands behind her so her tits stick out. "I'll come with you," she offers in a purring voice.

"Me too," says Mermaid Hair, popping up next to her friend.

Greeeeeaat. Just what I was hoping for. Stifling my sigh, I smile at them. I was really hoping to use my drink run to look for my Mystery Girl—and I still plan on keeping an eye out for her—but it'll be more difficult with baggage in tow. One of whom is obviously hoping for a repeat. And while I have no hard and fast rule against that—I'd do Mystery Girl again as soon as she'd let me, though I'd want to know her name this time—it's not something that happens often. Exceptions are rare, and this chick whose name I can't remember—but I knew it when we hooked up a few weeks ago—definitely doesn't rise to that level.

I hope she doesn't push it, though, because I hate having to firmly tell a girl I'm not having sex with her. Nothing ruins the good-time party vibe worse than that.

With a nod, I turn and head for the keg, scanning the crowd in search of my Mystery Girl. Blondie nearly trips over herself to catch up to me, especially in those crazy high wedge sandals she's got on. Not wanting to feel responsible for her death, I slow my pace so she can keep up, even though I'm gritting my teeth the whole time.

"Thank you," she breathes, her hand brushing the inside of my elbow like she wants to take my arm. I keep it moving, though, not giving her the chance to

hook her talons into me—I mean, hook her arm through mine.

Mermaid Hair falls in step on my other side, still clutching the T-shirt I took off for the second time tonight. I have the urge to snatch it away from her and put it back on, but I don't.

There's no sign of Mystery Girl as we head to the keg and fill cups for the three of us. Even as I sip and make vague replies to the girls' comments and attempts at flirting—nodding, smiling, grunting, and laughing as it seems most appropriate—I keep an eye out for the medium brown bob and crop top that caught my eye earlier.

“What's wrong with you tonight, Andrew?” Blondie pouts, her lower lip shiny as it pokes out. Reaching out, she strokes my chest. I let her for the moment, but shift just enough so her hand has to drop unless she follows me. She doesn't, thank god.

“Nothing,” I grunt, and I'm saved from having to give more of an answer by the arrival of Devon Marsinko, my newest housemate. He replaced Caden Mills, who never really liked living with us—especially after I accidentally scalded one of his pans last year. Oh, and the time Liam borrowed the pan he replaced that one with—well, *I* paid for it, but Caden told me which one to get—and then left it on the stove without cleaning it for three days until Caden stood over him, arms crossed, face impassive, and watched him scrub the thing to his satisfaction. He stopped leaving his pots and pans—or any dishes at all, for that matter—in the kitchen after that. Can't say I blame him, really, and based on his attitude this month, he's much happier in his current situation.

Honestly, I think we all are. Devon fits in well so far, and he's thrilled to be out of the dorms, where he's lived the last two years. He's not as precious about his cookware as Caden, probably because his mom only spent a few bucks on it at a garage sale, and he's been looking forward to the party tonight since Liam floated the idea last week. Caden would've spent the week grumbling, reminding us we'd have to clean afterward and to not let people in his room.

“Dude!” Devon says, tripping over his own feet and shooting a glare at the ground like there must've been something large in the way to make him

stumble like that. His eyes are glassy in a way that tells me he's been drinking more than normal for him. Probably because he doesn't have to worry about driving home later. He hangs onto my shoulder for support, then gives it an appreciative squeeze. "Nice delts, man. You been working shoulders good."

"Uh, thanks?" I chuckle. Devon's a funny drunk. And a complimentary one.

Straightening, he looks around. "You seen my sister?" he asks, holding the bottle in his hand in front of his mouth to stifle a belch. Blondie and Mermaid Hair are growing more visibly disgusted by the minute.

"Sure haven't, man." I clap him on the shoulder, then immediately put a hand on his chest to steady him, misjudging how unstable he is on his feet right now. "You want me to help you look for her?"

I know Devon has a younger sister. I didn't realize he'd've invited her to a team party.

He blinks bleary brown eyes at me, looking like he's close to tears. "Yeah, man. That would be amazing. You're the best, man." And he throws an arm around my shoulders, pulling me in for a hug.

I clap him on the back, but keep his arm around my shoulders as I step back a little. Nodding at the girls, I tug him toward the house. "What does she look like? And where'd you see her last?"

"She looks like my sister!" he shouts, then covers his mouth like he realizes he's being louder than necessary, not that anyone cares. Holding up his beer bottle at about waist level as though indicating her height, he says, "She's kinda short."

I don't even try to stifle my laugh. "Is she a kindergartner?"

He stops, pulls his arm away from me, and glares at me. "No." He sounds deeply offended by the question. "She's a year younger than me. Or sometimes two." Huh? "She's in college. She's just not so tall." Blinking, he looks around again. "Probably why she's hard to spot."

"Mmhmm. Probably. What's her name? We can ask around."

“Sadie,” he mumbles. Then he yells. “Sadie! Where are you?” He looks around hopefully, but no one responds.

“You sure she’s here, bro?”

“Sh’was. Saw her.”

“Maybe she went home,” I offer. Though the other option is that she’s in a room with someone hooking up. I’m not going to suggest that to her drunk older brother, though. Even if I’m not the one hooking up with her, I don’t need him taking a swing at me for suggesting it.

“She’s so little,” he mumbles. “Hope she’s not lost.” He turns his whole body to face me. “She’s a good kid. Nice. Sweet. Everyone says so.” He holds up a finger and points it at me. “Need to introduce her to you guys so you know not to fuck her.” He squints his eyes, jabbing the finger at me again. “Don’t fuck my sister, man. She’s too good for you.”

“Ouch, Dev. That hurts, man. Right here.” I point at my chest, and even though I’m playing, it does sting a little.

He waves me off. “You’re cool, bro. You just fuck too much. She needs a good guy. Not a ...” He stares at me, and I’m not sure if he’s trying to come up with a non-offensive phrase or if he’s totally lost his train of thought.

“Fuckboy?” I supply, but he just blinks at me again.

“What?”

“Never mind.” Hand on his shoulder, I guide him into the house and toward the stairs. Hopefully he can navigate them. “As much fun as this is, I think the party might be over for you tonight. Let’s get you up to your room.”

“What about Sadie?” he asks, sounding lost.

“I’ll look for Sadie after I get you upstairs.”

“Thanks, man,” he says, sounding relieved.

I guide him to his room, where he falls onto his bed like a tree, face first, feet hanging off the edge. Grabbing his trash can, I set it as close to his face as I can. Just as I’m about to step away, he grabs hold of the hem of my shorts

and lifts his head. “When you find her, don’t fuck her. Got it?”

Patting his hand, I tug my shorts out of his grip. “Yeah, man. I got it.” I have no interest in getting tangled up with a teammate’s sister anyway. I might be a fuckboy, but I have *some* standards. I wouldn’t do that to a friend.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sadie

JENNA'S WIDE EYED WHEN I COME DOWN THE STAIRS, ARMS CROSSED, HIP jutted out, and all alone. "Bitch, where have you been?" she demands as soon as my feet hit the ground floor.

I gesture vaguely up the stairs. "Upstairs. You saw me go ..."

Reaching out, she smacks my arm, then steps closer. "What happened? And was that —"

"One of the football players, yeah," I fill in before she can say his name. At this point, I feel like I *can't* learn his name. It wouldn't be fair. He doesn't know mine, so I shouldn't know his, even if Jenna knows.

“Did you ...” Looking around, she moves in closer, lowering her voice, placing her head next to my ear. “Did you get your V card stamped?”

Biting my lip, I nod. “Yup.”

“Oh my god,” she squeals, taking a step back and covering her mouth. After taking another look around, she grabs my arm and starts dragging me toward what I think is supposed to be the front door, but is actually the wrong way. “Come on,” she hisses. “You need to tell me *everything*, and I know you well enough to know that you won’t do that here.” Then she stops, flummoxed to find us in the kitchen.

Laughing, I practically trip over her when she stops suddenly. “You know me too well. And the front door’s that way.” I gesture back the way we came.

Huffing a sigh, she releases my arm and heads in the right direction. I hurry after her. Once we’re outside, she turns toward me, letting me catch up and then hooking her arm through mine. “I *thought* I knew you, anyway.” She eyes me without turning her head. “After this? I’m not so sure.”

“Aww, Jenna.” I lay my head on her shoulder for a moment, then lift it up as we continue the walk to her car. “Don’t worry. You still know me. But a girl’s surely allowed a secret or two, isn’t she?”

More side eye. “Was this your plan all along?”

Hooking my mouth to the side, I consider the question. “Kinda? I mean, it’s not like I was dead set on it. But I was open to the opportunity.”

“But why?” she practically explodes. “Why this way? Didn’t your mom tell you to wait until you really love the boy to give him your flower?”

I crack up at her phrasing. “Give him my flower?”

She giggles too, nodding and holding up a hand. “That’s literally what my mom told me. I’m not making that up.”

Shaking my head, I splutter through my laughter. “My mom never called it that. She told me to make sure I was ready, and ...” I shrug. “I was.”

“So who was it? Was it really —”

I cut her off again. “I dunno.” I shrug. “We didn’t exchange names.”

She pulls us to a stop and turns to face me, her face a picture of shock. “Your first time was an anonymous hookup at a party?”

My cheeks heat. “God, that makes me sound like a slut, doesn’t it?”

But she’s shaking her head before I can even finish the question. “No, that’s not what I’m getting at. It makes you a badass, as far as I’m concerned.”

I tug at where our arms are still joined, getting us started in the direction of her car again. We’re nearly there, and I’ll feel much better continuing this conversation in its relative safety. Sure, it’s not late and there’s no one around, but anyone *could*, theoretically, walk up at any time. I don’t want to have this conversation in front of an audience of any sort.

“Well, thanks.” Once we’re safely ensconced in her car, and she’s dutifully signaling and pulling into the road, I ask, “So did you wait until you were in love to give a boy your flower?”

She snorts, and we both crack up again. When she can speak, she gives a pensive shrug, her brows pulled down and in. “I’m not sure I was really in love, if I’m honest. I *thought* I was, but how much does a seventeen-year-old know about that anyway? It was more like we’d been dating for six months, he was a senior—and *not* a virgin.” She cuts her eyes to me meaningfully. “It just ...” Another shrug. “It seemed like the thing to do.”

Her words hang in the air in the ensuing silence. “Do you regret it?” I ask softly after a moment.

She shakes her head. “No. Like I said, I *thought* I was in love with him. Until he went to college and cheated on me within like a week of getting there,” she says, throwing a glance in my direction, her voice lighter than I’d expect given the subject matter. “I was heartbroken for like a month, and then I got pissed, invited the cutest guy I could find to homecoming, and got over him really fast.”

“By getting under someone new?” I ask, stifling my laughter.

She points at me. “Bingo.” Then she waves her hand. “Enough about me. Let’s talk about you.”

“Wait.” I glance around, confused. “Where are we going?” We should be back to campus by now, but we seem to have gone in the opposite direction.

She glances at me, grinning. “Glad you’re so observant,” she says dryly. “We’re going to get ice cream, of course. We need fortification while you tell me all the salacious details of your shocking choices.”

That makes me laugh. “Salacious details, huh?”

“Dude.” She pulls into a grocery store parking lot. “You banged a known fuckboy for your first time.” She throws the car in park and faces me. “You didn’t tell him your name and clearly don’t want to know his, because you interrupt me every time I’m about to say it.”

I hold up my hands. “It seems unfair, though. If he doesn’t know my name, I shouldn’t know his, right?”

Cackling, she shakes her head and pulls the key out of the ignition. “Whatever you say, Dogbreath.”

“Hey!” I protest, scrambling to get out of the car after her. “Only Devon gets to call me that. You’re my friend. You have to give me *affectionate* nicknames.”

“But you said Dogbreath *was* affectionate. Are you changing your mind about that now?”

I wave a hand. “It’s different. He’s my brother. He’s supposed to be a butthead sometimes. You’re my friend. You’re not supposed to insult me and pretend it’s affectionate.”

She whirls around and points at me. “Aha! You admit it’s an insult!”

I throw my hands in the air. “Of *course* it’s an insult. No one said it wasn’t.”

Crossing her arms and cocking one hip, she studies me. I plant my hands on my own hips, raising an eyebrow. After a minute of hosting a stare down in front of the grocery store entrance, she shakes her head and resumes her path into the store. “I stand by my earlier statement—siblings are weird.”

“I won’t argue with you about that one,” I say, falling in step beside her. “But so are only children.”

She gives me a doubtful look. “If you say so, Dogbreath.”

“Should I start calling you Jerkface too, then?” I ask with a laugh.

Hooking her mouth to the side, she screws up her face in thought as she grabs a hand basket and leads the way to the freezer section. “I feel like you can do better than that.”

“Well, I feel like you can do better than Dogbreath,” I point out.

She considers that as she peruses the ice cream choices. “Point taken. Should we get pints or go for a half gallon?”

I survey the options, then settle on a half gallon option that sounds tasty. “If we get this, we’ll have ice cream for a while and barely have to spend more. And I’m pretty sure this size will fit in our mini fridge’s freezer.” I got Devon’s old one from his dorm days, and it’s the biggest size.

“Works for me.” She takes the ice cream from me and sets it in the basket, turning sharply and striding away like she’s on a mission.

“What else do we need?” I ask, jogging a little to catch up, which isn’t as easy as it looks in these wedges. Yes, they’re mine, but I barely ever wear them. I typically go with flats, but Jenna wouldn’t let me wear my strappy flat sandals tonight.

I mean, I guess I could’ve insisted, but it’s hard to resist the kind of flattery she heaped on me when I tried on the wedges, especially since my goal was to hook up tonight, even if she didn’t know it at the time. I *wanted* to dress to kill. And hey—it clearly worked. It just means it’s more difficult to hurry along now that my mission is complete.

“We can’t *just* have ice cream,” Jenna tosses over her shoulder, heading for the bakery section. “We need cookies too, at minimum.”

“Is there some sort of standard menu for these kinds of things that I’m unaware of, being my first time and all?”

Jenna turns to face me, her mouth open and eyes wide in delight. “Awww, Sadie.” She steps up and hooks her arm around mine. “You’re a dishing virgin too.”

I blush at her words, looking around to see if anyone heard her. “I’m *not* a virgin anymore, remember? That’s the whole point of this?” I wave a hand around to indicate the ice cream and the grocery store as a whole. Thankfully, it’s fairly empty this time of night on a Friday.

“Right, but you’ve never had a post-coital debrief, so in that regard you *are* still virginal.”

“Will you please stop saying that?” I hiss.

With a bright laugh, she releases my arm and walks around a shelf displaying plastic clamshell boxes of different types of cookies. Selecting one—M&Ms, it looks like—she deposits it in the basket and heads for the checkout stands. “It’s nothing to be embarrassed about,” she says breezily, but—thankfully—quietly. “We all start at the beginning.” She casts me a sidelong look, then starts singing, “Let’s start at the very beginning. A very good place to start.”

“Thanks, Julie Andrews. Or should I say Maria?” I tell her, catching the *Sound of Music* reference when Maria teaches the Von Trapp children to sing. “Does everything go back to show tunes?”

She nods. “I could sing the version from *Schmigadoon* that explains how sex and pregnancy works if you’d prefer?”

“Hard pass,” I say, sweeping a hand through the air to emphasize how much I do *not* want her to sing that. Ever. But especially in the middle of a grocery store. “I had a thorough sex ed unit in health class, both in middle and high school. I’m honestly still scarred for life from the STD slideshow the health department nurse came in and showed us.”

Jenna turns to me, a look of horror on her face. “Did you just say STD slideshow?” she all but shrieks.

“Shhhh!” My cheeks are flaming as we turn into the checkout line where a bored cashier—a guy about our age with long hair, the tips dyed a faded neon green—waits for us, clearly able to hear what Jenna just shouted. I’d been keeping my voice just above a whisper, and here she is screaming about STDs in public.

“What?” she asks, flipping her hair over her shoulder. “If you speak at a normal volume, I won’t have to repeat what you’re saying to make sure I

heard you right. But that *is* what you said, right?”

The cashier grins. “Mr. Reed’s health class, right? At Eastwood?”

My eyes widen, and I nod. “Yup,” I squeak.

Jenna whacks me on the arm. “See? Now you’re bonding with someone over your shared trauma. Nothing at all to be embarrassed about.”

Doesn’t stop my cheeks from being hot enough to fry an egg.

The cashier just laughs and scans our items. Jenna pays while I open my phone and send her half the total right there.

Jenna’s right, though. I’ve never dished before, and somehow I’m more nervous about this than I was about hooking up with a guy I don’t know at a party.

“What is wrong with you?” I groan into my phone when I finally answer it. It’s been ringing nonstop, and when I finally fumbled around and managed to get it off the nightstand, it was to see my brother’s goofy face on the screen. Which means he’s called me even more times to break through Do Not Disturb.

Sitting up, I rub my face. “This better be an emergency. Are you dying?”

He laughs, far too cheerful, especially considering *he* hosted a party last night. A party at which alcohol flowed freely, and I know him well enough to know he partook. “What happened to you last night, sis? You disappeared!”

“I didn’t disappear,” I grumble, resting my face in my hand, eyes still closed. “I left.” Jenna and I stayed up way too late last night, talking and watching movies. It started with the planned—what did she call it? Post-coital debriefing?—which lasted far longer than I would’ve preferred, but wasn’t as bad as I was expecting.

She hooted and hollered when I detailed our mini-flirtation, throwing out a, “Damn, girl!” when I told her how brazen I was—how brazen *he* was. And

when I expressed my disappointment about having to finish myself off—because with the way he was handling things, I knew he couldn't get the job done—she reached over and patted my arm.

“Number one,” she said, holding up a finger. “It was *literally* your first time. Most women don't orgasm at *all* their first time. *And* it was your first time with a new partner. Even when you have some experience under your belt”—she snorted—“literally”—another snort that had me giggling too—“it takes time for you and your new guy to learn each other's likes and dislikes. Just because *he* couldn't get you off without your help doesn't mean *no one* will ever be able to.”

That had actually made me feel better. At least until she muttered, “Though I have to admit, with his reputation, I'm surprised he couldn't get the job done.”

“Maybe his reputation isn't as well deserved as you think,” I said primly, though secretly I wondered if maybe it was me. Maybe *I* was the problem. Not him.

“Leaving is the same as disappearing.” Devon's voice pulls me back to the present. “I wanted to introduce you to my roommates. Come over after lunch.”

Despite my desire to flop back onto the bed, when I glance at my phone and see it's noon, I sigh and drag myself out of bed. After using the bathroom, I poke my head into the common room and see no sign of Jenna. She must still be asleep. I guess that's what happens when you stay up until three thirty in the morning gorging yourself on ice cream and cookies.

Since I've been summoned back to Dev's house, I take a quick shower and have a “lunch” consisting of string cheese, a couple granola bars, and one of the few cookies left from last night.

While I'm munching, Jenna comes out, also bleary, hair sticking out all crazy from her bun. She glares at me. “What are you doing? Why are you already dressed?”

Brushing off my hands, I toss my wrappers in the trash can. “Devon called.”

“Ah,” she says, sinking into a chair. “That's who I heard you talking to.”

“Yeah. He wants me to come over and meet his roommates.”

“And you’re going? Just like that?”

I shrug. “Yeah? I mean, I don’t have a reason not to. It’s not like I have other plans.”

Jenna seems to consider that, blinking at me, then snagging a cookie from the box on the table next to her. “I guess that’s true,” she mumbles around a mouthful. “When you’re back, let’s go shopping, though. And we need to finish decorating, and it’d be easier before classes start tomorrow. Otherwise we’ll get too busy with homework and hookups and won’t have time.”

My brows climb my forehead. “Homework and hookups?”

She shrugs, grinning. “Now that hooking up is a thing you do, after all.”

Rolling my eyes, I grab my keys and phone and stick them in my pockets. My outfit today isn’t vastly different from last night’s, except my cutoffs are an inch or so longer, I’m wearing a loose V-neck T-shirt that covers my belly button, and I’m wearing my favorite pair of flip-flops. They’re all black, they’re super comfy, and the straps have a subtle sparkle. Cute and practical—my favorite combo. I have my hair pulled back in a half-up style because I’m too tired to care about it looking nice like last night. I’m just meeting my brother’s stinky roommates, after all.

Even if I might’ve considered them as potential romantic partners—or future hookups—once they know I’m Devon Marsinko’s little sister, all chances of that will be over, so why bother?

“Wait, wait, wait,” Jenna says, lurching to her feet. “You’re leaving now?”

“Yep. He said after lunch. I ate something.” I check my phone. “It’s like one o’clock. The sooner I go, the sooner I can come back.”

“Fine,” she sighs, “but at least put on some lip gloss and mascara, okay?”

Rolling my eyes—because again, what difference does it make?—I dutifully return to the bathroom, grab my stick of combo blush and gloss and dot it on my cheeks and lips before blending it in, then swiping on a coat of mascara. When I come back out, I do a quick turn. “Better?”

“Much.” Stepping forward, she pulls down a couple of face-framing pieces, curling them around her fingers for a second to get them to lay how she wants. “There. Perfect.” She smacks my ass as I walk past. “Knock ‘em dead.”

When I get to my brother’s house, he answers the door right away, pulling me inside with a hug and rocking me back and forth.

With a chuckle, I pat his back. “How are you this perky after a game *and* a party last night?”

Pulling back, he shrugs and grins. “Just lucky, I guess. Come on, let me introduce you to everyone.”

“You know,” I say to his back as he leads me up the stairs, “I was here last night. I probably met all your roommates already.”

He casts me a glance over his shoulder. “Yeah, maybe. But I need to make sure that they know that I know that they know that you’re my sister.”

Lips pursed, I sort through that again and decide it makes sense after all. “Why not just fit me with a chastity belt and get it over with?” I grumble as we reach the top of the stairs.

He gives me an open-mouthed look of disgust. “Gross, Sadie. Don’t involve me in your denial kinks.”

I choke on a laugh, but don’t have time to respond before he’s knocking on a cracked open door and pushing his way inside. “Sadie, this is Liam Gardner. Liam, this is my sister Sadie.”

Liam stands and I have to look up at him, because he’s about the same height and build as my brother, if not a little bigger. He offers me a smile and holds out a hand, his hazel eyes scanning me, his short, light brown hair mussed like he’s run his hands through it a ton. Or hasn’t done anything with it since waking up. “Nice to finally meet you, Sadie. Devon has only good things to say about you.”

Giving Devon side-eye, I shake Liam’s hand. “Nice to meet you too. Somehow I find that hard to believe.”

Devon looks at me, offended. “Why would you say that? You know I think you’re awesome.”

“Uh-huh. Okay.”

After Liam, I meet Jason Beasley, and then he takes me to the last door. He knocks and steps just inside, exchanging some banter I’m not paying attention to. Warmth floods me when I realize this is the room my hookup brought me to last night. He must be friends with Devon’s roommate. That or he’d already hooked up with someone before me, because he knew he’d be able to get in this room.

That thought makes my nose wrinkle in disgust. I mean, I know Jenna said he has a reputation, and obviously she knows who he is, but ...

Although, based on her reaction and the fact that she knows who he is, could he be ...

My eyes widen as I realize I recognize the other guy’s voice when he says, “There was a lovely young lady who wanted to help me celebrate.”

Oh my god, oh my god, ohmigod! He’s talking about me! I try to force myself not to react physically, though I can’t stop my jaw dropping in disbelief.

“This chick was hot, let me tell you. Up for anything and —”

He’s about to tell my brother about our hookup! The hookup where I lost my virginity!

Not that he knows that part, but that’s not the point!

Thankfully, Devon cuts him off, because despite him being obviously complimentary, I do *not* want to listen to him discuss my sex life with my *brother!*

“Right, right. That’s great, man. I kinda figured.” He lowers his voice to a stage whisper that makes me roll my eyes. Their whole conversation was at full volume with me like a foot away, and he wants to whisper now? “My sister’s here, and I wanted to introduce you.”

“I’m right here,” I say loudly. “I can still hear you even when you whisper, bonehead.” Then I reach over and smack him on the arm.

If I'm going to survive this, there's only one way through, and that's to pretend I have as much confidence all the time as I did last night. *Last night when I lost my virginity in an anonymous hookup with my brother's roommate.* Well, I guess it's not so anonymous now.

I push the door all the way open as Devon mutters, "Alright, alright. I still don't think you wanna hear about Andrew's conquests, though."

Taking a step inside, I cross my arms, my chin lifted as though daring him to give away that we've met already. "You never know, Dev. I might."

Devon scoffs at that comment, clearly not taken with my bravado. "Sadie," he says, blissfully unaware of the way his roommate is eye fucking me, despite having actually fucked me already, "this is Andrew Maloney." I narrow my eyes. "Andrew, this is my baby sister, Sadie."

Baby sister. He called me his *baby* sister to Andrew. With the other guys, I was just his sister. But with Andrew I'm his *baby* sister? WTF, Dev?

Andrew's brown eyes travel up and down the length of my body before meeting mine, then a slow smile spreads across his face and he stands. "Sadie. Nice to meet you."

CHAPTER SIX

Andrew

FUCK.

Fuck fuck fuckity fuck.

I'm basically on autopilot as I offer Sadie my hand, torn between glee at discovering her name and horror as the words 'baby sister' bounce around in my brain.

There are so many things wrong with this situation. First, I hooked up with the sister of one of my best friends. And not just *sister* but *baby* sister.

Though, to be fair, I had no idea at the time, so I think I could be forgiven for that—not that I plan on telling him.

And from the way Sadie's looking at me—half challenge, half panic—I don't think I need to worry about her filling him in either. Which suits me just fine.

But second, the fact that she's my friend, roommate, and teammate's *baby* sister does nothing to keep me from wanting a repeat of last night. I'd already thought I should keep an eye out for her to see if I could make that happen, and now that I know who she is—and can refer to her by name instead of as Mystery Girl in my head—I only want it *more*.

Unfortunately, she doesn't stick around long. Hooking a thumb over her shoulder, she turns to her brother. "I gotta go, Dev. My roommate and I have to get some shopping done before classes start tomorrow. I'll catch you later, okay?" Before he can answer she turns to me and holds up a hand in a brief wave. "So nice meeting you," she faux-gushes. Did the other guys get that kind of passive aggressive politeness too, or is that special for me?

Then she's gone, with Devon stepping out into the hall, yelling, "Bye, Sadie!"

"That seemed abrupt," I say when Devon comes back into my room and collapses into my desk chair.

He shrugs and picks up a pen, rolling it over his thumb again and again. "Nah. It's fine. She was just here because I insisted on introducing her to everyone. She took off before I got a chance last night."

"You mean you were too busy getting drunk before she left last night, and by the time you remembered she existed, she was gone?" I ask as I resume my seat on my bed, picking up my playbook and tossing it to the foot of my bed. With Devon settling in like this, it'll probably be a bit before I can get back to it.

The pen in his hand stills, and he narrows his eyes like he's considering whether it's worth giving up a fidget for the satisfaction of throwing it at me. But then he breaks into a smile, gives another shrug, and starts rolling the pen over his thumb again. "Something like that. Either way, I wanted to make sure you guys all met her so you know to look out for her when she comes to parties in the future."

"Look out for her," I repeat slowly. "As in ..."

“You know, make sure she’s safe at parties, help her out if she finds herself in a jam, and help her steer clear of ...” He trails off, his eyes roaming the room like he’s searching for the right way to end that sentence.

“Steer clear of guys like me?” I offer.

He smirks. “Basically, yeah.”

Crossing my arms, I tilt my head to the side. “But you’re introducing her to me, so how does that keep her safe from guys like me?”

With a shake of his head, he puts the pen back on the desk. “C’mon, man. You know what I mean. I don’t have to worry about *you*. I already told you not to fuck her last night, and you promised you wouldn’t.”

My stomach drops at his words. “Right.” The word comes out sounding choked. “True. I did.” Holy shit, I did.

Dammit.

I mean, I knew I should stay away from her as soon as he introduced her, but some part of me was already planning on ignoring that instinct. Now that he’s reminded me I already promised I’d stay away?

Shit.

Since I’d already fucked her at that point, does that make the promise moot, though?

I doubt Devon would see it that way ...

“Alright, man,” he says, interrupting my thoughts. “Sadie’s gone. Fill me in on this hot chick who was up for anything?” He leans forward, clearly interested now. “What kind of ‘anything’ are we talking?”

Sadie’s attitude both today and last night, the way she held herself, the defiant tilt of her chin flits through my mind ... and I have zero desire to share any of that with Devon now.

“Oh, uh ...” I wave a hand dismissively. “You know. Nothing too crazy or kinky, just ... she was forward. Knew exactly what she was looking for.”

If I was hoping that would be enough to satisfy him, I was wrong. He makes

a “come on” gesture with one hand. “And? What was she looking for?”

Fine. If he’s going to force me to do this ...

Spreading my arms, I put on my best douchey smirk, then lace my hands behind my head. “Me, of course.” Though, to be honest, she clearly had no idea who I was. She didn’t know my reputation.

I guess she does now, though. Or she will soon, if she didn’t already. I’m guessing since she didn’t recognize me last night, she hasn’t frequented these kinds of things.

Devon cackles. “Of course. But like —”

“It was just sex, dude,” I cut in with a shrug, letting my arms down. “Nothing crazy. Just hot, anonymous sex.”

His eyebrows jump at that. “Anonymous?”

“She wouldn’t tell me her name.”

He whistles. “Well, I guess you won’t have to worry about her trying to trick you into a relationship. Or turning into one of those chicks who comes around thinking they should get special treatment because she hooked up with a player.”

“Exactly.” I should be thrilled about that. But somehow I’m not. “So what’s the deal with your sister?” I ask, reaching for the playbook to make the question seem more casual than it is.

He eyes me warily. “What do you mean? There’s no deal. She doesn’t have a deal. She’s just my sister.”

Chuckling, I shake my head. “No, I mean, where was she before this? Why haven’t we met her before? I know you’ve talked about her before, and I’m pretty sure you said she’s a sophomore. Where was she last year?”

“Oh.” He relaxes. “She was here. I mean, she attended Marycliff, but she still lived at home. Mom and Dad insisted.”

I raise an eyebrow, and he just shrugs. “I know, right? They didn’t do that to me. And believe me, Sadie was pissed about that. They’re a little

overprotective where she's concerned, and it irritates her to no end. I mean, I get it, I'm protective of her too, but I realize that she needs the opportunity to live her life."

"So your parents baby her but you can just fuck off and do whatever?"

He chuckles a little, but it's covering something. Blowing out a breath, he shakes his head, picking up the pen again and flipping it around his thumb. "Nah, man, it's not like that. They care about me too, obviously. They're just less worried about me growing up and becoming independent." He spears me with a look. "With Sadie, it's a combo of her being the youngest and also she almost died when she was a newborn."

My eyes widen in shock. I didn't expect him to say that. "Is she okay now?"

Setting the pen down, he waves a hand. "Yeah, yeah, she's fine. There was something wrong with her digestive tract when she was born. They had to do surgery on her. I don't remember the details—I was just a toddler myself. But I dunno ..." He lets out another slow breath. "They've always been a lot more cautious with her. It's not like I can just do whatever the fuck and they don't care or anything. They love me and support me and let me have a normal childhood—play sports, run around, do fun stuff. But with Sadie?" He shakes his head again. "Everything was too dangerous. She didn't start riding a bike without training wheels until she was eight because they were too worried about her falling and getting hurt. When she played tee-ball the summer after kindergarten, a ball bounced and she caught it on the forehead." He points to a spot right in the center of his forehead. "I mean, it obviously didn't feel good. It got bruised and scraped a little from the spin and the threads on the ball, but she wasn't seriously injured. Even so, they pulled her from the season and wouldn't let her play again. After that, they only let her do art and music and stuff like that."

"Wow."

"Yeah, so she's been pretty sheltered. Which is why I want her to be able to have a normal college experience, because it sucks she's been deprived of that her whole life. But also why I want you guys to know who she is and help me look out for her. If anything happened to her ..." His lips press in a tight line.

His parents will kill him, I think, filling in the blanks. Or he'll blame himself. Or it'll just prove everyone right that she needs to be kept in a bubble her whole life.

And imagining someone like Sadie, with that attitude, that confidence being restricted like that forever? That's just not right.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sadie

“I HOOKED UP WITH MY BROTHER’S ROOMMATE,” I ANNOUNCE LOUDLY AS I enter my dorm room.

Jenna pokes her head out of her bedroom wearing a bra and shorts, a shirt in her hand. She blinks at me a few times, and I’m not sure if she’s trying to compute what I’m saying or what, but then she says. “And that surprises you because ...?”

I blink at her for a second, processing. Why wouldn’t it surprise me? Then I throw my hands in the air. “Because! It does! I didn’t know!”

Laughing, she pulls the shirt over her head. “Oh, sweetie,” she says in a voice that matches my mother’s for condescension and steps closer, crossing her

arms. “You hooked up with a guy at a party at your brother’s house. And he took you upstairs to a bedroom, not to a bathroom or some other out of the way corner.”

“He could’ve been friends with the guy who’s room we used,” I say, knowing I sound like a petulant child. If I crossed my arms and stomped my foot, it’d seal the deal. “Or he could’ve just lucked onto an open bedroom door first thing. Maybe my brother’s roommates are dummies who can’t remember to lock their doors?”

She gives me an almost pitying look. “Right. I guess that’s ... not beyond the realm of possibility. So you’d convinced yourself that this was just some random guy with no significant connection to your brother—despite being at a party hosted by your brother largely for his teammates and their friends and followers—and that you’d never see him again, is that it?”

I nod, feeling stupid now that she puts it like that. “Yeah. Basically.”

“I see. And now your brother has introduced you to all his roommates, and you’ve discovered that the guy you gave your flower to is none other than Andrew Maloney, notorious fuckboy?”

I can’t help laughing at her using “gave your flower” again. “That about sums it up. Though I didn’t necessarily know the fuckboy part. It’s not like my brother introduced him and said, ‘This is my pal Andrew, notorious fuckboy.’”

Jenna laughs too. “We should start a band and call it Notorious Fuckboy.”

That reduces us both to giggles, even though I still feel kinda dumb. “I should’ve let you tell me who he is,” I admit when the giggles subside.

Her face serious, Jenna puts her arms out for a hug. “I understand why you didn’t. And while I knew you’d find out eventually, I wasn’t sure if I should tell you when you so clearly wanted to keep up the mystique of the whole experience for as long as possible. I kinda thought you’d have at least twenty-four hours. I didn’t expect your brother to demand you attend him at his residence the next morning, nor that you’d so quickly comply.”

I pat her on the back. “You’ve been reading Jane Austen again, haven’t you?”

Laughing, she pulls back and nods. “I can’t help it that *Pride and Prejudice* is my favorite.” She slips on her flip-flops and picks up her keys and phone. “Let’s go shopping.”

I do my best to put the situation with my brother’s roommate out of my mind. It’s not like it really matters. Apparently the guy hooks up with just about anyone, so it’s not like we have some special connection. Once he lands whoever he’s targeted, he moves on. Which means he’ll move on from me.

Which is what I want.

That’s why we didn’t exchange names, after all. I refused. That way we wouldn’t get tangled up in each other’s lives. The goal wasn’t a relationship, it was to A—dispense with my virginity so it’s no longer a specter hanging over my head, and B—see what all the fuss is about. So much of life seems to revolve around sex—having it, not having it, when to have it, who to have it with, how to have it safely—and it features quite heavily in my favorite books ... I wanted to see if it lived up to the hype. I’ve been so sheltered for so long, this was my first chance.

And to be honest?

I’m a little underwhelmed.

I mean, maybe Jenna’s right. Maybe it’s because it was a one-night stand and he didn’t know what *I* specifically would like. But maybe everyone just acts like it’s a huge deal because everyone *else* acts like it’s a huge deal, like it’s all some unspoken conspiracy.

Or Jenna’s right again, and it was my first time, so of course it’s not going to be some amazing, earth shattering experience.

Either way, at least it’s over with, it didn’t actually hurt like some people say—though I think “practicing” with toys ahead of time likely helped on that front a lot—and now I know what it feels like to have someone go down on me. I can tick off a lot of boxes, and it won’t be so surprising next time. Assuming I can find a corner of campus that my brother doesn’t overshadow

that contains guys I'm interested in who are also interested in me ...

Fortunately, a university campus is large, and unlike high school, no one here gets too worked up one way or another that Devon Marsinko is my brother. Girls don't want to be friends with me so they can get closer to him. Guys don't either, for that matter. And even though I didn't get as much opportunity to be involved in campus life my freshman year, the sophomore dorm get-together Friday night after the first week of classes was fun, and there were even a few guys who talked to me for a long time.

"So did anyone ask you out?" Jenna asks when we both get back to our room.

"Huh? No. Why? Did someone seem like they wanted to?"

Jenna laughs. "Umm, maybe those three guys who were vying for your attention all night? I couldn't even elbow my way past the wall of testosterone and the way they were all trying to outdo each other for your attention."

I give her a quizzical look. "You must have me confused with someone else, because that didn't happen to me."

She laughs again, then stops suddenly. "Wait. You're serious?" She points at the door. "Do you seriously not realize that *all* of those guys who were talking to you were flirting?"

"Uhh, no they weren't. They were just being nice."

"They were just being nice," she mutters, looking at the ground and shaking her head. "Jesus Christ." Then she refocuses on me, hands on her hips, one hip cocked to the side. It's her lecture-mode pose. "No, Sadie. They were not just being nice. They all wanted to get with you and you ... friend-zoned all of them, I guess?"

I splutter out a laugh. "Don't be ridiculous. That didn't happen."

"What happened to the brazen hussy who fucked Andrew Maloney like a week ago?" She gestures at me. "Where did she go?"

"Brazen hussy?" I repeat. "What century are we in again?"

She shushes me and waves a hand. "You know what I mean. You went up to

a guy, flirted with him, and followed him to his *bedroom*. But you can't tell that the guys who live downstairs are flirting with you? How does that even work?"

Closing my eyes, I inhale deeply, because this conversation is getting out of hand. It's like ... I don't even know what it's like, other than frustrating. And clearly I'm not the only one getting frustrated, because Jenna's crossed her arms and her nostrils are flaring as she waits for my response.

"I don't know what to tell you," I say, infusing my voice with as much calm as I can manage. "Last week, I *intended* to hook up with someone. I was paying attention to who might be most receptive, and shockingly, the guy showing off without a shirt on seemed to fit the bill. He saw me notice him and approached me. I was *trying*."

"And tonight you weren't?" Jenna fills in. "Or you couldn't be bothered?"

I shrug. "Tonight I was just being myself. I wasn't trying to accomplish anything other than go to the mixer and meet some of the other residents." I hold up a finger. "Just because I hooked up with a guy *once*, doesn't mean I want all of my sexual encounters to be the same."

"Right." She nods. "I get that. And honestly, I'm still astonished you had *one* hookup, so I definitely don't expect you to make a habit of it."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I'm not sure if I should be offended or not.

She makes a dismissive noise. "It just means that you don't give off the vibe of someone who's in it just for sex."

"Maybe I am!" I protest, not sure why I'm upset right now. I guess just because I'm so tired of being put in the box of the prim little good girl that I've been my whole life. What if I don't want to be that way anymore? "Or I could be. If I wanted."

"Okay. *Do* you want that?" Jenna waits, her brows lifted, as I think about that with my mouth open.

"No," I grumble at last, realizing that while it felt exciting to hook up with Andrew last week at the beginning, by the end, it seemed like it was a lot of anxiety and effort for not enough reward. At least not any kind of reward I

couldn't handle better on my own.

“Right. So anyway, that doesn't mean you couldn't go on a date with a cute guy who's into you. A date doesn't mean you're required to sleep with him—though I'm sure plenty of guys would argue that point. You don't want to be saddled with one of those types anyway, so don't worry about them.” She flicks her fingers as though to get rid of ‘those types.’

“Okay. I wasn't actually worried about them, so ...”

She makes an inarticulate sound of frustration. “Just ... those guys were flirting with you. Did you like any of them?”

I shrug. “They were fine, I guess.”

She rolls her eyes. “Oh my god, you're impossible. If one of them were to ask you out ... like, the guy in the blue shirt, with the dimple? What about him? If he asked you out, what would you say?”

I wrinkle my nose and shake my head. “His name is Devon. I couldn't date a guy with the same name as my brother.”

That makes her laugh. “Okay, fine, I guess I can see the problem there. Well, what about the other one? With the ...” She trails off, seemingly at a loss.

Amused, I wait, trying to suppress my smile, but it breaks through anyway. “They all kinda run together, don't they?” I ask after she can't come up with anything.

Laughing, she nods. “Yeah, I guess so.”

“And I guess that's why Chad or Brad or Thad or whatever their names were didn't make much of an impression on me?”

“But the guy clowning at the party with his shirt off did?”

I think back to Andrew, to what attracted me to him in the first place. For one thing, he fit the type I was looking for that night. For another ... “He's hot,” I say with a shrug. “And not in the bland, nondescript but good looking way as Sam or Scott or Steve, but in a catch your eye and keep your attention kind of way. Plus, like I said, I was on a mission that night.”

She stares at me for a moment. “And how do we get you on a mission again?”

I shrug. “I’m not sure I see the point right now. Maybe someone will get me to change my mind, but I’ve had sex and ...” I shake my head. “I’m not sure it lives up to the hype.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

Andrew

I DO MY BEST TO PUT SADIE MARSINKO OUT OF MY MIND. DEVON'S ONE OF my best friends. My roommate. My teammate. He's protective of his sister and wants to keep her *away* from guys like me.

That shouldn't sting the way it does. I mean, I've worked hard to cultivate the reputation I've achieved. I leave women satisfied, but I'm not interested in strings. With strings come expectations, and I've had enough of those to last me a lifetime. When you come from a family of type A high achievers, it's unavoidable.

The problem is, I don't fit into their mold. I tried my best growing up. I studied, I worked, I did my damndest, and while I got my share of As, it was

the Bs that killed me. I did great in things like math and science, but the classes that required lots of writing? Forget it. Somehow I couldn't quite master the art of writing essays in a way that made teachers give me As. I didn't have enough sources. Or I didn't support my points adequately. Or ... it was always something.

And I was just never good enough.

Even with sports—which I've always loved—I wasn't the fastest or the biggest or the strongest. I'm fast. And I'm not small or weak. But I know I don't have what it takes to go pro. And since I can't go pro, my parents don't understand why I'm even bothering with college ball. "Why not focus on your studies?" is the common question I get from them.

I can't tell them the real answer—that I gave up on trying to please them with my grades a long time ago. They would just say that they only want me to try my best. Which sounds nice and all, but the problem is, they're confident that my best means getting As, when in reality, sometimes the best I can do is a B, if I'm lucky.

These days, I do enough to pass and stay eligible to play football. After this season, I won't even have to worry about that, though. This is my last year to play, even though I won't graduate until next December. NCAA rules state that college players can only play four seasons. This is my fourth, so that means it's my last. Plus, for the education portion of my degree, I need a semester of student teaching. I'm not sure I really want to be a PE teacher, but ...

At least it gives me something to do and would mean I could coach football eventually. I've helped out with Coach Carter's football camp the last couple of years at the end of the summer—we just finished up last week before our first game—and it's pretty fun. It wouldn't be the worst way to make a living, though I know that won't meet my parents' expectations. They keep pushing me to go to med school, which is not something I'm interested in. Though I have enjoyed my classes that focus on rehabbing muscle injuries ... Becoming some kind of trainer or physical therapist might be cool too.

It's hard to decide, though, when I can't tell which things genuinely appeal to me and which things seem appealing because of all the noise from growing

up in my family. Do I want to be a PE teacher and football coach because I actually like it or because it would piss off my parents? Or does looking at becoming a physical therapist appeal because it might make my parents happier or because I genuinely find it interesting?

But I still have time to decide, and right now I'm trying to focus on enjoying my last season of playing football while I still can rather than dwelling on the end of my football career and what comes after. I'm not sure what I'll do with myself without playing football ... It's been a major part of my identity for most of my life. The thing that sets me apart from my older brother and the long shadow he cast as student body president, Valedictorian, his choice of Ivy league schools, and editor of the *Harvard Law Review*.

"Why can't you be more like your brother?" is my parents' other favorite question, though at least they haven't asked that one as often since I went to college here at Marycliff. Far away from my family in Denver and anywhere they have connections. I'm here to forge my own path. And if they don't like it? Too bad for them.

But despite my intention to leave Sadie alone, I end up looking for her whenever I'm walking around campus.

I just want to see how she's doing, I tell myself. Keep an eye out for her like her brother asked.

Ha. Right. Anyone with half a brain can figure out I have my own reasons for looking for her, and there's very little altruism involved.

I don't see her at all the first week. But the second, I spot her heading into the library when I'm on my way to the campus coffee shop between classes.

With an hour to kill, I can do so just as easily in the library as I can at the coffee shop, can't I? Some would say that's a better place to spend my time. My parents certainly would, though they'd also likely tell me to leave the poor girl alone.

Maybe I will. The library's a big place, after all. There's no guarantee I'll be able to find her.

But once I'm inside, I catch a glimpse of her disappearing up the stairs, and I follow quickly, taking the stairs two at a time, pausing at the top to look

around. She went right, I'm pretty sure ...

Quietly, feeling like a cat chasing down a delectable mouse, I stalk along one side, looking down the rows of books, seeing if I can find her. Is she looking for a book? Or will I find her at a table studying? Maybe she has one of the small study rooms reserved?

One of my study groups for an English class used one, so I know they're down this way. I head in that direction, still checking each aisle as I pass, scanning the tables dotting the floor here and there.

Bingo.

She's at a table next to the windows in the far corner. I almost miss her, but the light glints off her earrings as she pushes her hair behind her ear, her head bent over a book.

Studying. Perfect.

I make my way down the line of bookshelves, making a show of scanning the shelves like I'm searching for a particular book. Really, my attention is all on her.

Will she notice me? If she does, will she speak to me?

I'm hoping she does, because then it won't look like I followed her up here. If *she* initiates conversation, it's just a random, casual encounter.

Sure, I can make it look that way too, but it's easier if she says something first.

I inch closer, clear my throat, pull a book off the shelf, flip through it a bit, then put it back, move to the next shelf, select another book at random, rinse and repeat.

I'm just about even with her table now, looking hard at the spines of the books like I'm searching for a needle in a haystack. I've seen her glance at me more than once now, but she's not saying anything. Dammit.

Either she doesn't recognize me or she doesn't want to acknowledge me because she's embarrassed about our hookup. I can't decide which of those two options is worse.

Picking a book at random, I open it and flip through it a few times, make a sound of satisfaction like I've finally found what I'm looking for, then turn and take a few steps, stopping and backing up like it's only just occurred to me that I recognize Sadie.

"Sadie?" I ask, infusing surprise into my voice. "Hey! Good to see you again." I lay a hand on my chest. "I'm Andrew Maloney. Your brother's roommate."

She glances up at me, cheeks bright pink, and presses her lips in the kind of smile you give a stranger when you pass them on a sidewalk. "Hey," she says softly, refocusing on her page.

"Mind if I join you?" I ask, pulling out the chair across from her and sitting down before she can respond.

"Oh, uh ..." She blinks rapidly as I settle into the chair, seeming unsure how to respond. Very different from the vixen who knew exactly what she wanted the first night we met.

"Sorry," I say quickly, bending and fishing in my backpack for ... something. I don't even know. "I won't be long," I add, inspiration hitting. "I just needed to write something down from this book."

Of course, I can't find anything to write with, and I don't have a notebook either. But I have my laptop. That's even better.

Pulling it out of its sleeve, I place it on the table and open it, logging in and taking my time opening a document to type out some random ass quote from this book.

When I glance at Sadie, her flustered look is gone, and instead she looks like she's trying not to laugh.

I lift my eyebrows, hoping to be let in on the joke.

She leans her chin on her hand, studying me. "What's your major?"

We get to ask get-to-know-you questions? Nice. This is going better than I could've hoped already.

"Exercise Science. I'm also getting my teaching certificate."

She nods, biting the inside of her cheek, the amusement on her face increased, if anything. Why's that so funny?

I'm about to ask just that, but before I can, she asks me another question. "And your minor? Or do you have one?"

I shake my head. "Nah. Didn't really see the point."

Now she's biting her lip, her grin fighting hard to take over. "What class are you taking where you need a quote from *Breeding Stud Sheep*?"

Scrambling for the book, I pull it toward me, actually reading the faded letters on the spine for the first time. "Oh my god," I mutter while Sadie cracks up. How did I not notice I ended up in a section on animal husbandry? Specifically breeding sheep?

"You spent so long looking at books," she says between giggles. "How did you not actually read any of the words in them?"

My face is heating, my cheeks turning red like hers did just a minute ago, but for a very different reason. Dropping the book on the table, I cover my face with my hands. "Oh my god," I mutter again, shaking my head. I'm caught. Fully and irrevocably found out. My ruse has failed completely. Any and all chance of playing it cool is totally over.

"Awww," she coos, her tone a mixture of pity, laughter, and condescension. "I can see this didn't work like you planned it. What was the goal here?"

Dropping my hands to the table in front of me, I stare at her for a moment, taking in the way she's biting her plush lower lip, amusement dancing in her eyes, her face flushed, but not with embarrassment anymore.

Mine still is, but I can deal with that.

She asked a question, though, and she's clearly waiting for my answer.

"What was my goal here?" I ask, partly to buy myself time, partly to make sure I remember the question.

She nods once, slowly.

I study her for a beat, take a breath, open my mouth, then let the breath out

without saying anything. How honest should I be?

Her eyebrows lift, silently inviting me to respond, but she waits without saying a word.

Finally, I nod as though coming to a decision. “I saw you. And I wanted an excuse to talk to you.”

That has one eyebrow arching high on her forehead. “Why?” Just the one word in response. Somehow that shouldn’t seem promising, but the fact that she hasn’t just laughed me off again seems like maybe it is.

I shrug and lean back in my chair, trying—and likely failing—to seem unaffected. “Your brother asked me to watch out for you. I wanted to see how school’s going so far.”

She laughs at that. Not the giggles from before, but loud, ringing laughter, her head falling back, mouth open. The kind of laugh that’s likely to bring a librarian around to shush us if she doesn’t cool it soon.

After a moment, she recovers, moving her hair out of her face and running a finger under her eye as though wiping away tears.

I didn’t think it was *that* funny.

When I open my mouth to say something, she holds up a hand. “Wait, wait. You’re telling me that *my* brother”—she points a finger at her chest—“told you”—she points at me—“to look out for me. You specifically. He asked you to do that.”

I jerk my head back, feeling a mix of indignation and irritation. “I mean, I think he generally told all his friends that, especially those of us living in the same house ...”

Her laughter interrupts me again, causing me to trail off. She shakes her head, holding a hand toward me, palm out as though to fend me off. “Oh my god, seriously?” She collapses forward onto the table. “Do you not see how hilarious that is? Considering ...” She flips her hand back and forth between us.

I cross my arms and shrug. “Seems like he just wants to make sure you’re

okay. He mentioned this is your first year living on campus instead of at home. Is it a big adjustment?"

Whether it's my question or my tone of voice, she sobers, sitting up again and pushing her hair behind her ears. There's a stray strand caught on the corner of her mouth, and everything in me wishes I could reach out and tuck it behind her ear for her as well, but I can't. For one thing, I'd have to get up and go around the table to do it, and that's strange enough. But also, I'm not supposed to touch her.

So why are you here? A voice in my head asks that sounds a lot like Devon's. We both know you're not just checking up on her. It's not like you genuinely bumped into her somewhere and are having a normal conversation. You orchestrated this encounter. And she knows it now too.

But I ignore that voice, instead focusing on her eyes and ignoring the way the low scoop neck of her T-shirt reveals a hint of cleavage. Cleavage I've had my face in.

And would like to again.

Her mouth hooks to the side as she contemplates my question. "It is," she says at last. "But also, not really. I mean, I attended classes here last year. Mostly getting my pre-reqs and gen eds out of the way. It's a little different not going home at the end of the day—or at least having home be somewhere new—but it's good so far."

"What's your major?" I jump in at the first sign of a pause, seized by the desire to know. She knows mine, after all.

"Mass communications," she says. "I'm going to work in PR. My idealistic dream is to work for a charity that benefits kids with medical issues, but ..."

She waves a hand airily then shrugs. "We'll see."

A smile creeps across my face. "That's super cool. Since you're living on campus, that means you have a roommate, right? How's that going?"

She nods. "Yeah. Jenna. She was with me at the party that first night." A hint of pink stains her cheeks. "It's taking a little getting used to living with another person who I'm not related to, but we're friends, so that helps."

I nod. “Good. That’s good. I’m glad.”

That has amusement creeping over her face again, her brows lifting once more. “Are you? Well, thanks. If that’s all you wanted to talk to me about, why go through all that nonsense with looking at books and pulling out something you don’t need?”

My cheeks warm again, and I duck my head, running my hand through my hair and down my face. I offer her a chagrined half-smile. “Would you believe that it seemed like a good idea at the time?”

CHAPTER NINE

Sadie

AFTER THE FIRST TIME I BUMP INTO ANDREW IN THE LIBRARY, I START SEEING him around. A lot. At the coffee shop. In the student center. Just ... around. And every time, he stops and talks to me for at least a few minutes. Asks how classes are going. How campus life is treating me. If my parents have started hassling me to move back home yet. If my roommate and I have started hating each other already.

He's flirty and goofy, just like the first time we met at the party, his questions always holding a tinge of a joke, even though he genuinely listens to my answers.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, he joins me in the library when I go to study

between classes in the middle of the day. We both have the same block free. The second week of meeting there, he starts bringing treats—juice and cookies the first time.

“What, are we in kindergarten again?” I ask with a laugh, even as I take the offered bottle of apple juice and the chocolate chip cookie in a small white pastry bag.

He shrugs. Grins. “I wasn’t sure what kind of coffee you like. Or if you prefer tea. And I figured juice was safe. Who doesn’t drink juice?”

I wipe my mouth after taking a sip, fighting back a grin. “Diabetics?”

He freezes, mid-chew. Then narrows his eyes. “You’re not, though. You just took a sip.”

Shrugging, I paste on the most innocent look I can muster. “Or I’m having a sugar crash and you came to my rescue just in time.”

He studies me through those narrowed eyes for a second, then relaxes, shaking his head. “Nah. I played with a guy who had Type I in high school. He always had his own stash of emergency snacks. You’d’ve been digging through your bag when I got here if that were the case.”

I incline my head. “True. I’m fine.”

He gives an emphatic, “Mmhmm,” in agreement that makes me blush, because he’s clearly referring to my looks, and not whether or not I have diabetes.

“That makes you blush?” he asks, laughter riding his words. “Seriously?” He leans over the table and lowers his voice. “After the places I’ve had my tongue, agreeing that you’re fine causes a blush.” Then he shakes his head, his expression amused, and takes a sip of his own juice—cranberry cocktail, instead of the apple he got for me.

God, this guy. “You’re shameless,” I comment, deciding I need to voice the thought.

He shrugs, unaffected. “Why should I be ashamed? Everyone knows what they’re getting with me.”

I give him a long, considering look. “I’m not sure I agree with that statement.”

His brows jump in question.

Pulling my cookie closer, I break off a piece and pop it in my mouth, forcing him to wait for me to elaborate. “Take this, for instance.” I gesture between us. “I thought I knew what I was getting with you that night at the party. And sure, that’s what you lead people to believe. But that’s not what I’m getting now, is it? You don’t normally meet your hookups in the library for biweekly study sessions or bring them juice and cookies afterward.”

“Isn’t it funny that biweekly means twice a week as well as every other week? If I didn’t know better, I could be confused and think that we only meet every other week.”

“Aaaand now you’re deflecting.” I cock my head at an angle and cross my arms. “Does my directness make you uncomfortable?”

He takes a big bite of his own cookie—which looks like a snickerdoodle—and shakes his head. “Your directness is one of my favorite things about you.”

That comment warms me, but I ignore the feeling. I’m not going to let him distract me so easily. “Then why the deflection?”

He shrugs, sets the cookie down on its paper bag, and brushes off his hands. “Who says I’m deflecting? I was just making an observation about a word you used. In any case, no, you’re right that you’re getting more than the standard package. But our situation is different.”

“Oh? How so?”

Setting his elbows on the table, he rubs a hand across his mouth. I took a psychology course last year that talked about body language. Supposedly covering your mouth means you’re stopping yourself from saying something. What is it that he thinks he shouldn’t say?

After a moment, he sits back again. “You’re my friend’s sister. I told you, he asked me to look out for you.”

“Uh-huh. And that’s what this is?” I gesture around the library. “You looking out for me? Protecting me from the big, bad books?”

He chuckles, having the grace to look down as the tips of his ears grow pink. “Okay, maybe that’s not the only reason.”

“Care to share with the class?” I ask, making an inviting gesture.

That provokes another chuckle, and he bobbles his head from side to side as though debating with himself if he should say what he’s actually thinking or not. “Fine. You intrigue me.”

“I intrigue you,” I repeat flatly.

He shrugs, as though unconcerned whether or not I believe him. “You intrigue me. You have since that first night.” He lifts his hand, tracing my outline in the air in front of him with one finger. “This combination of confidence and shyness. The way you didn’t pretend you didn’t want me the first night, your refusal to give me your name—which, by the way, was what firmly planted your hook more than anything —”

“Firmly planted my hook?” I splutter in protest. “The point of refusing to tell you my name was to *not* plant a hook. It was to avoid any further entanglements.”

“Clearly that worked out the way you wanted,” he says with a smirk.

I press my lips together, as much to smother my smile as to project my irritation.

“Anyway,” he continues breezily, “as I was saying. You were all confidence that night, except you seemed skittish once we got to my room. And even now, you blush at my compliments.” He shakes his head. “But you still bust my balls if given half a chance.”

“It’s not my fault that you seem to need to be taken down a peg or two,” I say with a shrug.

“See?” He points at me. “That right there. That’s exactly what I’m talking about.” He sets his hands on the table and leans in. “I like it.”

Shifting in my chair, I reach for my cookie again, unable to hold his gaze

when he's being so complimentary. It confuses me. Because I know Andrew Maloney doesn't really date. He hooks up. But that's it.

So why does he keep seeking me out? Why study with me and talk to me on campus and bring me cookies and juice in the library?

"Wanna come over to my place tonight?" he asks after a moment, and thankfully I've already swallowed the sip of juice I took, because otherwise I might've spit it all over the table.

"I'm sorry, what?" I ask, raising startled eyes to his.

He chuckles. Leans in and lowers his voice again. "I've been wanting to go for another round with you since that first night. How about tonight?"

Shocked and uncertain, I look all around, as though hoping for inspiration to strike from the wall of books on breeding animals, but nothing is forthcoming. "What about Devon?" I ask. "I thought you said he asked you to look out for me."

A wide grin spreads across his face. "Who says this doesn't count? Besides, it's not like you're going to get your heart broken. You barely tolerate me."

"That's not true," I protest immediately. "I mean, no, I'm not going to get my heart broken. But I more than tolerate you." I actually like him. In the same way you like the neighbor's big, goofy puppy that bounds out to see you and jumps and slobbers and acts like you're his new best friend, but you're kinda glad it's the neighbor's puppy and you don't have to worry about its mess.

His grin turns sly. "Are you saying you like me?"

Rolling my eyes, I act annoyed, but my smile gives me away. "I mean, not in a romantic way." I flip a hand, dismissing that idea. "But sure. I like you well enough. You brought me juice and a cookie, after all." I break off another piece of cookie and pop it in my mouth.

"I knew that would win you over," he whispers, like he's saying it more to himself, but it's clear it's for my benefit as well. "So tonight, then?"

Shaking my head, I sip my juice. "Nah. I don't think so."

That has his eyes widening in surprise. "What? Why not?"

“Well, as you’ve pointed out, Devon’s asked you to look out for me. And regardless of whatever lie you’ve told yourself, we both know us hooking up isn’t what he meant. And besides”—sitting back in my chair, I cross my arms, and give him a cool once over—“been there, done that. I’m not sure I need a repeat performance.”

He chokes on his own spit. “You don’t need a repeat performance?” he repeats, incredulous. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

I shrug and shake my head, half my mouth turning up in an irrepressible grin.

He clutches his chest. “Oh. *Ouch*. Damn, Sadie. That fucking hurts.” He drops his hands to the table and looks me over. “You came, though.” He says it at normal volume, and I startle, looking around to make sure no one’s in earshot.

There’s no one around, though. I mean, we’re in the animal husbandry section. Marycliff’s ag department is small, and this section rarely frequented, which is why it’s my favorite place to study. No interruptions. At least there weren’t until Andrew started showing up.

I can’t say I’m upset about his interruptions, though.

“You did,” he insists, still at normal volume.

Leaning forward, I hiss, “Fine. Yes, I did. But not because of *you*. I got myself there, thanks.”

He spreads his hands. “Well, now you gotta say yes. You have to give me the chance to redeem myself.”

With a laugh, I shake my head again. “I just ... I’m not sure it’s a great idea.”

He studies me for a moment. “Fine. Not tonight, then. But we have another home game this weekend, and we’re hosting a party again. You should come. Bring your roommate. It’ll be fun.”

I chew on the inside of my cheek while I consider that. “Fine,” I agree at last. “I’ll come.”

He smirks, and I can almost hear him say, *Yeah, you will*, the words echoing in my head in his voice. But I pretend I don’t know what he’s thinking and

pull my textbook closer to me.

“Thanks for the snack,” I say, already burying my face in my book. “I really need to study, though.”

“No problem,” he says easily. “Me too.”

CHAPTER TEN

Andrew

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WAS THINKING BY INVITING SADIE OVER. IT'S CLEARLY a terrible idea. I promised her brother I'd leave her alone, for one thing. *Though you're not exactly doing that, are you?* his voice accuses me.

But we're just studying. It's not like that's sexy. Though with Sadie, it kinda is ...

And she hasn't really given any indication that she's interested in another round with me. I guess I just figured ...

Well, I haven't had anyone turn down round two before.

And when she said she didn't want a repeat performance? That just burns. I

could've handled it—maybe—if she really just didn't want to bang her brother's roommate. That would make sense, anyway. But the fact that she was disappointed? *Ouch*.

Oh, she might not have said those exact words, but that's what she was getting at. And that fact has embedded itself under my skin, like a splinter that's worked in so deep I can't get it out. Every day that passes, every time I see her, that fact slaps me in the face all over again—I disappointed a woman in bed.

And that thought shakes the very foundation of my being. I thought letting go of football in a few months would be bad enough, but this? This is so much worse.

I have a long-established reputation of being the guy that makes sure my hookup gets what she needs too. That's why there are always plenty of women willing to have sex with me, even when they know that's all they're getting. Sure, being on the football team helps with that, too. But it's more than just that.

I'm attractive. I maintain my hygiene. I know plenty of tricks to make chicks come. *And* I'm on the football team.

So Sadie saying *she* got herself off, and that I didn't have much to do with it—well, it stings. A lot. My pride. My ego. I can't have word getting around that I can't get the job done.

Not that I think Sadie'd spread that on purpose. But if she tells her roommate—who she's admitted she's friends with—and the roommate tells other friends, and it spreads exponentially like a virus ...

Not. Good.

While I already wanted another romp with Sadie, I probably would've let it go if she discovered that she doesn't like hookups. Or she's worried about her brother's reaction. But her disappointment means I need to prove myself, and now I'm more determined than ever.

I know better than to be a pushy asshole when I see her again on Thursday for our standing study session, though. She smiles at me when I walk up, this time with a coffee, a hot chocolate, and a pastry for us to share.

“You brought a snack again? But none for you?”

I give her side eye as I set down the drinks, pastry bag, and my backpack. “Who said this was for you? Maybe it’s all for me.”

She giggles, and I grin back. “Nah, I’m kidding. Of course I brought something for you. But it’s a big pastry, so I thought we’d share.” I move the cups in front, tapping each in turn as I say, “Mocha and hot chocolate. I wasn’t sure which you’d prefer, so I got two things I’d be okay with.”

“Hmm.” She hooks her mouth to the side as she contemplates her choice. “I like both pretty equally, but I think I’ll take the mocha this time.” She reaches for the cup and takes a sip, her eyes meeting mine. “My favorite is mocha and caramel together. But sometimes a hot chocolate just hits the spot, you know?”

Lifting the hot chocolate, I tap the cup to hers like we’re toasting. “I know exactly what you mean.” I hold her gaze, infusing my words with layers of meaning. “Sometimes you have a craving, and only that one thing will satisfy it.” Right now, I’m craving her, but I keep that thought to myself.

She blushes, though, like maybe she can read my mind.

We chat for a few minutes while we share the pastry—a large pumpkin scone with cream cheese frosting—exchanging small talk about our classes and football before diving into our respective studying. She’s a serious student, and it shows in the way she approaches her work—organized and thorough, the syllabus for whatever class she’s studying for always in easy reach.

I, on the other hand, have a more laissez-faire approach to my studying. I have to admit, though, that meeting with Sadie twice a week like this has already improved my typical performance, even this early in the semester. I don’t usually bother to do more than skim the assigned reading, but since neither of us leaves until we have to head to our respective classes, I might as well make use of the time. She only pays me so much attention before getting to her own studying.

When she starts packing up her things, I do the same, peeking at my phone to check the time. Still ten minutes to get to my next class. Plenty of time.

“Hey,” I say, getting her attention as I sling my backpack over my shoulder

and sliding my unlocked phone across the table to her. “Give me your number so I can make sure you can find me at the party this weekend.”

She eyes my phone, then me, slowly zipping her backpack and settling it on her shoulders. “I have a feeling it won’t be difficult to find you. You’ll be at the center of the noise and action, right? That’s where you were last time.”

Wrinkling up my face, I shake my head. “Just because that happened once, doesn’t mean it’ll happen every time.”

“Uh-huh,” she responds doubtfully, her gaze returning to my phone.

I let out a theatrical sigh of exasperation. “Would you just put your number in my phone, please? What if I want to ask you what kind of pastry you want to try next? So far I’ve been guessing, and it seems to be going okay, but wouldn’t you rather tell me what you’d like instead of hoping I don’t show up with something you hate without knowing?”

“Oh, fine,” she says, giving in with a roll of her eyes and body language that screams annoyance, but a smile tugging at her lips that she can’t quite repress all the way. Picking up my phone, she taps on the screen.

Her irritation at my request for her phone number is kinda funny. She clearly doesn’t know what to make of me, and I can’t exactly blame her. She’s obviously heard about me, otherwise how would she know about my reputation?

And while it still pisses me off that I didn’t live up to my reputation with her, and I definitely want the chance to redeem myself, the truth is, I enjoy spending time with her. I look forward to spotting her on campus and knowing I’ll get to see her twice a week, at least when away games don’t have me missing Thursdays, which will happen in a couple weeks. But even on those kinds of weeks, I’ll at least get to see her on Tuesdays.

She holds out the phone to me, and I take it from her, making sure to let my fingers brush hers, smiling when she seems to give an involuntary shiver.

Yeah, she may not think I’m as impressive as she should, but she’s not totally unaffected by me either.

I still can’t figure out what I did wrong, though. I was using all my usual

tricks, but it didn't seem to be working. I know some chicks get off easier with penetration and clit stimulation, and she seemed to prefer to do the stimulating herself. I didn't realize that would end up being a problem, though.

Now that I know, I can make sure she's really warmed up. Maybe a drink or two to help her relax and loosen up will help, too. Not too many, obviously. I don't want her drunk for a few reasons. The obvious being that I want her aware and on board with what's happening, but also because when you're drunk, it's sometimes harder to reach orgasm. We want just enough alcohol to relax and feel less self-conscious, but not so much we run into problems.

I'm hoping this party will be the place to make that happen, but she doesn't seem all that enthused about going to the party or about finding me once she's there. And I get the feeling that if I push anything, she'll do the opposite of what I want.

I quickly tap out a text to her and hit send. "There. Now you have my number too. That way you can text me if you decide to switch tables or are running late."

She arches an eyebrow. "Or if I want to give you my drink and pastry order?"

I grin. "That too."

Devon knocks on my door then pushes it open later that night after practice, Piggy in hand.

I set down my phone and grin at the sight of him with our team mascot/hot-potato game. Piggy gets passed around throughout the season. The deal is you have to hide it in a teammates' gear when he's not looking. Whoever gets stuck with Piggy at the end of the season has to take care of him during the off-season, which means keeping him in a safe place, making sure he has a bath if he needs one, and mending any holes that inevitably happen after rough handling by a bunch of jocks over multiple years. It's a fun, team-building thing that also carries a certain amount of superstition with it. The theory is that if we don't keep Piggy moving and take good care of him, we

won't play as well.

"How's Piggy doing?" I ask as Devon steps inside.

He pats the dinky stuffed pig on the head. "He's good. I was just checking him over to make sure he doesn't need cleaning."

"And? What's the verdict?"

He shrugs. "He had a couple of smudges. You know how Wilson is. I don't understand how he keeps a girlfriend as grubby as he is. But it wasn't anything I couldn't spot clean."

Of all of us, I think Devon is the one who cares about Piggy most. If the lore didn't include making sure no one hangs onto Piggy for too long, I'm pretty sure he'd keep him the whole season and through the off-season. But that's not the game. And no one respects the rules of the game more than Devon.

I eye him as he sits in my desk chair. "You know, you can't leave Piggy here now. I'm sitting right here."

He chuckles and shakes his head. "I know." His eyes twinkle. "If I want to get him to you, I know how to make it happen. And you'll never see it coming."

"Well, now I will," I grumble, but he just grins and shakes his head.

"I haven't seen you much lately outside of practice," he says, his grin turning sly. "Who's keeping you so busy? Anyone I know?"

I still, doing my best not to shift guiltily on the bed. "Nah, man," I do my best to make my voice as light and normal as possible. "You know how it is. Just a busy semester." I swallow hard, hoping it's not audible. The truth is, I've been avoiding Devon. While it's true that spending time with his sister occupies some of the time he and I might hang out, since that's really confined to our library meet ups—at this point, anyway—it's just guilt keeping me out of his way.

"Busy semester, huh? Since when do you load up a fall semester with classes you have to actually think about? Or do more than the bare minimum?"

"Whatever, man. Fuck off," I say dismissively. "There are only so many easy

classes a guy can take, and I've gotten through most of them already. Even with the lightest load possible, I still have some upper level classes that can't be put off any longer. Anatomy and physiology is kicking my ass." That part's not a lie, at least. Or lie by omission. But no way in hell am I telling him that part of the reason I'm not feeling like I'm drowning is that I spend twice a week studying in the library with his sister.

Granted, she's not in the class or anything. And she doesn't do anything in particular to help me other than just show up at the usual place at the usual time and do her own shit while I do mine.

He stays and talks for a few more minutes, telling me about some chick in his bio class that he's interested in, but she doesn't seem to be picking up what he's laying down.

"I talk to her, and she responds, but it's just surface shit," he complains, "like asking to borrow her notes when I missed class last week. She's nice and all, but I'm running out of things to try to talk to her about."

"Right, but you're trying to talk to her during class? Or right when she has to get to another class, right? That's not exactly the best time for a whole conversation."

He grunts. "Fine. I guess that's true. But even when I've seen her outside of class, I smile at her, she smiles back, but she doesn't come talk to me."

My eyes bug. "And you don't go talk to her because ...?"

He answers that with another grunt.

"Just be direct, man," I tell him. "Ask her out. Tell her about the party this weekend and ask her to come. Get her number so you can text her the address. See what happens. Chicks dig that shit, I promise."

"What if she's not the kind of chick who likes that, though? What if she prefers subtlety?"

I scoff. "At a certain point, you gotta stop being subtle. And do you really want to play games just to try to get laid? Or would you rather know where you stand with someone and go from there? If she likes you, she'll want to give you her number and come to the party. If not, at least you know and you

can move on.”

He contemplates that for a moment, then stands and heads for the door. “Okay. I guess I can see your point. Thanks, dude.” He stands and tosses Piggy in the air, catching him again as he exits my room.

A fresh wave of guilt hits me as I watch him leave. It’s a little hypocritical of me to be telling him to be direct about what he wants while I’m hiding the fact that I’m trying to hook up with his baby sister again. Because that’s what he calls her—his baby sister—despite the fact that she’s only a year behind him in school.

The fact is, despite what he says about wanting to make sure she gets to have a life, he still sees her as a baby just like his parents.

So which part of his words should I put more weight on—the part about wanting her to live her life the way she wants? Or the part about protecting her from guys like me?

What if hanging with guys like me is how she wants to live her life? Shouldn’t I help her learn how to do that safely so she can come out the other side unscathed?

If that’s the case, I think I’m doing a marvelous job of looking out for her, even if it’s not exactly what Devon has in mind.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Sadie

“SADIE?” CALLS JENNA FROM THE LIVING ROOM, WHERE SHE’S LOUNGING ON the couch munching on popcorn and reading for a class.

“Yeah?” I come out of my bedroom holding the book I needed for a short paper I have to write for my English class.

She holds up my phone, screen out, wiggling it at me. “Why is Andrew Maloney texting you?”

My face heats immediately, and I snatch my phone away from her, hiding it as though that’ll somehow erase her knowledge of his text from her memory. At least it’s nothing scandalous—which he would totally do, and I’m a little surprised he hasn’t yet.

ANDREW

Coffee, tea, or juice tomorrow?

Caramel mocha and a chocolate chip cookie

After I send the text, I look up to find Jenna watching me avidly. She draws a circle in the air with the pen in her hand. “When were you going to tell me about this little development?”

I shrug, taking my seat. “It didn’t seem worth mentioning.”

She pushes herself up so she’s fully sitting, pulling her legs under her and leaning forward, pointing at me with her pen. “You’re trying to tell me that you didn’t think it worth mentioning that you’re somehow in a texting relationship with the guy who stamped your V-card, is friends with your brother, and apparently is planning on bringing you a beverage tomorrow? And why? What’s tomorrow?”

Sighing, I slump my shoulders. Is there a good reason I haven’t told Jenna about all this? No. But it feels ... strange. I’m not sure what to make of any of this—either Andrew’s attention or Jenna wanting all the details. I don’t know how I feel about it all.

“Look,” she says before I can say anything. “You obviously don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to. But I’m happy to listen if you want to talk it through.”

That actually makes me feel better. At least about her involvement. I shift my mouth from side to side, still debating what and how much I want to tell her. “Okay, here’s the thing.”

She wiggles in her seat and claps her hands. “Oh, good, because the suspense is absolutely killing me.”

Laughing, I shake my head. “Andrew, like, followed me into the library one day a couple weeks ago?” I don’t know why I sound like I’m asking a question. Jenna’s eyes widen and she leans closer, waiting for more. “I have a gap in my schedule on Tuesday afternoons, you know, so I go to the library and study, because if I come here, it makes it harder to make myself leave on time for my next class. Anyway, I got all settled in my favorite table on the second floor, when here comes Andrew, pretending to look for a book and

acting like he doesn't notice me."

Jenna claps a hand over her mouth, cackling when I tell her about the book he selected and how he acted when he realized he'd been caught out. Her smile turns knowing when I fill her in on the fact that he's met me every Tuesday and Thursday since, started bringing snacks, and yesterday asked for my phone number.

"That boy has a crush on you," she sings.

"What? No. That's ridiculous."

She arches an eyebrow. "Is it, though? Everything you've described is textbook crushing behavior."

"But ..." I can't come up with anything more coherent than that.

"Do you have another explanation?" she asks, making it clear that she doesn't think I do.

I cast around, trying to find something. "Devon did ask all his friends to look out for me."

She props her chin on her fist and hums. "Oh, well. Yeah. I guess there's that. And how many of his other friends act like Andrew?"

"None," I mutter. "And, well ... he did ask me to the party at their house after the game this weekend. And, um, I think he wants to hook up with me again."

Jenna's mouth drops open. "When were you going to tell me about the party?" she shouts, reaching over and smacking my leg.

I hold up my hands defensively. "I don't know! I wasn't sure if I wanted to go!"

"We're going," she says definitively. "I need to check this dude out for myself. Especially if he's going for a repeat. 'I think he wants to hook up with me again,'" she says in a mocking voice, rolling her eyes. "And you don't think he has a crush on you because ..." She rolls her hand, inviting me to fill in the blank.

Huffing, I cross my arms. "Wanting to have sex with someone doesn't mean

you want to *date* them. So that's not proof he has a crush on me. Just that he finds me attractive and feels the need to prove to me that he's as good in bed as everyone says."

"Oh my god!" Jenna shrieks, mouth hanging open. "What did you say to him that makes him want to do that?"

I tell her what I told him—about being a little disappointed I had to do the job myself—and she gasps like I said I murdered his childhood dog.

"You didn't!"

I nod slowly. I still don't get the big deal. It's true. And also ... he said he wanted to hook up again before I told him that, but Jenna's freaking out enough, so I don't think it's necessary to tell her that part right now. Or maybe ever.

When she recovers from her latest shock, she straightens, pushing her hair over her shoulder, and levels a look at me. "We're going to the party. I want to see this guy in action with you."

"Gross, Jenna. You're not going to watch us have sex."

She wrinkles her nose, grinning and shaking her head. "Ew. No. I'm not a voyeur. I just want to watch you guys flirting. Just think, Sadie, you might be the one to tame the manwhore."

If anything, I feel even more self-conscious than I did last time when Jenna and I show up at the party at Devon and Andrew's house. And Liam and Jason's house too, obviously, but I barely know those two.

Once again, Jenna has me dressed up more than I'd choose for myself. Last time, I went along with it, wanting to look the part. This time, though, I wanted to just wear my normal clothes. She wouldn't hear of it, though.

"Aren't you glad you dressed up?" she leans in and asks once we get inside. There are people everywhere, more so than last time. I guess now that the semester's in full swing—rather than being the weekend before classes

started like last time—there are more people available to come? Or maybe they’ve made more friends?

I don’t really know how these things work, I just know that this time feels a lot more overwhelming all around.

Instead of short shorts, Jenna put me in a denim mini this time with a cream colored off-the-shoulder graphic tee with palm trees on it. Then she did my makeup and hair, claiming I needed an effortlessly sexy vibe, and that it would drive Andrew wild.

I’m not trying to drive Andrew wild, but I have to admit that I look pretty cute.

Devon bounds up to us shortly after we arrive. “Baby sis!” he crows at the sight of me, wrapping me in a hug.

I return his hug, used to this kind of behavior from him, and pat his back. “Hey, Dev. How was the game?”

He pulls back, his face slack with shock. “How was the game? Are you telling me you didn’t come?” He places a hand on his chest, his face morphing into a dramatic approximation of hurt. “You didn’t support your one and only brother?”

Rolling my eyes, I laugh at his theatrics. “Nope. I’m not even sure why you’re surprised. I stopped going to your games your sophomore year of high school.” That was when I finally convinced Mom and Dad to stop dragging me along, and in return, they didn’t force Devon to come to my things anymore, either.

Sure, we care about each other. But not enough to be bored to tears in the name of support. Instead we tell each other about our wins and losses—or the equivalent—and commiserate or cheer on as appropriate.

Devon grins. “Just joking. It was good. We won. I made everyone boop Piggy’s snout for luck again, and it worked just like before.” He runs a hand through his hair, scanning the room, and I turn to see who or what he’s looking for. He turns his grin back on me. “Sorry, sis. Not trying to be rude. But I’m hosting tonight, after all.”

“Oh, of course.” I make an expansive gesture toward the party. “Don’t feel like you have to babysit me. I’ve got Jenna. We’ll be fine.”

He turns his smile on Jenna, holding out his hand for hers. “Ah, yes. The illustrious Jenna. So glad you could make it.” When she places her hand in his, he uses it to pull her close and say in the closest he can come to a stage-whisper in this noise, “Next time make her come to the game again. It’s good for her.” Then he lifts Jenna’s hand to his mouth and kisses it before releasing her and moving into the crowd.

When she turns to face me, eyebrows raised, I hold up a finger. “Don’t even think about it. We’ve been over this plenty of times before. While I’m not forbidding you from dating my brother if you’re both actually interested in each other, I absolutely refuse to be any kind of go-between. Got it?”

Jenna holds up one hand like she’s swearing in court. “I promise, I will never make you a go-between for your brother and me.” She points in the direction where he’s already disappeared. “That was hot, though. You have to give me that, right?”

I wrinkle my nose. “Gross. That’s my brother. I am categorically incapable of finding him or anything he does hot. You’ll have to run that by someone else.”

With a roll of her eyes, she laughs and links her arm with mine. “Noted. And don’t worry. I have no intention of trying to get with your brother. I know he’s like that with everyone.”

He reappears across the room, and we can see him flirting with a group of girls. “He really is,” I confirm. “He has been for as long as I can remember.”

As far as I know, he doesn’t have the same kind of reputation as Andrew Maloney, who’s also supremely flirty with everyone in his vicinity—which is why it’s difficult to take him at all seriously—but I think he could if he decided to.

“Come on,” Jenna says, tugging me along. “Let’s go find your boyfriend.”

“He’s *not* my boyfriend,” I protest immediately. She’s been calling him that since she found out we were texting on Wednesday, and it’s only gotten worse since he texted me after the game. I already knew they won, actually,

because Andrew told me. And he also gave me grief for not attending the game and supporting *him*. As though that were something I should be expected to do.

When I showed Jenna that text, she went, “Ooooooh,” in a sing-song voice like a middle schooler. “He wants to be your boyfriend.” I swear to god, the next thing out of her mouth was going to be, “Sadie and Andrew sitting in a tree K-I-S-S-I-N-G,” but I managed to distract her with his follow up text telling me to meet him in the backyard by the bench like last time.

“Well, whatever he is,” she says, “he’s likely been waiting a long time by now.”

“Who’s fault is that?” I sputter.

She flips her hair over her shoulder. “Ours. Don’t worry. It was on purpose. We’re worth waiting for.”

Any response I might’ve given—like not wanting to play those types of games—is lost because she’s not paying attention, instead dragging me by the hand through the crowd to get to the back door.

Once we’re outside, we pause to look around.

As promised, Andrew’s waiting by the bench. But just like before, he’s not alone. There are at least four girls surrounding him, as well as a few guys, and one chick is clinging to his arm and pressing her boobs against him.

Jenna lets out a soft, “Daaamn.” She shakes her head. “Well, better to know now.”

I try to laugh, but it comes out choked. “Know what? That he flirts and hooks up with women at parties? It’s not like I *didn’t* know that before, Jenna. That’s how I met him, after all.”

“True. But he invited you. That’s just cold.”

Just then he turns his head, spotting me, and a grin splits his face. He shakes off the other girl like she’s nothing and makes his way toward me. That’s when I notice he has two cups in his hand. As he nears, he holds it out to me. “Sadie! You made it! I was starting to wonder if you were going to stand me

up. Here. I got you a drink.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

Andrew

SADIE ACCEPTS THE CUP I OFFER HER QUIETLY, PEERING DOWN INTO IT.

“It’s trash can punch,” I tell her. “One of the guys decided we needed it tonight.”

That has her wrinkling her nose and looking up at me. “Was it actually made in a trash can?”

Laughing, I shake my head. “No. We stole one of the big buckets they use to mix up gatorade for us from school and that’s what we used. That’s just what it’s called.”

When I turn to say hi to her friend, I’m startled to find her glaring daggers at

me. She crosses her arms, staring me down.

“Uh.” I hook my thumb over my shoulder. “Do you want me to get you some punch too?”

“No,” she says slowly, clearly, deliberately. “I want you to explain what all that was.” She gestures in the direction of where I was waiting for Sadie.

Raising my eyebrows, I glance back at the group I just left. “Uh ... a party?”

“Seemed to be pretty *friendly*.” She makes the last word into an accusation.

I glance at Sadie, who appears equally interested in my answer, if less angry. “Umm ...” I’m not quite sure what they want me to say.

Sadie’s friend lets out a dramatic sigh. “The girl.” She tosses a hand out, pointing at the group again, clearly not worried about being rude. “She was all up on you, rubbing her boobs against you. Are you seriously going to stand here and pretend like you didn’t even notice?”

“Oh.” I look between the two of them, rubbing the back of my neck. Honestly, I didn’t really notice. I have no interest in that girl. I was waiting for Sadie, who I wasn’t one hundred percent sure was going to show, and being nice to the people who chose to wait with me. But chicks press themselves against me at parties a lot. It doesn’t really mean anything. I’m not sure these two will buy that, though.

I spread my hands. “Look. It’s a party. At my house. I can’t exactly tell everyone to piss off and leave me alone. People—women—want to get close to me. I can’t help that I’m a likable guy.” I flash my most charming smile, though it doesn’t seem to work on the friend.

“Jenna,” Sadie says quietly, touching her friend’s arm. “Let it go. It’s fine.”

Jenna looks like she wants to protest, but after a silent exchange with Sadie, she shakes her head and subsides. “Fine,” she mutters. Then she steps closer to me, one finger pointing in my face. “If you break her heart ...” The finishing threat is unvoiced, but hangs in the air, a palpable thing.

“Got it,” I say, holding my hands up in surrender.

What is it about Sadie that makes everyone around her turn protective? Her

parents I understand. What good parents aren't protective of their kid, especially one with such a rough start in life as Sadie had? Even my parents, who don't seem to think I can do anything right, are protective of me. It's kinda fucked up, really, but I know their criticisms stem from a place of trying to protect me from making wrong choices.

Her brother being protective also makes a certain amount of sense. I mean, not that I understand it from personal experience. My brother and I don't get along, and if he ever felt protective of me, that feeling died years ago. But Devon and Sadie obviously have a good relationship, so again, I kinda get it.

But her friend? This is a bit excessive, in my opinion.

Fortunately, Sadie's able to defuse the situation, and her friend subsides. She's still standing with her arms crossed, but she's now looking at the rest of the party instead of at us—though I'm sure she's still paying attention to what we're doing.

I step closer to Sadie. "I'm glad you came."

Her eyes flash with amusement, and I'm not sure ... then I replay the words in my head, and I grin.

That seems to spur her on, and she tosses her hair back, lifting her chin in that way she does when she's decided to be the feisty ballbuster who caught me at the first party. "Not yet I haven't," she murmurs just loud enough for me to hear.

And Jenna too, because she chokes on a laugh, turning to survey us, her eyebrows raised as her gaze lingers on Sadie. "I think I'm going to get some punch. If you can't find me, text me." She holds up her phone and gives it a wiggle before sauntering away.

I watch her melt into the crowd before turning back to Sadie. "If I'd known all it would take was a dirty joke to get your chaperone to leave you alone, I'd have started off with one."

Sadie laughs and shakes her head. "I think it has to come from me. If you'd started off that way, we'd've had a harder time shaking her."

"Noted." Stepping in closer, I tuck her hair behind her ear. It doesn't really

need it, of course, but it's an excuse to touch her.

Her eyes drop to my chest, her cheeks turning pink. That reaction makes me grin. It's that strange dichotomy she encompasses—dirty jokes followed by blushes at the prospect of her innuendo becoming real.

“Would you like to come?” I ask, dipping my head so I can speak directly into her ear, nipping at the lobe as I pull away, enjoying the gratifying shiver the action causes.

Her blush deepens, but she won't meet my eyes. “Um ...” She glances around, looking past me, to the side, everywhere but at me. “I'm ... not sure?” She finally raises her eyes to mine. “What happens after?”

“What do you mean?” After what, exactly?

She looks around again, then back at me. “After ... *after*. We're dressed, we come back down, and then ... you pretend you don't know me anymore? You stop meeting me in the library? We hang out until I'm ready to go home? What is this, Andrew?”

I shrug, because I haven't thought beyond getting her naked in my bed again. Is it possible that once I feel I've redeemed myself I'll be ready to move on? Sure. But I enjoy her company, so I doubt I'll drop her like a hot potato once we both get off.

Sliding my hand down her arm, I tangle my fingers with hers. “I enjoy our study sessions, so no, I won't stop showing up to those. But ...” I bend my knees, catching her eyes, wanting to make sure we're on the same page. “I'm not offering any kind of commitment. I'm not looking for a girlfriend, and based on everything, I didn't think you were looking for a boyfriend. We have fun together. I just want to keep doing that until we're not having fun anymore. Does that work for you?”

Her face solemn, her eyes dart back and forth between mine. “No commitment,” she repeats. “Does that mean you'll sleep with other people?”

I shrug. “Maybe? I dunno, Sadie. I haven't since the last time we were together.” I wave behind me. “That chick earlier? She's not interesting to me. Will I feel differently tomorrow or in a week or a month?” I shrug again. “Maybe? Who knows? You hooked up with me a couple weeks ago without

even wanting to know my name. Is it so different now?”

She seems to hesitate, like maybe she wants to say yes, it is different now. But instead, she shakes her head, the tension leaving her, and she gives me a small smile. “I guess not,” she says.

“Good.” I nudge the bottom of her cup. “Drink up. We want to get you relaxed enough that you’re not stuck in that head of yours, and hopefully we can have a better experience than last time.”

Tapping her cup against mine, she says, “Cheers,” and drinks deeply. With a grin, I raise my own cup and do the same.

This is gonna be fun.

One cup is all it takes to get Sadie giggly and relaxed, her face flushed. And she has no trouble leaning against me, her natural tendency to be reserved released by her lowered inhibitions.

The only trouble—or almost trouble—comes when her brother makes a circuit of the backyard and spots Sadie standing with me. He comes over and throws an arm around my shoulder. “Andrew!” he practically shouts, jolly and tipsy, having a bit of trouble keeping his balance.

If I’m the fuckboy of the group, Devon’s the real partier, making the rounds, checking to be sure everyone’s having fun, drinking plenty himself. He’s friendly and likable at all times, but even moreso when he’s had a few, which he clearly has.

“Hey, Dev,” I say, matching the cheerfulness of his tone. “Having fun?”

“You know it, man,” he says, holding up a hand for a high five. Then he turns to Sadie, expecting the same.

Laughing, she slaps his hand, and he captures hers and yanks her closer for a hug. “Sadie, Sadie, Sadie,” he says, sounding almost contemplative. “It was weird when you weren’t around, but now it’s kinda weird that you are. Know what I mean?”

“Yeah, Dev,” she says. “How ‘bout you hold up more of your own weight, huh?”

He blinks, straightens, looks down at his sister, his arms still resting on her shoulders. “Right. Sorry. Hey, how’s it going? Having fun? Andrew keeping you away from the douchebags?”

She chuckles. “He sure is.”

“Watch out, though,” he loud-whispers. “Some people think he’s a douchebag.”

She glances at me over his shoulder, grinning widely. “Oh yeah? Do you think so?” she asks, her voice vibrating with suppressed laughter.

He thinks about that for longer than I like. “Hey!” I protest.

Turning, he shoots me a mischievous smile. “Nah. I know Andrew’s a good guy. He just doesn’t want a girlfriend. Doesn’t make him a bad guy, does it?” He turns to his sister, seeming genuinely uncertain and wanting her reassurance.

“No,” she replies gamely. “It doesn’t make him a bad guy, as long as he’s not leading anyone on.”

Devon shakes his head emphatically. “He does not. Well, he kinda did once, didn’t you, Andrew?”

Stuffing my hands in my pockets, uncomfortable with this turn in the conversation, I shrug. “Not really. I did my best, but some chicks just don’t want to believe that all I want is some no-strings fun. They think—or maybe just hope—I’ll change my mind. So far, I haven’t.”

Sadie’s studying me over her brother’s shoulder, the smile gone from her face, and I can’t help wondering what she’s thinking, remembering her brief hesitation earlier. Does she wish I would change my mind? Hope she could be the one to make that happen? “Well,” she says, her eyes never leaving mine, “if everyone knows what they’re getting into, they only have themselves to blame if they have unrealistic expectations, right?”

I grunt, something between acknowledgment and agreement. Is that her way

of letting me know she doesn't have more expectations? Or that if she ends up disappointed, she's prepared to shoulder the responsibility herself and not make it my problem? I should feel relieved, but somehow I don't. Not entirely.

Devon nods. "Right. Exactly. That's what I say." He pats Sadie heavily on the shoulder. "Okay. Have fun." He backs away, wagging a finger at both of us. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do." Then he turns and lopes off, heading toward another group of people.

"I feel like we've already done a lot of things he wouldn't do," Sadie says quietly next to me. "Or at least that he wouldn't like knowing *I've* done, particularly with you."

Chuckling, I wrap my fingers around hers. "I think you're probably right." And with that, I decide it's time.

Leading her by the hand, I take Sadie up to my room.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Sadie

I LET ANDREW LEAD ME TOWARD THE HOUSE, NERVES BUBBLING IN MY stomach, trash can punch notwithstanding. Or maybe it's the trash can punch making my stomach feel funny and not nerves at all ...

I feel pleasantly warm and light, though, practically floating up the stairs.

Once the door to his room closes, Andrew pulls me to him, one hand cupping my jaw and tilting my head to the side so he can trail a line of kisses down my neck that make me gasp in delight.

While he might not've gotten me off last time, he definitely knows how to kiss.

More heat floods my body as he takes his time kissing, nipping, soothing with his tongue, his hands roaming my body, first over and then under my clothes.

My shirt comes off, and he sits on the bed, burying his face in my cleavage. And I'm extra glad I went with my pretty pink lace bra. I knew this was a possibility when I was getting ready. I even thought, *I might be having sex tonight*, and so I made sure to be clean and shaved and wearing my prettiest bra and panties.

Is he going to go down on me again? I know that's supposed to do the trick for most women. Maybe it didn't work for me last time because I was just surprised?

"I can practically hear you thinking," he whispers against my skin. "Don't get so wrapped up in your head. Relax and just feel."

His hands span my waist and he sets me back, looking me over in a way that makes me think, *Easy for you to say*. How am I supposed to not get in my head when he's *looking* at me. It makes me self-conscious, very aware of my half naked state and what he might think. Are my boobs okay? The right one is a tiny bit bigger than the left. Can he tell? Will he think that's weird?

Though from the way he's cupping them and kneading them, I'm guessing he's not bothered, at the very least.

When he reaches behind me and unclasps my bra, my arms go up to catch the cups automatically, and I flush when he gives me a wicked grin and nudges them away. Like he thinks I'm being a tease on purpose, when really I'm just ... I don't know. Still feeling self-conscious, I guess. Are my nipples too big? Too small? Normal? I mean, I think they're normal, but it's not like I've gone around inspecting other women's nipples. Andrew gets around, though. He's probably seen hundreds. Thousands. He'd know if mine were weird.

I can't *ask* that, though. That would sound ridiculous. And how do you ask that anyway? It's not like I can just casually go, "So are my nipples weird looking? Or pretty normal?" or, "How do my nipples compare to the other women you've slept with?"

But then he says, "God, you're gorgeous," in an awe-filled whisper when he

finally gets my bra away. He makes quick work of my skirt, pushing it off my hips along with my panties, and encourages me onto his lap with his hands on my hips.

He lets out a groan when I settle against the hard ridge of his dick, the fabric of his shorts scraping my tender skin, sensitizing it. After running his hands up and down my body, he cradles my neck and brings my mouth to his at last, sating me with long, languid kisses until we're both needing more, our bodies moving together in a motion that imitates sex, but isn't quite the thing.

With one arm wrapped around me, he slowly lies back on the bed, bringing me with him. Then he rolls us, reversing our positions. Sitting up on his knees, he tugs off his shirt, his muscles rippling and gleaming in a way that's mesmerizing. He grins when he catches me watching him, preening a bit for my benefit, and I can't help giggling.

"I like when you laugh," he murmurs before capturing my lips again, one hand sliding beneath me, holding me against him as we kiss.

It's different than the first time. He's taking more time with me, making me feel almost like ... he cares? I know that sounds like I think he's an uncaring asshole, but that's not true. It's just that last time it seemed like sex was more of an athletic performance than a way to connect. Something to do that's fun and passes the time, sort of like how we'd make up goofy games as kids, running around and hitting the big, bouncy four-square balls with old racketball rackets we found in my parents' garage. Or how kids will randomly start racing each other at the park for no reason than the joy of running and seeing who's fastest.

But this time, it seems like he wants to connect with me, and while that's nice, it's also unexpected.

Lacing his fingers with mine, he holds my hand as he kisses his way down my body again. *This is it, I think. He's going to go down on me again.*

"Look at me," he commands, his voice gruff when he positions himself between my legs.

Peeling my eyes open, I watch as he dips his head and licks, his eyes bright, never leaving mine.

“Jesus,” I breathe, and he lifts his head and grins—pure, male satisfaction in one expression—before dipping his head and doing it again.

He continues like that for a while, holding eye contact like we’re having some kind of staring contest, and I refuse to be the one who looks away first. Something about it is working for me, though, whether it’s his slow, deliberate dedication to the act or the fact that he’s commanded me to watch him do it, I’m getting more and more turned on.

Eventually he pauses, holding me open with his fingers and looking down at my spread pussy, and all my self-consciousness comes flooding back. Now that he’s not making eye contact, I let my eyes fall closed again. And while it should be easier to focus on what he’s doing to me, somehow I feel more removed than ever.

His fingers slide inside me, moving gently, pressing here and there like he’s searching for something, and he resumes his attention on my clit, but that build-up I was feeling before is lost.

After a bit, he lets out a soft grunt, and I’m not sure if it’s frustration or what, but he keeps his fingers pumping gently in and out of me, his thumb drawing circles around my clit, and he says, “Sadie. Open your eyes.”

When I look at him, he looks almost concerned. “What’s going on? What’s happening in your head?”

I shake my head, both unable and unwilling to explain or even try.

“Does this feel good?” he asks.

“Yes,” I whisper, and he gives me a brief smile.

“Did you like watching me eat you out?”

A blush races up my chest to my cheeks, but an answering flush of heat also flows south, ramping my arousal back up. I nod. “Yes.” Another whisper.

His grin this time is that same smug look from before. “Good. Keep watching then.” He drops back down, licking and sucking for a few more minutes before withdrawing and crawling over me, dropping kisses on his way up my body before giving me a quick kiss on the mouth.

Standing, he strips off the rest of his clothes and reaches for a condom. It's really unfair how gorgeous he is—golden skin, rippling muscles, the V where his torso meets his legs, thick thighs, lightly furred, but the divots between muscle groups still clearly visible. He'd be an awesome live model for an art class.

While I don't have any real frame of reference for peens, his juts out, thick and proud, and I have to admit, it looks quite nice. And it feels nice too. I already know that much, even if I needed to help myself finish in the end.

Reaching down, he strokes himself a couple times, then rolls on the condom before climbing back on the bed and positioning himself between my thighs once more. "Prop yourself up on your elbows," he says.

Giving him a funny look, I do as he asks, then he grips my legs just below my knees and folds my legs back. "Watch," he commands. And he rubs the head of his dick all over my center, making me gasp, then he dips just inside me, coming out and rubbing himself all over me again. He dips inside me once more, a little farther this time, staying a beat longer, then withdraws.

He keeps up this pattern, moving farther inside me and staying a little longer each time, and when I glance up at his face, he simply nods back at what he's doing. "Keep watching," he whispers. So I do. I watch his dick disappear inside me, filling me more each time, until finally he presses all the way inside, and I let out a sigh as though I'd been waiting for this moment for so, so long.

And honestly, I was. I expected this from the first, and he dragged it out, ramping up the anticipation, and I have to admit, it's much hotter than just diving right in and banging away.

But it's also torturous, and I'm getting impatient. Reaching down, I slide a hand between us, desperate for some friction on my clit. Andrew adjusts, propping my feet on his chest with my knees still bent, making sure I have room to move my hand, his fingers digging into the tops of my thighs where he hangs onto me, keeping us connected as he moves in and out.

Then he does something that tilts me a certain way, I'm not sure exactly what or how, but he finds that magical place inside me with his dick, and soon I'm flying over the edge into my orgasm with a quiet gasp. He fucks me through

it, moving my feet out of the way so he can lean over me and take what he needs. I can't decide if it's too much or just right, but soon enough, it's over. He comes with a shout, half collapsing on top of me, lingering for just a moment before reaching between us and pulling out.

He deals with the condom and falls onto the bed beside me, one arm thrown over his head, breathing hard and making a contented sound.

I'm not really sure what to do with myself now. I stare at him as his breathing returns to normal, taking in his closed eyes, the sharp blade of his nose, his full lips that he uses so well. Should I just roll out of bed and get dressed? Leave first so we can slip back into the party without anyone realizing we just hooked up?

But before I can come to any conclusions, his eyes open, and he looks at me, grinning. "Well?" he asks.

My eyebrows jump. "Well what?"

Chuckling, he rolls to his side facing me, propping himself on his elbow. "Well, did that make up for last time?" When I scrunch up my face, he flops onto his back with a groan. "Seriously?" he asks. "What was wrong with that?"

"It's just ..."

He makes a *go on* motion with his hand when I hesitate. "It's just what? What's the problem?"

Sighing, I close my eyes. "I thought *you* were going to make me come. Isn't that supposed to be the deal?"

He props himself up on his elbow again, studying me, and I want to shrink away, but there's nowhere to hide. The cocky, goofy guy I normally get is nowhere to be found. In his place is a serious, contemplative version of Andrew I've never seen before. "I'm not sure there's anything about sex that's so clearly defined. What happens between two people is unique to them. If you get off better doing it yourself, why would I interfere with that?"

I hum, thoughtful. "So sex with me isn't like anyone else?"

He chuckles. “No. And while sometimes, when it’s just mechanical and nothing special, it can feel like it’s the same with a different face, that’s not my preference.”

“Really?” I can’t keep the surprise out of my tone.

“I know what kind of reputation I have. And yeah, I’ve had a lot of hookups. It doesn’t mean I don’t see all those women as individuals, though. And it doesn’t mean I don’t see *you* as an individual. Last time, you swatted me out of the way and took over. Awesome. I want you to get off. If that’s how you make it happen, go for it. Today, I was working my ass off, trying to figure out how to push you over the edge, but you were struggling to relax. The only thing that helped was telling you where to look, then all your attention was absorbed by what we were doing and you couldn’t get too lost in your swirling thoughts. But again, you took care of yourself. I figure that must be what you like.”

I move my mouth from side to side, looking down and avoiding his gaze. “I guess I just thought ...”

“What?” he asks, but it’s prompting more than demanding.

I shake my head.

He trails his fingertips down my arm. “Is sex with me just the same old, same old for you? Nothing unique to me?”

Laughing at how wrong he is, I shake my head. “I wouldn’t say that.”

“What then? You’re giving me a complex now.”

“It’s just ...” I trail off, hesitating. How’s he going to react when he finds out this is only the second time I’ve had sex? Lifting a hand, I plunge ahead. “I don’t exactly have a frame of reference.”

His brows wrinkle. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Covering my face with my hands, I let out a noise that’s part frustration, part nervous energy. “It means”—I pull my hands down—“I haven’t been with anyone else.”

He sits up, turning to face me, shock stamped on his face. “Wait, what?”

I nod.

“You’re a virgin?” he asks, incredulous.

I let out a choked laugh. “Not anymore.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Andrew

THOUGH HER CHEEKS ARE STAINED WITH RED, SHE MEETS MY GAZE ALMOST coolly as she says, “Not anymore.”

“Fuck,” I mutter, pushing myself up to sitting and scrubbing my hands over my face. Of course she’s not a virgin *anymore*. I’ve deflowered her. Sadie. The younger sister of one of my best friends-slash-teammate-slash-roommate.

Fuck. My. Life.

“Hold on a second,” I say, dropping my hands and skewering her with a glare. “At the last party ...”

She sits up too, clutching the blanket to her chest, suddenly concerned with preserving her modesty, apparently. “Look,” she starts, but I hold up a hand to stop her.

“No. It’s my turn. You have the audacity to tell me I don’t live up to the hype when you have literally zero experience before this?” All of this is causing my brain to explode, dust and ash everywhere, and I’m scrambling to try to make sense of the mess and noise. “No, that can’t possibly be true. Or if it is, like you’ve never had a dick in your pussy, you’ve at least fooled around, right?”

The way she won’t meet my eyes is all the answer I need. “Fuck,” I say again.

“Well,” she says primly, scooting to the edge of the bed. “Yes. That was the plan. And we’ve accomplished it.” Her legs go over the edge and she stands. “Twice.” She casts a glance over her shoulder at me, futilely trying to wrap the blanket around her, but one ass cheek still peeks out plus most of her back.

“What are you doing?” I ask, too flabbergasted to make sense of anything right now.

She gives me a withering look. “Getting dressed.” She says it like it should be the most obvious thing in the world.

“Wait. No. Stop.”

Pausing, she merely raises her eyebrows at me, then bends and plucks something off the floor, pinning the blanket to her chest with her chin and shimmying into some article of clothing—her panties if I had to guess.

When she drops the blanket—covering her tits with one arm while she reaches for her bra—I see that I’m right.

Scrubbing my hands over my face again, I stand up and pull on my underwear and shorts. If she’s getting dressed, I want to have some clothes on too before I continue this conversation. Though what exactly I want to say, I’m not sure. I just ... I can’t ...

“Seriously?” I ask, unable to be more articulate than that.

Her tits now nestled snugly in her bra, she crosses her arms and looks at me, waiting until I drag my eyes up to hers before answering. “What exactly are you having difficulty understanding?”

I wave my hands around. “All of it! Virgins don’t come onto guys the way you did, and then they definitely don’t insist on keeping it anonymous.”

“Fat lotta good that did me,” she mutters, stepping into her shorts.

That stops me just as I’m getting warmed up for a really good rant. “Well, I gotta say, if you really wanted to have sex with some nameless guy and have it stay that way, picking up someone at your brother’s house was probably not the best choice. Even if you hadn’t wound up with one of his roommates, chances are high it would’ve been a teammate.”

She whirls around, angry, mouth open and clearly ready to let me have it, but then she takes a breath and pauses. Lets it out. Her shoulders slump, and she shakes her head as she puts her top on. “Ugh. You’re right. I hate to admit it, but Jenna basically said the same thing too.” She finishes straightening her top and waves a hand around. “I don’t know what I was thinking. Well, that’s not entirely accurate. I was thinking it’d be nice to see what all the fuss is about. And then it wouldn’t be such a big deal later on when and if I ever actually date someone.”

That has my brows pulling together. “Are you telling me you’ve never even dated anyone?”

Another shrug. “I mean, I’ve been on a few dates, I guess, but nothing serious.” She casts a glance toward the door. “Not with Devon around. Even when he wasn’t around, his shadow still lingered. No one wanted to touch me.” She gives me a look that’s amusement tinged with sympathy. “In fact, I think you’re the only friend of his who’s had the balls to defy Devon’s clear directive not to touch me. Sure, he wants his friends to be nice to me. He’s not a dick. But he doesn’t want any of his friends dating me, and since everyone wants to be Devon’s friend, well ...” She lifts her hands and lets them fall in a gesture of helpless resignation. “Doesn’t leave much of anyone for me. At least not anyone I’d want to date. Hence keeping it nameless, because there was a chance you’d’ve already heard of me, and I didn’t want to risk ruining my one and only chance.”

I'm not sure how to respond to any of that information. She sounds so dejected that I want to offer her comfort, but I don't think I can say anything to make that better.

She gives me a forced smile. "So it was refreshing when you showed up, shirtless and posturing—literally"—she giggles—"and flirting shamelessly. It made it easy to flirt right back and take you up on all your suggestions. But this"—she gestures at the bed—"everything we did here that night? That was all new for me. All of it. Except for the orgasm. I've had plenty of those, just not with anyone else in the room."

My mouth goes dry at her casual dropping of that tidbit. "You masturbate a lot, huh?" My voice sounds like I swallowed a handful of gravel, which completely destroys the casual tone I was going for.

She laughs. "I don't know about *a lot*, but I know my way around down there." She makes a circle with her hand over her lower abdomen, and I let out an answering chuckle. "Anyway. I should probably be going."

"Whoa. Hang on." I hold out a hand to stop her, and she narrows her eyes, still rooted to the spot. "Now that I know all of that," and frankly, I haven't quite yet pieced my brain back together after her series of revelations, "I feel like you can't possibly decide that you now know all there is to know about sex and you're content to go back to solo sessions for the foreseeable future. Besides, weren't you wanting someone *else* to give you an orgasm? You've done it for yourself plenty, and you wanted to delegate, right?"

Her eyes narrowed, she gives a slow nod.

"Well, you need to show me what you like. And then let me try again."

Her eyes go wide, and she chokes on a laugh. "Show you what I like? You mean masturbate for you?"

Trying and failing to bite back my grin, I nod slowly. "Exactly. I need to see how you like to be touched, or else how will I be able to do the job?"

She arches an eyebrow. "And who says I want you to?"

Stepping closer, I tuck a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "You did," I whisper. "Remember? Just now."

Her eyes widen again, darkening with desire as her nostrils flare on her indrawn breath.

“I’ll come to your place next time,” I continue, my voice still quiet. “I’ll text you my schedule, and you tell me when you want to hook up again, okay?”

It takes a minute, and I almost think she’s going to say no, but then she nods. “Okay,” she breathes, sounding almost like she can’t help herself and she’s agreeing against her better judgment.

Hell, I’m going against my better judgment here too. But something about the knowledge that I’m the only man who’s touched her only makes me want to do it more.

I end up ducking out of the party early, bailing to take a walk in the cool September evening. I’ll help clean up when I get back—it’s not like the real cleanup will happen before tomorrow anyway. And if anyone notices I’m gone, well ... they’ll probably assume I’m with a chick.

I wouldn’t mind being with a chick. One specific chick, at least. She’s the reason I’m out walking anyway. I need some time and space to get my head on straight.

“I still can’t fucking believe she’s a virgin,” I whisper to myself. Well, *not anymore*. The memory of her face, her sardonic tone of voice as she said those words, has me grinning. Only Sadie could deliver that line with that timing and not sound patronizing or condescending.

Of course she’s not a virgin anymore. She’s had sex twice now. With me.

And I still didn’t make her come.

That rankles more now that I know that she was specifically looking for someone else to give her an orgasm.

I’ve had plenty of those, she said.

Jesus. Now I desperately want to be the one who sends her flying over the

edge next time.

Well, next time I'm involved anyway. Because the actual next time will be when she puts on a show for me.

God, I hope she goes through with it.

The possibility that she might not makes my breath seize in my chest. Which is ridiculous. I don't get tangled up like this about chicks.

But none of them have ever been Sadie.

Maybe I'm a sick bastard for being this hung up on being her first—*and only*—but for whatever reason, I'm not ready to let her go yet.

It's not just that, though. I genuinely enjoy spending time with her, and I look forward to our library study sessions. I like getting to talk to her and seeing how she reacts to the things I bring her. And I like watching her get down to business and focus on her books, able to completely ignore me.

Maybe that's what's different about her. Even though she was obviously interested in me that first night, she's not chasing after me like most of the girls I've sat with in the library or around in general. She's almost indifferent to me, which shouldn't be appealing, but somehow it is.

Is it just that I like the chase?

I mean, I do, but I can't think that's all of it. If it were, since I've caught her—twice—I should be moving on.

No, it's something more. Something specific to Sadie that I find appealing.

Pulling out my phone, I stare at it for a minute, trying to decide if it would be weird to text her now or if I should wait until tomorrow.

Fuck it. Unlocking my phone, I send her a text.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Sadie

ANDREW

I'm free after 6 most nights and we have a bye week next week.

Okay

I STARE AT THE TEXT FROM ANDREW FOR PROBABLY THE HUNDREDTH TIME since he sent it an hour ago. And my pathetic response.

I'm terrible at this. How come I'm so terrible at this?

Oh, right, because I have no practice, and therefore no game.

"Stop it," Jenna says from her spot on the couch next to me. She points at the TV. "You're supposed to be watching the movie to distract yourself,

remember? Or did he respond? What did he say?”

Turning off my phone I tuck it under my thigh. “No. He didn’t respond. Why would he? All I said was, ‘Okay.’ Not exactly something that keeps a conversation going.”

“Well,” she says thoughtfully after a moment. “You’ll see him on Tuesday, right? For your standing library date? If you’re too chicken to do anything sooner, you can always talk to him then.”

I grunt in response, but she does have a point.

“I still can’t believe you hooked up with him again,” she whispers. Then she looks at me and asks at a normal volume, “So are you guys like dating now? Or what, exactly?”

Shrugging, I shake my head. “No. I don’t know. We’re ...” I throw my hands in the air in exasperation. “We’re just us. We study together at the library twice a week because he decided to join me, and now he wants to—” My cheeks flaming, I clamp my lips together to stop myself from telling Jenna the specifics. She knows he wants to see me again—and not just at the library. But I didn’t tell her he wants ... *a show*.

“Show you the ropes?” she fills in.

“Something like that,” I mutter.

She claps. “Look at you! You’ve got your very own sex tutor. Didn’t you tell me about a book you read that was like that recently?”

Pressing my hands to my cheeks, I nod. This conversation is not helping them return to their normal color and temperature. “Yeah. I don’t think this will be that ridiculous, though.”

She scoffs. “I mean, it’s real life, not a romance novel, so I shouldn’t think so. Still.” She gives me a sly grin and wiggles her shoulders. “It’s pretty fun, though, right?”

“Aren’t we supposed to be watching the movie?” I ask, needing to stop this conversation before it goes further. Before I tell her more embarrassing details. Before ... I don’t know. I just don’t want to talk about it anymore.

I'm not sure how I feel about all of it, and having Jenna poking and prodding at me doesn't help.

"Right," she says, turning her attention back to the TV. "Of course."

I know Jenna means well, but talking about this somehow makes it ... I dunno. More difficult to process, at least right now. And I'm trying *not* to think about the fact that Andrew wants me to masturbate for him and already sent me his schedule so we can make it happen.

Apprehension fills my belly with butterflies as I head to the library like normal on Tuesday afternoon. Part of me considered skipping and just not even telling Andrew, but that's cowardly, and he's been nothing but good to me. He's sweet and funny and flirty, and even if that's just how he is and has nothing to do with me, specifically, I have to admit that I enjoy the attention. It's new and different for me. Usually guys go out of their way to make sure I know that they're being friendly—and nothing more—because of my brother. And if they start out at all flirty, once they find out I'm Sadie Marsinko, Devon Marsinko's "baby" sister, that gets immediately shut down.

Not Andrew, though.

He knows exactly who I am and that hasn't changed anything for him. It's refreshing.

Which is why I don't ghost him on Tuesday, and instead show up like normal, despite the fact that I know he's going to ask me when we can hook up again. One thing about Andrew is that he's not at all shy about asking for what he wants.

Based on our first meeting, he can be forgiven for thinking I'm the same way. But the truth is, that night was completely out of character for me, and now I'm trying to navigate my way with a guy who expects that but instead is getting ... me. Normal me, not me trying to pretend I'm a heroine in a romance novel. And even though Jenna delighted in pointing out the similarities between my current predicament and a romance novel set up, I'm less thrilled about those comparisons now that I've found myself embroiled

in it in reality.

I get to our table first, which is normal, but does nothing to relieve my anxiety about this.

What if he doesn't show up?

The thought rockets into me out of nowhere. It hadn't occurred to me until just now as I'm pulling out a chair and setting my backpack in it before pulling out the one next to it to sit in. Given how nervous I am about seeing him, you'd think the idea of him not showing up would fill me with hope or the possibility of relief, but instead it only makes my dread worse.

Yes, I'm apprehensive about how today's conversation will go, but it's also mixed with giddy anticipation when I stop and actually take stock of all my feelings. The idea of him skipping today?

That just makes me sad.

But my moment of trepidation is blessedly short-lived, because minutes later, Andrew comes strolling around the stacks, projecting his usual aura of cocky self confidence.

What must it be like to move through the world that way?

Nice, probably.

He gives me a grin and lifts his chin in a nod of acknowledgment before setting his backpack on the floor, pulling out a chair, and dropping into it. No snacks today. Does that mean I've annoyed him by not really responding to his text the other night and this is his way of showing it?

Resting his elbows on the table, his chin on his clasped hands, he gives me a once over, clocking everything about my appearance in one quick appraisal. "So," he starts, but seems to stop at just that one word.

Folding my hands on top of my closed laptop on the table in front of me, I parrot, "So."

That makes him grin, a quick flash of humor that warms me. I like making him smile or laugh. It's not difficult—he has an easy smile and he's not stingy with it—but it's rewarding all the same.

Dropping his hands to his lap, he looks me over again. “I sent you my schedule. I thought the understanding was that you’d pick a time.”

I hum my acknowledgment of that statement.

Chuckling, he shakes his head. “That’s not an answer, Sadie.”

I spread my hands in front of me. “What do you want me to say?”

He lowers his voice and leans in. “I want you to say, ‘How does Thursday at seven sound?’”

Cheeks flaming, I force myself to hold his gaze. “How does Thursday at seven sound?” My mind races through Jenna’s schedule. Because the deal was that we’d meet in my room. Will she be mad if I schedule this?

She doesn’t have evening classes, but what if she needs to write a paper?

“What’s going on?” he asks, concern lacing his voice. “If you really don’t want to ...” He leans back in his chair, his face falling in genuine disappointment.

“No!” I protest quickly, reaching a hand out as though to stop him from leaving, though he’s made no move to do that. “I’m just worried my roommate might be upset if I schedule something without talking to her first.”

His expression brightens, and he reaches for my hand, his thumb sweeping across my palm. “Well, let’s call it a tentative date, then. If your roommate gets pissed, then find out when works for her and let me know.” He squeezes my hand to get me to raise my eyes to his—they’ve been locked on the sight of his hand holding mine. “But actually text me this time, okay?”

Coloring, I offer him a small smile. “Okay.”

He squeezes my hand again before releasing it. “It’s a date.”

It’s a date.

Those words haunt me for the next two days. And when I see Andrew in the library during the day on Thursday, he's extra smirky, tells me he's looking forward to this evening, and offers to pick up something for dinner before he heads over.

Of course, Jenna has no problem with heading to the library for a couple of hours tonight, especially since she's Team Andrew all the way. Or at least, Team Sadie and Andrew. Much as she may have teased me about still being a virgin a few weeks ago, she's excited that I'm having this experience now.

I am too, even if it does all seem really surreal.

This isn't how things were supposed to happen, after all. I was supposed to bang him and never see him again. And even if I did—because realistically, hooking up with a random dude at one of my brother's team parties means I would likely bump into the guy again even if I hadn't actually thought that through at the time—by that point, he'd know I'm Devon's sister and immediately be uninterested in anything more with me.

Plus, Andrew's not supposed to be the type of guy who ever wants more with anyone. So everything about this is completely unexpected and unplanned.

Except, now Andrew and I *are* making plans. And following through on them.

The butterflies resume their occupation of my belly as seven o'clock draws closer. I take my time getting ready, making Jenna stay to help me pick out an outfit after my shower.

"Like it matters," she says, sitting on my bed while I flip through my closet, contemplating and discarding option after option and only occasionally holding something up for her opinion. "It's just going to end up on the floor within minutes of his arrival, right? That's the whole plan? Just stay in your robe."

She gestures at the purple, fuzzy robe currently wrapped around me. I look down on it and shake my head. "No. Hard pass. I need to wear something ..."

"Sexy?" she supplies when I don't finish the sentence.

Shrugging, I nod. The problem is, sexy isn't really part of my wardrobe

aesthetic. Cute girl next door is more my vibe.

With a sigh, Jenna pushes off the bed and steps up next to me. Flipping through my closet, she stops on a short floral sundress with spaghetti straps that's almost too small now. Pulling it out, she holds it up. "This. No bra. Sexy thong if you want to wear anything underneath."

I almost choke on my own spit at the idea of going commando under the dress that barely covers my ass. Even just a thong seems almost unbearably risqué.

Rolling her eyes, she thrusts the dress into my arms. "Again, you won't have it on long. And you'll be in our room the whole time. It's not like I'm suggesting you go to the movies wearing this and nothing else."

I suppose she has a point, both about the fact that I won't be wearing it long after Andrew arrives and the fact that I won't be going anywhere. Still. Wearing so little feels scandalous.

Maybe that's good, though? Maybe it'll help get me into the right mindset to be able to do what I know Andrew wants.

And while I know I could say no—and part of me definitely wants to—doing something so illicit has an undeniable appeal. Like at the party when I decided to lose my virginity to a random guy. No one would ever expect that kind of behavior from me. And while this is more obviously wanton, it's within the safety of my own dorm room.

"Okay," I agree at last, clutching the dress to my chest.

Jenna smirks and leaves the room so I can change.

Digging through my underwear drawer, I find a black lace thong and decide it's likely the sexiest pair of panties I own. I might need to consider adding a few things to my wardrobe if sexy is going to make a more frequent appearance, because I can't go out in public like this, but what if I end up on a real date sometime?

Not with Andrew, I chide myself, because the mental image that immediately popped to mind was the two of us in some imaginary fancy restaurant, him giving me that sexy smile from across a table lit by the warm glow of

candles. He'd look good all dressed up in candlelight.

But despite the fact that he's interested enough in me to keep whatever this is between us going for a while, I'm not silly enough to think he'd actually *date* me. Like for real. He'd probably be the first one to admit that he's not boyfriend material. Between Jenna's bare-bones knowledge of campus gossip and the comments Devon's made, I know enough about Andrew to know that much.

So I push the thought of dating Andrew aside, content with the idea that I'll at least get what I've wanted from this relationship, such as it is, from the beginning. Namely, an orgasm induced by someone else. Because from what I can tell, Andrew's not planning on giving up until that happens.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Andrew

SADIE ANSWERS THE DOOR ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER I KNOCK. LIKE SHE was standing on the other side just waiting. Which is adorable.

Grinning, I step inside, my smile a combination of amusement at her eagerness and just being happy to see her. And once I get a load of what she's wearing, I'm even more happy, my dick already chubbing up and getting ready to go.

Her tits are loose in a short dress with tiny straps that look like I could snap them with a quick flick of my fingers if I wanted to. "Cute dress," I tell her, making sure to insert my full appreciation into my tone.

Her cheeks turn pink, which just makes her even cuter. "Thanks," she

responds just above a whisper, tucking her hair behind her ear and meeting my eyes. “How was practice?”

“Good.” I step all the way into the room, and she closes the door behind me as I set my backpack down on her couch and unzip the top. “Here are the sandwiches I promised this afternoon,” I tell her as I pull the paper-wrapped sandwiches out of my backpack. “You okay with eating first? I’m starving.” After passing her one of the sandwiches, I retrieve a small pastry bag. “Plus cookies for dessert,” I say, holding it up and wiggling it back and forth.

She bites her lip, looking at the sandwich in her hands, and I can tell she wants to say something but is holding back.

“What?” I prompt, curious about the workings of that mind of hers.

She shakes her head, but lifts her eyes to mine. “Oh, nothing. I was just thinking something that made me smile.”

Moving my backpack out of the way, I sit on the couch and pat the seat next to me. “Now you’ve gotta tell me.”

She rolls her eyes, but her blush deepens as she sits down. She unwraps her sandwich, keeping her eyes studiously on her actions, lifts one shoulder, and quietly says, “It’s just, I thought *I* was going to be dessert.”

Chuckling, I lean in and bump her with my shoulder. “Don’t worry. You definitely are.”

I don’t know if it’s the simple act of eating or just her adjusting to my presence in her room, but it doesn’t take long for her to relax, telling me about her day since I saw her earlier and listening as I talk about practice, my teammates, and my own class load.

She must not be very hungry, though—did she eat a big lunch, or is she nervous?—because she only eats about half, then picks at the other half before wrapping it back up in its paper. I, on the other hand, demolish my sandwich in less time than it takes her to eat half.

And since she wants to be dessert, I wait until she’s wrapped up the other half of her sandwich before plucking it out of her lap and setting it on the side table next to me and scooting closer to her.

Her eyes are big and round as I reach for her, but she comes willingly, leaning into my touch and meeting my lips with hers. Our kiss starts out soft, more like a greeting, a reacquaintance, than an obvious invitation to sex.

I've been wanting to do this all week. I thought about kissing her at our library meetings both on Tuesday and today. In fact, I got through far less homework than normal because I was distracted by her lips. Of course, she seemed completely oblivious to that.

I didn't kiss her before this, though, because I don't want to give her the wrong idea. This—a few hookups, a sandwich or two—is all I have to offer. Especially now in the middle of my one and only season as a starter. I can't afford the distraction of a relationship.

But this, here, within these set parameters? This I can do. And here I get to kiss her as much as I want in the short time we have.

Because how many more times will we have together? Today and maybe once more, depending on how things go?

I might be little more than a dumb jock, but I'm not dumb enough to think she'll keep going for this when it's all I can offer. And while it's surprising that I haven't felt the urge to move on yet, I know myself well enough to realize it's only a matter of time.

So I won't do anything to make her think we could be more than this—a few friendly fucks and some study sessions, though I don't intend to give up the study sessions even after I decide to hook up with other chicks. I enjoy that time with her in the library too much. But now that I know she came to me a virgin hoping I could show her the best of partnered sex, I feel the need to make good on that previously unknown expectation.

She deserves that much, at the very least. And I don't have the reputation I have for nothing.

After making out on the couch long enough that she's giving as good as she gets, I pull back, taking in her swollen lips and lust-drunk eyes, and whisper, "You ready to show me your toys?"

Her flushed face gets pinker and she moves away from my hands, but she nods and stands, extending a hand to me.

Taking it, I stand as well, and she leads me into her room. Glancing around, I take in the twin bed, dresser, bookshelf, and desk. She has a few framed paintings and posters on the walls, with a few others on the floor leaning against the wall in the corner. She clearly hasn't quite finished decorating her room yet.

Going to the small closet, she rummages around for a moment then pulls out a little box and flips the lid back with a Vanna White flourish. Inside, she has a few different toys, including a small bullet vibe, a respectably sized realistic dildo, and a couple others that I'm assuming are vibrators of some type, but their specific use isn't readily obvious just from looking. At least, not to me.

Meeting her eyes, I gesture to the bed. "Wanna show me your favorite?"

Her flush has made it all the way to her chest. Biting her lip, she selects one of the vibrators and steps over to the bed, where she finally meets my eyes. "Could we ... I dunno. Make out some more first? It feels weird to me to just start masturbating. Are you going to sit in my desk chair and study what I'm doing like I'm at the gynecologist or something?"

I raise an eyebrow. "Your gynecologist visits sound like they might need to be reported to the medical licensing board. And then maybe the police."

She lets out a laugh, closing her eyes and covering her face with her free hand. "Oh my god. That's not what I meant."

Closing the distance between us, I circle her wrist with my fingers and tug her hand from her face, then drop a soft kiss on her lips. "I know. And yes, we can do whatever you need. I want you to feel comfortable. And I just want to know how to make you feel good. You want that too, right?"

Her eyes open, and she nods. "Yeah."

"Then let's make you feel good," I whisper, dropping a kiss on her neck, my fingers going to the hem of her dress and lifting.

She raises her arms and ends the kiss to duck out of the fabric, and then she's in front of me wearing nothing but a tiny scrap of black lace that barely covers anything, her perfect tits topped with hard little nipples just begging for my touch.

With my hands on her hips, I back her up until she's right in front of her bed, then dip my head and tongue her nipples one at a time. She gasps, her fingers clutching at my hair like she's using her grip on me to anchor herself.

When I straighten, she kisses my mouth. There's a soft thud, and I glance behind her to see the vibe on her bed, and she's reaching for my shirt, tugging it up. Obediently, I bend and help her get it off.

"There," she murmurs, dropping the shirt on the floor, her eyes on my chest. "That's better."

Not to be outdone, I hook a finger into the waist of her panties and start to drag it down. Her flush deepens, but she helps me get them off and immediately reaches for the waist of my pants.

I catch her hand before she can start pulling them down, and she meets my eyes, confusion in hers. "This is about you," I say in answer to her unspoken question.

Her tongue darts out and wets her lips. "I want you naked, too, though," she says.

I hesitate for barely more than a heartbeat before toeing off my shoes and shoving my pants and underwear off. Yes, it's easier to maintain control when I have clothes on, but honestly, if a hot chick wants my clothes off, who am I to object?

Her gaze wanders appreciatively over my body, and when I stroke myself, her lips part on a quiet gasp.

"On the bed," I gasp, the command coming out almost harshly. But I've been dying imagining this since I floated the idea last weekend. And now we're here, I'm running out of patience.

Her eyes snap to mine, flaring, but then she sinks onto the bed, scooting so her back is against the wall. With a hiss of discomfort, she flinches away, then grabs a pillow and stuffs it behind her, leaning back against it and getting comfortable.

As tempting as it is to grab her desk chair and plant myself front and center, she clearly doesn't want that, so I step closer, running my hands over the

outsides of her closed thighs. She gazes up at me, her eyes still wandering from my face, to my chest, down to my cock, and back again, like she's not sure where she should focus. With gentle pressure, I part her knees and lean down to kiss her on the mouth. She responds immediately, sucking in a breath and opening for me, tangling her tongue with mine.

I let my hands roam over her skin, then fumble around until I find the vibrator, placing it on her belly and straightening. "If you don't want me in the desk chair, where should I sit?" I ask, my fingers now trailing up and down the insides of her thighs.

When all I get from her is, "Um ..." I lean down for another kiss.

"I'll just stay here," I whisper against her lips. "Do what feels right."

"Kay," she whispers back, kissing me again.

When I feel her hand creep between us and down to the promised land, I break off the kiss, resting my forehead against hers and watching her as she pets her pussy with her slim fingers. She's breathing hard, whether from nerves or arousal, I'm not sure. Even if I didn't know the full extent of her experience, or lack thereof, I'd be able to tell this is something she's never done before. The fact that she's game despite her nerves makes me like her even more. While I don't have a problem with people knowing their preferences and boundaries, being with someone who's adventurous is exciting. I love testing my limits and trying new things, and I've never really found anyone who's as up for that as I am.

Maybe I've finally met my match in Sadie, though.

I'm quickly distracted by the way she sighs as she circles her clit with two fingers. Moving to her side, I sit on the bed, keeping a hand on her leg so it hopefully feels less like a performance for her and more like something we're both part of. I watch, mesmerized as she parts her pussy lips and brings the vibrator to her pink clit.

She arches immediately, and I glance up at her face. She has her eyes closed, her lower lip caught between her teeth as she writhes on the bed, her free hand coming up to her head but not finding anything to cling to.

On instinct, I catch her hand in mine, threading our fingers together. Her eyes

flutter open and I squeeze her hand before we both return our focus to what she's doing between her thighs.

She's so fucking hot like this, flushed and writhing, completely lost to sensation. And I have to admit that it's a different experience to how she's been with me the last couple of times. She was more passive, more uncertain, even that first night when she was clearly on board with everything leading up to the point where our clothes came off. Of course, knowing that was her first time, that makes sense now.

But this masturbating woman in front of me knows exactly what she wants and how to get there.

Her breath comes faster, and I hear the motor of the vibrator whirring faster as she bumps up the speed, moving it in tight circles.

God, I want to slide between her legs and slip my fingers inside her. Fuck her with my tongue. Something more than just sitting here watching.

My hand goes to my aching dick, stroking myself slowly as I watch her abs tighten, her thighs straining as she pants and sighs and comes with an explosive cry, her hand squeezing mine, her thighs clamping shut around her hand, the vibe still whirring.

After a second she pulls it out and the motor stops, her legs falling open again, her whole body relaxed.

She turns her head to the side, her eyes glazed, her skin still flushed, her mouth open to say something. But when she notices where my hand is and what I'm doing, her gaze sharpens, she releases my hand, and pushes herself upright.

When I lean in for a kiss, she evades me. "No," she says quietly. "It's my turn to watch."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Sadie

ANDREW'S HAND STILL, AND I MAKE AN ENCOURAGING MOTION. "NO, NO. Don't stop." My eyes flicker up to his. "You got to watch me. Now it's my turn to watch you."

He seems a little stunned by my request, but he recovers quickly, that sexy grin I've come to know and love taking over his face. "You want a show?" he asks.

My chin dips in a nod, and he resumes stroking himself in earnest, his thumb swiping over the bead of precum leaking from the head of his dick and rubbing it in, using it as lube.

Part of me thinks I should get some lotion or something and offer it to him,

but I don't want to break the spell of the moment. Watching him is fascinating. The way the head of his dick appears and disappears behind his hand, the way his breathing gets harsher, his hips straining, the muscles of his torso, thighs, and arms standing out.

It's my own live porno, and I'm loving every second of it.

When my eyes wander up to his face, I find him watching me through slitted eyelids. Something about that makes this whole thing a thousand times hotter.

Should I have looked at him while I was using my vibe?

But I push that tiny spark of anxiety aside. He obviously enjoyed the show. I mean, look at him.

"Fuck," he moans in a whisper. "You're so fucking hot, Sadie. Do you see what you do to me?"

My eyes track back down to where his hand moves faster. He leans back, propping himself up on his elbow, his hips undulating like he's fucking his hand, and I feel a new surge of arousal. Which is bonkers, because I just came seconds ago, but this guy is turning me on all over again.

I'm gonna have to take care of myself again once he leaves.

He makes a sound that's half whimper, half groan and pushes into his hand, come spurting onto his belly.

His head drops back, his eyes closed, his chest heaving as he catches his breath. After a moment, he looks down at his hand, his abs curling as he takes a look at his mess.

I quickly reach for a box of tissues, pulling out a few and handing them to him before holding out the box in case he needs more. He gives me a grateful smile and wipes himself off, grabbing another tissue to wipe off his hand as he sits up. "Thanks."

"Of course. No problem. There's a trash can in the corner over there." I gesture at my desk, and he gives a quick nod of acknowledgment before disposing of the tissues. Then he bends and grabs his clothes off the floor, tossing them on the bed and separating out his underwear before stepping

into them.

Oh. He's getting dressed. Which I guess means he's leaving.

Not wanting to seem like I expected anything different—and I don't know that I did, exactly, it's more that I didn't really think about what would happen *after*—I scramble off the bed, pick up my panties, and pull them on. Instead of putting the dress back on, I move to my drawer and pull out a pair of soft joggers and a tank top and get dressed.

Andrew looks me up and down as he pulls his shirt down over that lickable torso. "Cute," is all he says.

My nose wrinkles involuntarily, and he laughs. "Isn't cute a compliment?" he asks, sitting back on my bed and putting his shoes on.

I shrug. "Sure. But ..." I shouldn't complain. I don't mean to, honestly. It was a thoughtless reaction, because obviously he doesn't *only* think I'm cute. The last half hour should be proof enough of that.

"But what?" he prompts when I don't elaborate.

Rolling my eyes, I cross my arms. "It'd just be nice to be something else sometimes."

Standing, his eyes bright with amusement, he steps in front of me. "For instance?"

I press my lips together and shake my head. I'm not trying to fish for compliments. I really wish he'd just let this go.

His voice drops half an octave. "Sexy, maybe?"

I tilt my head like I'm indifferent, but he can tell he's on the right track. Bending, he kisses the side of my neck. "Don't worry, Sadie. You're unbearably sexy too." Then he kisses me on the mouth and steps back. "Let's do this again. Is it easier for you to come to mine next time? There's a party on Friday that's not at our house, for once. We can go? Or I can put in a quick appearance and then meet you back at my place if you prefer?"

"Oh, uh." I blink at him, trying to figure out what the best answer is. "The last one, I think? Meet at yours?"

He flashes me a quick grin. “Perfect. I’ll text you. Oh, and be sure to bring your toys.” And with that, he’s gone.

After Andrew leaves, I flop back on my bed, not sure what to do with myself. Grabbing my phone, I check the time. He was only here for about an hour.

Something about it feels like a bit of a letdown. And any arousal I’d felt watching him jerk himself off dried up when he left so suddenly.

Is this what hookups are normally like?

I mean, I’ve heard the phrase wham-bam-thank-you-ma’am and *hit it and quit it*, so I guess it’s not necessarily *abnormal*.

Though I’m not sure what happened with Andrew qualifies for the second one, because isn’t that when you only hook up with someone once? And this is the third time and there’s at least one more happening this weekend. So no quitting happening here. At least not yet.

Jenna’s comment about my situation with Andrew being like one of those love tutor romances I like reading floats through my brain. The difference is those always have some kind of conversation where the two characters agree that one will teach the other about sex, and typically, there’s also a specified end date. Like, once they complete all the “lessons,” the less experienced character will be ready to go out into the world and date with confidence.

Of course, they always end up together. It’s a romance novel trope, after all. It wouldn’t be satisfying if they *didn’t* end up together.

Andrew and I have never had that kind of conversation. He’s not trying to “teach” me anything. In fact, today was supposed to be about *me* teaching *him*. So this is obviously not some kind of real life love tutor situation.

Plus, there’s no chance Andrew and I are going to live happily ever after.

Rolling onto my stomach, I text Jenna to give her the all clear, then get off my bed and straighten my room, tossing the dress I had on in my laundry hamper, cleaning my toys and putting them away, just generally doing my

best to keep myself busy because I don't want to sit and wallow in my feelings about whatever's happening between Andrew and me.

I'm confused.

I like him. Like, I get excited to see him at our library study sessions, and the idea that he might eventually get bored with me and give them up makes me unaccountably sad, which is uncomfortable because those sessions were supposed to be just for me anyway. I hadn't invited any of my friends to join me on purpose. I'm not *supposed* to want someone else to join me. Yet having Andrew there makes my week better. Those two days a week I get to see him give me something to look forward to, and I don't like even thinking about that stopping.

Even though I wasn't sure about a repeat performance after our first hook up, his persistence and the fact he obviously cares about my pleasure also raises my estimation of him.

There's also the fact that he's the first guy who's continued to show interest in me even after finding out that Devon's my brother. And that counts for a lot.

He seems to like me, too. He sought me out, after all. And he's the one who keeps pushing for more hookups.

But then he disappears as soon as we both orgasm. I mean, at least it's after we *both* do, I suppose. I've heard plenty of stories of guys who get their rocks off and leave their partners hanging. Though if he'd been like that, with no real effort to help me get mine, no way would I have gone back for more.

I guess at the parties, it made sense that we wouldn't linger. Especially considering the parties were at his house, which is also my brother's house. Any time we spend together there comes with the risk that Devon will see us and figure out there's something happening. And while it's ridiculous, he'll lose his shit. Because that's what my whole family does any time I embark on anything remotely risky.

Not that having sex with Andrew is all that risky. We use condoms. And Andrew's a good guy.

But for whatever reason, me having a relationship is seen as a risk by my

parents and my brother. Me living on campus *in the same town I grew up in* was too risky last year, and only months of pleading got my parents to agree for this year, plus having Jenna over for dinner near the end of last year so they could meet her before approving of me moving in with her.

And while I could technically just announce that I'm leaving, I'd have to be willing and able pay all my own bills, and I'm not quite there yet.

Though maybe I would be if me getting a job wasn't also seen as too much ...

Even if I worked, though, I wouldn't be able to afford to go to school full time and pay for everything with a part time job. Not to mention the loans ...

As it is, my parents saved up for college for Devon and me, and with scholarships and the college fund, I don't have to take out much in student loans. So while my family might be overbearing at times, I know it comes from a place of love, and their support makes life easier in the long run.

It just means I don't want Devon to know that Andrew and I are hooking up. It's not like it'll last much longer anyway.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Andrew

I CAN'T WIPE THE GRIN OFF MY FACE AS I LEAVE SADIE'S DORM.

That was fucking *hot*. And I got her to agree to one more time with me. Which means, I get one last chance to give her an orgasm, and dammit, I'm doing it this time, even if it means I need to use toys to help get her off. She's clearly used to that, and if we had endless amounts of time—*like if she were my girlfriend and this was a real relationship instead of a series of hookups*—maybe I could get her relaxed enough and used to me enough to make her come with my tongue or my fingers or both.

But the fact that we've made it this long is already practically a record for me. It's definitely the most times I've been with one chick in quite a while.

Plus, even with repeats, they weren't usually consecutive. There were other hookups in between. I've never pretended to be monogamous, after all.

I would be, if I were open to an actual relationship. And sometimes, especially after hanging with some of the guys who *are* in relationships—Dylan, for example, and his girlfriend Charity—the idea seems tempting.

In fact ...

Pulling out my phone, I shoot him a text.

Hey. You busy?

DYLAN

Maybe. Depends on who's asking

Me, obviously. I need help with something

Where? Do I need a shovel?

Lol what? No. I just need advice

Right. Sure. Just finishing dinner. Come over whenever

Dylan answers the door right away when I get there, opening it and gesturing me inside. I poke my head in and look around before hesitantly stepping inside.

“What's your problem, dude?” he asks, laughing at me.

Grinning, I shake my head. “Nothing. Just making sure I'm not walking in on anything I shouldn't be.”

He rolls his eyes. “Like I'd tell you to come over if that were likely. That only happens when you show up unannounced to take a piss.” He's referring to the time I caught him and his girlfriend engaged in some kind of kinky role play back at the beginning of their relationship. They were keeping it hush hush for some reason, and that's how it all came out.

I hold up my hands in surrender. “Never can tell with you these days. I'm just being cautious.”

“The maid's outfit is retired,” Charity calls from the next room. “Quit being

weird, or I'll make you go somewhere else."

"She'll do it too," Dylan whispers. "Don't be a dick to my girlfriend."

I hold up three fingers. "Scout's honor."

That makes him laugh. "Like you were ever a Boy Scout."

Dropping my hand, I shrug. "I did my time as a Cub Scout in elementary school." That was when my brother Ryan and I were still close, when everything I did wasn't compared to him. We started together in the same Pack when I was in Kindergarten and he was in third grade. It was fun, having this thing that we were both part of, but since we were different ages, we were in different Dens, so it was like we were together but still our own people.

I think that was maybe the last time that was true. By the time I got to fifth grade, he was deep into Boy Scouts, moving through the ranks with his eye on Eagle Scout, and I could already tell everyone expected me to follow the same path. Except it was too much. Too much time, too much effort, too much *pressure*. Even at ten years old, I felt it.

I just wanted to have fun. Cub Scouts was fun—campouts and learning to whittle and going to the big events where we got to canoe and race pinewood derby cars and hang out with other kids. But after Ryan left, it became less fun. We weren't together, and suddenly it was about living up to his example instead of being my own person.

It sucked.

So I went out for football and left the scouting to Ryan. That was his thing. I needed my own. And the only way to get that was for it to be something he didn't do at all.

"Really?" Dylan asks, distracting me from my trip down memory lane. "Huh. I wouldn't have pegged you as the type."

"You wouldn't peg me at all," I mutter, and he laughs, taking the deflection in stride.

"You're right." He leads me into the kitchen where he grabs a couple bottles

of water out of the fridge and holds one out to me. “Since I don’t need a strap on.”

I laugh as I crack open the water bottle. “True. And while I’m open to a lot of things, I’m not sure how I feel about getting fucked in the ass, by a guy with a dick or a chick with a strap on.”

Still grinning, he takes a healthy swallow of his water. “That’s fair.” He points at me. “Just to be clear, I wasn’t offering.”

“Aw, c’mon, man. If I’d let anyone do it, it’d be someone like you.”

That has him choking on his water, his lips still curled in a grin as he grabs a towel to mop up the result of his spit take. “Right. So, is that what you wanted help with? Figuring out how you feel about getting fucked in the ass?”

Still grinning, I shake my head. “Nah, man. I can sort that out on my own. Or maybe with a hot chick who’s into that sort of thing. Either way, that’s not what I wanted to talk about.”

He studies me briefly. “Is there a hot chick who’s into that sort of thing?”

Brows wrinkling in confusion, I shrug. “I mean, probably? Somewhere, anyway.”

“But no one’s propositioning you for that?”

“Nope.”

“Is there a hot chick propositioning you for something else?”

Scrunching my face, I scratch my nose. “I wouldn’t say she’s propositioning me.” I mean, she was pretty forward the first time we were together, but I’m still the one who moved us to the bedroom. She just insisted on anonymity. At least at the time.

He points at me, triumphant. “So there *is* a chick? I told Charity there was, but she didn’t think you’d be here about some kind of relationship problem.” He raises his voice. “Hear that, Spitfire? I was right! Now you have to pay up!”

“You guys had a bet going?” I ask, incredulous, looking between Dylan and Charity as she walks into the room, arms crossed, scowl in place.

“Seriously, Andrew? You’re here for advice about a girl? You?” When I don’t respond except to shrug, she drops her arms and sighs. “Well? Who is she? What’s the problem? Is she trying to rope you into a relationship against your will? But you learned that ghosting people is wrong and hurtful and you don’t want to do that this time?”

Oof. Ouch. I deserve that one. Her best friend wanted to date me, and despite my efforts to discourage her—though I guess I didn’t try *that* hard—we ended up hooking up after a double date with Charity and Dylan and then I didn’t talk to her again.

She seems to have recovered, though. She was at our house party after the first game, and she and Caden seemed to be pretty chummy. A lot more than just roommates, if you ask me.

“No,” I mutter. “That’s not the issue.” I clear my throat. “She’s not angling for a relationship. In fact, I’m the one who’s been pursuing her.” Because if I’m being honest, that’s what I’ve been doing the whole time. And the fact that I feel like I’m the only one making much effort has me feeling ... out of sorts. But I can’t tell if it’s because I’m just used to girls chasing me or if it’s because she genuinely would rather I left her alone.

Though if she felt that way, why wouldn’t she just say so? Why agree to hook up with me at all?

The look of shock on Charity’s face is almost comical. “Wow,” she says quietly. “Who would’ve guessed the perpetual fuckboy with women falling into his lap—sometimes literally—would find someone he has to put in effort to pursue?”

I don’t even flinch at that assessment. She doesn’t say it as an insult, and we all know it’s the truth.

She pulls out a stool at the breakfast bar and boosts herself onto it, making a rolling motion with her hand. “So? Who is she? Do we know her? What’s she like? Does she have a magical vagina? Did she enchant you, and that’s why you’ve suddenly changed? Or did you get a head injury over the summer that

I didn't hear about?" She darts a glance at Dylan, who shakes his head at her snark.

"What?" she says, holding her hands palms up in the universal gesture of, *What'd I do?* The smug grin she can't quite suppress sort of ruins the effect, though.

"No, I didn't get a head injury," I say with a laugh, starting with the easiest question, especially since it's a joke. I'm pretty sure. "And no, she didn't put a spell on me or anything." I furrow my brow. "I don't think she did, anyway. That kind of thing isn't real." I shake my head, dismissing that and ignoring Charity's smirk. "And I don't know if you know her." Looking at Dylan, I ask, "Have you met Sadie, Devon's sister?"

His eyebrows climb his forehead. "Devon Marsinko? Outside linebacker?"

I nod.

He shakes his head. "No. I haven't met her yet. Heard about her, though. And Marsinko seems protective of her. Didn't he move into your house over the summer? You think dating his sister is smart?"

I hold up my hands. "I didn't say we were dating."

Snorting, Charity shakes her head. "No. You just said that you were pursuing her. Meaning you *want* to date her?"

I open my mouth, then pause. *Do I want to date her?*

Closing my mouth, I shrug. "I dunno about *dating* and like a relationship like"—I wave my hands at them—"this. But I like hanging out with her."

"*Outside* of the bedroom?" Charity clarifies.

I nod.

"What about inside?" Dylan asks.

I nod again.

"Motherfucker," he curses. "So you've already hooked up with her." This time it's a statement.

And it's worse than that, but I'm not going to tell him that she was a virgin the first time. Giving them a lopsided grin, I shrug. "I didn't know she was his sister at the time." I swallow. "The first time, anyway," I add quietly.

Dylan shakes his head, and Charity covers her mouth with her hands.

"The *first* time?" she clarifies. "The first of how many times?"

I shrug, because I'm not going to dignify that question with a specific answer.

Not to be deterred, she holds up two fingers, watching my reactions closely. Then three. When she gets to four, I look away, and she looks around the room like she's trying to decide how best to respond.

Dylan has his arms crossed and shakes his head again. "Do you not remember what happened the last time guys on the team dated each other's sisters?"

Brow furrowed again, I shake my head. "No. Should I?"

Rubbing a hand over his face, Dylan sighs. "Seriously? You don't remember a couple years ago when Cal McAdam found out Simon Hindley was dating his little sister and lost his shit? They were best friends, and it almost destroyed their friendship. And then, as if that weren't bad enough, McAdam was pissed about not being the starting quarterback, so he started dating Grayson Kilpatrick's sister to try to throw him off his game. He ended up having to sit out the bowl game that year for fighting. You seriously don't remember this shit?"

I nod slowly. "Now that you mention it ..." I wasn't paying that much attention to the starting offensive line that year, to be honest. I knew shit was going down, but wasn't aware of the specifics. I was too busy dealing with my own drama—my brother's law school accolades and my parents riding my ass about when I was going to get serious and declare a real major and do something with my life—to pay attention to what seemed like petty team squabbles that Coach was handling. Not like it made a difference to whether or not I played. The rival quarterbacks and left tackle had nothing to do with me, a lowly underclassman tailback riding the bench.

"Just ... are you sure this is a good idea?" Dylan asks gently.

To my surprise, Charity jumps to my defense. “I get where you’re coming from,” she says, “but this is Andrew we’re talking about.”

“Hey!” I protest.

She holds up a hand. “He’s not one to get hung up on a chick. If he’s so hung up on her that he’s hooked up with her multiple times, admits to not only spending time with her outside of that but actually *enjoying* it, shouldn’t we admit that there must be something special between them? And maybe an overprotective brother shouldn’t be enough to stand in their way? Especially if she wants to be with him, too?” She looks at me. “She wants this too, right?”

I shrug. “I think so? I mean, she hasn’t said no.” At least, not recently. And even when she did, it wasn’t *no*, so much as it was, *try harder*. And I know that sounds douche-y, but I think if she wanted nothing to do with me, she’d have no qualms about saying so very explicitly. “Yeah,” I say, feeling more confident. “She has fun with me, too.”

“I’m sure she does,” Charity murmurs, shaking her head. “So what’s the issue?”

I shrug. “Well, what Dylan said. She’s Devon’s sister. And when he introduced us, he made me promise not to fuck her.”

“Shit,” says Dylan.

Charity’s brows pull together. “But you have fucked her. Several times. Despite your promise?”

I shrug. “Like I said, I didn’t know who she was the first time, and we’d already hooked up by the time he made me promise. I didn’t put it together until the next day when he brought her around to introduce her.”

Charity’s hand is covering her mouth again, her eyes bright. “Sorry,” she says, fanning her face, then folding her hands on the counter in front of her. “Sorry. This is just too good. Such a mess. I love it.”

My brows raise. “You love that I’ve found myself in a mess?”

She shrugs. “Yeah. And I’m not sorry about that.” She wrinkles her nose and

looks me up and down. “You kinda deserve it.”

“Ouch.” This time I say it out loud.

She shrugs. “It’s true.” Her eyes take on a faraway look as she stares at the opposite wall, drumming her fingers on her lips, her brows pulled together. “So you’re interested in Sadie, your friend’s sister. He doesn’t know about you two.” She shoots a look at me to confirm, and I nod. “And you know he doesn’t want you hooking up with her.” Her eyes narrow. “Wait, you said he made you promise not to fuck her. That was it? Word for word?”

At my nod, she takes on a serious look laced with compassion, reaching a hand toward me and laying it on the counter. “Look, I know I give you shit, and we both know why, but honestly, I don’t think you’re a bad guy, so take this with that in mind: Do you think the reason he made you promise not to fuck her is because he doesn’t want his sister turning into some kind of groupie?”

My brows furrow.

“What I’m trying to say,” she continues, “is that if you’re wanting to *date* her, be in an actual relationship with her, that wouldn’t necessarily be breaking your promise to her brother.”

Dylan’s eyebrows climb his forehead at her statement. “That’s some lawyer level loophole finding right there,” he says, his tone full of admiration. “You sure you don’t want to go to law school?”

She chuckles and shakes her head, but I’m mostly ignoring them, considering her words.

She kinda has a point.

“You never answered whether you actually want to date her, though,” Dylan says. “Do you?”

I guess that’s the question, isn’t it.

“I think ... maybe, yes?” Saying it out loud feels strange. But not bad, strange. Just unfamiliar.

Charity makes a derisive noise. “Well with that kind of certainty, what

woman would turn you down?”

I shoot her a glare. “Fine. Yes. I want to date her.” There. I’ve said it, and I didn’t choke on the words. I didn’t even feel like I was going to. Actually, saying it so definitively, something clicked into place. A sense of *rightness* as the idea fully takes root. “I want to date her,” I repeat softly. I want Sadie to be my girlfriend.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Sadie

JENNA LAYS HER HAND OVER HER HEART IN DRAMATIC FASHION WHEN I COME out of my room dressed in a silky off the shoulder top and fitted skirt that hugs my hips and thighs with my hair falling in soft waves from the heatless curls method Jenna helped me with that she found online. I have to admit that I feel a little bit strange—like I’m wearing some sort of costume, even though people go out dressed exactly like this all the time.

I don’t, though. And that’s why it feels weird.

“I can’t believe my baby’s all grown up,” Jenna declares in a fake southern accent. Or at least that’s what I think she’s going for.

Feeling juvenile, I stick out my tongue at her, which makes her fall over on

the couch, cackling.

“No, but seriously,” I say, smoothing my hand down my fitted skirt, “I look okay?”

Standing, Jenna steps closer to me and motions for me to spin by circling her finger in the air. I oblige, feeling even more silly.

“You look dead sexy,” she says when I’ve completed the turn. “I’d do you.”

My cheeks heat, and I glare at her. “Shush.”

She smiles, but doesn’t listen. “Seriously, Sadie. You look gorgeous. Andrew will think so too.”

“The waves aren’t too much?” I ask, turning to examine myself in the full length mirror on the back of our door.

“Not at all,” she reassures me. “Stop overthinking, and have fun.”

With a sigh, I turn back to face her. “Yes, ma’am.”

She chuckles and gives me a quick hug before handing me her car keys and shooing me out the door. She’s letting me borrow her car to drive myself to Andrew’s house. He texted a few minutes ago that he was headed home from the party after he’d made an appearance.

When I’d explained to Jenna what was happening, she’d seemed confused. “Why aren’t you just going with him to the party?” she’d asked. I told her that we didn’t want to be seen arriving and leaving together, because Devon might figure out that something’s going on between us and neither of us want that. While she’d accepted that explanation, she hadn’t seemed too happy about it. Whatever doubts she might have, though, she’s keeping them to herself now. Which I appreciate.

The helpful cheerleading and getting me ready to go is what I need right now, and she seems to intuitively understand that.

As requested, I have my favorite toys safely stowed in my purse, which only adds to the feeling of oddness as I walk through the halls of my dorm, down the stairs, and out into the parking lot to find Jenna’s car. She showed me where she’d parked it earlier, so I know where I’m going. And I already have

Andrew's address saved in my favorite maps program so I don't have to worry about finding the place. I'm pretty sure I don't need it, but I like the added reassurance that I'm going the best way from here to there.

Getting in the car and driving away from campus settles my nerves, my insecurity fading away as I get closer, especially once I get another text from him that I catch a glimpse of at a stoplight.

ANDREW

Home! We have the place to ourselves. Can't wait to see you

The way he's so open and sweet seems at odds with his reputation. I'd expect some kind of lascivious message, or maybe even a dick pic with a caption like, "Ready and waiting."

Instead he's telling me he's excited to see me? Who would've guessed he'd have this side to him?

I smile the rest of the way to his house, the butterflies in my stomach rioting with excitement more than nerves this time.

Sex might not be exactly what I'd expected it to be based on romance and erotica novels, but I have to admit that it's pretty fun with Andrew. Plus, I enjoy spending time with him. He makes me laugh, and he makes me feel good, emotionally and physically.

Which is not what I would've expected from our ... whatever this is.

Part of me wants to push for an explanation. But I'm certain this'll fizzle out soon. Andrew's not known for having a long attention span where women are concerned. I'm not sure why I'm special enough to command his focus for as long as I have, but I know it's not going to last. *This isn't a book*, I remind myself for the millionth time. *The hot football playing fuckboy isn't going to fall for the nerdy virgin and live happily ever after.*

Not that I really think of myself as a nerd, but ... ever since Jenna brought up the similarities between my life and some of the books I enjoy reading, I can't unsee it.

But fiction and reality rarely overlap so closely. Just because the setup of our relationship sounds like a book premise doesn't mean it'll end like one.

Or it'll end like one of those "love stories" that masquerade as romance novels where the main characters don't end up together. Of course, in most of those someone's dead by the end ...

Back to *reality doesn't follow fictional rules*. That's what I need to remember. When—because let's face it, it's when not if—Andrew and I stop whatever this is we're doing, it won't be some grand, heartbreaking tragedy. This'll be a blip. A fun memory and a good story about my first sexual experience.

When I get to Andrew's house, he opens the door as I take the two steps up to the front door, grinning at the sight of me, his eyes traveling over me. A pang of self-consciousness hits, but I smile back, pretending I'm fine.

He moves back, barefoot, dressed in slim fitting dark wash jeans and a dark gray button down shirt that fits him to perfection, cuffed above the elbow. He wears the shirt untucked, making him look just the right amount of casual and dressed up.

I've never really managed to walk that line so well on my own. Even now with Jenna's help, I feel overdressed, like I'm expecting us to go out for dinner at a nice restaurant rather than up to his bedroom to have sex.

Maybe nerdy virgin wasn't so far off the mark after all.

But I'm distracted from my thoughts by Andrew closing the door and then turning me to face him with a hand on my hip. "You look gorgeous," he says in a husky voice just above a whisper. And then he kisses me.

I hadn't realized we kiss each other in greeting now.

But maybe it's not in general. Maybe it's just for our sex dates. Which is not a phrase I'd ever expected to say at all, much less in reference to myself. And yet, here I am, meeting up with someone for the sole purpose of having sex.

I never would've guessed deciding to have a random, anonymous hookup at my first college party would land me here. I'm not sad about it, though.

Andrew starts off with soft, closed mouth kisses, his lips caressing mine. It's perfect, and I feel like I could stay here kissing him like this forever.

Then his hand comes up and cups my jaw, his thumb caressing my cheek. Slanting his head, he kisses me again, this time parting his lips, his tongue slicking my lower lip. I open for him, and his other arm cinches around my waist, pulling me flush against him as our kiss deepens.

After a moment, he lets out a soft grunt and breaks away, taking a half step back, leaving me swaying on my feet. He gives me a sexy smile and tangles his fingers in mine. "Let's go up to my room."

His husky voice makes an answering smile come to my lips, and I nod, letting him lead me by the hand through the house, up the stairs, and to his room.

The lamp is on, and there are condoms on the bedside table. Once inside, he reaches for my purse. I pass it to him, and he drops it on the floor by his bedside table with a thunk. "Is that what I think it is?" he asks, stepping closer and reaching for my waist.

"If you think it's the toys you told me to bring, then yes."

"Good girl," he whispers, ducking his head to kiss me.

The words send a shiver up my spine, though my brows draw together as I return his kiss. Something about the phrase is undeniably sexy, but also discomfiting. Do I like being called a good girl for doing what he told me to?

Kinda?

But also the rebellious streak that's tired of being bossed around registers and objection.

Any protest I might've made is quickly lost in his kiss, his hands tugging my top out of my skirt, the pads of his fingers on my bare skin. Soon, he's lifting the top, and I raise my arms so he can pull it off, dropping it in a pool behind me.

His hands skim the outline of my torso as he takes me in, wearing the new scarlet lace bra Jenna insisted we go shopping for when she found out about this plan. He runs one finger over the edge of the cup. "I like this. Sexy."

"Thank you." Not wanting to be the only one without a shirt, I reach for the

buttons of his, undoing them one by one, starting at the top.

He helps me by going from the bottom, and we chuckle when our hands tangle in the middle. He undoes the last button and pulls his shirt off with quick, sharp movements, like he can't wait to be rid of the thing.

Knowing his propensity to go shirtless at parties, I wonder how long he's actually worn it tonight.

"What's that face?" he asks, dropping the shirt and sliding his hands from my waist up my back.

I shake my head. "Nothing."

He gives me a doubtful look. "Come on. Just tell me. If we're going to do this, if I'm going to make you come, you need to feel comfortable with me. And if you're holding back, it'll make it more difficult."

Sighing, I shake my head, though one corner of my mouth is sliding up in a smile. I roll my eyes, embarrassed by my own thoughts. I know I'll sound jealous. "I was just wondering if you took your shirt off at the party tonight."

His brows knit together, and he unhooks my bra. I bring my arms up to trap the cups in place, which has his eyes darting to mine. "Why would I take my shirt off at the party?"

He sounds genuinely perplexed, though I'm aware he didn't actually answer the question. Does it really matter, though? It's not like he's my boyfriend. We've never had any kind of talk about exclusivity. Hell, for all I know, I'm not the only hookup he's had this week, though I'd hope he didn't hook up with someone at the party and then come here to have sex with me less than an hour later.

I shrug, letting my bra fall. "I was just thinking about the last couple of parties we've been to. Both times you were in the backyard shirtless for a while."

Understanding dawns, and he laughs. "Oh, I see what you're getting at. No, no one demanded a gun show from me tonight." His brows furrow again. "Well, someone did, but no one important. I knew I'd be meeting you, so I didn't want to get roped into any of that kind of bullshit."

His words soothe my unwarranted irritation, but make me feel a little out of sorts in another way. “Does that mean you would’ve given them a ‘gun show’”—I make air quotes with my fingers—“if you hadn’t been meeting me?”

He shrugs. “Probably. It’s just goofing around.”

I run my hands up his torso, over his pecs, and rest them on his shoulders. “The attention’s fun too, I suppose,” I say to buy me a second to consider the reality that him being with me is causing him to change his normal behavior. Does that mean something? Do I want it to? Gah! I don’t even know! I’ve spent so long trying to convince myself this is a short-term fling that’ll end any day now, but then he’s sweet and considerate and doesn’t show off for everyone when he knows he’s meeting up with me that night. Which makes it seem like maybe I mean more to him than he’s let on ...

He grins, his hands resting on my waist. “Exactly. It’s fun. That’s the whole point of parties.” His brows pull together once more. “Wait, is that a problem for you?”

I shake my head, both to say no and also to clear it of my previous thoughts. I can’t read too much into his behavior. He’s been upfront about what he wants and what he’s offering. Hoping for more is only setting myself up for heartbreak. Besides, even if we were actually dating, would him goofing around shirtless at a party really be an issue? I don’t think so. It’s not like him being shirtless means he’d sleep with someone else. He hasn’t the last couple of times, as far as I know.

“No.” I smile back at him, both to reassure him and because being near him makes me want to smile. “I was just wondering. But see? This is why I didn’t want to say anything. I was worried you’d interpret it as me getting weird about something you clearly do often.” Because I’m determined *not* to make things weird, after all. Part of why this works is *because* I’m not trying to get him into a relationship. This is just fun. Nothing more.

“Alright,” he says. “Good.” Then he bends his head, kissing me deeply again, his hands sliding up to cup my breasts, thumbs swiping over my nipples and making me gasp.

Then he wraps his arms around me, his hands going to the waist of my skirt

and trying—and failing—to push it off. He backs up, his face a picture of consternation, his fingers sliding around the waistband. “How does this thing come off?”

CHAPTER TWENTY

Andrew

SADIE'S LAUGH RINGS THROUGH MY ROOM. SHE'S GRINNING WIDELY AS SHE steps out of my grasp, her hands going to her right side where she slides down a hidden zipper.

When she starts to push the skirt off, I reach for her. "Hey. That's my job."

Another laugh, but she lets me push the skirt down. Following its path to the floor, I kneel in front of her, face to face with red lace panties that match the bra lying on the floor at her feet.

She's waxed. Or shaved. And I blink at the glimpse of her bare mound peeking through the lace. I didn't make a fuss about pubic hair the other times we've been together—it's normal and doesn't bother me, though

hairless does mean I don't have to worry about getting hair in my mouth when I go down on her and that's nice—but it's clear she did this for me.

Leaning in, I kiss her just below the waistband of her panties. She lets out a soft gasp, her hands touching my head, then moving off, like she's not sure what to do with them.

I kiss her again, my feelings about her questions about whether I was shirtless at the party tonight in a swirl.

When she first asked if I'd been shirtless at the party tonight, I thought maybe she was worried I'd hooked up with someone. But when she mentioned me goofing with my friends, it didn't seem like that's where her mind went. She did seem like maybe she was jealous, though. Or is that just wishful thinking?

Do I want her to be jealous? A little possessive of me?

Part of me does. And I think that's the part of me who feels that way about her. Who doesn't like the idea of her being interested in another guy. At least not now. Not while we're still ... whatever we are.

My conversation with Dylan and Charity filters through my mind even as I tug her panties down, kissing her newly bared skin as I pull the scrap of lace to the floor.

The fact is that I want this to be something more. More than just a few sneaky hookups. And if we hadn't already planned on her meeting me here, I might've suggested I pick her up and take her to dinner. But there's no telling how long my roommates will be out, and I've been so looking forward to tonight that I didn't want to risk not getting to follow through on the main plan for either of us.

I want to watch her come again, and I want to be the one causing it this time. Not just a secondary participant or audience. But the primary actor. And not just to assuage my own base, primal need to prove myself capable, but because I know she wants the experience. What started out as a need to redeem my perceived lackluster performance has turned into the desire to give her what she's been wanting for who knows how long.

And I don't want tonight to be the end of it.

Would she be open in continuing this for an indefinite amount of time?

Running my hand up the back of her leg, I tug on it when I get behind her knee. She wobbles a little, but lifts her leg and lets me place it over my shoulder, her hands once again going to my head, but this time for balance.

With my hands cupping her ass, offering more support, I pull her to my face, licking the seam of her pussy, finally slaking my need to taste her again. She gasps, tilting her pelvis to give me better access, and I feast on her.

She's sighing and moaning, letting out a sharp cry of surprise when I suck on her clit, her fingernails digging into my scalp.

"Shit, Andrew, god," she groans when I don't let up. But then she seems to be swaying, and her heel digs into my back, her leg sliding from my shoulder to my bicep, making it hard for me to help her stay up, and I drop that arm so she can put her leg down.

"Sorry," she says softly. "I was losing my balance."

Grinning, I rise to my feet, swiping my hand over my mouth. "Don't be sorry. But how about you get on the bed now?"

A small, almost embarrassed smile on her lips, she crawls onto my bed, and I can't stop myself from caressing her ass as she goes. She casts me a look over her shoulder, and I shrug, unrepentant. "I couldn't resist."

Chuckling, she sits, leaning on her arm, naked and sexy in the soft lamplight, watching me as I shuck off my jeans and underwear. She leans back as I climb over her onto the bed, lying on my pillows, parting her legs for me to fit between them. I settle, my pelvis meeting hers, my aching dick trapped against her belly, propping myself on my forearms, and dipping my head for a kiss.

She kisses me back, her hands sliding up my arms, over my shoulder, and down my back. Her thighs come up, embracing my hips, her legs wrapping behind mine.

God, she's so fucking sexy. With how responsive she is, I'd still never guess that she's as inexperienced as she is.

I love it. I love her openness and willingness to try new things.

She's perfection.

I kiss my way down her jaw, and she tips up her chin, giving me greater access to her neck, her hands sliding away from me as I work my way down, pausing to suck on her tits until her nipples are hard and shiny, begging for more. "God, I love your tits," I whisper, and she lets out a soft laugh. Glancing up at her face, I see she's smiling. "What?" I ask. "It's true. They're perfect." I plump them in my hands in illustration. "They fit so nicely in my hands, and you moan and sigh when I suck on your nipples. It's great."

Laughing more, she covers her face with her hands, and I know that I'm embarrassing her at least a little.

"I take it no one's told you how great your boobs are before," I murmur against the skin of her belly as I head for my ultimate destination.

She shakes her head. "No," she says huskily. "I can't say they have."

"Well that's a damn shame," I tell her as I move her thighs apart, placing them over my shoulders. "You're gorgeous." I kiss one thigh. "Sexy." Kiss the other. "And you taste amazing." With that, I lick up her center. Her thighs quiver, her hips lifting off the bed in response, and she inhales sharply, but doesn't say anything.

As I feast on her pussy more, I decide I need to compliment her as often as I can, that way she'll get used to it and not find it embarrassing.

Backing off, because sometimes constant stimulation gets to be too much, I slide a finger inside her, pumping it slowly, feeling along the front wall of her pussy for that rough spot I know will make her feel good. When she gasps again, I know I've found it.

Withdrawing, I add a finger, caressing that spot and dipping my head to draw circles on her clit with my tongue.

"Oh god," she mutters, her hips moving, her hands searching for something to hang onto.

I'd really love it if I could make her come like this, and so I'm determined to

give her as much time as she needs, even if I know that I have her toys if I need them. But eventually my jaw starts to hurt, and based on watching her with the vibrator, she needs more stimulation to push her over the edge. Slowing down to give myself a break isn't going to do it. I know that she can come without a vibe since she has during our first couple of hookups. But I'm not giving her what she needs, and she's too self-conscious to give me explicit directions.

Pulling away, I kiss her thigh again and climb over her to get to her purse.

She gives me a sultry smile. "Time for the toys?"

Chuckling, I nod, handing the purse to her when she makes grabby hands. She gets out a small velvet bag, opens the draw string, and dumps two toys on the bed—the vibe she used on herself last time and a slim bullet vibe.

I pick them both up, holding one in each hand like I'm weighing the options. Then I look at her. "Do you have a preference?"

"Well." She sits up, touching the larger one she used last time and flipping it in my hand. She runs her finger around a raised hollow circle. "This one feels great, because it sucks and vibrates. But this one," she indicates the bullet vibe, "works well with sex."

I raise an eyebrow. "Does it? But I thought you'd only ever been with me?"

Her cheeks turn pink, and she focuses on the vibrator. "Mmhm." She lifts one shoulder. "I've used dildos, though. I imagine it's not vastly different, although ..."

My other eyebrow lifts. "Although?"

"Well," her cheeks turn redder, "a dildo isn't really attached to anything. So having a whole other body involved is quite a bit different. I figured the smaller one would fit between us more easily."

"Ah. Well, we'll have to experiment. For science."

She chuckles. "Right. For science."

"I mean, I am an exercise science major," I point out. "Science is in the name. Experiments and tests are part of the deal. Especially tests using

muscle stimulation.”

She’s grinning now, the embarrassed blush gone from her face, her eyes meeting mine as she engages with me. “Wouldn’t this be more like nerve stimulation?”

My grin matches hers. I like that she’s willing to banter with me. And that this seems to relax her, get her out of the self-consciousness that I know holds her back from being with me one hundred percent. “Well, nerves are what make muscles fire.” I drop a hand between her legs, circling her opening to gather her wetness then circle her clit. She makes a satisfied sound that’s almost a purr, pressing into my touch. “When I stimulate these nerves appropriately,” I say, my voice turning to gravel, “it makes muscles contract. The experiment is to see which type of stimulation is most effective.”

Dropping back to her elbows, she lets out a husky laugh. “Right. I suppose it is.”

“We’ll start with this one,” I tell her, setting the bullet vibe on the side table and holding up the other one. I remember watching her hold down the button on the back to turn it on and off last time, so I do that, experimenting with turning the vibration up and down before going back to a lower setting—though not the lowest, I know she needs more than that, and her pussy is plump and open, already aroused from my earlier attention—and placing it on her pussy.

She grunts softly, reaching down and positioning the vibe in the right place. I give her a quick grin of thanks—see? She’s already giving me more direction than ever before. This is good progress—and rub the vibe in small circles the way I saw her do last time. She’s watching me, her eyes open, not really giving much reaction, though she doesn’t seem irritated or bothered.

“Does this feel good?” I ask. “We need to document everything.”

“Of course. Science.” She grins widely.

“Exactly. So? Tell me how it feels.”

Her brows furrow, her gaze abstracting as she examines her body’s inner sensations. I bite back my smile, because she seems to be accepting and leaning into my “science” explanation of what we’re doing, and it’s great.

“It feels good,” she says. “Like a gentle massage.”

“Not enough to make you come, though?”

She shakes her head, a quick and decisive negative. “Not even close.”

I hum. “Thank you. That’s informative.” I turn up the vibration one level at a time, watching her reactions. One level doesn’t change much. At two, I can tell a difference in the sound of the motor, and she sucks in a breath. At three, she gasps, her hips moving like she’s not sure if she’s trying to get more or move away.

I stay at that level, making those small circles again, watching as she writhes and undulates. After a moment, I ask, “How do you feel now?”

“Shit,” she breathes, her hands clutching the sheets, her hips moving, abs tense, thighs spread wide.

“Does that mean it feels good?”

Biting her lip, she nods enthusiastically.

I turn up the vibration again.

She gasps, makes a soft, high pitched sound of pleasure when I start the tiny circles. “Fuck! Yes. Don’t stop.”

I want to say something, like I’m still a scientific researcher, but I worry that’ll be a distraction, and it’s clear that she’s almost there. I don’t want to do anything to fuck that up. So I do as she says, keeping the same pressure and movements until she lets out an almost shocked sound, her legs straightening, her whole body shuddering as she comes. I follow her movements as best I can, keeping the vibe glued to her clit, giving her the best orgasm I know how until she’s scrambling to get away from me, pushing at my wrist, using her legs to push herself away.

Taking the vibe away, I turn it off, watching her sprawled on my bed, legs splayed, one arm thrown over her face, the other out to the side, chest heaving as she catches her breath. I stretch out beside her. “So that was good?”

Laughing, she peeks out from under her arm. “Yes. Very good. Thank you.”

“Mmm. My pleasure.” I lean over and kiss her, and she wraps her arms around me, welcoming me to her.

As our kisses grow more heated, she moves her hand down my body, gripping my hard cock and giving it a few pumps. “Should we test stimulation for you?” she asks, pulling away from our kiss with a cheeky grin. “For science?”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Sadie

I'M GRINNING AS ANDREW ROLLS ONTO HIS BACK. "YES, OF COURSE," HE answers. "Scientific discovery is very important to me."

"Oh, I know." I stroke his cock. "I can tell."

His hips lift, and he presses into my hand, his eyes closing as he inhales deeply. "That feels good."

I keep it up. "How good?"

He cracks open an eyelid. "Good. But not amazing."

Humming in acknowledgment, I lean over him, experimentally licking the

crown of his dick.

He hisses. “Better,” he says. “Do that some more.”

Licking him like an ice cream cone, I oblige, pumping my hand slowly and squeezing him tightly as I do it. I know this isn’t what he really wants with my mouth, though, so after licking up his shaft one last time, I take the head of his dick all the way into my mouth and give it a suck.

He moans. “Yeah. That. More.” His hips flex, pushing a little farther into my mouth, but not much.

Because I’m kinda a nerd, I did some research on blow jobs online. I figured it might be useful, especially with Andrew continuing to want to meet up. I use the tips I learned that sound doable, testing the depth to which I can take him, trying to swallow when he gets to the edge of my gag reflex—though that’s a lot easier said than done I realize now that I’m here—backing off when I need to and using my hand as an extension so he gets pressure and suction on as much of his shaft as possible.

It seems to be working for him, because he’s moaning and hissing, especially when I use the tip of my tongue around the underside of his head. “Oh god,” he moans, so I do it some more.

The longer I keep it up, the more he swells in my mouth, and combined with the sounds he’s making, that seems like a really positive sign.

Pretty soon, he taps me on the arm, and I lift my head, still pumping his cock with my hand. “Jesus, Sadie,” he whispers. “If we’re going to test more than one type of stimulation on me tonight, we need to switch it up soon or I’m going to come in your mouth.”

“Oh. Right.” I’m grinning, though, as I sit up, releasing my hold of his cock.

He reaches for a condom, making quick work of opening the package and rolling it on, then adjusts the pillows under him and reaches for me. “Ride me?”

Nodding, I take his hand and let him help me into position straddling him. He reaches between us and holds his cock straight up for me. I line myself up and sink down slowly, both of us letting out matching moans of pleasure.

“God, you feel good,” he whispers, hands on my hips as I move slowly.

“Mmm. You do too.” And he does. I really like having him inside me, the way he fills me up, the way he touches me, the way his eyes get bright when he looks up at me like this.

Leaning over, I support myself on my arms, moving up and down. With his hands on my hips, he meets me, letting me set the pace.

“How does this feel?” I ask after a moment. “For science.”

“Right. Course,” he pants. “God, it’s fucking amazing. So tight. I can’t get enough of your sweet little pussy, Sadie.”

The way he says my name—half gasp, half moan—fills me with pleasure. *I’m* reducing him to this. Me. Sadie Marsinko, the bookworm girl next door who’s barely dated, turning a highly experienced man into a panting, moaning mess.

I love it.

He holds onto my low back just above my ass, thrusting up into me from below, taking over now, and dear god, it feels amazing.

“Oh god,” I moan, and that just spurs him on, and I think he must be getting close.

But then he slows, runs his hands up and down the tops of my thighs, letting me ride him again. One hand leaves me and he’s fumbling in the sheets, and then I see he has the bullet vibe.

Bringing it up between us, he pushes the button on the end to turn it on before meeting my eyes. “Science,” he says.

When I nod and sit up, biting my lip to hold back my smile, he places it on his lower torso, wiggling it under me, and as soon as the vibe hits my clit, I gasp, my head falling back and my eyes closing.

“That’s it,” he encourages. “Ride me and get yourself off with the vibe. I want to feel you come on my cock.”

Something about his dirty words makes the whole experience better, hotter,

and I do what he says, moving my hips to find the ways that bring me the most pleasure. He holds the vibe in place with one hand, his other roaming my body, caressing my skin, weighing my breast, drawing circles around my nipple with his thumb to draw it up into a tight, sensitive peak.

My hips keep moving, chasing my second orgasm, and surprisingly, it doesn't take long for me to combust again, with Andrew gripping my hips and keeping me going all the way to the other side, pausing only to let me pull the vibrator out.

Then he pulls me down to him, kissing me and thrusting up into me at the same time, rolling us so our positions reverse, and he's fucking me like his life depends on it, until with a groan, he grinds into me, his dick pulsing inside me as he comes.

He collapses off to the side, our legs still tangled together, both of us lying there, taking a beat to recover. After a moment, Andrew pulls off the condom, ties a knot in it, and deposits it on his side table, collapsing next to me once more and pulling me close.

I go willingly, enjoying using his shoulder as a pillow with his arm wrapped around me, but it doesn't take long for my mind to start whirring. How long are we going to cuddle? Do I need to get up and start getting dressed? Should I wait for him to do it first? Once I put my clothes on, do I leave immediately? Or ...?

That seems like the best move, thinking about it. I don't want to stay so long that he's like, "Welp, see ya later," and it gets all awkward.

Things between us have been pretty comfortable. I don't want to be the one responsible for awkwardness.

Maybe that's why he bailed so fast last time? Maybe he was worried he'd stay too long, and I'd have to awkwardly ask him to leave?

Now that I'm the one who has to go, it makes more sense.

His hand trails down my back in a gentle caress, and he seems to be in no hurry for us to get up and get moving, so I calm my racing thoughts and just enjoy the moment. We'll get up and get dressed soon enough, and that'll be my cue that it's time to go.

“So,” he starts, and I brace myself. That’s the start of something that might end unpleasantly. “We need a full report. For science.”

I burst out laughing, because I’d gotten so wrapped up in my own thoughts, I’d forgotten about that. Propping myself up, I grin at him. “For science.”

He nods, clearly trying to keep his expression serious, but his dancing eyes and the way he presses his lips together to keep back a smile give away his humor.

“Of course. Well,” I say thoughtfully, “I think we learned that both methods work quite well.”

“Do you have a preference?” he asks, and I stop and think about that for a moment, tracing the dips and curves of his muscles with my fingertips as I think.

He traps my hand under his, flattening my palm on his chest. “That tickles,” he murmurs.

“Sorry. Um, I like both in different ways,” I say, meeting his eyes. “The vibe I usually use is great for that. And you using it on me was amazing.”

“But?” he prompts, quirking a brow.

“But using the other vibe during sex was also amazing. The sensations are different, so it’s like apples to oranges, but both orgasms were great. Ten out of ten, no notes.”

That makes him chuckle. Part of me wants to turn the question back on him—for science, of course—but part of me is also worried about what he’d say.

What if he prefers blow jobs? And that’s what he really wants all the time? Would I be okay with giving blow jobs more than sex? Or if we did some kind of compromise where I got sex with the vibe when I wanted it and finished him with a blow job?

Before I can say anything, he pulls me in for a kiss. “For my part, I like all of it with you. It’s all equally good. You’re amazing, Sadie.”

My cheeks heat at the compliment, and that makes him chuckle, but he doesn’t say anything. I expect him to get up then, but instead, he nudges me

back in place so we're cuddling again. He draws in a deep breath that makes me think he's about to say something, and once again I brace myself, because I have no idea what he might say next. Everything with Andrew has been surprising, if I'm honest. From our first anonymous encounter to him showing up at the library to his insistence on more hookups. Is he going to ask when we can do this again? Or tell me that since he finally gave me an orgasm, we shouldn't do this anymore?

But before I can find out which of those things—or something else entirely—he's going to say, my brother's voice comes from somewhere in the house.

“Andrew? What are you doing, dude? You disappeared from the party.”

The sound of feet thumping up the stairs reaches us, and I sit up, instinctively crossing my arms over my chest, looking around, frantic to find something to cover myself with, but the blankets are all in a wad in the far corner, and Andrew's in the way.

“Shit!” I hiss, scrambling off the bed and grabbing for my clothes. They're at least all in one tidy pile, so I don't have to search the corners or anything.

“Fuck,” Andrew groans, still sitting in the bed, taking a deep, bracing breath.

“Dude!” Devon calls again, and he sounds like he's right outside the door.

Panicked, I look at Andrew. “Hide me!” I mouth.

He finally hops out of bed, leaping for the door as it starts to open, slamming it closed again with his body.

“What the hell, man?” Devon says, sounding shocked and upset. “What the fuck?”

“Sorry, man. I'm naked.”

I look at him, echoing my brother's sentiments. “What the fuck?” I mouth.

He shrugs. “Gimme a sec, okay?”

“Fine,” Devon grunts, sounding irritated, and he's muttering something, but I can't make it out through the door.

Andrew gestures toward the closet, and I duck inside, tripping on shoes and

hitting a small rolling suitcase with my knee.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers. His mouth opens again like he wants to say something, but then he closes his mouth with a quick shake of his head and shuts the closet door.

Crouching naked in the closet, clutching my clothes, I listen to him rustling around, then opening the door.

“Dude,” Devon says. “I’ve seen your junk before. It’s not that big of a deal to me if you’re naked. I didn’t think you cared either.”

“You surprised me,” Andrew says. “Sorry. I was, uh ...”

“I saw you leave earlier by yourself. Did you get bored and decide to come home and jack off or something?” Devon laughs. “None of the chicks at the party interested you, huh?”

“Ha, yeah,” Andrew says. “Something like that.”

Closing my eyes, I let my forehead fall onto my closed fist. What have I gotten myself into? And how am I going to get out of here?

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Andrew

I FORCE MYSELF NOT TO GLANCE AT MY CLOSET FOR FEAR OF GIVING AWAY TO Devon that I'm hiding someone in there, my heart pounding so loud that it's distracting and I almost don't catch what he says.

“Was it freaky or embarrassing porn or something?” Devon asks, still stuck on the theory he floated.

I mean, I was in my room naked and alone, as far as he knows, so what other explanation could there be? Clearly, *I was boning your sister* is out. Even if I wanted to tell Devon—and honestly, part of me wants to because hiding it from him feels shitty—even I'm not dumb enough to think that him walking in on us is the best way for him to find out. Should I be the one to tell him?

And if so, what's the best way to do it? Should Sadie be there? Or should she tell him herself, since he's her brother?

When I don't answer immediately—because I'm distracted by my thoughts, and what the hell am I supposed to say to that anyway?—he laughs raucously. “You dirty dog. I noticed you don't seem to be hooking up as much lately. Is that it? Your tastes have gotten more extreme and random hookups are too vanilla for you lately?”

“Dude.” I clap him on the shoulder. “I'm not answering that for so many reasons.” That won't dissuade him from thinking whatever he's decided, but I don't need to confirm it and have him blabbing to everyone. I know this is a little bit of the pot calling the kettle black, since I have a reputation for not keeping my mouth shut too, but the last thing I need is Devon going around telling people I'm into like ... chicks peeing on me or something.

“Right, right,” he says, holding up his hands. “Course. I get it.” He nods knowingly.

Sighing, I shake my head. “I'm not into weird, kinky porn. I just didn't feel like staying at the party that long tonight. I'm tired. I've got a lot of homework.”

His eyebrows climb his head as I list off the reasons I supposedly left the party after only staying an hour. “Right. You were in here naked doing homework? On a Friday?”

I shrug and cross my arms. “Being naked is relaxing.” Shaking my head, I take control of the conversation and redirect it back to him. “Did something happen? Why'd *you* come home? Are you accusing me of coming home early to jack off to kinky porn because that was your plan?”

“What?” he scoffs, a hint of outrage coloring his tone. “No!”

“Uh-huh, sure.” I get to nod knowingly this time. “Projection much?”

“Shut up, man.” He shoves me. “I came home looking for you. You didn't answer your texts. Someone said they saw you leave. I was worried about you.”

That's actually kinda sweet. “Oh. Well, as you can see, I'm fine.” I spread

my arms, glancing down my bare chest at my whole and unharmed torso and jeans clad legs.

Devon nods. “Right. Yeah. Since I’m here, wanna play *Call of Duty*?”

“Sure. Let me change, and I’ll be down in a minute, okay?”

“Cool.” Devon leaves, and I wait until I hear him go down the stairs before closing the door and opening the closet. Sadie blinks up at me, still naked, her clothes in a ball that she’s clutching to her chest.

“I’m so sorry,” I whisper, reaching a hand to her. “I ...” I glance at the door and shake my head.

“No, no,” she says, taking my hand and gingerly climbing to her feet. “Don’t apologize. I don’t want my brother finding out about this either.”

That rankles. Both that she doesn’t want to tell her brother and that she thinks I don’t want to. Like she’s only good enough to be my dirty little secret. That’s not at all what I want.

She dumps her clothes on the bed and starts dressing, completely oblivious to me watching her with my arms crossed and a frown on my face.

“You don’t?”

She pauses, one arm through the strap of her bra, then slowly pulls up the other one and adjusts her tits. She smirks when my eyes drop to her chest. It’s not my fault, though. A hot chick I get to have sex with pretty regularly just manhandled her tits in front of me. How’m I not supposed to look at that?

“No,” she whispers, amusement leaking into her tone. “I don’t want Devon to find out. He’d lose his shit.”

I know she’s right, but at the same time, if I want to date her—and I’m pretty sure I do—won’t we have to face that eventually?

“Aren’t you getting changed?” she asks, grabbing her vibrators and stuffing them and the drawstring bag back into her purse. “Fuck. My shoes are downstairs.” She looks at me, panic once again on her face. “How am I getting out of here? I don’t think I can climb out the window.” She looks at the window, as though seriously considering that option.

“No. Don’t try to do that.” A vision of her falling and breaking her ankle—or worse—flashes through my mind, and the combined fear of her getting hurt and then having to explain to Devon why his sister is falling off our roof has me shaking my head emphatically. “Give me a few minutes. I’ll ... I’ll figure something out.”

I grab a pair of shorts and a T-shirt out of my drawer, my mind racing as I ditch my jeans, grab the underwear I had on, and dress in my clean clothes. Could I sneak her out the back door while Devon is distracted?

Maybe ...

But what if he hears her? Or hears a noise and wants to investigate? How will I keep him in the living room while letting Sadie know the coast is clear to sneak out the back without him noticing? Or how do I get him to stay in the living room while I usher Sadie out the back?

I glance at her, remembering her bare feet. How will I get her shoes to her?

And what if he glances out the front while she’s getting into her car?

Fuck.

Fuck fuck fuck.

None of that is possible. The window idea is starting to look more tempting ...

No. No, that’s a terrible idea in the best of circumstances, and shoeless Sadie in a skirt in the dark is definitely not that.

Sadie sits on the bed, watching me. Could she just stay up here until after everyone’s asleep?

Maybe ...

She probably won’t like that plan, but right now I don’t have a better idea.

Her stomach rumbles loudly. Shit. I won’t even be able to feed her. It’s not like I can take her to get food.

A plan slowly dawns on me.

Grinning at her, I say, “Give me a few minutes. I’m going to convince Devon we need food. Once we’re gone, I’ll text you the all clear. You can grab your shoes and leave.”

Relief suffuses her face, and she nods, rubbing her arms. “That sounds perfect. Thank you.”

“Of course,” I say easily, leaning over her to give her a kiss. “We’ll have to figure out a better plan for next time, though.”

Sadie’s eyebrows jump. “Next time?”

I flash her a quick grin, deciding now’s not the time to hash anything out. “Yeah. Next time.” After one last kiss—because I can’t help myself—I slip out the door and head downstairs.

Devon’s already got the game set up and waiting on the screen when I come down. He looks me up and down. “Awww, you slipped into something more comfortable just for me?”

Flopping down on the couch, doing my best to present my usual, laid-back attitude while adrenaline dumps into my system because of Sadie hiding upstairs in my room, I smack his shoulder. “No. Just the opposite. Being naked’s the most comfortable.”

He laughs. “Isn’t that better, though? Chicks always get dressed up in less comfortable clothes when they want to impress.” He makes a show of looking me over again. “Though I’m not sure you’re very impressive.”

I scoff, biting back the first retort that comes to mind—*That’s not what your sister thinks*—but I’m not *that* big of an idiot. “I’m impressive as shit,” is the sad comeback I scrape together.

He tosses a controller into my lap, and I have to flinch so it doesn’t land on my junk. “Let’s do this.”

Picking it up, I toss it back on the couch. “I’m hungry. Let’s get food first.”

“Grab something from the fridge, man, come on.”

I wrinkle my nose and shake my head. “Nah. Let’s go grab something. There’s nothing good here.”

“That’s cause no one ever goes shopping,” he grumbles, dropping the controller and standing. He stretches and scratches his belly under his shirt, then stuffs his feet back in his shoes that he took off in front of the couch.

Triumph at his easy acquiescence flows through me, followed by a stab of panic when I realize I need to get my shoes from the door. Where Sadie’s shoes are conspicuously sitting.

Devon’s paying no attention to me as I dig through the pile of shoes next to our door, as though my slides aren’t sitting right there. I nudge Sadie’s shoes into the center of the pile, half covering them before I straighten and slip on my slides.

“You wanna drive, or you want me to?” I ask Devon.

“It’s your idea. You drive,” he says, sounding like a petulant kid.

“Gotcha. Let’s go.”

I hold the door open, letting him out, and casting one last glance up the stairs. This isn’t the way I wanted my night with Sadie to end.

As I close the door behind me, I can’t help thinking about Charity’s loophole. If Sadie and I are dating, that’s not really breaking my promise to Devon, right?

But will Devon see it that way?

And at what point do Sadie and I get to decide that his feelings don’t get to dictate what we do?

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Sadie

OMG I'm trapped

JENNA

What? What are you talking about? Aren't you with Andrew? Did he leave you tied to his bed or something? Wait, how are you texting me if he tied you to his bed?

OMG Jenna. I'm not tied to his bed. Devon came home, and I'm hiding in Andrew's room until he gets him out of the house so I can leave. So for now, I'm stuck.

[Cry laughing emoji]

I'm so glad I have you for moral support.

FLOPPING BACK ON THE BED, I STARE AT THE CEILING, WAITING FOR JENNA TO respond. I want to pace. To peek at Andrew's things. But I'm worried they'll be able to hear my footsteps downstairs and Devon will figure out Andrew has someone up here, then he'll come looking, and he'll figure out that someone is me. And what's the point of that when Devon's just going to freak out because he thinks I'm too good for his friends—which begs the question that if he has such a low opinion of his friends, why's he friends with them? And he'd be freaking out over nothing, anyway. This thing with Andrew has to have nearly run its course by now.

Right?

Though he did say something about next time ...

I'd set aside my shock about that—I'd kinda figured this time was likely the last time, since his whole deal was that he wanted to give me an orgasm, and he did—in the drama of figuring out how I'm going to get out of here without my brother noticing. But now that I'm just sitting in Andrew's room with nothing to do but think ...

Next time.

A rush of arousal floods me as I think about doing what we did tonight again.

In principle, I don't have any objection to a next time. The problem is, the more time I spend with Andrew, the more I enjoy spending time with him. The more I want to see him. And I know that's not how he does things.

Am I okay with a string of hookups?

Will I get my heart broken in the end?

Or will I be able to keep my feelings out of the equation?

I know the answer is no to the last one. If I'm really honest, my feelings are already involved. I look forward to our Tuesday/Thursday library meetups already, and my belly swoops every time I get a text because it might be from him.

I've done my best to keep those feelings on lock and made sure that he doesn't know they're developing. I nearly always wait for him to text me, for

example. Or if I do text him, it's purely for information purposes, and not the kind of conversational check-in texts I do with friends and imagine I'd do with someone I'm dating.

Because we're not dating.

The thing is ... I'm not sure I can say no to another hookup. Even if it's *just* a hookup, and can never be more.

My phone vibrates in my hand, and I hold it up to read it.

ANDREW

The coast is clear. Let me know when you're home safe.

Okay

I stare at my phone a moment longer, rereading his text. It melts me even more, and it's not like I was an ice sculpture to begin with. More like a scoop of ice cream that's nearly turned into a puddle of ice cream soup.

Yeah. I think I might be in trouble.

I'm home

ANDREW

[Thumbs up emoji]

Wow. All I got is a thumbs up.

I mean, I guess that's better than nothing, but seriously? Maybe I'm not in as deep as I thought after all. Because he definitely isn't.

The next morning, my phone ringing wakes me up. Which is a strange way to wake up, because normally the only person who calls me is my mom, and since I'm going to have dinner with my parents tonight, it would be weird for her to call now.

Unless something happened?

Panicked, I grab for my phone, sitting up as I unplug it. But then I see the screen. It's not my mom. It's Andrew.

Brows furrowed, I answer. "Uh, hello?"

"Hey," he whispers. "Hang on."

Um, seriously? I think, but I don't say that. Because I'm not sure it would do any good. But also, what the fuck?

I hear him breathing and what sounds like doors opening and closing, and then in a normal voice he says, "Sadie. How are you?"

My name in his mouth once again makes me feel warm and gooey, like the inside of a toasted marshmallow. He says it like my name is a relief to him. A comfort. Like talking to me is the best part of his day.

"Uh, I'm okay?"

He chuckles. "Are you asking me?"

With a soft laugh, I settle back against my pillows, rubbing my eyes with my free hand. "No. I'm fine. I just ... I didn't expect you to call. I was still sleeping."

"Oh, man. I'm sorry. Do you want me to let you go?" His voice is full of genuine regret.

"No. It's fine. I'm awake now. What's up?" I try to keep my voice light and chipper.

"Oh, um. Not much. I just wanted to hear your voice."

Oh my god. I mouth the words, needing to express how I'm feeling in some physical, tangible way. He wanted to hear my voice?

"Really?" I ask, hating how my voice squeaks at the end.

He chuckles. "Is that so hard to believe?"

Um, I mean, a little bit, yeah. "Uh ..."

He chuckles again, the sound low and sexy. “You seriously don’t realize that I like talking to you and spending time with you?”

I look around my room, as though it holds the answers. “I guess?”

“You guess,” he repeats quietly. “Well, if you’re that uncertain, what can I do to make it more obvious?”

I’m silent, my mouth hanging open. Then I pull the phone away from my ear, look at it to make sure it’s actually Andrew, put it back to my ear and wonder if I’m still dreaming.

Another soft laugh. “Okay, well, how’s this—let me take you out for breakfast.”

“What? Now?”

“Well, since you just woke up, feel free to take some time to get ready. Is half an hour okay?”

“What about Devon?” I blurt out.

“Well, I wasn’t really planning on inviting him. I thought it would just be you and me.”

“No, I mean, yes. But like, what are you going to tell him?”

“Uh, nothing? Unless he asks where I’m going, then I’ll just say out. I don’t have to report to him or anything. He’s my roommate, not my warden.”

I force a laugh. “Right. Of course. Makes sense.”

“So, breakfast? I’ll pick you up in thirty?”

Biting my lip, I think about it. I mean, why not, right? “Sounds good.”

I can tell he’s grinning when he says, “It’s a date.”

He ends the call, because I’m still sitting stunned. It’s a date? Like an actual date?

A breakfast date. In thirty minutes.

I better get in the shower.

When Andrew shows up a little over half an hour later, Jenna's sitting on the couch, ostensibly reading a book, but I know she's watching our interaction like a hawk.

Ignoring her, I open the door and greet Andrew with a smile. "Hey! Ready?"

He smiles back at me. "Hey." Then he steps in close, slips a hand to my low back, and bends his head to greet me with a kiss.

I'm so shocked, I almost forget to kiss him back.

He lifts his head with a soft chuckle. "Let's try that again." And he kisses me once more.

This time I'm prepared, so I kiss him back like a normal person, but ...

It was one thing for him to kiss me hello when I went to his house for sex last night. But we're going out for breakfast ... with no plans to be alone in private that I'm aware of. Is "breakfast" code for something?

Stepping back, I clear my throat as I grab my purse, studiously avoiding looking both at him and at Jenna. "So where are we going?" Out of the corner of my eye, I see Jenna perk up. She's been dying of curiosity since I told her Andrew was picking me up for breakfast.

"There's a little cafe downtown that makes killer biscuits and gravy," Andrew says. "I thought we'd go there."

Looking at him again, I smile. "Sounds perfect." Breakfast is *not* a euphemism. Okay.

"You two kids have fun!" Jenna calls as we walk out the door.

I poke my head back in and stick my tongue out at her before pulling the door closed on her cackling.

Andrew reaches for my hand once we're in the hall, threading his fingers through mine, and I think my brain might be short-circuiting.

Wait, is this all a dream? Did I get in a car wreck last night and I'm in a coma

and this is some elaborate, medically-induced hallucination? Do coma patients even dream?

“Your roommate seems pretty funny,” Andrew says as we head down the stairs, still hand in hand.

“Yeah. She thinks so, at least.”

He grins at me. “You guys get along? I know dorm roommates can be challenging, especially if you didn’t get to pick.”

“Oh, we chose to live together. Yeah. We’re friends. We have fun together.”

“Good. That’s good.”

Conversation peters off, and suddenly I’m worried. We’ve barely made it to the front door, and already we don’t have anything to talk about?

How is that possible, though? We’ve been meeting up in the library twice a week for a while now and haven’t run out of topics of conversation.

But he’s never kissed me hello those times. Or held my hand, which he now releases, jogging a couple steps ahead of me to a black, two-door car, the light flashing as we approach. He goes to the passenger side, and opens the door, holding it for me.

Like a gentleman.

Andrew Maloney is behaving like a gentleman. And holding my hand. And kissing me hello. And taking me out to eat. On a date.

Is he ...?

Are we ...?

No. That can’t be possible.

But everything about this adds up to him acting like ... a boyfriend?

Does Andrew want to be my boyfriend?

I almost blurt the question out in the car, but I hold it back, trying to act normal instead. But try as I might to ignore it, my brain keeps tallying

everything up and getting the same answer—Andrew Maloney wants to date me. For real.

And I think this is his way of showing that.

I manage to maintain the impression that I'm fine with all of this through breakfast—and it's not that I'm *not* fine, it's more that I'm uncertain. I like to have things spelled out. Clarified. Especially when what I'm putting together directly contradicts all the information I've had up until now. And not just from other sources either. From Andrew himself.

He's made it clear that he doesn't date. That he just enjoys having fun, and sex is fun.

Finally after we're winding down with our food—biscuits and gravy for Andrew, French toast topped with strawberries and whipped cream for me—I decide it's time to just ask the question.

It won't stop bugging me until I do. And I'd rather just rip the Band-Aid off, so to speak, than stew in this uncertainty for who knows how long.

Clearing my throat, I push my plate a few inches forward and set my napkin on the table. "So, uh, about this ..." I circle a hand at us and the table.

Andrew wipes his mouth with his napkin and leans back in his chair, relaxed. "Yeah?"

"You called this a date."

He nods once.

"Right. So, does that mean we're dating? That you want to date me?"

His eyebrows jump, but he makes no other movement. Then he leans forward, resting his elbows on the table and putting his hands together in front of his mouth. "That pretty well sums it up, yes. Is that okay with you?"

"What about my brother?" Because that's the other question that's been pounding like a drum in my mind. If Andrew wants to date me, what will my brother do?

Andrew's brows draw together. "What about him? I don't want to date him."

I shift in my seat. “It doesn’t bother you to date your friend and roommate’s sister? Because it’ll sure as hell bother him.”

He squints, moves his mouth to the side, then takes a deep breath, laying his hand on the table. “I understand that he probably won’t be thrilled, but I think if we give him time, he’ll get over it. I also don’t think that we should let our brothers dictate our lives.”

Something about the way he says that makes me suspect he has a brother and their relationship is maybe not as good as mine is with my brother—the issue of me dating, aside.

At the same time, he does have a point.

I place my hand in his. “Yes.”

His eyebrows lift. “Yes?”

Smiling, I nod. “Yes. It’s okay with me if we start officially dating.”

And that’s how Andrew Maloney became my boyfriend.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Andrew

DYLAN PLOPS HIS TOWEL-CLAD ASS DOWN NEXT TO ME ON THE BENCH IN THE locker room after practice and nudges me with his elbow. “So?” he asks, keeping his voice low and glancing around surreptitiously. “Did you lock things down with ... you know who?”

“Dude, are you hooking up with Voldemort?” Liam asks from his spot at the end of the bench.

I roll my eyes and sigh. “Fuck off,” I say to both of them, but I should know better than to think that’ll make anyone leave me alone. Just like Dylan should know that lowered voices and surreptitious looks will have the opposite effect of what he intends.

Shoving his arm, I push him in the direction of his own lockers. “Dude, go get dressed.”

But he doesn’t budge. “Aw, c’mon, man. I’ve been waiting for days now for a report, and you haven’t given me anything.”

Whoever said chicks are the worst gossips has obviously never spent any time in a locker room. “And I’m not gonna.”

“No, dude, now I gotta know,” Liam chimes in. “Who’s she who shall not be named? Or is it a he? Is that why it’s a big secret?”

“Fucking hell,” I mutter, shaking my head. “No,” I tell Liam. “It’s not a dude. It’s nobody. Don’t worry about it.”

“Now I’m even *more* worried about it,” Liam counters, undeterred.

“Thanks a lot, man,” I say to Dylan, who just shrugs, unconcerned.

“Answer the question,” he demands.

“Yes!” I hiss, trying to keep it down so Liam doesn’t hear, even though I know the effort is wasted. “I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

Dylan grins, gets up, and heads back to his locker. And now I’m fair game for Liam, who slides down next to me, towel across his lap, bare ass on the bench as he puts his feet in the legs of his boxers. “So,” he starts, standing to pull his boxers up and gracing me with a face full of his bare ass before they’re covered in green cotton. When he turns to face me, I see that there’s a Big Foot character on the front and it says “Sas-CROTCH.” I can’t help laughing, and Liam grins, pleased.

I leap on the opportunity to distract him. “Where’d you get those, man?”

“I worked at a pub back home over the summer that leans in hard to the whole Sasquatch thing. It’s even on their logo. They carry these in their merch area. I laughed at them all summer, so I used my employee discount on the last day to get a pair. You like?”

I scrunch up my face, tilting my head to the side. “I mean, they’re funny, I’m just not sure what exactly they’re trying to say. You have a really hairy dick?”

“Shut up, man.”

He jabs at my shoulder, but I dodge the blow, laughing, then grab my clothes and put them on quickly while he glowers at me.

“It means my dick is huge,” he counters, stomping back to his locker a few down to grab his street clothes and get dressed.

“Is it, though?” I ask lightly. “And anyway, I know that Sasquatch has big feet, but I didn’t think he was that much bigger than a tall guy anyway. I thought he was just hairy and has big feet. Hence why they also call him Big Foot.”

Liam seems to consider that, his brain ticking slowly through my logic and trying to come up with a counterargument. I’m moving quickly enough, and he’s taking long enough, that I’m stuffing my feet in my shoes and zipping up my bag before he responds.

“You know what they say about big feet, though.” He’s practically leering at me.

Throwing my bag over my shoulder, I raise my eyebrows. “What’s that?”

He stops. “Come on, man. You know.”

“Big feet, big”—I tilt my head to the side quizzically—“shoes?”

Then I turn and start to walk away, leaving Liam shouting, “Dick!” after me loud enough that everyone in the locker room stops to look at him. “Big feet means big dick!” he yells.

As I’m going through the door, he’s rallying the rest of our teammates for support. “Right, guys? We’ve all heard that, right?”

Laughing, I let the door close behind me.

“You took her out for breakfast for your first date?” Charity asks when I show up at her and Dylan’s place later. But she already knows the answer, because I literally just said that.

“Yes,” I say slowly, like I’m talking to someone unbearably dense.

She’s shocked, and not in a good way. “What? Why?”

“Is Dylan here?” I ask. She let me in when I showed up unannounced and immediately bombarded me with questions, not letting me even ask about her boyfriend first.

She waves a hand. “He’s in the bathroom. But who cares? You know I’m the one you actually want to talk to. Any good advice he might have will be the same as mine, and this way you don’t have to parse through the bad advice too. So.” She beckons me into the living room, still talking as we go. “Breakfast? Really?”

“What’s wrong with breakfast?” I grumble as I plop myself down on one of the couches. Charity takes a spot on the other.

“Nothing’s wrong with breakfast,” Dylan says, entering the room, bending to give Charity a kiss and then settling on the couch beside her. “Who’s complaining about breakfast?”

I throw a hand in Charity’s direction. “Your girlfriend.”

She looks affronted. “I’m not complaining about breakfast, the meal. I’m suggesting it’s not the best first date option.”

Dylan holds up a hand. “Wait. Are we talking breakfast for dinner? Like you went to a place that serves breakfast all day and got pancakes or something?”

“Please!” Charity protests. “Is that actually better? Is that really a good first date option?”

Dylan shrugs. “I suppose it depends on the girl.”

“Sadie Marsinko is the girl.”

Dylan looks at me, eyebrows raised. “So? Was it breakfast for dinner? And what did she think?”

“No, it was actual breakfast at breakfast time.”

Standing, Dylan holds up a hand for a high five. “My man!”

I slap his hand, laughing, while Charity shoots us both dirty looks.

“Don’t congratulate him,” she scolds. “It’s fine to feed your one-night stand before you send her packing, but that’s not a first date meal for someone you want a relationship with.”

Dylan doesn’t seem convinced by this argument. “We haven’t heard what she thought about it.”

“And we’re not going to right now either,” Charity counters. “She’s not here. And I don’t think Andrew’s a reliable narrator.”

“Hey!” I protest.

“Aw, c’mon, Spitfire. He’s not *that* bad,” Dylan says in what I think is supposed to be a conciliatory tone, but it doesn’t do much to make me feel better.

“Not exactly a rousing defense,” I say to Dylan.

He just shrugs. “Well? What’d she think?”

“She seemed okay with it. And it wasn’t a meal after a one-night stand, thank you very much. It was planned. I called and asked her to breakfast the next day. Like a proper date. She had French toast and said it was delicious. I paid. I made it clear it was a date, and she agreed to date me.” While Dylan seems satisfied, Charity still isn’t.

She shakes her head. “Pathetic, dude. Do better.”

“What do you want from me?” I ask, arms thrown wide.

“Dinner! An activity”—she points a finger at me—“but a classy one. Take her to a play or the symphony or a gallery opening.”

I make snoring noises, and she chucks a throw pillow at me.

“I’m serious!” she protests.

“So am I!” I shoot back. “None of those sound like anything I’d ever want to do.”

“She might, though.”

Dylan rubs his chin. “You know —”

“Don’t you start in on me too,” I interrupt before he can agree with his girlfriend.

Laughing, he holds up a hand. “I’m not saying you need to take Charity’s specific suggestions. Though if Sadie likes any of those things, you’ll probably need to suck it up at least occasionally if you want this to go anywhere. Either way, dinner and something else afterward—like live music somewhere or dancing—would be good. Chicks like that kind of shit. You definitely don’t want to get stuck in a habit of just meeting up for sex if you’re planning on this being more than that.”

I shift in my seat. “I mean, we study together too,” I grumble.

To my surprise, Charity nods approvingly. “Good. That’s good. That shows you want her for more than just her body. You actually like spending time with her.”

“I’ve told you that before!”

She shrugs. “I didn’t know you’d studied together then. And you have to admit, you tend to lose interest quickly, so how am I to know if this one will genuinely last? For all I knew when you got here, you showed up today to get advice on how to break it off and let her down gently so her brother wouldn’t castrate you.”

“He wouldn’t do that,” I say. Adding, “Would he?” when Dylan looks doubtful.

He makes an uncertain face and lifts his hands. “Maybe? Like I said. He seems pretty protective. And he did make you promise not to fuck her, which you’ve done multiple times now.”

“I didn’t know she was his sister the first time!” I protest, throwing my hands out defensively.

“But you did all the other times,” Charity points out helpfully.

“I thought you guys were on my side.” I slouch farther down on the couch.

“We are,” Dylan says.

“Eh ...” says Charity. “What?” she adds when we both glare at her. “I’m just being honest.” She lifts her chin. “I’m team Sadie.”

I can’t help laughing. “Okay. Fair enough. I guess I better figure out when I can take her out to dinner. And find another activity for after.”

“That’s the spirit!” Charity says encouragingly as I get off the couch.

Standing in the middle of the living room, I point back and forth at the two of them. “Is that how he won you over?” I ask Charity. “Fancy dates and art gallery openings and shit?”

Pressing her lips together, she turns red as Dylan laughs. “Sure,” he answers. “We had lots of ... activities. And dinners.”

Holding up my hands at the clear subtext here, I shake my head. “Never mind. I forgot that you guys were into kinky shit. I don’t wanna know.”

With Charity’s protests and Dylan’s laughter following me out the door, I head home.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Sadie

“OKAY, THIS IS WEIRD,” I SAY WHEN I ANSWER ANDREW’S CALL. IT’S Sunday afternoon, and I’m getting through some reading for class. Andrew and I have texted since breakfast yesterday, but this is the first time we’ve spoken.

“What?” he asks, sounding a little out of breath.

“You calling. You usually text, but now you’re calling. Again. What are you doing?”

He chuckles. “Just out for a walk, and I wanted to talk to you.”

I put a scrap of paper in my book to mark my place and set it down. “Oh?

About anything in particular?”

“Yes and no.”

It’s my turn to laugh. “That’s not any kind of answer.”

“Well, I wanted to ask if you were busy tonight for dinner.”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Cool. I’ll pick you up at six.”

I choke on a laugh. “That simple, huh?”

“Well, you said you don’t have plans. And since you said yes to dating me, I assumed the answer would be yes to dinner. Do I need to ask specifically?”

“That does seem kind of silly, doesn’t it?” And maybe it is, but I kind of want that anyway, though I’m loath to admit it.

“Little bit.” I can hear the smile in his voice. “Sadie, would you do me the honor of having dinner with me this evening?”

That makes me laugh too. He sounds like he’s been reading Jane Austen along with Jenna. “Yes. I’d love to have dinner with you. Where are you planning on taking me?” I’m partly asking out of curiosity, and partly because if he takes me to one of the spots the team tends to frequent, I wonder if we might bump into my brother.

He names a restaurant I’m not familiar with. “It’s French,” he adds, to clarify.

“Oooh, fancy. Should I dress up?”

“If you want to. You haven’t worn an outfit yet I haven’t liked, so I’m sure whatever you decide on will be fine.”

Is the fuckboy-turned-boyfriend supposed to make me swoon? Because that line just did it. “Aww. Okay. Thanks.”

We chat for a few more minutes before hanging up, and suddenly I’m a little sad that Jenna isn’t here. She decided to go to the library to study because she said she’s tired of looking at the walls of our dorm room. I wanted to take advantage of the rare moment of solitude. One thing that’s a lot different

about living here versus at home with my parents is that I have a lot less time on my own.

Last year I had my classes pretty well grouped together so I was on campus from about eleven or noon to late afternoon, but I had the mornings at home all to myself once they left for work. And they have enough of a social life, that I had plenty of evenings on my own too. Despite being a little bit helicopter-y as parents, they didn't make me the entire focus of their lives.

Now that I'm in the dorm, Jenna's here an awful lot, and my bedroom is so tiny that I don't enjoy spending so much time in there if I don't have to. Plus, it just feels rude and antisocial, like I'm avoiding Jenna, if I hole up in there while she's in our shared living space. And I'm sure she wouldn't be hurt if I explained that I wanted some time to myself, I'd still be able to hear her moving around, and it's just not the same at all.

But now that Andrew's called and asked me to dinner, I want someone to share it with. Someone to help me research the restaurant so I know what to order ahead of time and figure out what to wear.

I could text her, but since she's studying, I don't want to interrupt.

Pulling out my laptop, I set to work looking up the restaurant he mentioned so I can see their menu. If Jenna's not home after that, I'll start looking through my closet and putting together outfit options.

While I know she has her misgivings about Andrew, of all people, being my first official boyfriend, I think this show of effort will help allay some of her fears. To be honest, I have a few misgivings of my own about this relationship. But I've lived my entire life being cautioned to make safe choices. For once, I want to throw caution to the wind and just *live*.

Even if it's a little risky.

"I can't believe you guys are actually dating," Jenna says, her shoulder propped against the wall outside the bathroom as I finish my makeup in the bathroom mirror.

“I know, right?” I say, putting the mascara wand back in the tube. I touch up the edges of my lip gloss, making sure it’s not smeared, then pick up my silver drop earrings and put them in. “Who would’ve guessed?”

She chuckles and shakes her head. “Certainly not me. I figured getting some experience would do you good, but this ...” Her brows crimp together, and she shakes her head again.

Forcing a smile, I step out of the bathroom and grip her shoulders. “This is fine. I’ll be fine. He’s my *first* real boyfriend. I know—and you know—that he won’t be my last.”

She nods and chews on her lip, clearly unconvinced. “But what about your brother?”

I shrug, stepping past her to put my lip gloss in the purse I’m bringing with me. I decided on a flowy sundress with a cropped cardigan in deference to the cool late September evening. The days are still surprisingly warm this year, letting us all get away with shorts and flip-flops for much longer than normal, but with sunset coming, having a sweater is just smart. Plus, it’s cute. And while I know I’ve been turning up my nose at *cute* lately, it’s what I’m working with, so I might as well lean into it, right?

“My brother,” I murmur, fussing with the sweater so it hangs just so, but really I’m stalling. “I’m not sure how best to handle him,” I say at last. “For now, I don’t plan on telling him. Not until I’m sure this is going to last longer than a couple of weeks.” I meet Jenna’s eyes. “We all know this isn’t Andrew’s usual thing. He might get bored really fast, we’ll break up, and then what’s there to tell?”

Jenna doesn’t look convinced. “You’re not worried he’ll find out? Even after the fact?”

I suck in a breath and hold it, letting it out slowly through pursed lips as I consider the question. “I mean, yeah? I guess so. But I haven’t decided how to deal with him yet, so I’m just putting it off until I don’t have another choice. And if he finds out after the fact ...” I shrug again. “What’s he gonna do, really? It’ll be over at that point.”

Still looking doubtful, Jenna nods. “Okay.”

A knock on our door interrupts any further conversation. I rush to the door, making sure I get it before Jenna can, though when I glance back at her, hand on the knob, she hasn't moved. Instead, she's watching me, eyebrow arched, amusement written all over her face. I stick my tongue out at her, compose myself, and open the door, a smile blooming on my face at the sight of Andrew.

He's wearing nice dark wash jeans topped with a black button-down shirt that's open at the collar and a suit jacket I'm sure he wears on game days. It's the perfect combo of dressy and casual that doesn't make me feel over- or underdressed in my outfit choice. And it's damn sexy too.

He looks me up and down, his own smile growing as he takes me in. Stepping forward, he murmurs, "You look beautiful," then greets me with a kiss.

"Awww," Jenna chimes in as she moves to the couch. "You two are too cute for words."

"And yet, here you are, saying words," I toss at her as I step back from Andrew to scoop up my purse, keys, and phone. I offer her a grin to mitigate any sting from my comment, and she sticks her tongue out at me. We both laugh, and I wave goodbye, noting that her earlier doubtful look is gone, replaced by curiosity and, dare I say, approval.

When I'm on my own—or at least away from Andrew—doubts about our relationship plague me. Jenna giving voice to her doubts certainly doesn't help either. But as soon as I'm with Andrew again, all my doubts quiet down, and I just have fun.

Yes, I know his reputation. And I know this is new for him. But it's new for me too, and I can't help thinking that's part of what makes it work.

Conversation with him is easy, both on the way to the restaurant and once we get there. The waitress is friendly and bubbly, making recommendations from the menu when we reveal we've never been in before. After we place our orders and she whisks away our menus, Andrew looks at me from across the table, his eyes sparkling in the warm overhead lights and romantic lighting from the small oil lamp on our table. He looks equal parts mischievous and sexy.

“What?” I ask after a moment, reflexively smoothing a hand over my hair.

He shakes his head, sitting back in his chair and smiling. “I’m just happy you’re here. That we’re doing this.” He glances out the window at the evening light, then refocuses on me. “My friends told me that a breakfast date was a terrible first date, so I’m supposed to make up for it this time. I’m under orders to take you out to a nice dinner and then to ‘do something.’” He makes air quotes around *do something*.

Grinning, I raise my eyebrows. “Do something, huh? What kind of something?”

“I was informed that a movie was not an option. But there’s live music at a spot a couple blocks from here. Or there’s an open mic at a comedy club. Any interest in either option?”

I consider both. “Live music, I guess?” My nose wrinkles as I make my choice, and he laughs.

Leaning forward, he reaches for my hand. “We don’t actually have to do either one. That’s just what I was told would make a good make-up date for my first date blunder.”

I watch as he threads his fingers through mine, sparks of happiness dancing in my chest. Placing my chin on my free hand, I lean closer to him. “Wanna know a secret?”

“Of course,” he answers immediately. “I love secrets. Tell me all your secrets.”

Laughing, I shake my head. “I’m not sure I’m ready to go that far, though you do know a few already.” At his knowing look, I nod. “Yes. That one. And here’s another.” I lower my voice to a stage whisper. “I liked our breakfast date. I thought it was fun.” Talking normally again, I say, “And honestly, I’m happy just spending time with you. If you want to go see some kind of show, we can, and I’m sure I’ll have fun. But we can just go for a walk or a scenic drive and talk. That actually sounds really perfect to me.”

“Since you’re not exactly wearing walking shoes, how about we do the drive tonight, and we’ll save the walk for next time?”

My smile—that I’m not sure has left my lips since he picked me up—pulls wider. “Perfect.”

After our dinner and while we’re waiting for dessert, Andrew’s brows crimp together, his face growing unusually serious. He shifts in his seat. “Can we talk about your brother?”

“Uh ...” I sip my water. “Sure? What about him?”

He spins the salt shaker around, then lines it up with the pepper shaker. “Well, I just ... I know when we were fooling around, we didn’t want him to catch us.” He meets my eyes. “I still don’t want him to *catch* us. That sounds awkward as all hell. I think we should tell him we’re dating.”

My stomach plummets. “You want to tell him we’re dating?” I repeat, my voice sounding screechy even to me.

He grimaces and looks away, lifting one shoulder. “Yeah?” But he sounds less than certain. “I mean, I don’t *really* want to tell him. But I think we’ll have to. Or he’ll eventually find out some other way, and I think that would be way worse. Don’t you?”

I breathe out slowly, considering his point. Then I shake my head. Honestly, him finding out from someone else sounds pretty ideal. And then I can just ... avoid him until he cools off. “I don’t know,” I hedge, because while I can avoid my brother, I realize that Andrew doesn’t have the same luxury. They’re teammates. And roommates.

Reaching for my hand, he threads his fingers through mine. “Look, I won’t say anything if you don’t want me to. But think about it. Him walking in on us would be *way* worse than sitting down with him and having an uncomfortable conversation, don’t you think?”

I didn’t think my stomach could fall any further, but the thought of him coming in while Andrew has my legs over his shoulders and his mouth on my—I savagely cut off the image, only to have it replaced by one of Devon walking in while I’m riding Andrew. And for some reason we’re on the bed the wrong way so I’m facing the door with my boobs out.

Covering my face with my free hand, I let out a whimper of dismay.

Andrew squeezes my hand. “Hey. I know. I’m not excited about it, either. He ...” He clears his throat. “He’s one of my best friends, and I know he’s protective of you.”

I give him a pointed look. “That’s putting it mildly.”

He lets out a soft chuckle. “All the more reason to be up front with him. It won’t be fun. I know that. But the alternative is way worse.”

Swallowing, I straighten up and nod. “You’re right. I know.” It’s uncanny how his words so closely echo Jenna’s from earlier. “It’s just ... can we wait? Just a little bit? I want to enjoy this for like a week or maybe two first without my brother causing problems. Because, make no mistake, he *will* cause problems.”

His face falls, but he recovers quickly, giving my hands another squeeze. “I can work with that,” he says, and it sounds reassuring, but when he pulls his hand away, I feel the withdrawal acutely.

But he returns to his normal self—funny, charming, sweet—and I don’t dwell on it, instead choosing to focus on the positives. I’m dating a sexy athlete who could have anyone, but is choosing me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Andrew

SADIE'S REQUEST THAT WE DON'T TELL HER BROTHER RIGHT AWAY MAKES ME uneasy despite my agreement at dinner. I'd hoped we could tell him tonight. Or maybe tomorrow at the latest. But she wants a week.

People have already started noticing that I'm not hooking up like normal. And if I'm out of the house because I'm spending time with Sadie, they're going to want to know where I am. Plus, it's not like I can bring her back to my place unless everyone's gone. And even then ... well, we know how that panned out last time.

Even if it's not Devon coming home early, it could be one of the other guys. And if I caught one of them fucking Sadie—in an alternate universe where

she and I aren't dating, of course—no way would I be able to keep that to myself. I'd tell them to tell Devon immediately, or I'd take matters into my own hands. So there's no way I can expect anyone else to keep this a secret.

At least the plan is to go for a drive after dinner, so we'll be able to spend time alone without worrying about getting caught.

I head for the river, driving along it away from downtown and out toward the country. The sun's gone, the eastern sky an inky indigo, while the western sky still shows traces of pink, orange, and blue, the fading remnants of sunset.

"It's so pretty out tonight," murmurs Sadie, leaning forward to look up at the sky, catching the traces of high clouds and the crescent moon. Then she looks at me and smiles, and all my worries fall away.

If she wants to keep our relationship quiet for a little while longer and enjoy what we have before her brother causes problems like she said—and I'm sure she's right that clueing him in will cause some issues—I can't really be upset about that, can I? It's not like she's embarrassed about me. She wants to keep what we have light and easy, which is what I want too. That's one of the things I like most about being with her—it's easy. Comfortable. Fun.

There's no sense of having to measure up to some standard—despite her initial comments that I didn't meet her expectations in the bedroom—and I can't remember the last time I've had any kind of relationship that felt that way.

After a little while, I find a spot to pull off the road. It must be a parking area for some out of the way hiking trail, because there are clearly marked parking spots in the gravel and a trail that goes off into the trees, but we're mostly hidden from the road, and it's perfect for what I have in mind.

When I park the car and kill the engine, Sadie looks at me, eyebrow arched. "Is this the part where you take me into the woods and murder me?"

Chuckling, I unbuckle my seatbelt and lean toward her, reaching for her face and drawing her lips to mine.

She sighs into our kiss, then breaks away with a soft hum. "Much better than axe murder in the woods."

I laugh again. “Oh good. That seems like a pretty low bar to clear, but I’m glad I can manage it.”

She grins, her teeth flashing white in the scant light from the moon and stars on the clear night, but instead of saying anything, she kisses me again.

We make out until turning sideways like this gets uncomfortable. Reaching down to the side of my seat, I scoot it all the way back, adjusting the steering wheel so it’s out of the way, then pat my lap. “C’mere.”

She just sits and looks at me for a moment, but I can’t make out her expression. Then, with a shrug, she clambers across the center console, hitting the horn with her ass as she straddles my lap and tries not to bump her head. Covering her mouth with her hand, she giggles as I guide her into place.

Still laughing, she adjusts her knee placement, her thighs squeezing mine, her skirt flared around us. Tentatively, she settles onto my legs, and her warmth and weight feel perfect. I just wish she were a few inches closer, where my dick is already half hard from kissing and getting her into my lap.

“Is this okay?” she asks, laughter still riding her voice.

My hands slide to her ass and give it a squeeze. “More than okay.” I move one hand up her back to guide her closer, and as we kiss, she inches up my legs until the heat of her pussy is lined up with my hard dick, and she’s grinding against me. All it would take is a few strategic moves, and I could be inside her. As much as I want that, I’m not sure she’d get as much pleasure from it, and I firmly believe that everyone should have an orgasm in every sexual encounter. But there’s definitely not enough room to maneuver here.

Dammit. I wish we’d made plans to end up in one of our rooms somehow, because I’ve been looking forward to being inside Sadie again as soon as I left the last time.

She’s grinding on me, and I know her well enough to know that she’s enjoying it but also nowhere near close to coming.

I still her with my hands, and she pulls away. “Let’s get into the back seat,” I whisper.

She nods eagerly, nearly falling off my lap when I open the door, dissolving into giggles once again. “Oh my god,” she says quietly, her voice pitched just above a whisper even though there’s no one around and no evidence of people for miles. No cars have even come past here since we parked.

“Why are you whispering?” I ask as I follow her out and open the door to the back seat.

She shakes her head, biting back a giggle. “I don’t know. It just seems wrong to talk loudly.”

That makes me laugh too. She climbs into the back seat, moving all the way to the other side, pulling her legs up against the door as I get in.

“Feeling suddenly shy?” I ask, leaving the door open so I have more room to move if I need it. I reach up and switch off the dome light, though I enjoy being able to see her. We’re fairly hidden from the road, but there’s no need to alert people to our presence more than necessary if someone should happen to drive by.

She shakes her head. “No. I’m just trying to give you room.”

“I don’t need room. I just need you,” I tell her, reaching for her ankle and pulling her leg up onto the seat.

She comes willingly, and I wish I could see her face, because I know she’s giving me questioning looks. More than that, I wish I could see her body, though I have to admit there’s something extra sensual about doing this all mostly by feel.

My hands run up her bare thigh, finding the fabric of her panties as I move in closer to her. “What color are they?” I ask, sliding a finger under the edge of the elastic surrounding her thigh.

“Red,” she whispers.

“Sexy,” I whisper back. Then I kiss her, teasing the outline of her pussy through her panties until she’s pushing herself into my hand. Moving her underwear to the side, I give her the contact she’s craving, running my fingers up and down her seam a few times before dipping into her opening to gather some of her wetness before rubbing gentle circles around her clit.

She makes a noise in her throat, her hips flexing at the contact. Yeah, she might have difficulty relaxing enough to come with another person without the heightened stimulation of a toy or the specific knowledge of her own touch, but I still know how to make her feel good.

Sliding a finger inside her, I find her G-spot, tapping it gently to start with, my thumb still making slow circles around her clit. We don't have any distractions here. No roommates to worry about barging in and interrupting. Nothing but time and ourselves, and I'm determined that I'm going to get her off tonight or die trying.

Now that I know she takes a good amount of warming up, I'm going to spend as much time as possible doing this before I go down on her. Because I'm definitely feasting on that pussy tonight, and I want to feel it pulse with an orgasm on my tongue.

I'm not going to tell her my plans, though, because I think it'll just make her get in her head. At first, I gave up fairly quickly, thinking she must not be that into it—every so often you find a girl that isn't that into giving or receiving head, after all—but now I know she just needs more. More time, more patience, more stimulation. And I'm prepared to deliver.

I keep my movements slow and steady until she's moaning and moving against me, clearly ready for me to ramp up the stimulation. Then I kiss my way down her neck, dragging down the top of her dress as I kiss the tops of her tits, then I slide down to the floor, wedging myself behind the front seat, finally having to take my hand away from her pussy long enough to get her situated and her clothes out of the way.

“What are you doing?” she gasps, as though it isn't obvious.

“Eating your pussy,” I answer, barely recognizing the growl in my voice. I'm usually smooth, measured, calculated. But something about her has me turning feral.

I think she's about to say something, but when I shove her skirt up and push the fabric into her hands, she lets out a soft, “Oh,” still sounding mildly surprised. And when I yank her panties out of the way again and set my tongue against her sweet pussy, the sound she makes is pure pleasure.

Not holding anything back, I feast on her, taking my time to lick and suck on all her delicate parts, using my fingers to keep her going, adjusting as needed, but never, ever giving up.

“More,” she gasps, her thighs tightening on my shoulders as I draw tight circles around her clit with my tongue. I give her more pressure and as much speed as I can. When that doesn’t seem to be enough, instead of circles, I just move my tongue against her as much as possible, and that seems to be doing the trick, because she’s panting, gasping, making the soft, high pitched sounds that let me know she’s nearly there. Her ass is rising off the seat, and everything in her body pulls tight before she lets go with a shocked cry of pleasure, her pussy squeezing my fingers, and god, I want to feel that on my cock again.

I think that’ll have to wait until we have toys at our disposal once more. Next time. Even if it’s a date that ends with car sex, next time I’m going to make sure she at least has the bullet.

I stay with her until she’s trying to climb the walls of the car to get away from me. Pulling away from her with a soft chuckle, I extricate myself from the floor and climb onto the back seat, moving her leg out of the way and setting it in my lap in the process.

She leaves it there, her breath still coming hard and fast, and I stroke the smooth skin of her leg while she recovers. “Now what?” she asks softly after a moment.

“Well,” I start, sliding my fingers up above her knee. “I was kinda hoping you’d climb on my lap again, but this time I want you to ride me instead of just grinding on my dick.”

“Oh yeah?” she asks, a smile clear in her voice. “Did you come prepared with a condom?”

I scoff. “Of course I did.” I lift my hips to get the condom out of my pocket. “Grabbed a couple before I left tonight. Gotta be prepared.”

“Mmm. I like that quality in a man.” She pulls her leg under her, moving closer to me.

I take that as a green light and yank open my pants, shoving them down

enough to free my dick and rolling on the condom as fast as I can. Between making out, eating her out, and giving her an orgasm, I'm beyond ready.

Once the condom's on, she doesn't waste any time climbing onto my dick, both of us sighing as she impales herself in one slow, sweet slide.

"Jesus," I hiss, and she hums in agreement, moving slowly, finding the angles she likes best. "Yeah, babe," I encourage her in a whisper. "Ride me. You feel amazing."

She tilts her head back, clearly enjoying herself, and once again I wish I could see her better. But something about the lack of sight somehow makes this immeasurably hotter. "Fuck."

"I like it when you talk while we have sex," she whispers.

Grinning, I push up into her, and she gasps. And then I launch into a monologue of dirty talk, a stream of consciousness play by play of everything going through my mind as she fucks me senseless until I have no words, because everything in my brain is focused entirely on the way she makes me feel, the pleasure centered on the six and a half inches that juts out from between my legs until lightning races down my spine and my cock jerks as I come inside her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Andrew

I WALK SADIE TO HER DORM ROOM, BOTH OF US GRINNING LIKE IDIOTS AS WE climb the stairs hand in hand and slowly make our way down the hall. “I had fun tonight,” I tell her when we stop in front of her door.

“Me too.” She lowers her eyes, still a little shy around me for some reason. But when I tip her chin up with my fingers to kiss her goodnight, she kisses me back enthusiastically, dropping my other hand in favor of wrapping her arms around me. I kiss her thoroughly until someone walks by and mutters, “Jesus, get a room,” and we break apart laughing.

“Thanks for tonight,” she says, getting out her keys to open her door.

“My pleasure. We’ll have to do it again soon.”

She grins. “For sure. See you Tuesday?”

I nod. “If not sooner.” I take several steps backward, giving her space to unlock her door and go inside. She waves at me one last time, that smile still on her face, before letting the door close, and I finally turn and head back down the stairs.

I’m a little worried I’ll face the Spanish Inquisition when I get back to my house, but to my surprise, no one’s in the living room when I return. I hole up in my bedroom, grateful for the reprieve.

It’s no shock, though, that the reprieve is short-lived.

“Where were you last night?” Liam asks me when I get down to the kitchen for breakfast the next morning. He’s sitting at the table with Devon, both of them eating eggs and toast and drinking coffee.

Grabbing a mug, I pour myself a cup before answering. “Out.”

“No shit, asshole,” Devon grouses around a mouthful of food.

“You’re the one talking with your mouth full,” I clap back. “Who’s the asshole now?”

Grinning, he flips me off as he swallows. “There. Mouth empty. ‘Out’ isn’t an answer. And you’re the asshole, just to be clear.”

I shrug. “Sure it is.”

“I heard a rumor you’re dating someone,” Liam pipes up, and I wish I could grab those words out of the air and shove them down his throat.

“Oh yeah?” I say, opening the fridge and staring inside. Shit. Shit shit shit. Why couldn’t Dylan wait until we weren’t in the locker room to be so nosy? He had to know someone would overhear and start gossiping about me. Or maybe that was his plan so I’m forced to tell Devon whether I want to or not.

“Was it the Voldemort chick you were talking about the other day? Who is she?” Liam continues, undeterred by my clear signals that I don’t want to talk about jack shit this morning. “Is that who you were with? Where’d you go?”

Grabbing eggs before staring in the fridge too long gets weird, I also grab the

tortillas last second and the package of chopped bacon. It'll be a breakfast burrito morning, because I don't want anything that keeps me in the kitchen any longer than necessary right now. Not with these two nosy fuckers getting in my business.

"No one," I grunt, opening and closing cabinets, though what I'm looking for exactly, I'm not sure.

"Oh my god," Devon mutters, standing. "It's like you don't even live here." He practically shoves me aside as he gets out a bowl, a fork, and a plate, and pulls the skillet out of the sink. "Wash this," he says, holding it up with one hand and pointing to it. "Beat the eggs in that." He points to the bowl. "Cook them. Eat them. Jesus."

"Thanks," I mutter, taking the skillet and going to the sink.

Devon stomps back to his seat, sitting down heavily and resuming his breakfast. "Answer the question," he demands around another mouthful of food. "Are you dating someone? Who is she? Is that who you were with last night? And who's the Voldemort chick?"

I don't bother to stifle my chuckle at the thought of how Sadie'd react if she knew we were referring to her as Voldemort. But the laughter dies when I think about Devon's reaction to the same thing.

God, I can't even imagine the shit show that would ensue if I just blurted out that I was with Sadie last night. Sadie'd be pissed, especially since I said I'd give her a week. And Devon'll lose his shit no matter what. Hell, he might clobber me with the skillet he just shoved at me.

I figure we should tell him together when we do, so that neither of us has to bear the brunt of his reaction alone.

While I know she thinks that he'll give *her* hell, I have a feeling I'll be the one who's the main target of his anger. I'm the one he told to promise not to fuck his sister, after all.

It's not just fucking, though. We're dating. And I really like her.

I'm hoping Charity's right and that'll be enough to mitigate things somewhat. Also, can someone really hold you to a promise you made after you'd already

unknowingly done the thing you promised not to do?

I shake my head, washing the skillet quickly and grabbing a paper towel to dry it. “You don’t have much room to bitch about me being clueless in the kitchen while you talk with your mouth full,” I tell Devon, shooting him a look before pulling out a few eggs to scramble. “And besides, that’s not just one question. Which one do you want me to answer?”

He snorts.

“All of ‘em!” Liam chimes in, pushing his plate away and picking up his coffee. At least he has the decency to wait to talk until after his mouth is empty. Though I’d be willing to bet that part of Devon’s irritation is that Liam begged him to make breakfast for him too. And here I come in, acting all clueless and stupid.

This is the same reason Caden couldn’t wait to move out. While I *know* how to cook—at least basic stuff—I don’t like it, and neither does anyone else here. Caden loves to cook, but he hated cooking for us. Guess we didn’t make it too easy on him, especially when I didn’t wash his pan after borrowing it that one time. Between that and Liam scorching the same pan, he stopped letting us use any of his shit after that.

I’m trying to be better so we don’t scare Devon off too. He’s a good guy, a good roommate, and a good friend.

And I’m a shitty friend for breaking my promise to him and messing around with his sister. Except it’s not just messing around, and doesn’t she deserve to be happy too? Don’t I? And if we make each other happy, how can he really object to that?

Finally, pouring the beaten eggs into the pan, I clear my throat and answer. “Yes.”

My answer is greeted with complete silence. Not even the sound of them moving or breathing. When I glance back at them, they’re both staring at me, not even blinking.

Then Liam cracks a smile. “I knew it!” he crows, bouncing in his seat. “Come on, come on. Who is it? Who managed to capture the heart of the ever-elusive Andrew Maloney?”

Devon snorts. “You think this guy has a heart?”

“Ouch, man.” I say lightly, tossing him a glance over my shoulder and clutching my chest, though the hurt isn’t all pretense. I know I usually prefer hookups, but that doesn’t make me heartless. “That hurts. I have a heart. And it’s not my fault that no one’s been able to hold my attention before now.” I shrug, turning back to my cooking eggs and pushing them around the pan with the spatula I grabbed out of the drawer.

They toss good-natured barbs at me and each other for a few more minutes, and I keep my attention on my cooking food, trying not to be bothered by the fact that everyone keeps acting like I’m a piece of shit for not having a relationship before now. I know why Charity acts that way, but my friends? Shouldn’t they have a better opinion of me than that? And if Sadie’s opinion is anything to go by, I seem to be doing pretty well at the boyfriend gig. Thankfully, eggs don’t take long to cook, and pretty soon I’m dumping them onto my tortilla. Rolling it up quickly, I take a big bite, lift my burrito in a salute to my friends, and get the fuck out of that kitchen.

“Hey!” Devon shouts after me. “You never said who she is!”

No shit. And I’m not going to. At least not today.

I make indistinct noises like I’m answering around the giant bite in my mouth as I climb the stairs.

“What?” he calls after me, but I pretend not to hear him, grateful for the dubious sanctuary of my room.

I know it’s just a matter of time before one or both of them follow me up here to try to figure out what’s going on. The only answer is to leave.

I scarf my breakfast burrito, grab my gym bag, and head to school for my morning workout. Hopefully by the time my friends get there, I’ll be far enough into my workout that I can avoid them.

How am I going to last a week like this?

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Sadie

ANDREW

Where are you?

In my room. Why?

Is it okay if I come over?

What, like now?

Well, in a few minutes. I'm just leaving practice. Have you eaten yet? We can grab dinner

Dinner sounds good

I POKE MY HEAD OUT OF MY DOOR. "JENNA?" I CALL, PITCHING MY VOICE

loud enough to be heard anywhere in our suite. Considering it's not very big, that's not difficult.

"Yeah?" She comes out of her room, her hair in a messy bun, a pencil sticking out of it.

"Andrew's coming to pick me up in a few. We're going to get dinner."

"Oh, sure," she says, crossing her arms. "I see how it is. You get a hot new boyfriend, and now you won't even have dinner with me?"

I roll my eyes at her dramatics. "It's not like we had solid plans. And I'm sure we'll have plenty of other opportunities to have dinner together. He has an away game this weekend. You'll have me all to yourself."

"Uh-huh. Now all I get are his sloppy seconds."

I make a face, and she cackles, waving me off. "Go. Have fun. Enjoy your youth. I'll grab dinner later and plan on studying in the library, that way you guys can have some privacy if you want it. I'll text you when I leave." My cheeks heat, and she cackles again. "Please." She waves me off. "Get ready. As hot as car sex might be, wouldn't you prefer to have the privacy of your bedroom? Just text me when it's safe to come home."

"Thanks, Jenna," I tell her as she disappears back into her room.

"Just be sure to return the favor when the time comes," she calls through her cracked door.

"Absolutely!"

Crossing to the bathroom, I close the door on Jenna's laughter to get ready to go, excitement making my pulse race. I'd honestly expected not to see him again until tomorrow at our usual study time, but I'm thrilled he wants to hang out with me tonight.

Once I get his text that he's waiting outside my dorm, I say goodbye to Jenna and head down, grinning when he climbs out of the car as I exit the front door. He comes around to the passenger side, all lean, athletic grace in his joggers and Marycliff Football sweatshirt—September has finally caught up to us, and today was much cooler than it has been, especially now that it's

dinner time.

He reaches for me, taking in my jeans, crop top, and faux leather moto jacket. “I like this,” he says, tugging me closer by the open sides of my jacket.

Grinning, I tilt my head back to look at him. “Thanks.” Pressing up on my toes, I meet his kiss, happiness thrilling through me. He’s kissing me here, out in public in front of everyone.

A shot of fear rides the tail of my happiness, though. What if Devon happens to walk by? Or one of their other teammates?

Ending the kiss, I move to the door of the car, and Andrew turns and opens it for me. Once he’s inside, he puts the car in gear, setting his hand on my thigh as he navigates his way out of the parking lot and onto the road, the sharp shock of fear fading back into the mellow glow of happiness at his casual affection.

As much as I’m worried about my brother’s reaction when he eventually finds out I’m dating his friend, I really hope he gets over it quickly. Because I can’t understand why anyone would be upset about this.

We quickly fall into a new routine. Or maybe it’s just an expanded routine. Andrew still studies with me on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the library. But he also comes to see me nearly every day after he’s done with classes and practice. We usually get dinner. Sometimes we study together some more in the library. Other times Jenna lets us have the room for a while.

On Friday night at the end of the second week of that, she drops her bag on the floor when she comes into our suite and looks around, arms crossed. “It’s an away game again this weekend, right?”

I pause the show I’m watching to distract me from how much I’m missing Andrew even though they just left yesterday afternoon. He wasn’t even able to stay for our whole library study session, just dropping by with a cookie for me and giving me a kiss goodbye. “Right.”

“Okay, good.” Sighing, she flops onto the couch next to me, ignoring my

raised eyebrows at that comment.

“Is something wrong?” I ask.

She lets out another sigh, then purses her lips. “Not wrong, exactly.”

“Then ... what?”

Letting her head loll to the side, she looks at me. “It’s just nice to know I won’t have to clear out for a while so you can have sex.” I shift, uncomfortable and feeling guilty, but before I can say anything, she holds up her hands. “Look, I get it. Privacy is difficult to come by when you both have roommates. And his roommate situation only complicates things. But it’d be nice if you could figure out a way to go to his place at least *sometimes*. I’ve offered to leave every time, so it’s my own fault for not sticking up for myself more, but it’s hard, because I know telling your brother will be difficult. But you said you’d tell him, and didn’t you tell Andrew you only wanted a week? And wasn’t that like ... two weeks ago?”

“Yes,” I say, the word riding my own heavy sigh. “I know. I do. And I’m sorry. Andrew’s been great, really patient about the whole thing, but I know it’s wearing on him too. I just ...” I hold up my hands like I’m trying to wrap them around the concept of telling my brother that I’m dating his friend. “I don’t know how to do it.”

Jenna spears me with a look. “Please. Just do it. There’s no way that’s going to be remarkably *better*, but the longer you wait, the more likely he is to catch you or for someone else to catch you and tell him about it. Either way, he’ll be way more pissed than if you tell him yourself.”

Poking out my lower lip in an exaggerated pout, I say, “But it sounds so much easier to just let him catch us.”

She arches a brow. “Easier for who?”

“Well, me, obviously.”

Jenna’s eyes narrow. “But would it be? Really? I mean, I get how it seems that way in the short term—you’d avoid an uncomfortable conversation and we both know those are your kryptonite—but in the long term, you’d have way more unpleasantness to deal with.”

Grunting in acknowledgment, I let my head fall back onto the couch, staring up at the ceiling.

“You don’t think so?” she prompts.

I shrug. “I’m not sure it’d really make much difference, to be honest. Once Devon finds out, he’ll tell Mom and Dad, and they’ll be pissy too.”

“Why? I thought they were cool with you growing up and living your life.”

It’s my turn to spear her with a look. “You’ve met my parents. You have to have realized that they are the opposite of chill. They are not at all cool with me growing up and living my life, and the only reason I’ve managed to avoid dinners with them the last couple of weeks is because I’ve told them I have lots of homework and can’t make it.”

“Jesus, Sadie. I didn’t realize you were lying to your parents too.”

“I can’t help it!” I protest. “If they find out I’m dating someone, they’ll also lose their shit. *And* they’ll tell Devon. Who’ll lose his shit. And then Andrew will dump me, because who wants to be with someone whose family is going ape shit about their daughter dating?”

“Ah,” she says, a soft syllable of realization. “That’s the real issue. It’s not necessarily dealing with the fallout of your brother finding out you’re dating his friend, you’re scared about Andrew’s reaction to the fallout.”

“Of course I am. Even if he weren’t Devon’s friend, I’d hide this from my brother and my parents as long as possible. You don’t really understand what they’re like.” I hitch myself around to face her. “They still see me as the baby who nearly died. Their fragile child who needs to be wrapped in bubble wrap and never allowed to experience anything that could end up with her getting hurt. Do you know that I didn’t even learn to ride a bike until I was in fourth grade? Devon learned in like kindergarten, but they were so worried I’d somehow hurt myself that I wasn’t even allowed on a bike at all until after first grade. Honestly, Devon’s the reason I even learned at all. He snuck a wrench out of Dad’s toolbox one day, took the training wheels off my bike, and told me he’d teach me to ride on two wheels. And he did.”

Jenna’s grin looks conflicted. “What did your parents say?”

Shrugging again, I rub my arms. “Um, they didn’t find out for a couple more weeks, and by then they couldn’t really be mad. I was riding well, I hadn’t gotten hurt, and all they said was to make sure I wear my helmet when I ride, which I was doing anyway. But I dunno. It sucked. They weren’t really happy for me—or they were, but it was so tainted by fear that it eclipsed the happiness. And I know this’ll be the same way. Even moving into the dorm was that way.”

She nods, her brows crimping. “But Devon’s always been on your side with this kind of thing, right? I mean, he’s the one who got you riding on two wheels. He helped you convince your parents to let you live on campus. Why wouldn’t he be on your side here?”

I give her a rueful grin. “Because it’s Andrew. His friend and resident fuckboy. He *might* support me if it was some, I dunno”—I wave a hand in the air—“English major. Or some guy he thinks is a sweet little nerd who’s too tentative to do more than hold my hand. But Andrew?” I shake my head. “Nope. He’ll lose it. And Andrew will see that my family is too crazy with their overprotective tendencies and he’ll decide I’m too much trouble. It’s not like this is a long-term relationship. I know that. But I wanted more than a week or two, you know?”

Reaching over, Jenna squeezes my arm. “I’m sorry, Sadie. I get it. I do.” Patting my arm, she withdraws her hand. “But you can’t hide this forever. You gotta figure out a way to tell everyone, or else he’ll start feeling like a dirty little secret and break up with you for that. That boy’s ego is too big to stay hidden for long. And besides, he’s gotta want more room than your tiny twin bed when you guys are together, right? And if you could have sleepovers sometimes, wouldn’t that be nice?”

A grin creeps across my face. “Because then you could have the room to yourself?”

Standing, she shrugs and moves toward her room. “I mean, that would be a nice side effect, sure.” Pausing in the tiny space in front of our rooms and bathroom, she grins at me. “I love you, Sadie. I want you to be happy. But hiding your happiness won’t help you stay that way in the long run.”

“Yeah,” I say softly. “I know. I’m just worried being open about it won’t help

me stay that way either.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Andrew

A SMILE COMES TO MY FACE WHEN MY PHONE RINGS AS SOON AS I WALK INTO my room Sunday night. I'm just getting home from being away all weekend for a game. Sadie has good timing.

Except she doesn't. My smile dies when I see it's my mom calling. I don't really feel like talking to her—I'd rather talk to Sadie and see how she's doing—but ignoring her won't save me for long. With a sigh, I flop on my bed and answer. "Hey, Mom. How's your weekend?"

"Good. I'm glad you answered. I was beginning to wonder if you'd died and no one bothered to tell us."

I let my eyes roll but suppress an audible sigh. "Nice to talk to you too, Mom.

Sorry. Been busy. It's football season. Practice, games, you know the drill."

"Yes. I do." The disappointment in her voice is palpable, but she brightens when she says, "But this is your last season, right?"

"Unless I happen to get scouted. I'm starting, after all." I can't help needling her just a little. Especially since she so frequently does the same to me, though I'm never sure if it's on purpose or not. Is she needling me when she broadcasts her obvious disappointment with my life choices, or is she just unable to pretend to be supportive? Or does she hope that expressing disapproval will spur me to make choices she and Dad find more acceptable despite the lack of success so far ...

My money's on the last one. Me needling her is retaliation, plain and simple. I try not to, but sometimes it's impossible to resist.

She's silent for a beat. "Are you being scouted?" she asks, her voice that kind of calm quiet that masks strong emotions.

"Not at this point, but you never know," I say blithely. "Whether I am or not, I take my position seriously. I'm a dedicated member of the team. I'm not sure why that should be surprising or viewed in a negative light."

She sighs, not bothering to hide it. "It's not, Andrew. Your steadfastness and sense of duty are two of your better qualities. I just ..."

I clench my jaw, waiting for her to finish. I have no desire to hear what she thinks my less good qualities might be, and that's sometimes what comes after that kind of statement.

"I just wish you'd apply them in more ... appropriate ways."

Ah, so it's this line again. I let the sentence hang, seeing if she'll elaborate on what 'appropriate' means in this context, though we both know that we both know.

She wants me to be more like Ryan. Despite the fact that I'm nearly done with an exercise science degree, she wishes I were pre-law. Or pre-med.

"Have you looked at the medical school brochures your father sent you?" she says after a moment. And there it is. Right on cue.

“Uh-huh.” I looked at them right before tossing them in the trash.

“The athletic department offers tutoring to student athletes, right? Are you taking advantage of it? If not, I really think you should. If you get your grades up ...” I let her drone on about my sub-par grades—I’ve always done well enough not to jeopardize my ability to play, but I’ve never seen the point in going above and beyond, because it’s not like I’m going to ever be the top of the class. Even if I had the intellectual capabilities, football has me missing class too often to make that feasible. And I decided years ago to let Ryan be the smart one. No point in competing on his turf. I do just fine, and I’m happy to be the athletic one. At least for now.

Once I graduate ... well, I’ll have to save that identity crisis for another day. Exploring that while my mom lectures me about grades and MCAT dates and how even though I won’t be graduating in the spring like most people, now’s the best time to start studying. I make appropriate noncommittal noises so she knows I’m still on the line, but I busy myself unpacking from the weekend while she talks. Might as well get something done.

“You know if medical school isn’t appealing,” she says at length, “physical therapy might be a good career for you. You could still work with athletes.”

And old ladies recovering from hip surgery, I think. Grandma had physical therapy for a while after hers. And while I love my grandma—she’s the one who’s always been proud of my football career—I’m not sure I want to deal with other people’s grandmas or whatever on a regular basis.

“Uh-huh,” I say to that too, and Mom sighs again.

Fortunately for me, my phone alerts against my face, and when I check it, it’s a text from Sadie. Perfect excuse to get off the phone. “Hey, Mom. Thanks for all advice. I’ll think about it. But I gotta go. My girlfriend’s wondering if she can see me tonight.”

“Girlfriend?” Mom squeaks. “Since when do you have a girlfriend?”

“Oh, a couple weeks now.” I toss my now-empty duffel bag into my closet and slide the door closed.

“Really?” Uh-oh. Mom sounds more interested than ever. “I’d love to hear more.”

“Maybe next time. I want to see her before it gets too late. Still gotta get up early, you know?”

Disappointment rings in her voice when she says, “Alright. Maybe Dad and I can come out to visit one weekend soon. Get to know her.”

I hum noncommittally. “Our next home game is in two weeks. You could come watch me play.”

Now she hums noncommittally. “Perhaps. I’ll speak to your father about it.” That’s often code for no with Mom. Though the prospect of getting to meet my girlfriend might sway them both.

They haven’t been to one of my games since I was a sophomore, when they came to make a show of supportiveness before trying to convince me I should quit, change my major, and follow Ryan’s footsteps by getting a degree in business and going to law school.

I refused, and they haven’t been to visit me at school since. To be fair, it’s quite a trek. But the fact they’d make an effort for that but not to see me start, scrapes at an old wound.

“Ryan introduced us to his girlfriend a few weeks ago,” she continues. “He’s planning on bringing her home for Thanksgiving. Maybe you could bring your girlfriend too.” Everything in me rejects that idea. I don’t want to subject Sadie to the intense pressure of my family. And besides, she has her own family. Maybe she’d want me to join *her* for Thanksgiving, if we even make it that long.

Though the fact that she hasn’t told her brother about us doesn’t seem like that’s likely. Still, though. It’d definitely be preferable. Even if Devon hates me at that point and spends the whole time trying to kill me with his eyes.

“Perhaps,” I parrot back at Mom. “I’ll speak with her about it when we get closer to Thanksgiving.” Not to mention, with our game schedule, I might not even be able to go home for much of Thanksgiving break. That’s another perk of being a football player—often we only get a day or two off, which means I don’t have to spend too much time at home getting reamed by my parents for not living up to their lofty expectations.

“Don’t leave it too long,” Mom says. “It’ll be November before you know

it.”

After we say goodbye, I let my shoulders sag in a mixture of relief and weariness. That’s always how I feel after talking to one or both of my parents.

For all his pretentiousness, Ryan’s not so bad. He respects the fact that I don’t want to do things the same as him, even if he doesn’t understand. He congratulated me for getting a starting spot this year, at least. And if he were around, he’d come to a game. But since he’s in law school on the other side of the country, it’s not really possible. It would be nice to see him at Thanksgiving if I can swing it ... I’m just not entirely sure that the trade off of dealing with my parents is worth it.

Shrugging off those thoughts, I open my contacts and call Sadie. She’s who I really want to see, and when I’m with her, everything feels great. The only hitch is the fact we still haven’t told her brother. I’m not really sure how much longer I can hold off my teammates’ nosy tendencies. Everyone knows I’m dating someone and that I’m not telling who it is. There are varying theories as to why, everything from my secret girlfriend being a professor, to unattractive, to someone’s mom. No one’s floated the sister idea. Yet.

But once that issue is dealt with—which I hope will be soon—everything will be smooth sailing.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Sadie

“BABY SIS!” CROWS MY BROTHER, GALLOPING ACROSS CAMPUS TO GET TO ME as I’m about to head into the library on Tuesday.

Startled, I freeze. Shit. Is Andrew already here? I send up a prayer to the gods of ... whoever watches out for sisters hiding the fact they’re dating their brother’s friend. *Please let him be upstairs already.*

If Andrew walks up while I’m talking to Devon, will he just walk right past without a word? Will he stop and say hi to Devon? Will he reveal the fact that he’s there to meet me?

All these thoughts race through my mind as my brother envelops me in a hug and rocks me back and forth.

Laughing, I pull away from him when he finally stops, adjusting the strap of my bag on my shoulder that was knocked off kilter by my brother's enthusiastic rocking.

"What are you doing?" he asks. "Where have you been? I haven't seen you in ages. Are Mom and Dad still requiring your attendance at weekly dinners?"

"I take it you haven't been if you're asking me that question."

He points at me. "You've always been the smart one of the two of us. And that means you haven't been lately either. Good for you." He holds up his hand for a high five, and I smack it. "But seriously. I thought I'd see more of you now that you live on campus, and I feel like I see you less than ever. What gives? Why don't you come hang out with me now that Mom and Dad don't give you a curfew?"

"Uh, cause I have my own friends?"

"*Ouch, Sade.*" He puts a hand over his heart, his fingers rumpling the fabric of his gray football sweatshirt. The same team sweatshirt I—*ahem*—borrowed from Andrew the last time he came to my dorm. He played at trying to get it back off me, but when I offered it back before he went home, he shook his head, flashing me that sexy grin of his, and said, "Keep it."

Devon acts like he's yanking something out of his chest and hands the imaginary object to me. "Here's your spoon."

Grinning, I shake my head. He's been doing that since we were younger when he saw an old version of Robin Hood where the Sheriff of Nottingham says he'll carve someone's heart out with a spoon because it'll hurt more. Ever since, when someone says something hurtful, at least in a joking way, he does this.

"No, but seriously," I say. "I've just been busy. And anyway, so are you. You've got games and practice and everything. When am I even supposed to hang out with you?"

He makes a face. "We had a bye week not that long ago. But was Sadie anywhere to be found? Nope. I texted you and you ghosted me."

I laugh. "Oh my god, I did not ghost you. I told you I was with my friends

and not looking at my phone. I didn't see your text until later, and when I got it, I responded!"

"Psssh. Who doesn't use their phone for hours even when they're with their friends? I've seen you check your phone in the middle of a movie at the theater."

When I'm with Andrew, I tend to not check my phone at all. And I'm pretty sure we were having sex in his car when Devon texted, so yeah, I wasn't looking at my phone at that point.

I press my lips together, and unfortunately my cheeks heat. *Dammit. I do not need to be blushing right now!*

Devon gets a calculating look in his eyes. "Hold on." He takes a half step closer. "What aren't you telling me?"

Rolling my eyes, I huff out a sigh. "Nothing, Dev. I'm in college. Making friends. Living my life. Wasn't that the plan for this year, after all?"

"Yeah," he admits slowly. "But I figured I'd be around for a lot of that. Helping you out. You know, looking out for you like I did in high school."

I roll my eyes again and cross my arms. "While I appreciate your concern, I'm going to be twenty in like a month. I don't need a babysitter anymore. I haven't for a long time." *In fact, I didn't need one in high school either, but I don't say that part out loud.*

I know it comes from a place of caring. And Devon's on my side more than not. But even his 'looking out for me' feels suffocating after a while. When am I going to be allowed to grow up? Do I need to figure out a way to get a job on the other side of the country when I graduate?

Devon's brows drop, and he looks almost ... hurt? "I'm not trying to babysit you," he says more quietly. "I just want to make sure you're alright."

"I'm good, Dev," I say, matching his tone. "Better than I've been in a long time."

He studies me for a second, then nods. "Okay. Good. I'm happy to hear it." He opens his mouth to say something else, but then his gaze catches on

someone or something behind me. Grinning, he steps past me, and I turn to see Andrew approaching. “Andrew!” Devon greets him, holding out his hand for Andrew to clasp. Andrew shifts the drink carrier to his other hand and takes it, both of them pulling in to bump shoulders in that uniquely bro-type greeting.

“Hey, man,” Andrew says, sounding happy but surprised to see Devon. “What are you doing here? Meeting someone for a project?”

“Nah, man. I just saw my sister about to go inside and stopped her to say hi. I haven’t seen her around much lately, so I wanted to catch up. What about you? Project?”

Andrew glances at me, and I don’t know how to interpret that. I widen my eyes, telepathically willing him to tell my brother anything but the truth. He clears his throat, rubs a hand over his mouth, and says, “Nah. Just studying. Actually, Sadie here’s been helping me this semester. I’m meeting her for a study session right now. I’m running a little late.” He looks past my brother to me. “The line at the coffee shop was longer than normal today.” He holds up the drink carrier, a white pastry bag poking out of one of the holes. “Guess with midterms approaching, everyone’s needing the extra caffeine. I’m glad you weren’t inside wondering what was taking me so long.”

“Oh, uh, yeah, uh, me too. I mean, I’m glad you weren’t waiting on me inside,” I say, lamely gesturing toward the library, keenly aware of Devon witnessing this exchange, studying us both.

Then he surprises me by grinning and clapping Andrew on the shoulder. “That’s awesome, man.” He hooks a thumb in my direction. “Sadie’s super smart, so if you’re struggling in any of your classes, she’ll whip your ass into shape. My senior year she even went through my schedule with me and made me a calendar so I could keep track of all the due dates for all the projects and application deadlines. She’s a whiz at that sort of thing.” He turns his gaze on me, genuine warmth in his smile. “That’s cool you’re helping out my friends like that. You charging for extra spending money? Helping anyone else?”

“Oh, uh ...” I shake my head. “No. Nothing like that. This is my normal study time. Andrew bumped into me once, asked if he could join me, and it just became a regular thing. I don’t really do anything other than my own

homework while he does his.”

“It just works well for both of our schedules,” Andrew clarifies. “It’s like having a workout partner, you know? It’s easier if there’s someone else there working and cheering you on.”

Devon nods. “Right. Well, that’s cool. Okay, I’ll let you guys get to it, then. See you at home,” he says to Andrew, then turns and gives me another hug. “Quit hiding from me, sis,” he says, then leaves as abruptly as he showed up.

I stand, watching Devon as he strides away, looking back once with a smile and a wave. After I wave back, he turns a corner, and he’s gone.

Then I turn on Andrew, spreading my hands wide. “What the hell, man?”

His brows pull down and in. “What? You want me to lie to my friend? About studying together? Why?”

Sighing, I shake my head and turn toward the door. He’s right that Devon didn’t react badly, but ... “I just don’t want it to come back to bite us.”

Andrew holds the door for me then slips his hand into mine as we head up the stairs to our usual table. “I think it’ll make it easier for him to accept our relationship if he believes there’s more to it than me just wanting to fuck you.” I make a face at his crude choice of words, and he laughs softly. “I promise that’s what he’d think. But if he knows we study together regularly, that means I’d’ve gotten a chance to get to know you, which means he’s more likely to believe us. Plus, it’s the truth. If we’re going to tell him everything anyway—and we are right?” He waits for my reluctant nod before continuing. “We might as well tell him the truth.”

I stop at the top of the stairs, horrified by that thought. I point at Andrew, nearly jabbing him in the chest, and he raises his hands in surrender. “We are *not* telling him that we had an anonymous hookup at the first party. There is no reason he needs to know that. Got it?”

With another soft laugh, he wraps his hand around mine, leading me to our usual table and putting down his backpack, his face sincere. “No, we don’t need to tell him that. He doesn’t need to know all the details. But it’s been over two weeks now, Sadie. We need to tell him soon.” He grimaces. “The whole team knows I’m dating someone already, and the fact that I’m keeping

who it is a secret only makes everyone more interested. I don't know how much longer I can hold them off."

His words make me want to flop around in a pouty tantrum, because even though I know I promised, I still don't want to tell my brother.

Instead, I nod. "I know. We will."

"When?" he asks, and I press my lips together, shaking my head.

"I don't know," I practically wail, collapsing into the chair and covering my face with my hands. "You're right. I know you're right. And Jenna's already said that she's getting tired of going somewhere else so we can have privacy and that I need to find a way to spend time at your place too. I just ..." I drop my hands, giving Andrew a pleading look. "Once we tell Devon, I'm worried everything will change."

He slides into the seat across from me, reaching for my hands. "You're probably right. I'm sure it will change. I'm just not convinced it'll be a bad thing. It *will* be nice when I don't have to sneak you in and out of my house. And Devon *will* get over it. But the longer we keep it from him, the worse it will be when he finds out. Do you want to tell him yourself? Or do you want me to be there?"

I study his face, his gold-flecked eyes radiating sincerity and warmth, his straight nose, high cheekbones, square jaw, and surprisingly plush lips. "I think I should do it by myself," I say at last. It'll be hard enough as it is. Even though I know Andrew would be nothing but supportive, I can't help thinking that his presence will only make Devon more likely to explode. If I tell him on my own first, he'll have time to calm down before he sees Andrew again and can hopefully be rational by that point.

Andrew nods and flashes me a grin. "Okay. Tell me when you're going to do it, though, so I can be prepared."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Andrew

SADIE'S PASSING COMMENT ABOUT HER ROOMMATE GETTING TIRED OF MAKING herself scarce makes me determined to figure out a way to spend time with Sadie alone but not in her room. I can't blame Jenna. I'd probably be annoyed by now too if I were in her shoes.

Fortunately, all my roommates are planning on going to the game night hosted by two of our teammates on Thursday night. It's a weekly tradition where Jackson and Eli invite everyone over for a round robin video game tournament. I haven't gone much this semester since I've been spending all my free time with Sadie, but there hasn't been a week so far that all my roommates have decided to go.

It'll be the perfect night to have Sadie over. Especially since those tournaments can last a while, and my roommates are all competitive as fuck. Well, I suppose we all are. Sort of the nature of the beast with football players.

Some of the guys don't really care about video games, though, and they come just to hang out and have fun. Not my roommates. If they're playing, they're playing to win, no matter what the game. Which is part of the reason they don't always go. If it's a game they're not good at, they won't bother.

Tonight is Mario Kart, which is a classic, and I'm honestly a little bummed to miss out. But having the place to myself to spend time with Sadie more than makes up for it.

"You sure you don't wanna come?" Liam asks, poking his head into my room.

I look up from the book I'm studying on my bed and lift it. "Nah, man. Too much homework. I'm still behind from missing last week. Maybe next time."

He looks like he might protest, but instead just nods. "Alright. I'll hold you to that. Good luck."

"Thanks, man." I stay where I am, my ass planted on my bed, my textbook in my lap until I hear everyone leave. I even wait another fifteen minutes to be sure they don't come back because they forgot something.

Eventually I decide the coast is clear, and my heart rate kicks up at the prospect of having Sadie over for an intimate dinner in my home. I place the order for dinner we discussed this afternoon at the library, put on my shoes, grab my keys, and head out to pick her up, a big smile on my face as I text her to let her know I'm on my way.

After I pick up Sadie, I deposit her on the couch with a kiss and press the remote into her hand. "Make yourself comfortable. I just need to get a few things ready before our date officially starts."

"What are you up to?" she asks, her eyes sparkling in the lamp light. She

grins at me, her lips shiny and pink, and I can't stop myself from kissing her again.

"You'll see," I tell her after yet one more kiss—why should I stop myself from kissing my girlfriend in my own house, after all?—then I finally back away, adjusting myself in my pants.

I realize that kind of gesture is at odds with the romantic atmosphere I'm going for, but it just makes Sadie laugh and look me over like she wants to eat me up. And I love that for us.

Taking the stairs two at a time, I run up to my bedroom and pull out the hunter green tablecloth, simple glass candle holders, and white taper candles from where I stashed them in my closet. I rip open the packaging then run my hands through my hair when I realize that the tablecloth is going to be creased. Shit. I really wanted this to be perfect. Should I have washed it first? But then I'd risk my roommates seeing the fact that I have a tablecloth and asking questions, so that's not really an option. Maybe if I ironed it? But I don't have an iron. Or an ironing board. Does any of my roommates? Even if they did, I don't think I want to waste time doing that.

My phone dings with a text that the food will be here in a few minutes. I ordered takeout from an Italian restaurant in town. I figured a chicken and pasta bake plus salad and breadsticks would be a safe and easy choice.

Maybe once I get the food plated and on the table the tablecloth won't look so bad?

I mean, the options are to hope that it's not too bad or ditch it altogether, and since I bought the damn thing, I want to at least give it a try. Keeping my steps light, I hurry back down the stairs with everything bundled in my arms.

Sadie glances my way from the couch, craning her head around to try to see me around the living room doorway. "What are you doing?" she asks.

"You'll see!" I tell her again.

Her chuckle floats to me, but then she's quiet. I'm not sure if she's not watching TV because she doesn't want to or because she's trying to listen in on what I'm doing, but despite giving her the remote, I can't hear it. When I peek in on her, her attention's on her phone, so she must've decided that was

a better option for passing the time.

My asshole roommates haven't cleaned their shit off the table recently, so I waste time finding a box and dumping everything into that. We can sort it later. Or not. Most of it is probably trash anyway. I doubt they even remember what they've left on the table.

I pick up a piece of mail, see it's addressed to me, and nod in confirmation. See? I can't even remember how much of this shit is mine. No way anyone else can either.

Once the table is cleared and given a cursory wipe down with a wet paper towel, I spread out the tablecloth and examine the effect, my hand over my mouth. Yes, the creases are still visible, but I think it looks okay? Or it will once there are candles and plates and shit, right?

Sure. We'll go with that.

I set the glass candle holders in the center, then open the candles and stick them in. One falls over. "Shit!" I hiss, scrambling to right it.

"Everything alright in there?" calls Sadie.

"Yup!" I reassure her. "Everything's fine!" I've never done anything like this before—staged a romantic dinner for my girlfriend—and I'm determined that it'll be, well, if not perfect, still *good*. And part of that is not getting my girlfriend to help. That'll ruin the effect far more than creases in a tablecloth.

Once I get the other candle to fucking stay in its fucking holder—the line from *Happy Gilmore* rings through my head, "It's your home! Don't you want to go in your home?"—I dig through the junk drawer for the lighter. After lighting the candles, I take a moment to admire the effect.

Yeah. I think it's good. The creases are already a little less noticeable. Add some plates and the food and it'll be great.

As I'm pulling out the plates, the doorbell rings.

"Want me to get that?" Sadie asks, her voice getting closer.

"No!" I practically shout, racing to head her off. "No, you sit. I'll get it." She's standing in the hallway, trying to peer around me to see what I've been

doing, but I grip her shoulders, kiss her, and steer her back to the living room. “It’s almost ready. It’ll be worth it, I promise.” I hope, anyway.

After getting the food, I head back into the kitchen, plate our food, stash the food containers on the counter out of the way, and then go get Sadie. “Dinner is served,” I tell her in my most pretentious voice.

Setting her phone down, she giggles and stands, coming around the couch and hooking her arm through mine. “Should I be worried?”

I shake my head. “Not at all.”

When we get into the kitchen, she gasps. “Oh, Andrew. I love it.” She turns to face me. “You’re the sweetest.” Pressing up on her toes, she gives me a quick kiss. “This is the best date ever.”

A bubble of happiness fills my chest at her words. It might not be as perfect as I’d imagined or hoped, but Sadie’s pleased, and that’s what matters.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Sadie

WHEN ANDREW INVITED ME TO HIS PLACE TONIGHT, I WAS EXCITED, BUT THAT was because I knew we'd have amazing sex in his room. And since it's the team game night, he's assured me that everyone will be gone for hours.

I still need to tell my brother about us—and I will—but there honestly hasn't been time. I even screwed up my courage and asked him to meet me somewhere yesterday, but he didn't respond for hours—and he accuses me of ghosting him, ha—and when he did, it was too late to hang out and we both had too much going on today. Since they're gone for the weekend again—leaving tomorrow and coming back Sunday—it'll have to wait until next week.

But dating a retired fuckboy—or at least one who’s on hiatus until our relationship ends—wouldn’t lead me to expect something as romantic as the candlelight dinner he’s set up for us in his dining room. Sure, it’s takeout and not something he cooked himself, but he was thoughtful enough to find out what I’d want and order it. And he’s playing to his strengths. He’s not much of a cook, so trying to make me a gourmet meal would’ve ended in disaster.

He holds my chair out for me, and I sit, beaming at him across the table when he takes his seat. Even though we’ve already spent a couple hours together earlier today, our conversation flows just as easily, swapping stories and catching each other up on the parts of our day we were apart.

When we finish eating, I collect my plate, but Andrew waves at me to leave it where it is. “I’ll clean up after,” he murmurs.

I arch an eyebrow. “Oh?” I ask, feigning ignorance. “After what, exactly?”

Grinning, he stands and comes around to me, holding out a hand. A matching smile stretches across my face as I place my hand in his, letting him pull me to my feet and into his arms. He kisses me, gently at first, then more deeply as I respond.

We both know this was always going to be dessert. “Did you bring your toys?” he asks, skimming his lips down my jaw.

I hum my affirmative, and he pulls away, his sexy smile decidedly wicked.

“Good.” He twines his fingers with mine and leads me to the living room where I left my purse. He hooks it with his free hand, then takes us upstairs to his room. Once inside, he closes the door and tosses my purse on the bed before pulling me in for a kiss once more. With his mouth fused to mine, he backs me to the bed, gently guiding me down and climbing on top of me.

We’re both still fully clothed when he settles between my thighs, his hard dick pressing against my center as he grinds into me, heightening the anticipation for both of us. “God, Sadie,” he whispers. “I can’t wait to be inside you. To feel you coming on my cock.”

I moan my agreement, and he lifts my leg so it hitches over his hip, his fingers dragging the fabric of my flowy skirt nearly to my waist. His hand palms my ass, and my arousal spikes, my hips pressing up to meet his. I tug

his shirt up so I can get to the skin of his torso. “I need to feel you,” I murmur when he nuzzles my neck. “Too many clothes.”

He grunts, but doesn’t stop nuzzling his way into my cleavage. My fingers thread into his hair, lightly scraping his scalp with my nails because I know he likes it, and he tugs the low neckline of my top to the side. Hooking a finger into the cup of my bra, he exposes my nipple, quickly covering it with his mouth.

Gasping, I arch into the contact. “Jesus. Yes.”

“You’ll never believe it, man!” Devon’s voice says, right outside the door, and we freeze. “I got knocked out in the first round! And not just that, the first match of —”

The door opens before Andrew can do more than lift his head, meaning my brother barges in with my nipple out, pointed and shiny in the air.

“What the fuck?” Devon roars as I shriek and rush to cover myself, but Andrew’s hands are in the way since he’s trying to do the same thing.

At least my hands are blocking the view? I think, panicking. And only my one nipple was out? As though that’s not bad enough.

“Sadie!” Devon shouts, but his eyes are locked on Andrew, who’s standing in front of me, legs braced, fists clenched at his sides like he’s ready to protect me.

Scrambling off the bed, I place a soothing hand on Andrew’s back, and the look he gives me is so full of pain, it almost robs me of speech. “Let me deal with him,” I say quietly, then step in front of Devon.

He’s not to be dissuaded, though. Looking past me, he points at Andrew. “What the hell, man? I trusted you. You *promised* me.”

I throw Andrew a confused look over my shoulder. What did Andrew promise Devon, exactly? But Andrew won’t meet my gaze. His jaw ticks, his chin jutting out. He doesn’t say anything, and I can only guess it’s because he’s letting me deal with my brother.

“Devon,” I say sharply. “Let’s talk.”

He finally turns his gaze on me, fury boiling behind his eyes. Then he grabs my arm and shoves me behind him, still standing in Andrew's doorway. "I'm taking my sister home. When I get back —"

Grabbing his arm, I give him a yank to interrupt his threat. "When you get back, nothing," I hiss. "And you're *not* taking me home."

He rounds on me. "Yes I am." Yanking the door closed, though why, I'm not sure, he maneuvers me toward the stairs. Angry, I plant my feet, trying to stand my ground, but he's bigger and stronger than me, so it's move or get pushed over. "What's the big deal? I thought he was your friend."

He gives me a cutting look as he tromps down the stairs, and I have to practically run to keep up. "That's exactly why I know he's *not* the kind of guy you should be dating."

"Why?" I stop halfway down, waiting for him to turn and face me before continuing. "Because he has a 'reputation.'" I make dramatic air quotes then cross my arms.

He gives me that look again. "Yes. Exactly. Do you know how many girls he's fucked just this year?"

"Do you mean calendar year or school year?" I quip, because if it's the latter, I'm pretty sure I do know. At the very least, I know how many girls he's fucked since we got together—one. Me. And that's what matters more than his past.

He growls. "Look, I'm just saying he's not known for his fidelity. Or remembering that he's hooked up with and dropped a chick when he starts hitting on her again. Once he manages to get into your pants," he looks sick getting that phrase out, "he'll be done." He looks up at me from the bottom of the stairs, his face full of care and sympathy. "I've seen how girls are after he churns through them. I don't want that for you. And I don't want to have to beat up my friend and teammate for breaking my sister's heart. It would make things awkward."

I bite my lip, "I don't know how to tell you this but ..."

"God!" He explodes. "You already let him in your pants? Dude! I don't need to know about your sex life!"

Laughing, though without much humor, I shake my head. “Considering how deeply you’ve inserted yourself into my sex life, it seems like you do.”

He looks affronted. “What are you talking about? I haven’t inserted myself into your sex life!”

I throw my hands in the air. “How can you say that with a straight face? That’s all you’ve done since I was old enough to even *have* a sex life.” At the sight of his brows still drawn together in confusion, I scoff. “Seriously? You cock blocked me all through high school.”

That uncomfortable look passes over his face again. “I’m not sure it’s called that when you’re a girl.”

I shoot him a glare. “Fine. You cock blocked all the guys who might’ve been interested in me, then. Everyone knew I was your *baby sister*. And because everyone wants to be your best friend, they knew to steer well clear of me if they harbored any attraction to me at all. Which left me with very little to choose from in the dating department. Did you never wonder *why* you went on all the dates your heart desired while I sat at home until after you graduated?”

His lips purse, his eyes darting to his left as he considers the question. “I guess I thought you just weren’t that interested,” he says at last.

“Seriously?” I demand, wondering how my brother could be so dense. “I was definitely interested. But anyone I might be interested *in* wanted to stay on your good side, so they all left me alone. I was just Baby Sadie or Baby Marsinko. Who wants to date a baby?”

“You didn’t like those nicknames?”

“No!” I explode. “Of course I didn’t! They reduced me to a weird extension of you, rather than being my own person.”

He studies me for a moment. “Why didn’t you ever say anything?”

The hurt in his tone softens the edge of my anger, and I let my hands drop to my sides. “Because I knew you weren’t doing it on purpose.” I press my lips together, his accusation to Andrew, *You promised*, echoing through my head. What exactly did he promise? “Or I *thought* you weren’t. What did Andrew

promise?”

He shifts, looking away, his hand going to the back of his neck in a sure tell that he's nervous. “Uh, nothing.”

“Bullshit.” I cross my arms again, staring him down when he glances at me.

Then his face hardens, his chin lifting. “I made him promise not to fuck you,” he says quietly but clearly.

I jerk my head back, then point at him. “See? Right there. You put yourself right in the middle of my sex life, and have the audacity to pretend you didn't.” I take two steps down. “For your information, I approached him first.” He makes a face and opens his mouth. I hold up a hand. “Save it. I'm not done.” I take a deep breath. “We're dating. We're together. We have been for weeks now. Andrew wanted to tell you right away, so don't get pissed at him. I'm the one who stopped him. And you wanna know why?” I move to the bottom step so we're eye to eye. “Because I knew you'd react just like you're doing now. That you couldn't possibly be rational about this. Because you never have been. You absolutely knew what you were doing in high school, just like you knew what you were doing here. The difference is, I don't actually care if you approve of me dating or not. You're not my dad. I'm not a little kid. And Andrew has enough faith in you, in your friendship, to believe that you won't hold it against him forever. And he cares enough about me to risk the possibility that you will. So stop and think about that before you go and threaten to beat up my boyfriend.”

With that, I spin around and march back up the stairs.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Andrew

WHEN MY BEDROOM DOOR OPENS AGAIN, I STAND UP QUICKLY, THEN SAG back to my bed when I see it's Sadie and not Devon.

She leans against the closed door, her eyes bleak when she meets mine. My breath catches, and I stand, spitting out words before I even know what I'm saying. "We should probably take a break." The words hang in the air, like one of Jason's protein powder-fueled farts, and as soon as I hear them I wish I could wave them off. But just like a fart, we're trapped with them, the space only growing more awkward as the seconds tick past.

"Oh," Sadie says softly. And I wish I could kick my own ass, because as soft as the single syllable is, her surprise is evident. That's not what she was

expecting. Certainly not what she was hoping for or intended to say herself.

That's what I thought she was going to say, though, and I wanted to ... beat her to the punch, I guess. I thought it'd hurt less if I said it first.

She pushes away from the door, not meeting my eyes. "Right," she says, just as softly. "Good, um, yeah. Good plan." She chokes a little on the last word, tears filling her eyes as she glances at me, quickly looking up, away, anywhere but at me, and right now I hate myself.

"Sadie, wait," I try, but it's too late.

She shakes her head, offers me the ghost of a broken smile, then opens the door and slips out. I follow her, because what else can I do? How else can I fix this? Stop this?

But then Devon is there, blocking my path, and when I try to step around him, he won't let me, putting his larger size and experience blocking to good use. "Dammit, Dev, let me past," I growl. But he just stands there, arms crossed, silent and unmoving.

We both hear the door click shut, and then he finally steps around me, giving me a disgusted look and shaking his head.

"What?" I bark, the challenge clear in my voice, needing to do something to get out the rising anger building inside me.

He pauses at his bedroom door. "Fuck, man," he rasps. "Seriously? I thought I could trust you. I knew you liked to fuck around, but I thought you had lines. Boundaries. Respect." He practically spits the last word. "She's my *baby sister*. And you promised me. You promised you'd stay away from her. The *last* thing she needs is to get tangled up with a guy like you."

I rear back, his words stinging and slashing as they pass, the last one landing right in my gut, driving the breath out of me. I want to slash back. Retaliate. Wound him as much as he's wounded me. But there's not much I can say. Not to Devon. He's always been a good friend, and he's right, I did promise. And we all know I'm just a fuckup, nowhere near good enough for the likes of her.

Except she chose me. She knew who and what I am, what I was, and she

wanted to be with me, regardless of anyone else's feelings or objections.

Suddenly tired, I turn toward my own door. "Or maybe she needs someone to recognize she's not a baby anymore and can make her own choices," I toss out, still needing to say something.

Footsteps pound on the floor, and before I can turn in surprise, he wrenches me around, getting in my face. "You don't know anything about it," he hisses, spittle flying, and I shove him off me, though he only backs up a couple of steps, shoulders heaving, face red. Raising a finger, he points at me. "You don't know her. You don't know what she's been through."

A dozen different comebacks fly through my head, each more provocative than the last. And I want to let loose, throw them in his face, show him how much I know Sadie—probably better than he does at this point—but I also know Sadie wouldn't want us to get into a fight. And that thought, more than anything, calms me down.

If I have any chance of fixing this, I need to keep my head. And not beat the shit out of her brother.

Can we please talk?

I don't like the way we left things.

This isn't what I want.

I have to leave in an hour, but I can talk on the phone. Please call.

I'll be back Sunday night. Can we meet up and talk then?

It's Tuesday. I get up for my morning workout breathing a sigh of relief. Sadie hasn't responded to any of my texts since she left on Thursday night, but I know she'll be in the library at our usual time. She's always there, and she's never late. Well, almost never late. Devon made her a little bit late last

week, but it's not like I was there already and waiting either.

I stop by the campus coffee shop to pick up her favorite drink and cookie, chafing at how long the line is taking, how long it takes the baristas to make the drinks, gritting my teeth as they chat with each other and people in line as though if I can will everyone to go faster, that'll somehow change the outcome of today.

Apprehension fills me from my toes to the top of my head, the weight of it sitting in my belly like bad fast food before an extra hard practice. Not just apprehension ... dread. I'm dreading the outcome of my time with Sadie, because even though she hasn't spoken to me, nothing feels final. Yet.

After this, though ...

And the fact she hasn't responded isn't exactly a positive sign.

I carefully place the pastry bag of cookies in my backpack and clutch the drinks as I make my way across campus to the library. It's cool and blustery today, the wind blowing, occasional bursts of rain pelting me, leaves swirling around. The wind started last night and has stripped a surprising number of leaves in a relatively short time.

Head down, I lengthen my stride to eat up the distance to the library, grateful to be out of the wind once I make it through the doors. I take the stairs two at a time to get to Sadie that much quicker, winding through the stacks and around the corner to our table ...

And it's empty.

The shock of the unexpectedly empty table has me blinking and turning in a slow circle, making sure I'm in the right spot. But no, I am. She's just not here.

My hands tightening on the paper coffee cups, I do a quick circuit of the area, but there's no sign of her. Briefly, I consider searching the library and seeing if she's here somewhere, just at a different table.

But if she's gone to the trouble of that, it's because she doesn't want to study with me. Stalking her isn't a good look. And there's a strong chance she's not here at all.

With a sigh, I sit at our usual table, feeling bereft, the splatter of rain against the window a fitting soundtrack to my misery.

Everything's fucked. Devon's avoiding me, which makes life awkward as all hell since I live down the hall from the guy and our lockers are close together. And our friends don't know how to handle it, so they're largely avoiding both of us from what I can tell.

Like I said, totally fucked.

"See man," Dylan says quietly after practice a week after Devon walked in on Sadie in my room, "this is why you don't fuck with your friends' sisters."

I glare at him. He's already showered and dressed while I'm dragging my heels, taking my sweet time getting out of my practice gear. Reaching into my locker, he grabs my towel and tosses it at my face. "Don't look at me like that. You know I'm right."

"What happened to 'it doesn't count if you actually like her and want to date her'?" I grumble, chucking the white terry cloth back at him.

He deftly snags it out of the air before it can hit him in the face and shrugs. "Charity said that, not me. Either way, hurry up and get showered. You stink, and I don't want to eat in the same room as you." He tosses the towel on the bench next to me.

"Who said anything about that?" But I strip down to my padded shorts anyway.

"Me. You're coming over tonight. I already told Charity, so don't make me a liar." With that, he heads to his locker, grabs his stuff and disappears.

Sighing, I finish stripping down and head for the showers. Dylan's about the only one who'll actually talk to me right now. With everyone else, it's grunts and nods of acknowledgment but that's about it. Even at home, Liam and Jason make stilted small talk. At least they're giving Devon the same treatment. They clearly want to stay out of our issues, and I can't say I blame them. It still sucks, though.

So if Dylan wants to have me over for dinner, I'm not about to pass that up. Even if it means having Charity bust my balls. I deserve it. And at least it means I can avoid going home for a few more hours.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Sadie

JENNA COMES INTO OUR ROOM AND STANDS IN FRONT OF WHERE I'M LYING ON the couch, staring listlessly at the reality TV dating show I have playing. I've been lying here all afternoon, deciding that studying in the library by myself would be too painful. And if Andrew showed up? Even more painful.

Crossing her arms, she blocks my view so I have no choice but to look up at her. "I thought you were going to stop moping," she says.

Lifting the remote, I pause the show so I don't have to deal with its inane chatter while Jenna berates me. I can't handle having both things going at the same time. I gaze up at her, taking in the stern set of her mouth. "I guess I lied." My gaze drifts back to the corner of the screen I can see past her legs.

She makes a disgusted noise, then shoves my feet off the opposite end of the couch and plops down. Annoyed, I cast her a glare, but shift so she has room to sit. She doesn't seem to give a shit.

“Sadie,” she starts, and it takes everything in me not to groan dramatically and cover my face. “You like the guy. And he obviously likes you.” She picks up my phone and thrusts it in my face, forcing me to look at the unread messages notifications that show the opening words of each of the texts I'm pretending not to see. “I get that what he said was shitty, but I think there's more to the story here. Don't you owe it to yourself to at least hear him out?”

Swiping my phone out of her hand, I stuff it under my leg. “I can't, Jenna. I can't do it.” I hold up a finger. “Either he wants to explain why we should be broken up—which you and I both know will include some kind of declaration of undying loyalty to my brother and the bro code or some equally stupid bullshit”—I hold up a second finger—“or he wants to ask me to give him another chance. And I can't do that either. They're both too painful.”

Undeterred, Jenna leans over and reaches under me to tug my phone free. “Stop it!” I slap at her hands, trying to stop her, but she doesn't care, and soon enough, her wily fingers find what they're after and get my phone back out. She reveals the unread notifications again, tapping on them so each one shows separately, and starts reading off the openers of each one. “Please talk to me. I really wish you would talk. I'm sorry. This isn't what I want.” She spears me with a glare on that one. “I don't like the way we left things. Can we please talk.” She tosses the phone back at me. “Do any of those sound like someone who wants to declare their undying loyalty to your brother and explain why you shouldn't be together?”

Pressing my lips together, I shake my head. “But I can't get back together with him either,” I whisper.

She throws her hands in the air. “And why not? Because I thought you'd decided you were done letting what Devon wants control your life.” She points at my phone. “This guy's already fucked his friendship with your brother. You have to realize that much.”

“Oh, so that's a good enough reason to get back together with him?” I retort sarcastically.

Jenna's lips twitch. "While I appreciate that you're getting more lively right now, no, that's not my point. My point is that your brother can't stand in the way if he's already ended the friendship, so what's the problem?"

Tears well in my eyes, and Jenna scoots closer, wrapping an arm around me. "You're miserable because you're in love with him. And based on those texts, I'd say that's true for him too. At least talk to him. If I'm wrong, tell him to go fuck himself and stomp out with your head held high, then come here and I'll buy you a tub of your favorite ice cream."

I let out a watery snort of laughter, then sniff, reaching for a tissue. She has a point. I haven't let myself admit how strong my feelings for Andrew really are, but yeah, she's right. I have fallen for him. I didn't expect to, but he's been nothing but sweet and caring the whole time I've known him. He's everything I could want in a boyfriend, and given my reading preferences, I want a lot. He's hot, he's kind, and he's amazing in bed. Shooting a glance at Jenna, I say, "I'm going to hold you to that."

Her eyes brighten. "Does that mean you're going to talk to him?"

Standing, I nod. "Yes." I check the time. He should be home from practice by now. My heart picks up speed at the thought of seeing him. If Jenna's right—if I'm right—I could have my boyfriend back within the hour.

"You're not going like that, though," Jenna says as I reach for my keys.

Looking down at myself, I pluck at the oversized ratty T-shirt and leggings with a hole in the crotch that I wear when I'm lounging and break out laughing. "You're right. Come on. You have to help me find the perfect outfit."

Twenty minutes later, I'm in Jenna's car driving to Andrew's house, my heart hammering in my chest. Once I park, I pause and take a few deep breaths. "You can do this," I whisper. "He wants to talk to you. Everything will be all right."

But there's a voice at the back of my mind that whispers, *What if it isn't?*

I shake my head, turn off the engine, and climb out. Even if it doesn't work out the way I want, I'll still be all right.

Sure, I'll be sad for a while longer, but eventually that will pass.

Squaring my shoulders, I tug on the cropped denim jacket topping the bodysuit and wide leg pants Jenna helped me pick out. I look sexy but in an understated and put together way, my hair pulled back into a half up style, simple eyeliner and mascara and a bold lip color as my makeup.

"You gotta show him what he's been missing," Jenna said as she helped me get ready. "Make him realize exactly how much he wants you."

I let those words replay in my head to bolster my strength as I stride up to the front door and knock firmly, crossing my fingers that Andrew answers. Or, at the worst, Liam or Jason.

Please don't be Devon. Please don't be Devon. Please don't be Devon.

And of course, when the door opens, it reveals Devon. His face brightens at the sight of me, then immediately shutters. He leans against the doorjamb, pulling the door against his body. "Hey, sis. What's up?"

I lift my chin. "I'd like to see Andrew, please."

Devon's eyes scan my outfit then meet mine again, giving a minute shake of his head. "He's not here."

Liar. I think the word, but I'm smart enough not to say it out loud. I don't want to argue with my brother. That's not why I'm here. I can't help getting pissed, though.

Eyes narrowing and cheeks growing hot, I scowl at Devon. Stepping forward, I plant my hand in the center of his chest, and give my brother a shove.

He's so caught off guard that he stumbles back a few steps, giving me an opening to get inside. "Andrew!" I call, making my way toward the stairs.

"Jesus, Sadie," Devon hisses behind me. "I told you, he's not here!"

I whirl on him, crossing my arms. "Really? Are you sure? Then you shouldn't mind me checking his room." Spinning on my heel, I march for the

stairs, ignoring the curious looks from the other residents poking their heads out of the kitchen. Out of the corner of my eye, I see them giving Devon questioning looks, but I don't know how he responds, because he's behind me.

It doesn't matter. They can all deal, because I'm talking to Andrew one way or another.

But when I get up the stairs and see that the door to his room is closed, no light peeking out from underneath, I slow my steps, deflating. Even so, I step up to the door, give a light rap, and open it, confirming that he is, in fact, not there.

"Told you," Devon says from behind me, though it doesn't sound as smug as it could, especially from him in this situation.

Taking a deep breath, I turn to face my brother, eyes narrowing once more. "Fine. You're right. He's not here. I'll wait for him to get back. And while I wait, you and I can have a conversation."

A pained look crosses his face, but I don't care. Jenna's right that I shouldn't let him run my romantic life anymore.

Crossing my arms, I stare him down. "You realize that Andrew broke up with me because of you."

His eyes widen, meeting mine for a split second before darting away. He raises a hand and rubs the back of his neck, his long-time tell that he's trying to come up with something to say that doesn't make him look like an idiot.

It takes way too long, of course, and I snort, a humorless laugh of disbelief. "Seriously?" I gesture at him with a flick of my fingers. "Is this to cover the fact that you feel like a piece of shit or because you didn't know he'd dumped me?"

Another wince, and he at least has the decency to drop his hand and meet my eyes. "Both," he says with a shrug, stuffing his hands in the pockets of his black joggers.

The mind boggles at the fact that we've been broken up for almost a week and Devon doesn't know. These guys live together. Do they never talk?

“How is that even possible?” I ask after several seconds.

Another shrug from my oh-so-eloquent brother. “Didn’t wanna talk about it,” he grumbles. “Guess he didn’t either.”

“Or you froze him out.” It’s his go-to when he’s pissed, especially at a friend. He just acts like they don’t even exist. He doesn’t respond to that, and I hold up a hand. “Hang on. You were so enraged that Andrew and I were involved, but he’s not even a good enough friend to have a conversation with? To try to clear the air? You’d let him go that quickly and easily?”

His eyes flash when he looks at me again. “Yes,” he hisses, his face flushing with anger. “He promised. He betrayed my trust.”

I throw my hands in the air. “Oh my god, Devon. Are you even listening to yourself? For one thing, you extorted”—I hold up a hand again to forestall the protest I see coming—“yes, extorted—that promise from your friend after it was too late. He just didn’t know it at the time because I hadn’t told him my name.”

Devon’s eyes bulge, and I shake my head, annoyed all over again. Leaning in close, I pitch my voice quietly so he has to really listen. It’s a trick my dad did with us when we were kids. “The thing is, Dev, *I’m* the one who approached Andrew first. I didn’t know who he was, I for sure didn’t know he was your roommate until you introduced us, but he and I had sex at that first party before you made him promise to stay away from me. So it was already a moot point. And this, this reaction right here?” I wave my hand up and down again. “This is why I didn’t date in high school until I was a senior, and even then just barely. This is why I haven’t dated anyone before now in college, even though I’m nineteen and should’ve had plenty of opportunity by now. You’re always around acting like I’m too young and stupid to have a relationship.”

“Sadie, look.” He holds out his hands beseechingly. “You don’t understand —”

“I understand perfectly,” I cut in through gritted teeth. “I understand *everything*. I understand that you think I’m a porcelain doll too fragile to be left alone. I understand that despite your friendship with Andrew, you have an extremely low opinion of him. Why is it, do you think, that you surround

yourself with friends who you think aren't good enough for me? And what exactly do you think you're protecting me from?"

He runs a hand down his face and shakes his head. "This." He sounds weary, and he looks at me from tired eyes. "This heartache. Andrew's a good tailback and a fun guy. I get why that seems appealing. But he's also not the kind of guy that's right for you."

Rolling my lips between my teeth, I pause a moment so I don't jump out with the first thing that enters my mind, namely, *Fuck you. You don't get to decide who's right for me.* Instead, I take a deep breath. "And what kind of guy is right for me?" I ask, my voice soft, but deadly.

Devon looks at me warily, as though sensing the trap, but he can't quite spot it, because he says, "A *good* one. One you won't be embarrassed to take home to meet Mom and Dad."

I nod, pursing my lips and tapping them with my finger. "Oh, I get it. Like, a guy who looks out for me? Who takes the time to find out my favorite coffee or cookie, for example, and makes sure to get it for me whenever he can? Like that?"

Nodding, Devon's face relaxes. "Yeah. Exactly. Like that."

"So Andrew, then. Andrew fits the bill." He flinches, startled, and I can't help but laugh, harsh and loud. "You really do think your friend's a piece of shit, don't you? Is it because you think so poorly of yourself? Is that why you surround yourself with guys you don't think are worth much?" His brows crimp, and his Adam's apple bobs as he swallows, but I wave a hand as though to brush aside the questions. "Don't worry. I don't expect you to answer that. Not honestly, anyway. The point, however, is that Andrew does all those things. And he's been doing them for weeks. He takes me out for dates. He takes an interest in the things I'm interested in. He studies with me." I shrug. Somewhere a door opens and closes, but I don't stop. Whoever it is can hear what I'm saying. I *want* Andrew's roommates to know he's more than just a fuckboy. And if it's Andrew himself? Even better.

"He wants to be with me and does whatever he can to make sure I want to be with him. And so I do. I want to be with him. And I knew." I point at Devon, ignoring Andrew standing at the bottom of the stairs in favor of finishing. "I

knew that as soon as you found out, it would ruin everything. So even though Andrew begged me to tell you”—his eyes widen in obvious surprise—“Yeah, that’s right. He *wanted* to tell you from the beginning. He didn’t like keeping our relationship a secret at all. And frankly, I didn’t like it much either, but I knew what would happen if you found out. And look.” I lift my hands and let them fall to my sides. “It has.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Andrew

I FEEL MARGINALLY BETTER AS I DRIVE HOME FROM DYLAN'S PLACE. WHILE the loss of Sadie still makes me ache deep in my chest, spending time with a friend has helped a little. Even Charity went easy on me tonight, which was admittedly a little weird, but nice all the same. I park in my usual spot in the driveway, squinting at the car parked on the road. No one updated me that they're having visitors, but that's not really a surprise considering the way things have been this week.

I sit in my car a moment longer, the weight of everything dragging at me, the lightness I'd felt after spending a couple hours with Dylan and Charity evaporating as I face the prospect of going into a house where all my roommates barely talk to me. But I can't stay in here forever ... right?

The thought of trying to sleep in my car briefly crosses my mind, but I dismiss it as quickly as it surfaces. That's ridiculous. Besides, if I were going to avoid going home, I'd crash at Dylan's. And while that has a certain appeal right now, I don't really want to do that. It would be too easy to turn it into a habit, and that wouldn't be good for any of us in the long run.

No, I need to go inside and deal with the situation I've created. I knew Devon didn't want me going after his sister, and I did it anyway. So I deserve all the shit I'm getting for it now.

Bracing myself with a deep breath, I get out of the car and climb the steps to the front door, opening it and going in without hesitation. Best to charge forward—though I enter like a normal person, not a rampaging psycho—and get it over with. Eventually things have to get better, right? Eventually Devon will calm down and our friends and roommates won't feel like they're taking anyone's side by being normal with both of us. Even if my relationship with Devon never goes back to normal entirely, hopefully it can at least be civil, considering we still have to finish out the season as teammates and live together the rest of the school year. I'd hoped to stay here until I graduate next December, but I guess we'll have to see how things play out.

I hear voices when I enter, but I'm so in my head that they don't register until I get to the stairs and freeze at the sight of Sadie and Devon locked in an argument. Devon's back is to me, and Sadie's so intent on what she's saying that she doesn't notice me either. "I *knew* that as soon as you found out, it would ruin everything," she's saying. "So even though Andrew begged me to tell you"—she leans in, driving the point home—"Yeah, that's right. He *wanted* to tell you from the beginning. He didn't like keeping our relationship a secret at all. And frankly, I didn't like it much either, but I knew what would happen if you found out. And look. It has."

She shifts her gaze to me, and I want to say something, but I don't know where to start. *I'm sorry* is the obvious choice. *I miss you*, close on its heels. But as much as the words sit on the tip of my tongue ready to launch into the air, when her gaze shifts back to Devon, I know she wants to finish with him before dealing with me.

Or maybe she doesn't want to deal with me at all. My gut shrivels at the thought. Is she just here to tell off her brother and leave? Is that why she

hasn't actually acknowledged that I'm here yet?

"Sadie," Devon whispers. "Jesus. What am I supposed to say to that?"

She makes a disgusted sound, and I'm tempted to echo it with one of my own. She steps down so she's even with him. "You're supposed to say, 'I'm sorry. You're right. You're old enough to date who you want, and I promise to stop interfering.'"

I can't see his face, but his shoulders stiffen, and he tips his head back, looking up at the ceiling. On a sigh, he lowers his head and shakes it, the picture of defeat. "Fine. You win. I'll stop interfering with who you date. But seriously? Can you not find some guy I don't know? Or at least someone I'm not really friends with? What about Hornby? I don't hang out with him, but he seems nice enough."

"What the hell, man?" I burst out, unable to hold it back.

Devon turns, a guilty look on his face, while Sadie's trying not to laugh. "Andrew. Dude. I didn't know you were there."

"So ... that somehow makes it better?"

"Look, dude." He takes a step down the stairs. "Come on. How would you feel in my shoes?" He gestures between all of us. "You guys dating has already messed up our friendship *and* my relationship with my sister."

"Oh, I'm pretty sure *you're* the one who's messed up all of our relationships with each other," Sadie says smoothly. "After all, the common denominator here is *you*."

I have to cover my mouth to keep in the, "Ooooh," that wants to come out in response to that burn. Damn, my girl is fire.

That thought sobers me, because she's not really my girl, is she? Not anymore.

Stepping past her brother, she stops in front of me on the bottom step, her eyes meeting mine, hope blossoming in their depths. "I'm sorry for not answering your texts," she whispers. "I didn't want to hear all the reasons you thought we couldn't be together. Even though we'd both said we

wouldn't let other people's opinions hold us back, that's exactly what we've done." She steps all the way down, reaching out and resting a hand on my chest. "I don't want to anymore. Even if Devon never approves, I want you anyway." She drops her eyes, starting to step back, as though realizing she's being presumptuous. "If you still want me, I mean."

I flatten my hand over hers, keeping her in place. "Of course I still want you," I say quietly, painfully aware of our audience. Devon's still on the stairs, and I'm pretty sure I heard a creak in the hall in front of the kitchen, which means at least one of my other roommates is listening in. "I wanted to take back what I said about taking a break as soon as the words left my mouth. That's *all* I've wanted to say to you since you left that day. I don't want to take a break. I only want you."

She presses up on her toes, her free hand sliding up and around the back of my neck, bringing her lips to mine. My arms immediately wrap around her as I return the kiss.

"Jesus," Devon mutters, but if Sadie doesn't care anymore, I don't see why I should. He's already basically ended our friendship anyway, so what more do I have to lose?

"Okay, okay," he says a little louder after a second. "I give up." I lift my head, though I don't untangle myself from Sadie, keeping her wrapped in my arms. Back on flat feet, she returns my hug, apparently ignoring her brother.

Walking down the stairs, Devon approaches and holds out a hand. "If you break her heart, we'll have problems," he says sternly.

"Seriously, Dev?" Sadie says, turning in my arms to face him. "You just said you'd stop interfering."

He glances at her. "No, you told me to say that." His expression softens. "I can't just stop caring and looking out for you. But I promise not to be a dick about who you're dating or making it so you feel like you can't date anyone." His eyes return to mine. "From what my sister tells me, you're doing a good job in the boyfriend department. As long as that continues, you'll get no objections from me."

There's a whoop from the kitchen as I shake his hand, and we all laugh as

Liam and Jason spill out. “Jesus. I was worried you guys’d never get over your shit,” Liam says. “Fucking finally.” To me, he says. “Congrats, man. Sadie’s awesome. But yeah, we’ll all kick your ass if you hurt her.”

“Oh my god,” Sadie mutters, but there’s a smile on her face that belies her annoyance.

“Alright, assholes. Get outta my way. My girlfriend and I need some alone time to celebrate getting back together.”

She laughs over the groans from my roommates, letting me pull her toward the stairs, turning to face me once we’re in my room and kissing me again. With her arms still looped around my neck, she ends the kiss and looks up at me, a smile tipping her lips as she takes a deep breath and lets it out on a satisfied sigh. “I’m so happy I get to do that again.”

“Me too,” I murmur, dipping my head for another kiss. I could kiss her all night, though I’d like to do other things too. “Are you hungry?” I ask, leading her to the bed and sitting.

She steps in front of me and climbs on the bed, straddling me. “No,” she whispers, running her hands through my hair. “I just want you.”

“Perfect,” I mutter. “Because I’m not going anywhere.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Sadie

ANDREW TAKES HIS TIME, SLIDING HIS HANDS UNDER MY CLOTHES AS HE kisses me, stripping me slowly and worshiping my body with his mouth and hands until I've come and he's so hard, I don't know how he can stand it.

When he at last rolls on a condom and slides inside me, the world feels right again. We're together. No more hiding. No more secrets.

As he thrusts inside me, he wraps an arm beneath me and holds me close. I cling to him, my fingernails digging into his back in the way I know he loves, my thighs clamped around his hips. "I love you," I whisper.

He freezes, drawing back enough to look at me, propping himself on his elbows and brushing stray strands of hair out of my face as he examines my

eyes. “Yeah?” he asks, something like wonder tingeing his voice. “Do you really mean that?”

I nod, a tendril of fear circling my heart. Is it too soon? Maybe. But I’m tired of hiding, of holding back, and missing out. “I know it’s soon, and you don’t have to —”

He cuts me off with a kiss, moving inside me again. “I love you too,” he whispers back. “God, Sadie. I don’t know what to do without you anymore.”

“You don’t have to.” I pull his mouth back to mine, groaning softly as he picks up the pace, holding him tightly when he shudders and comes, his cock pulsing inside me.

We lay wrapped in each other’s arms, sated and happy and connected in all the ways that matter most. Together.

EPILOGUE

Andrew

14 MONTHS LATER ...

Sadie steps in front of me in the bedroom of our apartment and straightens my tie, then smooths the fabric of my graduation gown over my shoulders. “You look good in a dress,” she says with a smirk.

Chuckling, I pull her in for a kiss. “Thanks. It’ll be fun to see you in this same getup next year.”

She grins and flicks the tassel on my cap. “It’ll be even more fun when you get to wear a different funny hat when you graduate with your Doctor of Physical Therapy in a few years.”

I'll be studying for the GRE during the spring semester while continuing to work as a personal trainer at a local gym. I started taking clients last spring and have been doing it part time while I finished up my degree requirements this last semester. I'll go full time after Christmas—which we're splitting between my parents and Sadie's, spending the week before with her family and leaving Christmas Eve to head to my parents' and spend Christmas Day with them. We spent our first Christmas as a couple at her parents' house, so it's only fair that my parents get us this time.

Then I'll start applying to physical therapy schools in the summer and fall, that way we know where we'll land after Sadie graduates next May. Since she doesn't need grad school to work in PR, she'll start applying for jobs as soon as we know where we're heading. It might not be the children's charity she's dreamed about, but there's no reason that can't happen eventually.

While some part of me resisted the idea of additional school—partly because my parents were so insistent on me going to medical school—I actually feel really good about this plan.

Sadie's mom and dad are actually a big reason I decided to pursue a career in physical therapy. While a little reserved when they first met me, they're now some of my biggest fans. They've welcomed me into the family, showing me the kind of unconditional support that I never really got from my parents. At one point, about a year ago, we were having dinner with her parents and Sadie's dad asked what I planned to do after graduation. I gave the usual deflection about not being sure and tossed out a couple of options, and he had a thoughtful discussion with me about each one, detailing the pros and cons from his perspective, but not trying to pressure me into any particular direction. Having a detached conversation about it where no one's sense of self-worth was tied to my career plans helped me to shift my thinking about it too. And my parents are thrilled that I'm going to physical therapy school, even if they think I shouldn't wait until after Sadie graduates. Since they credit her influence for me choosing a "respectable" career, they don't fuss too much.

"I'm so proud of you," Sadie says, kissing me again.

"Thanks. I couldn't do it without you," I tell her, giving her another kiss.

She grins and threads her fingers through mine. “Come on. Let’s get you officially graduated.” Then she leads me out the door and into the first step toward our future together.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read an ARC of *Ineligible Receiver*! Don’t forget to leave a review at your favorite review spots!

DEAR READER

Thank you so much for reading Andrew and Sadie's story! I had so much fun with these two, and I especially loved writing Sadie's relationship with her brother. He's such an adorable goof, and while he might be misplaced with his overprotectiveness, it definitely comes from a place of love. Plus brother's best friend stories are fun. And getting to delve into Andrew's character—who hasn't come off super great in earlier books—was fun too. I hope you love them as much as I do.

If you want more of Andrew and Sadie, be sure to grab their [free bonus scene](#). You don't *have* to sign up for my email list to get the bonus (and if you've already joined my list, don't join it again), but I recommend it if you don't already get emails from me, especially if you want to stay up to date on what's coming next.

For more sports romance, check out [Off Limits](#) or [Summer Fling](#)! Both are fabulous stories (or so people tell me), and I know you won't be disappointed!

As always, thanks for reading!

Until next time ...

Jerica

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This story took longer to get to you than I was planning, and as always I had a good deal of help along the way.

To Deb, I think this might be the first time you haven't had a multitude of notes, and I've always said that I hoped that would happen someday, but I'd also be worried you're having a stroke. It's been a few months now, though, and you seem fine, so I'm going to trust the book is good. Thank you.

To Leslie, for making my sentences sparkle. Thank you.

To my Junkies. I love having a group I can call my own. Thanks for being there.

And, as always, to you, dear reader. Whether you've been with me from my Wattpad days or just joined the ride, I'm glad you're here.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jerica MacMillan has been reading romance since she stumbled into the paperback section of the library as a middle schooler. And it's been an ongoing love affair ever since!

You can frequently find her sipping coffee out of snarky mugs while dreaming up stories and trying to bring them to life on the page. Join her Book Club at www.jericamacmillan.com/book-club and get a free book!

Keep in touch!

Don't forget to claim your exclusive bonus scene: <https://dl.bookfunnel.com/ka2d2z4ao5>

Here are the best places to keep up with me and what's new:

<http://www.bookbub.com/authors/jerica-macmillan>

<http://www.goodreads.com/jericamacmillan>

<http://www.facebook.com/jericamacmillan>

<http://www.amazon.com/author/jericamacmillan>

You're also invited to join my closed reader group on Facebook, [Jerica MacMillan's Book Junkies](#).

Or, if you want to speak to me directly, feel free to email me at contact@jericamacmillan.com.

Did you enjoy this story? Please leave a review at Amazon, Bookbub, or Goodreads!

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Keep reading for a sneak peek of Summer Fling

SNEAK PEEK OF SUMMER FLING

“HEY! WATCH IT!” ABBY SHOUTED AT THE OVERSIZED ASSHOLE STUMBLING through the room with his buddies, drinks in hand. He didn’t even bother turning around. Fuming, she switched her red Solo cup to her other hand, shaking off the Jack and Coke that had spilled all over her thanks to the inconsiderate jackass now howling in the middle of the room. What a moron.

She glanced down in disgust at the dark stain all over her pink tank top that skimmed over her curves and made her feel effortlessly pretty. She’d paired it with her favorite denim shorts and the new gladiator sandals she’d scored on clearance just a few days ago. And now they were all equally covered in sticky brown liquid.

With a sigh and a roll of her eyes, she started to weave her way through the

crowd of drunken Marycliff University students to find the kitchen. It was a big frat house on the edge of campus—she couldn't remember which one with their strings of incomprehensible Greek letters. Actually, it's not that she found them confusing. She just didn't care. At all. The rooms all led one into the other like a big maze. She'd ended up somewhere near the front of the house where Douchey McDoucherson and his crew were still howling and knocking into anyone and everyone. The kitchen was at the back. Megan, her roommate and best friend, had dragged her there as soon as they got to the house to get drinks. And then they went in search of Isaac, the reason Megan had wanted to come tonight.

He was her boyfriend? Fuck buddy? Abby wasn't sure. All she knew was that Megan desperately wanted her to come along as her wing woman, and then promptly abandoned her as soon as she caught sight of Isaac.

One thing for sure, this was the absolute last time Abby let Megan convince her she'd have fun at one of these parties. Abby wasn't a frat party kind of girl. She'd much rather stay home and watch a movie or read a book. Small parties with people she knew were fine. But this collection of drunken idiocy and shameless grinding?

No thanks.

She finally managed to break through the throngs and find the kitchen, as stuffed with bodies as everywhere else. A breakfast bar with cups and drinks scattered across it dominated the room. The real attention grabber was the keg and another group of morons, with a central moron doing a keg stand. Abby elbowed her way through the crowd, uncaring who she bumped into anymore, trying to get to the sink to clean up as much as possible. Fingers crossed they stocked paper towels here. The prospect of spending the rest of the night sticky didn't sound appealing, especially considering she'd probably have to walk home since she'd come in Megan's car. She'd be a walking bug magnet like this.

A guy stood at the sink. A tall guy with his back to her. A white T-shirt stretched taut across his broad shoulders and faded jeans clung to his ass. And what a nice ass it was. She allowed herself a moment to admire it, a smirk flitting across her mouth before she approached him.

“Excuse me.” She tried to pitch her voice loud enough to be heard over the noise of the party without shouting. No response.

She tapped on his shoulder, stretched up on her tiptoes, and practically yelled in his ear. “Excuse me!”

As he turned, someone knocked into Abby from behind. She lurched forward against the guy’s chest, crushing her cup against his abs and splashing the remains of her drink all over them both.

He let out a surprised shout, grabbing her upper arms to steady her when she fell into him, but pushed her away when the cold liquid soaked his shirt.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry.” Abby covered her mouth with her hand, feeling like a complete moron. He stood there with his arms out looking down at the mess on his shirt. Then he noticed the matching stain on her shirt, and his lips twitched like he might be suppressing a smile.

He cleared his throat. “It’s okay.” There was laughter in his voice.

Abby crinkled her brows in confusion. *Why is he laughing at me? I just spilled my drink all over him.*

Then she realized that his eyes were glued to her chest.

Abby looked down and gasped. Her light pink tank was more or less see-through now that it was wet. She could clearly see the pattern of the lace on her bra, as well as her pointed nipples. *Great. Just what I always wanted—to participate in a wet T-shirt contest at a frat party.* With a frustrated sigh, she reactively crossed her arms over her chest. Having random dudes talk to her boobs wasn’t a new thing, but it always made her uncomfortable, like her entire worth to some guys was as a walking pair of tits. But covering herself had the opposite effect of making the guy snort, starting to lose the battle to suppress his laughter.

“Can you move, please?” She put an edge on her demand, giving free rein to her irritation. The smug bastard was still snorting with barely suppressed mirth and staring at her boobs, not even trying to hide it. The fact that he was disgustingly attractive somehow made it worse—dark hair, square jaw, a dimple in his left cheek that gave him a hint of boyishness belied by his height and obvious muscles.

He stepped to the side and leaned one hip against the counter, allowing Abby access to the sink and himself a front row seat. His snorting turned into chuckling and quickly progressed to full-blown laughter. Abby shot him a glare while she turned on the sink and looked for a towel or paper towel or something to use to wipe off the soda.

“Sweetheart, I don’t think you’re gonna be able to do much to help your shirt.” A slight drawl stretched and flattened the vowels of his voice low, rumbly voice. When he leaned forward to talk to her, his breath fluttered the tiny hairs on the back of her neck that had escaped from her ponytail.

“Yes, I realize that.” She spit the words through clenched teeth while suppressing a shiver at his nearness. “But I’d like to at least get the stickiness off my skin before figuring out how to get home.” When she turned to look at him, his face was only inches away from her own. His dark brown eyes had flecks of gold in them this close, and his dark brows arched high at her words. If either of them moved an inch or two closer to the other, their lips would meet.

Before she could react to his closeness, he leaned back and snagged a roll of paper towels off the counter. The move caused his shirt to lift, revealing an appealing strip of tanned skin. Her eyes snapped back up to his face as he handed her the paper towels. Amusement still glinted in his dark eyes.

Annoyed and off-kilter, Abby ripped off two or three paper towels, got them wet, and started mopping up the worst of the mess on her arms and legs. She had to use more paper towels when she got to her sandals. After trying and failing to wipe her sandals out, she gave up and just stuck them under the running water, leaving them soaked but clean.

And now she was ready to go home. Though walking home with wet sandals sounded like a recipe for blisters. Was it worth it to try to find Megan?

Charlie Chuckles’s laugh track next to her while she attempted to de-soda-ify herself didn’t help with the decision-making process. He might have a nice ass, and okay, nice arms, and, if she were honest, a nice everything else, but he didn’t have very nice manners. She was getting sick of that smile and that laugh that she’d otherwise enjoy if they weren’t being used to embarrass her.

“Enjoying the show?” Abby reached for more paper towels.

“Very much.” He didn’t even bother to hide his smile, but it somehow seemed more disarming now and less mocking. Abby huffed in annoyance and turned back to her sandals, the corners of her mouth twitching in response. She wanted to hold onto her irritation, but found it difficult when he kept grinning at her like that.

“I’m Lance.” Chuckles stuck out his hand when she was done with her sandals. Glancing at his face and then his hand, she placed her hand in his and gave it a quick, firm shake.

“Hi.” Abby dropped his hand right away, ignoring his firm grip and the slight callouses on his palm. She turned away from him, trying to plot the best route to get to the front door through the drunken bodies clustered around the room.

“Usually when someone introduces himself, it’s polite to give your name in return.”

She didn’t spare him more than a glance, still scanning for an opening to make her escape. “When someone’s covered in soda, it’s polite not to stare at their see-through shirt and laugh at them while they clean their shoes.”

He laughed softly, the sound just reaching her ears over the noise. “Touché.”

Spotting a hole, Abby started to go, but stopped when he put his hand on her shoulder. “Do you need a ride?” All trace of laughter vanished from his voice with the question.

She turned back to face him, surprised to find him unsmiling now. “What?” He stood close beside her, his head bent toward hers to talk into her ear.

“You said you’d need to find your way home. How’d you get here?” His hand lingered on her shoulder, heavy and warm, holding her in place.

“I came with a friend. She drove, but judging by the last time I saw her, I don’t think she’ll be driving home anytime soon.” She’d found Isaac and they’d been getting ready to do body shots, giggling and heading for a room so they could strip and get drunk in private. “I have no idea where she is now, but I’m ready to leave.” She gestured to her shirt.

“Let me give you a ride.” Those gold-flecked brown eyes swept over her

face, sincerity shining in their depths.

“I don’t even know you.” She shrugged off his hand, disconcerted by his continued touch and proximity. She didn’t like when people insisted on touching her for no reason, especially random strangers. Turning toward the crowd again, she was disappointed—but not surprised—to find that the gap she’d intended to use had vanished, a new cluster of drunk people filling the empty space. Nature hates a void, after all.

And fate must hate her, because Hot Laughing Guy was still talking to her.

“Sure you do,” he said, his voice taking on a cajoling quality. “I’m Lance. On the other hand, I don’t know you, so maybe you’re right.” He stood close behind her, and she only had to turn her head to see him grinning again.

“Right, you’re very funny.” She sighed. “Fine. I’m Abby.”

Lance threw an arm around her shoulders and started steering her toward the door. He just laughed again when she once again shrugged out of his hold. His shoulders shook as he walked in front of her, his broad frame clearing a path for them both.

Once outside, Lance turned to her. “Do you need to find your friend and let her know you’re leaving?”

“No, I’ll just text her. There’s a good chance I don’t want to find her right now anyway.” Lance waited while Abby pulled out her phone, texted Megan that she was leaving, and slipped her phone back in her pocket. “Thanks,” she said, grateful that he gave her a little more space than he had inside.

It was after ten now, and the late twilight of June had finally given way to night. The concrete and asphalt radiated the heat from the day, but the darkness and cool breeze were a relief after being in a house full of the fug of bodies and alcohol.

She followed Lance to his car about a block away. The slight breeze plastered her still-wet shirt against her body. She plucked it away, grimacing at the way it stuck to her skin, painfully aware of her erect nipples.

She didn’t know what to make of Lance. He made her feel by turns embarrassed and flattered by his attention. She wasn’t used to being the

center of attention and didn't crave the spotlight. And while he wasn't the first guy to ever flirt with her, he was the first to be so brazen in his appraisal of her body and not a complete douchebag. At least she didn't think he was. He seemed genuine about offering her a ride home, and his hilarity at her expense quickly turned to concern when he found out she didn't have one.

That was the problem, though. While his looks were very attractive, she was self-aware enough to know that she didn't belong with someone like him. But for some reason, his arm had felt right around her shoulders. She'd enjoyed the warmth of his body pressed against hers, the feel of his hand where it rested on her arm, the hardness of the muscles hidden by his shirt. The guy obviously worked out.

And liking the feel of him disconcerted her so much that she had to put space between them.

Lance walked a few steps ahead of her, leading the way to his car. He didn't say anything, but glanced her way now and then to make sure she still followed him.

Stopping halfway down the block, he used a key to unlock the passenger side door of his car. Like actually stuck it in the lock on the door and turned to unlock it. His car wasn't at all what she'd expected. She'd pegged him as driving a flashy sports car—something red, maybe, and fast. Definitely with automatic locks. But the door he held open for her belonged to a beat-up old muscle car. It was some indeterminate yellowy gray rust combination that she couldn't quite make out in the light from the nearby street lamp. She looked at him for a minute before sliding into the car.

Abby waited until Lance got in the driver's side. "Why did you do that?"

"Do what?" He sounded genuinely confused.

"Open my door for me."

Lance flashed that grin at her again. He probably thought he was charming. He wasn't wrong. "My mom taught me to always open the door for a lady. She'd whoop me if she found out I did anything else."

"So you have to open the door for me, but staring at my bra through my wet shirt is fine? How does that work?"

“She’d probably whoop me for that, too.” The grin never left his face. He didn’t even pretend to be sorry.

Abby shook her head, trying not to grin back. “Should I save her the trouble and do the honors myself?”

Lance laughed. “I wouldn’t mind a bit if you decided to try.” He turned and winked at her. Abby snorted, crossing her arms. And immediately uncrossed them because that just trapped the sticky, wet fabric against her chest.

Lance started the car and pulled away from the curb. He’d rolled down his window while they talked, and now the wind blew in, playing with the wisps of hair that had come loose from her ponytail.

“Where are we going?” She realized he’d never asked her address.

“We just need to make a quick pit stop.” Abby examined his profile as he drove, wondering where he could be taking her, but decided not to push it. The guy was giving her a ride home, and while he acted flirtatious and cocky, she didn’t get a bad feeling about him. For some reason he made her feel comfortable and safe. It was strange, since she didn’t normally trust people she didn’t know, but she decided to just go with it for now. It wasn’t like she’d see him again after he dropped her off at home. She rolled down her window and rested her arm on the ledge, letting her hand ride the stream of air flowing past.

After a few minutes Lance pulled into the driveway of a one-story brick house. It appeared well kept up, if a little shabby around the edges, with a crack in the driveway and weeds in the yard. They were in an older neighborhood with big trees, mostly pines, but a few maples here and there.

Lance cut the engine and looked at Abby. “Do you want to come in? My roommates should be gone, so you won’t have to deal with any other random guys.”

“Uh, no. I’ll just wait in the car.” Lance examined her face, lingering on her lips for a second longer than necessary. Then he shrugged.

“Okay. Be back in a sec.” He got out of the car, and only hit two of the three steps to get to the front door.

Abby looked around the interior of the car now that she had nothing else to distract her. It was surprisingly comfortable and clean compared to the rundown look of the paint job. The tan vinyl was torn in a couple places, but there no clutter or trash lurked in the corners or on the floor.

Lance came back out a few minutes later wearing a clean T-shirt. He carried another shirt in one hand, flipping his keys around the first finger of his other hand as he jogged down the front steps. He slid into the car and put the extra shirt on the bench seat next to him, turning his body to face Abby.

“I wondered if you wanted to go hang out somewhere. I brought an extra shirt for you in case you said yes.”

“Where would we go?” Her tone of voice betrayed her surprise, but she was curious too.

“Wherever. We could get dessert somewhere or something. I’m not ready to be home for the night.”

“You could just drop me off at home and go back to the party.” Abby felt compelled to point that out.

Lance nodded slowly. “Yeah, I guess. I was bored at the party, though. The friends I came with were already wasted, but I’m too picky about my booze to get drunk on crappy beer and bottom-shelf liquor. I was looking for an excuse to leave when you crashed into me.”

Abby reached out and picked up the shirt. Staring at it in her lap, she fingered the soft blue fabric while she considered her answer. Did she want to go out with this guy she’d just met? Or would she rather go home? Since Megan was still at the party, she’d have the apartment to herself.

“You could just take me home and let me change into one of my own shirts and then we could go out.” She looked at his face, gauging his reaction.

Lance still faced her, his eyes locked with hers. A small smile curved his lips. “I could.” He drew the words out. “But then you might overthink it and tell me no. This way you change and we can go. Plus, there’s a twenty-four-hour diner with great pie not far from here, and I’m hungry now. It’d take too long to drive you home first.”

Abby thought about it for another minute. “Can I at least change inside? I don’t make it a habit to flash guys I’ve just met.” *Even though you’ve pretty much seen it all already.* She stopped herself before she said the last part out loud.

Lance opened his mouth like he was about to say something, a mischievous look on his face. Then he seemed to think better of it, his expression clearing. “Sure. Come on.”

Abby followed him up the front steps, his pace less hurried than the first time. The front door opened into the living room. College guys definitely lived here. It was comfortable enough, but mostly utilitarian, with no concern for décor. A large flat screen TV dominated the wall to the right, with wires, gaming consoles, and controllers in a jumble around the small entertainment center. Battered and mismatched furniture completed the room, looking like hand me downs or thrift store finds. There were no pictures on the walls, and the curtains covering the large bay window had either come with the house or were hand-me-downs from someone’s mom.

Lance opened a door to the left of the TV. “This is my room.” He reached in and turned on the light. “You can change in here.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

The comfortable and utilitarian theme extended into the bedroom, with a queen-sized bed, a nightstand, a dresser, and a bookshelf crammed with books the only furniture. Discarded clothes littered the floor between the bed and the door to the bathroom.

Abby went into the small bathroom. It was surprisingly clean from what she knew of college guys’ bathrooms. No globs of toothpaste left in the sink, and only a few items on the small counter—hand soap, deodorant, shaving cream, aftershave lotion, and a razor. The soap sat on the edge of the sink, the other items clustered neatly in the corner next to the wall.

Abby stripped off her tank top, dropping it on the floor. She grabbed a washcloth from a pile of mismatched towels under the sink, got a corner of it wet, and wiped up the soda that had seeped through her shirt. She slipped Lance’s T-shirt on and looked at herself in the mirror.

She snorted when she saw the Superman logo in the middle of her chest. Well, somewhat below the middle of her chest, because the shirt swallowed her. The shoulder seams came almost halfway down her upper arms, and the shirt covered her shorts.

She tried pulling the shirt tight around her torso, twisting the extra fabric behind her and tucking it in at the small of her back. She'd seen other girls do that and look cute. On her, she thought it just looked silly. She fidgeted with the shirt some more, folding here, tucking there, trying different things so she didn't look like a toddler wearing her dad's clothes. With a huff of annoyance, she gave up and let the shirt hang loose.

"It's not like I'm trying to impress anyone." Abby reached up and redid her ponytail as she talked to herself in the mirror. "I've already dumped soda over both of us and treated the guy to a personal wet T-shirt contest. Worrying about making a good impression on the hot guy sort of went out the window already."

With that little pep talk, Abby went back out. Lance looked up from his phone and smiled at her. He stood up from the couch. "Ready?"

"Sure."

Lance opened the door and gestured Abby through, locking it behind him. He jogged to catch up to her to open the car door before she got in.

Abby gave him a confused look. What was with this guy and his insistence on opening doors? She'd agreed to get dessert with him, but it wasn't like this was a date. He was just bored and didn't want to be home yet. That's what he'd said. That didn't make this a date, right?

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