




CHAD



and his NOT  
HAREM



Jaye Pratt & Amber Davis

# CHAD AND HIS NOT HAREM

---

JAYE PRATT & AMBER DAVIS

© 2023 by Amber Davis and Jaye Pratt

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it on a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters, and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities, is entirely coincidental.

Amber Davis asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book and on its cover are trade names, service marks, trademarks and registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publishers and the book are not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. None of the companies referenced within the book have endorsed the book.

Paperback ISBN 978-0-6455213-2-0

Cover designed by Jaye Pratt

Edited by Kelly Messenger at Messenger's Memos

Formatted by Jaye Pratt

*To all the single ladies with male friends who won't put out  
and do you a solid. May you all find a Chad who is willing to  
dick you down and put up with your crazy.*

# CONTENTS

[A Note from the Authors](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Six](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Thirty](#)

[Chapter Thirty-One](#)

[Also by Amber](#)

[Also by Jaye](#)

[Amber's Stalker Links](#)

[Jaye's Stalker Links](#)

[About Amber Davis](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Jaye's Acknowledgements](#)

## NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

Hello!

Thank you for choosing to read Chad and his not Harem. Before you start there are a few things we'd like to mention.

1. Are you like Amber and need to read a series in order even if it's a series of standalones? If yes, you'll need to go back and read Amber's Book Chase and the girl who came back, followed by Arden and the girl downstairs. Chad is a standalone, however you first meet him in Chase. Arden's storyline runs on the same timeline as Chad, however it's recommended you read Arden first if you are wanting to read in order.
2. This book is set in a fictional Australian town. It is very much Australian; some things have been embellished for the story. It is fiction after all.
3. The legal drinking age in Australia is eighteen and it is pretty common for eighteen-year-olds to be at a pub (or bar depending on where you are from).
4. There are medical conditions and procedures mentioned in the book. These are based on personal experiences and should no way be used to self-diagnose. If you experience any of the symptoms mentioned, please speak with a medical professional.

**We hope you enjoy Chad's story.**





The buzzer above the door dings, alerting me to someone’s arrival while I’m in the middle of setting up for the day. Kind of odd for 10 a.m. on a Wednesday morning—people generally don’t start showing up until closer to lunchtime. But who am I to judge? A customer is a customer.

Looking up, I take note of the three men heading straight towards me, chatting amongst themselves. The first guy, who appears older than the rest, leads the group. He is dressed in scrubs and looks like he needs to sleep for a week. His blond hair is messy, like he’s been running his fingers through it for hours. The second guy is tall and has a grin on his face that reminds me of my friend Arden’s; he has the whole pretty boy thing down pat. He’s dressed in slacks and a polo shirt and looks like he’s about to go and play a round of golf. And the third doesn’t seem to fit the group; he’s scruffy looking, dressed in a Star Wars T-shirt and jeans, and it looks like he has just rolled out of bed.

When they approach the bar, I stop what I’m doing and turn to face them. “Welcome to Grumpy’s. What can I get you guys? The kitchen doesn’t open for another hour.”

“That’s okay, we’re not here to eat. We’re here to see Chad.” The tall one speaks with authority in his voice.

“I’m Chad . . . who the hell are you?” I ask cautiously. Now that I live with Arden, you never know who will turn up. Apparently, he had a stalker last year, so he hasn’t messed around; the security at the house is tight. This scene, however, is almost the start of a bad joke: three men walk into a bar . . . My brother works security and I’ve learned a few things over the years, but my spidey senses are telling me to relax—these guys seem harmless.

“Oh, good, you made it!” Ella says as she steps behind the bar from the office out the back. Eyeing her suspiciously, I suddenly have a bad feeling about all of this. “Oh my god, no freaking way. Caleb?” she blurts out, bouncing up and down on the spot excitedly.

The sparkly horns on Ella’s unicorn slippers distract me momentarily. She’s only allowed to wear them while we’re setting up and there’s no one here. I tried to tell her no, but she put up one hell of a fight.

“Ella, what are you doing here?”

I glance back up, and the guy in the scrubs is staring at her. I take a step closer to her, and he blinks and shakes his head.

Well, I guess that’s Caleb.

It doesn’t really tell me who he is, just that apparently he knows Ella. Which, if you ask me, is probably as bad as if he had known Arden.

“I work here,” she replies, hoisting herself onto the stool I keep behind the bar for her. “What are you doing here?”

“Uhhh, we’re here to interview Chad as a potential housemate,” he tells her as he looks over at me again. “But by the look on your face, you weren’t expecting us?” He directs that bit at me.

“About that . . .” Ella bats her eyelashes at me. It might have worked when she was fifteen and demanding a job, but it won’t work now.

“What did you do?” I deepen my voice and level her with a stare.

“I found a solution to your problem,” she responds innocently. “It was obvious you were intrigued by the ad, but way too freaking chicken to do anything about it. So, I took matters into my own hands. You’re welcome, by the way.” She sits there smiling and swinging her legs on the stool.

“I don’t have a problem, and I sure as hell don’t need you to pimp me out for sex.”

“Sure you do. You can’t move back into your apartment for god knows how long, and you said so yourself, you also can’t live at Arden’s forever. Plus, pimping you out would imply I’m being paid. Which I’m not. So, therefore, definitely not pimping you out.” She pokes her tongue out at me and turns her attention back to the three guys still standing at the bar.

If I know anything, it’s that Ella is definitely not backing down from this, so I may as well listen to what they have to say. I must admit, I was kind of intrigued by the ad we saw last week, but I don’t know how I feel about sharing a girl with three other men. Especially a girl I’ve never met. How does that even work?

“Fine, Ella, you win. I’ll hear them out. But I’m going to need a drink for this conversation.” She looks at the clock on the wall and then back at me, in silent question. “Don’t even,” I warn. The look on my face must be serious—Ella doesn’t argue with me.

“Fine, would you guys like something to drink?” Ella asks them as she slides off her stool and pours me a beer.

“I’ll have one of them,” Caleb responds, and the guy in the polo shirt sniggers. “Don’t start, Lo. I just worked twelve hours and am in desperate need of a shower and sleep.” Although Caleb’s voice still has the authoritative tone to it, I can hear the exhaustion.

“I didn’t say a thing. I’ll have coke. I have to go to work after this. I’m Lochlan, by the way,” he says as he holds his hand out to shake mine and throws a wink at Ella. I shake his hand, and he squeezes a little too tight for my liking.

“Nice to meet you, Lochlan, I’m Ella,” she says handing him a glass of coke. She places a beer in front of Caleb and turns her attention to the third guy who’s been awfully quiet.

“What can I get you?”

“Just a water please,” he says as he pulls out a stool and makes himself comfortable.

“Sure thing.” Ella grabs a bottle of water and passes it to him before climbing back on her chair and making herself comfortable again.

“Thanks, Ella. I’m Isaac,” the final guy introduces himself. Funny, they are here to interview me, yet Ella gets the formal introductions.

“Nice to meet you.”

“You too.”

An awkward silence falls around us before Lochlan speaks again, this time to Caleb. “Wanna tell us how you know Ella? Please don’t tell me you slept with her—Mady will be pissed.”

I’m happy someone finally asked the question. I’ve been curious to know.

“Like you can judge, do you even know the name of the girl you were sneaking out of the house this morning? There is one rule, and you broke it, dude. You think she won’t know?” Caleb retorts.

“It’s different, and you know it. I’m not sleeping with Mady, and if you have time to be banging some random girl . . . No offence, Ella . . .” He has the decency to look a little guilty. “Then you have time to fulfil our girl’s needs, and we don’t need to be wasting *our* time interviewing for a housemate and potential dick for Mads.”

“Seriously, Lo? Get fucked. When do you think I have time to go out and get laid?” Caleb responds, clearly pissed at his friend.

“Uh, we never slept together. He was one of my doctors,” Ella offers to the room in order to defuse the situation.

“Oh,” is all Lochlan manages to say. I understand why Caleb couldn’t say anything outright—you know, doctor-patient confidentiality and all that.

“Does anyone want to explain what is actually going on here? I thought a harem meant you were all sleeping with... Mady is it?” I ask the guys.

“Traditionally, yes, but that’s not the case with us,” Isaac responds. “We all live together, but none of us are sleeping with her. Lochlan is a self-proclaimed sex addict with major commitment issues. He flat out refuses to ruin his and Mady’s fourteen-year friendship. Caleb is finishing up his final rotation at New Hope Private, so is currently working a billion hours a week and doesn’t have as much time for Mady as he did when he first moved in.” Caleb’s face falls at that revelation. It’s obvious he cares for her, but I get it. Your career can definitely get in the way. It isn’t easy to date when you own a bar and work pretty much every night and weekend. “As for me, I have some issues—”

“So we’re looking for someone to move in and screw our girl six ways to Sunday to keep her happy and satisfied,” Lochlan interrupts, and Isaac glares at him. “It’s been months. She needs to get laid.”

“She wouldn’t need someone else if you’d pull the stick out of your ass and realise what you have in front of you.” Isaac aims his words at Lochlan. “And you,” he says, facing Caleb. “If you’d let me fix the stupid fucking hospital roster that seems hell-bent on running every doctor into the ground, you’d have more time to spend at home.”

Isaac picks at the label on his water bottle, a move I’m all too familiar with—most customers do it when they have something to say, or they feel guilty. I’m going with the latter in this case.

Taking a moment to observe the other two guys, they both seem a little surprised by Isaac’s outburst, and it makes me wonder . . .

What’s wrong with this girl?

She lives with three men, and they either don't have time to have sex with her, or they can't.

"Does she know about this?" My voice cuts through the awkward silence. Not sure how they plan on pulling this off if she doesn't. I wouldn't feel right being a part of this if she's unaware her roommates are searching for a guy to move in with them and sleep with the girl they all seem to like.

"Not yet," Caleb responds. "But she'll be on board." His tone may hold authority, but there is definitely a hint of hesitation in his reply.

"I honestly don't think this is for me," I tell them. I can't shake the feeling that this isn't going to work, so I may as well be truthful.

"You like sex, right? And have a functioning dick?" Lochlan asks me, as if it's that simple. His last question has Isaac pulling apart the napkin on the bar. I wonder if that was a hit at Isaac after his comment earlier.

"Of course I like sex and have a functioning dick." I level him with a stare.

"Well, you tick nine of the ten boxes, so the room's yours if you want it," he tells me, then finishes his coke and gets up from his chair.

"Sorry for wasting your time, but this really isn't for me." I lean over the bar and offer my hand to Caleb.

"Thanks for meeting with us. I guess we'll keep looking," Caleb says, shaking my hand and standing.

"Could I talk to you for a sec before you leave, Doc?" Ella asks, nodding towards the end of the bar.

"Sure, I'll meet you guys in the car," he says as he makes his way out of earshot, and she follows him.

I notice her glancing over at me while they talk. I don't trust her—she's up to something. I know Ella well enough to recognise when she's scheming.

Isaac and Lochlan start to head towards the door, just as I process Lochlan's parting comment.

“Wait, you said I tick nine of the ten boxes?” I ask.

Lochlan turns around to answer me. “Yep, you own a bar, so you are tidy, and I assume you are good at spreadsheets, which ticks the boxes Isaac has. You have a good job, which covers Caleb’s requirements.” Lochlan is holding up fingers to count off each item. “You have man parts, and judging by the size of your shoes, they are big man parts, and you’re tall,” he says, putting up three more fingers. “You may be confused, but I can see your brain ticking and you’re curious about joining a harem. So that’s another tick. You’re willing to put out, and you’re not bad to look at,” he says with a wink and holds up nine fingers.

Wait, did he just hit on me? I’m more confused now than I was ten minutes ago.

“What’s the tenth box?” I ask, curiosity getting the better of me.

“Do you like tacos?”

“What kind of monster doesn’t like tacos?”

Lochlan laughs at my response. “Guess you tick all the boxes then,” he says as he finally pushes through the door and disappears outside, leaving me speechless and wondering what the hell just happened.



“Psst.”

I slap at the hand shaking my shoulder.

“Let me sleep,” I groan, the haze from the alcohol I drank last night clouding my brain. Why did I drink so much? Oh, shit...

I sit up straight, the memories flashing back. The bar, the hot as fuck bartender, the girl in the slogan shirt refilling my drinks. I open one eye and see him—Chase, Charlie... Chad.

“Hi,” he whispers. His five o’clock shadow makes him even more handsome than I remember, a tingle between my legs reminding me of just how attracted I was to him last night.

I don’t know why, but the cross between country and city looks good on him and definitely got my attention last night. His unruly dirty blond hair and hazel eyes were what I noticed first, then I looked at what he was wearing and couldn’t help but wonder if this guy could fulfil my lumberjack fantasy. We don’t really have them here, but after reading one too many romance novels featuring guys who wear flannel shirts and blue jeans . . . This girl couldn’t help but fantasise when I first saw him last night.



I smile back. I'm terrible in awkward situations. One-night stands are very far and few between because Caleb will usually scratch an itch if I have it. Although it has been a while since Caleb has had time to do that.

"Hi," I squeak in a weird tone. *Way to be sexy, Mady.*

"Um, why is there another guy sleeping next to me? You didn't tell me you have a boyfriend."

My eyes go round as saucers. I peek around Chad's bare chest and Lochlan is curled up under the covers, lightly snoring. Without thinking, I lean across the hunk of a man, his bare skin against mine awakening a fire between my legs—which I squeeze together to try to relieve some of the sensation—and whack Lo in the stomach. He lets out an *oomph* and rolls onto the floor. I can't believe he still ended up in here, when it was clear there was another person in my bed. One that definitely doesn't live here.

"What the fuck, babe?" he says, popping his head up from the side of the bed and smiling when he notices Chad.

Poor Chad looks between Lo and me, confused. I slip out of bed, clearly still naked, and two sets of eyes follow me. I know Lochlan is attracted to me. He just refuses to sleep with me, always with the endgame comments. Like he thinks if he builds me a harem of men that fulfil my needs, I will be here when he is ready. I'll have to break it to him that now I have the guys, I could never get rid of them unless they wanted to move on. The thought makes my heart hurt, even if it's selfish of me. So, when Lo finally comes around, he better be prepared to share, because he is the reason I know Caleb and Isaac.

I slip into my nightgown and turn to face the guys. Lo is standing there in his boxer briefs, bare chest and abs for days. Those things should be illegal, I've known him since we were ten and have loved him since before he had abs, however the abs have definitely not helped towards lessening my attraction to him. He has a huge-ass fucking smile on his face. I know the smile; he's done something I'm not going to like.

Chad clears his throat. He's now dressed in last night's clothes and looks ready to run.

"I'll walk you out." My reply is awkward, but how am I supposed to react when the guy I just had a one-night stand with wakes up to another half-naked guy in my bed? I throw Lo a look, and he just laughs and continues to watch me squirm.

Putting my big girl panties on, I walk to the door and swing it open. Luckily for me, my room is off the lounge room. It seemed the most appropriate with all my hospital trips that I'm close so the guys can listen out for me. It's also the biggest room.

Isaac and Caleb are standing behind the couch, as if they were waiting for us to come out.

"You owe me fifty bucks, dude," Isaac says to a smirking Caleb.

"Mady, I thought you would put up more of a fight," Caleb teases as he walks into the kitchen and flicks on the kettle. We have one of those fancy coffee machines, but Caleb still drinks the instant stuff—not sure if it's just to piss Isaac off, or he actually likes the crap.

A knock at the door startles me, even though I'm expecting it. There is a schedule, after all. Shamus opens the door; he no longer waits for us to let him in. He's been delivering us food for the better part of two years. When Isaac developed the app to cater to people with allergies, he brought Shamus on board to help with recruitment and training. We may now have to wait a little longer for food, but at least we can be sure there is nothing that will make me sick or that I'm allergic to. Shamus and Isaac have worked with restaurants and cafés in the city to develop the food delivery app for people with allergies and intolerances. Essentially, they created something that would be safe for me, but for some reason Shamus is still the only person to deliver my food, so now he just lets himself in.

"I have a bone to pick with you," he says, looking around the room as he addresses us all. He puts the food on the coffee

table and holds out a piece of paper. “Why was I not interviewed for this, and how important is the dick part?”

He turns to me now. “You know I love you, Mady, but you have a vagina.” He shudders as he says it.

I walk to him and snatch the paper from his hand. It’s a “Roommate Wanted” sign. I look around at my guys. What have they done?



“What have you idiots done? Seriously, you don’t think I can find dick myself?” I wave my hand in Chad’s direction.

“About that . . .” Chad finally speaks up.

“You’re in on this.” My voice is laced with accusation and my temper is rising. Here I was thinking I finally found someone on my own.

“Not exactly,” he says.

Again, we are interrupted by the door. But this time, the person is knocking.

“Will someone get the fucking door?” I snap.

Shamus walks to the door and opens it. The girl from the bar walks in, complete with unicorn slippers and a slogan shirt that says: “My girlfriend’s hotter than yours.” I recognise the T-shirt. It’s a custom one I created last year.

“Nice slippers,” Lochlan says as she enters the room and looks towards Caleb and Isaac, who are both now sitting on the couch.

I look between her and them. They nod at her.

“Uhh, Ella, what are you doing here?” Shamus asks her curiously.

“I’m here to pick up Chad.” Her smile is like the Cheshire Cat as she looks at Chad.

“Ella,” he warns. “What did you do?”

“Like I always say, there isn’t much that can’t be achieved with unicorn slippers and cookies.”

“Mady,” Shamus interrupts. “I’m still an option for this harem, right?”

“Shut up, dude, you like dick,” Lochlan replies while slapping him on the back of the head. He emerged from the bedroom at some point, wearing considerably more clothing than before, and I now notice he is also wearing pink unicorn slippers.

“So what? Why can’t I be her *not* boyfriend?”

“He has a point,” Isaac says. “She has a not husband who sleeps in her bed every night.” He tips his head in Lochlan’s direction.

“And we have Daddy over there.” Lo points to Caleb. “And we can’t forget her stalker.” He stares at Isaac, who flips him off. All funny stories, really. Ones I could explain when I have more time.

“See, it’s perfect, I bring snacks to the table,” Shamus adds.

The girl—Ella—pipes up. “But then you’re still missing the dick, and Chad here is a fine specimen.” Chad looks at her and narrows his eyes.

“It’s sorted then. I’m the not boyfriend, and he can be the dick. And since I have my own place, he can have the room.”



The front door bangs open, no knock again. What’s with all these people letting themselves into my house? Shamus is forgiven; he brings me food.

“Hey, the sexy part of LoLo has arrived,” Logan says, entering the room and interrupting my inner tantrum.

Logan is Lochlan’s best friend—they met in sex addicts anonymous. Really, a friendship made in heaven. Both lasted one day before they were back out there. The only difference is, now they are the ultimate wingmen for each other.

“Are you guys having a party without me?” he asks, feigning shock.

“Not a party, Logan. These guys wanted to find me a regular dick and a roommate.”

“I can help with the regular dick. You know the offer is there, babe,” he says in a smooth tone.

“And crabs,” Isaac adds under his breath.

“But roommate? Who’s moving out? You don’t have a spare room.”

“About that...” Caleb says, rubbing his eyes. He has been on long-ass shifts and must be exhausted. “We decided that

since Lochlan can't behave or be trusted to not bring strangers home, he will be bunking with Mady. He sleeps in there every night anyway, so he doesn't really need a room." Caleb has his authoritative tone on and it's making my thighs clench of their own accord. That right there is why Caleb is the daddy of the group. Romance novels really have given me *a lot* of fantasies.

"How is that fair?" Logan asks, clearly pissed off. "Mady can screw you guys, and apparently whoever that guy is—yes, I know bed hair when I see it—but Lo can't?"

"Mind your damn business, Logan. No one asked you," Caleb snaps. Not everyone in this house is fond of Logan—I'm pretty sure Caleb just tolerates him for Lochlan's sake. Isaac, though, he taunts the LoLo duo bad. I don't know if he actually hates them, but they definitely irritate him.

"No one ever asks me," Lochlan grouses, and grabs the now cold food before storming off to the kitchen.

"I should go," Chad speaks up, not giving Lochlan time to lose his shit over the room situation, but we will hear about it later. Bloody hell, I almost forgot there were so many people here.

"I'm sorry about this." My apology is sincere, and I wouldn't blame this guy if he ran for the hills after the crazy that just went down in my living room. I wouldn't be able to even explain it had he not been here to witness it himself.

"Don't be. Would you believe me if I told you I have a group of friends just as weird?"

"Honestly, I would." I laugh, and nervous butterflies swarm my stomach. What the hell? I think I might actually like this guy.

"So, I'm going to meet you at the car, Chad," Ella interjects. "Nice to see you guys again. Shamus, I'll see you at home, and I'm sure I will be seeing you at the hospital again, Caleb." She heads towards the door and high fives Shamus as she leaves.

Suddenly five sets of eyes are watching me, and it has me feeling a little insecure as I glance around the room, choosing

not to make eye contact with any of them.

“I will walk you out,” I say, finally meeting Chad’s stare. He nods and walks towards the door.

I make a point to slam the door behind me, letting the idiots inside know that I’m pissed at them. I’m sure their intentions were good, but they could have fucking asked me first, *before* they decided to pimp me out. What if I have my own requirements?

“I had a good time.” My voice is barely a whisper. I freaking hate this part. Maybe this is why I don’t do one-night stands.

“Me too.”

“Ask her on a date, doofus,” Ella shouts out the car window.

“I’m trying, Ella, but you’re interrupting me,” Chad yells back.

I don’t know how these two know each other, but it’s obvious they are close, kind of like siblings. Especially since she’s picking him up from some random—or I guess not so random—girl’s house. I have a sneaky suspicion last night was a setup that both Ella and the boys were in on. It’s not often the boys encourage me to go out on my own. I should have known something was up.

“Sorry, go ahead,” Ella says, winding up the window and pretending she isn’t watching.

My poor neighbours. I feel bad for them on a regular basis because of LoLo. Those two—who yes do refer to themselves as LoLo when they’re together—with their regular shenanigans. And now this.

Mrs Greenberg is outside watering her lawn in her nightie, clearly trying to get the gossip for her old lady book club. I swear those ladies get off on talking about what I must be doing with all these men. I think Ella might be the first girl to step foot in the house for a long time.



Chad clears his throat. “As Ella so eloquently put it, would you like to go on a date with me tonight?”

I glance up to meet his hopeful expression and my cheeks heat. “Yes, I think I would like that.”

I had a nice time with Chad last night. It couldn't hurt to get to know him a little better without the crowded bar scene. Plus, I would be stupid to turn him down—he's good looking, good in bed, and didn't get scared by the shit show in there.

“Great. I'll pick you up at seven.” He looks relieved and smiles wide before turning away.

I watch as Chad gets into the car and says something to Ella. She laughs as they take off. I head back inside, and all the guys are now at the table eating breakfast pastries.

Walking up behind Caleb, I throw my arms around his neck and hug him from behind, giving him a peck on the cheek. His beard tickles my face, but I love it. There go those tingles again. Damn hormones.

“Go to bed, you look like a zombie,” I say to Caleb before taking a seat at the table.

“And you look fucked,” Logan says, and Lochlan laughs at him. “Is he better than the Doc?”

“We all know that Daddy is good with his hands,” Loch jokes.

“Bro-gans,” Isaac says, shaking his head and shoving his last bite of croissant into his mouth.

“I'm off. I have work to do,” Shamus says, standing and dusting off his jeans, pastry crumbs falling to the floor.

“How do you know that Ella girl?” I ask him before I lose my train of thought.

“Oh, I, um, ah, I work security at her apartment,” he says sheepishly.

“How many jobs do you have?”

“Ummm, a few?” he hedges. “It's good to be part of your harem. Maybe I should add that to my resumé as well,” he

says with a wink.

“Wait, what?” Logan demands. “The food delivery guy gets to be in your harem and not me?”

“What can I say? He brings me snacks.” Everyone laughs at that.

The thing Logan doesn’t realise is these guys have all added themselves to this so-called harem. Lochlan and I have been friends since we were ten, so I guess it started with him. When I got really sick three years ago, Caleb just showed up and never left. I have a feeling Lochlan called in some favours because he and Caleb work at the same hospital.

Then we have Isaac, though our history is . . . different. It began as a failed one-night stand, then some random messages, which at the time I didn’t know were from him. When I didn’t reply, he showed up here one day and never left. And Shamus has been delivering food ever since then, come to think of it.

Our dynamic is weird, but it works for us. I can’t be mad at the idea of adding regular sex to the mix; since Caleb works so much, he’s always too tired. Lochlan refuses to sleep with me but will screw his way through New Hope, Isaac can’t figure out why he can’t get it up—which I feel might be linked to a childhood trauma that he isn’t ready to talk about—and, well, Shamus is gay.

Only time will tell if Chad can handle all this crazy.



“How do I look?” I ask Isaac, since he is the only one home.

Caleb is at the hospital working, and LoLo went to O’Malley’s—an Irish bar down the street. I’m sure Lochlan will be back later to crawl into bed with me.

“Fine,” he says, briefly looking up from his computer.

I brought a few options down to his cave, which is more like a granny flat decked out with tech gear. I’m still not entirely sure what he does, but I know he is super smart.

“Just fine?” I huff. “I went to all this trouble curling my hair and painting my face to look just fine?”

“What do you want me to say, Mady? You look super fucking sexy and I’m jealous as hell, wishing I could get hard and be everything you need?”

“Isaac, I’m sorry.” I instantly regret winding him up.

“Don’t be,” he says, getting up from his desk and walking over to me, pulling me into a hug. “I’m just jealous. I will get over it. If I can deal with the Bro-gans, I can deal with this Chad guy.”

I look up into his green eyes—the golden flecks throughout are mesmerising, and I could stare at him for

hours. I push a lock of his scruffy hair from his face. “If this is too much for you, I can cancel. You guys are my first priority.”

“No, please go. Jealousy is a natural feeling, and we are bound to hit some bumps in the road. If anyone can go, can it be Lochlan?”

I laugh and slap his chest. “Okay, I have to head back up to the house. I have my phone, you have your tracker. Speed dial 1 if I need you to call for an emergency, and the safe word is banana. Anything I’m forgetting?”

“Condoms and a toothbrush in case you stay at his house.”

“I’m not sleeping at anyone’s house. Can you believe this dress has pockets?” I say, while stepping out of his embrace and giving him a little spin.

“Have fun,” he says as I push up on my toes and place a kiss on his lips while running my fingers along the seam of his zipper. “Still nothing?”

“Nope.” He laughs, even though I know he’s deflecting.

It’s become sort of our thing now; I touch his dick, nothing happens. Any other girl would possibly get a complex and think the issue is her, but I know it’s not me. I believe he has an issue that stems from trauma, and together we will figure it out.

I race back up to the house, throwing everything I might need into an oversized handbag. Keys, wallet, phone, pepper spray, some weirdly shaped toothbrush Logan insisted I could use as a weapon if need be. Lollipops, lip gloss, tissues. It all gets added to the random crap I’ve accumulated in my bag over the years.

At seven sharp, there’s a knock on the door. I’m glad it’s only Isaac home—he isn’t likely to crowd me. Watching me like a creeper on the security cameras is more his style. His obsession with safety is ironic when he has no issues hacking other people’s information.

“Hi.” I smile up at Chad when I open the door. He looks super nice in a pair of faded jeans and a button-down shirt. I

do miss the more casual attire he was wearing last night; however, he does scrub up well.

“Hi yourself, you look beautiful.”

My cheeks warm with a blush. “The dress has pockets,” I blurt out, my brain short circuiting.

Why I thought a date was a good idea is beyond me; I’m socially awkward. That’s why the closest people to me are people who invited themselves into my life.

“So do my jeans,” he says with a smile. Good, he is as nervous as I am. “Let’s go eat.”

“I could eat.” I palm my face. *Damn idiot.*

“Good thing I came along to feed you before you fade away.”

I laugh at his comment and lock the door. If only he knew. “So, where are we going?”

“There’s a little French restaurant in the city called The Village.”

I screw up my nose before I can catch myself and smooth out my expression. I’m such an ungrateful twat, but I’m really more of a pub meal kind of girl. In my defence, they have safe options for me.

“It isn’t as fancy as it sounds, I promise. It’s more of a hangout for uni kids, but their sandwiches are to die for.” His choice of words is sort of ironic, given my history.

The city isn’t far from my house—around twenty minutes or so, depending on traffic. Chad fills the silence and talks about his group of friends he is living with. Arden sounds like a character, and I find myself excited at the thought of meeting him; maybe if this goes anywhere, I will get to meet his friends.

He also tells me about his brothers and the weird dynamic with his friend group. It makes me not feel so bad about my situation. At least he is used to chaos and drama. I’m not sure anyone can get used to LoLo though.

Chad finds a car park, and we walk side by side to a small back alley. If I didn't know better, I would think he was bringing me back here to kill me. I gasp when we turn the corner.

Fairy lights line the alley walls, and small tables with blue and white tablecloths and cute vases of flowers have been set up throughout the space. Pleasant music plays as the background to the animated chatter of the other diners.

Chad leads us to a table, and we take a seat. There are no menus, just a specials board leaning up against a pumping food van, and I have no idea what any of it is.

“Do you mind if I order for us? Is there anything you don't like?”

This is the part where I should tell him I'm broken; I can barely eat anything new without landing myself in hospital. But just once, I don't want to be a freak, and surely a sandwich isn't going to kill me. “Nope, I'm good.”

He gets up and walks towards the small queue of people at the van, and I can't help but stare at his ass as he walks away. My eyes are doing whatever the hell they want.

Maybe the guys didn't pick too bad after all. The only way he would have been too good to be true is if he took me for tacos. Lochlan would say a perfect guy takes his girl for tacos.

Ten minutes later, Chad comes back with a tray of food. “What is all this?” I ask.

“I have no idea, but I can tell you it all tastes fantastic. I sneak out here once a week just for the food.”

“Is that a . . .”

“A dessert taco, yes. I had to bribe them to make it and think you should eat that first before all the toppings fall out.”

Holy shit, Lochlan is going to be so impressed. There isn't much I can eat on a real taco, but this dessert one looks like it's safe.

I pick up the sweet treat from where it's been wedged between two sandwiches. Taking a bite, the combination of

cream and berries hits my tastebuds—it's divine. A low moan of appreciation escapes before I realise what I've done, and Chad watches avidly as I demolish every last bite.

“That was probably the hottest thing I have ever seen,” he murmurs, as if he's thinking out loud.

He holds out a napkin and I take it from him with a chuckle. “Thanks.”

As the night goes on, conversation flows easily. By the time we're finished our food, the alley is crowded, and we agree to give up our table and head to Chad's. We decided my place might not be ideal, since LoLo could come home at any time. Chad is confident everyone at his place will be out at his bar, with Ella working there tonight.

When we're back at his car, he asks the question I've been waiting for. I'm grateful he left it until the end of the night; I didn't want to spoil the date by needing to have this conversation.

“So... to address the elephant in the room, what's the deal with your ‘harem?’ How did you all meet?” He even uses air quotes.

“It's a funny story, actually. I've known Lochlan since we were ten and were friends at first sight. I know he loves me, but he refuses to sleep with me, being a self-proclaimed sex addict. He doesn't have a clinical diagnosis, but he has tried relationships and they end when he cheats. So, while we are kind of more than friends, there has never been any sex. He refuses to hurt me.”

“And you want to sleep with him?” he asks, keeping his eyes on the road.

I decide to go with total honesty. If Chad is serious about moving in, he needs to know what he is walking into. “Yes. I know him and what he is like, so I don't think casual sex would ruin that.”

“Fair call. What about the others?”

“Caleb is a friend of Lochlan's from the hospital. When I got sick a few years ago, he came to the house and kind of

never left. We sort of dated, but with his work hours it wasn't practical, so we casually have sex."

Chad nods and takes it all in. "And the one with the shaggy hair?"

"Isaac, we had a failed one-night stand about two-and-a-half years ago and then a few weeks after, I got a text that was a wrong number, or so I thought. We started texting every day for about six months, and when I didn't reply for twenty-four hours once, I guess he came to check on me. He also never left."

"So, he stalked you? Isn't that weird?"

I laugh because to anyone else, it is. "When you get to know Isaac, you will understand him."

"And you two haven't had sex."

"No, but not from lack of trying. He has some issues."

"Issues?" he asks with a raised brow.

"They are personal, but basically the essential parts don't work."

"Oh," is all he says before changing tack. "And what was Shamus saying about being the food delivery guy? Not only is he gay, I thought he worked security?"

"Wait, how do you know he works security? I only just found that out this morning. I honestly don't know how he manages it because every single time, without fail, he will be the person to deliver our food. He's even on the schedule Isaac created."

"Shamus works for Arden. I see him around the house often. My older brother, Ralph, is head of security for Arden, but Arden's sister, Julia, will still be in Canary Bay until she finishes school, so Ralph hired Shamus to look after security here while he is away with Julia."

"Huh, that's weird." So, Chad lives in the same building as Ella and knows Shamus through Arden. I'm starting to connect more and more dots.



He doesn't reply to my comment; instead, he just continues with his previous questioning. "So how would it work if I were to agree to all this?"

"This is where it gets a little confusing . . . but they've made a schedule, which helps. So, Lo sleeps with me every night—there has only ever been a handful of nights since we were teens that we haven't shared a bed. Since I got sick, especially, he can't sleep unless we're in the same bed. I spend Caleb's days or nights off with him when he gets them, but it is scheduled on the roster. Isaac and I go out Monday and Wednesday nights, usually just for dinner and a drink, or to see a movie. Shamus just brings the food, but now I think about it, there are times he randomly pops in. I also have Jarred—he is the yard guy. He's on Mady watch sometimes during the day, but only Isaac really knows that because he is usually working in the basement. I get bored, so Jarred will come and watch a movie with me. Anyway, how you commit to the 'harem' would be up to you. Caleb is exclusive with me, so is Isaac, and Loch is emotionally exclusive. You would, however, have your own room," I say at the end, like that's the selling point.

"What about group sex?"

"Not unless that's your kink. It has never come up before because of the dynamic."

"Hmmm."

"What are you thinking?"

"I have never had to share a girl before, so I don't know if I could do it."

"You're welcome to the room, no commitment required. If it's not for you, then that's fine."

"Are you sure? I think they want a walking sex machine," he says as we pull into a driveway, and I try to take in what I am looking at. This is no ordinary house—it's bloody huge.

"They just want all my needs met, but I have no idea why because I'm a burden more than anything," I confess as he parks the car.

The guilt eats at me almost daily. I hate how I'm such a burden on the guys. I *do* have my small business that keeps me busy and funds my late-night shopping addiction though.

You know those people who can't sleep and end up buying some random food strainer they saw an ad for on social media in the middle of the night? That's me, but the kicker is, half the time I don't remember ordering it until it shows up. It's like Christmas all year.

Well, it was, until the boys took away my credit card because I was starting to fill the house with random crap. My aunt left the house to me when she passed, so it's paid for, and she also left behind a small sum of money that covers most of my expenses. As the guys don't pay rent, they cover all the bills.

"I highly doubt that," he says, his intense gaze on me stirring those damn butterflies again.



Chad leads me into the house and gives me the grand tour. This is not a house, it's a damn mansion. Like, an *actual* mansion. It has a freaking fish tank built into the entire length of one wall and a library that is at least twice the size of my house. I'm jealous. I can't wait to meet Arden and his friends; the way Chad talks about Yasmin and Ally makes me feel like we'd actually get along. Chad walks close to me the entire time, occasionally brushing his arm up against mine, and it sends shivers through my body. I'm reminded of the way he felt on top of me last night. The way his hands trailed up and down my skin, teasing me everywhere... I shake off the memory and tune back into what Chad is saying as I follow him through the kitchen and out the back to a bar area.

"Would you like a drink? Tequila, soda water, and a slice of lime with lots of ice, right?" Chad asks, as he makes his way behind the bar. He remembers my drink order from last night, and I swoon a little more. The look on his face is mesmerising—it's obvious he's in his element behind the bar, Like it really is his happy place.

"Please," is all I can manage to squeak out as I watch him go to work making our drinks.

Before he has a chance to finish, I double over in pain. This can't be happening right now. "Purple fudge monkeys," I grit out before trying to slowly breathe through the unbearable stabbing pain in my abdomen.

Chad looks over at me and immediately stops what he is doing, worry replacing his previous happy expression. "Mady, what's wrong?" he asks, rushing to me.

He starts to rub my back, which provides a temporary distraction from the agony, and it seems like this is something he has done before. Most guys freak out. Then the next wave hits me, and I start to hyperventilate, forgetting all about the stupid breathing techniques.

I fumble through my bag, searching for my phone. We have a protocol for this. However, this is the first time in over twelve months that I haven't been with one of my guys when this has happened. Damn stupid bag! Caleb harps on and on about cleaning it out, but you never know when you will need a . . . paper clip?! I drop it back into my bag. Goddamn shit, where the hell is my phone? Another wave of torment crashes through me, and I drop the bag on the bench and try to focus, picturing LoLo teaching me how to breathe. Was it in through my nose, out through my nose? Or was that from the birthing videos I got sucked into watching the other night? I locate my vomit bag instead, which seems to be just in time as my stomach coils and I bring up everything I ate at dinner.

"Mady, what's happening? What do you need?" Chad's voice is laced with concern.

"Find my phone. Press 1, and one of the boys will come get me and take me to the hospital." I manage to say through my tears. The pain is unrelenting, crippling, and it's not easing anytime soon. Waves of nausea start to wash over me again.

"I can take you to the hospital. Come on. You can message them when you get there and are checked in," Chad says, picking me up in his arms and cradling me to his chest, then slinging my bag over his shoulder.

Everything is a blur as Chad carries me through the house, then we're back outside and at his car. He gently places me in

the passenger seat, straps me in, and rushes to the driver's side.

The drive to the hospital goes quickly. Chad doesn't ask if I'm okay, and for that I'm thankful. His hand grips mine, only letting go when we pull up at the hospital. He leaves his car in the loading bay, and I want to tell him not to leave it there—it will be towed—but the pain has doubled, and wordless cries are all I can manage.

He races to the passenger side of the car and carefully lifts me out. I have just enough wherewithal to snag my bag on the way. Cradled against his chest once again, the pain doesn't seem as bad. I inhale his scent of whiskey and something else I can't quite place, but it makes me feel comfortable in his arms.

The minute we walk in, Carla at the triage desk recognises me and takes us straight into a room, not bothering to ask what's wrong or fill out the necessary paperwork. One of the many perks of spending more time than a normal person would here. Not that anyone claims I'm normal.

“Miss Mady, it's been a hot minute since I've seen you. How's the store going? My sister loved the mug you made for her.”

I love Carla—she's trying to distract me. She knows there is no way in hell I'd be here if I didn't need to be. Unfortunately, I've been here a few too many times.

“It's good. Kind of slow at the moment, but that's okay,” I reply between deep breaths.

I'm still clutching my stomach and Chad rubs my arm, trying to comfort me. The waves of nausea are getting worse with every stab of pain.

“It'll pick up. Who's this one?” Carla asks, looking at Chad. “He's new?” She raises her eyebrow in question. This makes me laugh and then swear because *shit that hurts*. Carla is well acquainted with my “harem.” Especially because two of them work here.

Speaking of my guys, Caleb comes rushing in. “What happened?”

He's all business and very much Caleb. His doctor persona is so freaking hot. I may be in pain, but I sure as heck can appreciate how good Caleb looks in his scrubs and white coat. He walks straight up to me and wraps me in his arms. I let his familiar scent of soap, leather, and disinfectant settle over me—it's only natural that he smells like a hospital with the amount of time he spends here.

The moment I met Caleb, he instantly became my safe space. All my guys offer me that in different ways, but Caleb is the dominating presence of the group, hence the nickname "Daddy."

From behind Caleb I hear, "I'm Chad," as he introduces himself to Carla.

Still wrapped in Caleb's arms, I peek past him to look at Chad. He doesn't seem uncomfortable; not like he did this morning when he woke up to find Lo asleep in my bed. Maybe he's coming around to the idea of moving in with us and joining in on our brand of crazy.

"We were on our date when she doubled over in pain," Chad says to Caleb this time.

Caleb just nods at him. "Carla, can you get Sean to write up 10mg of oxycodone and 8mg of ondansetron? Might be best to add a dose of morphine and some fluids as well."

Carla agrees and hurries from the room. No doubt she will be back soon and demanding all the gossip about the new guy.

"How did you know I was here?" I ask Caleb.

He looks at me like I'm an idiot. "Well, you obviously didn't follow protocol." He levels me with his *I mean business* stare. Shit. I'm in trouble. "Isaac was alerted when your GPS pinged within a one-kilometre radius of the hospital. He sent out the 911."

"Isaac tracks your phone?" Chad asks curiously. "Mady was looking for her phone, but I told her I'd bring her to the hospital. I figured it would be quicker than waiting for someone to come get her," Chad explains to Caleb.

Caleb doesn't look impressed that I didn't follow the protocol, but something tells me he appreciates Chad's thought process. It's only logical to take the girl who is vomiting and in pain to the hospital *before* dealing with chaotic situationships.

"We all track her phone, but Isaac is the one who gets the alerts. He needs to do it, so we just let him." Caleb keeps offering comfort until Carla returns, then releases me so she can insert my IV and administer the meds he requested.

Caleb technically isn't my doctor anymore, but chances are Sean will be around to see me soon, and if you were to look at my chart, these are the standard steps to take. The priority is getting the pain and nausea under control as quickly as possible. The longer we wait, the harder my symptoms are to manage.

"Small sting," Carla says before inserting the cannula into my left hand. My veins aren't the easiest to find, especially when I struggle to even keep water down on a good day. I'm usually dehydrated, which is why either Caleb or Carla have to cannulate me—it tends to take others more than one try to find a vein.

"Your chariot awaits, madam," Lo says, barging into the room pushing a wheelchair. He's dressed in jeans and a nice shirt.

"What are you doing here? Weren't you out?" I eye him suspiciously.

"You need an ultrasound," he says, as if this answers my question. It doesn't, but that's Lo.

I look around the room, taking in Caleb and Lo, then focusing on Chad. The morphine has already gone to my head. "You don't have to stay. I'm sorry for ruining our date."

Chad closes the distance and leans down so close I could kiss him. I remember kissing him last night and clench my thighs together. Yes, I'm in pain, in a hospital, and it's not the time, but the meds are kicking in—plus I'm not a freaking

saint. You try being surrounded by a bunch of attractive men and not getting turned on occasionally.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Chad assures me, and even in my drug-induced state, I can tell he’s dead serious.

Without thinking, I lean forward and press a quick kiss to his lips before I pull away, giggling. “Did you just agree to join my harem?”

“I still don’t know how this will work, but you’re worth giving it a shot.”

Chad’s statement sets off those butterflies in my stomach again. I welcome the feeling; it replaces the nausea temporarily.

“You’re fucked now,” Lo laughs and slaps him on the back, then picks me up and puts me in the wheelchair. “Welcome to the harem. We’ll work out the details *after* we get our girl some tests and cleared to go home.”





When I got the notification Mady was on her way to the hospital, panic set in, giving me flashbacks from two years ago when I felt hopeless and not in control. I should have made her stay home, but what good would that have done? She should have someone who can provide what I can't. Mady may be sick, but she still has needs. I know sex can be a welcome distraction for her when required. I just hate that I can't give it to her.

I'm fairly confident I broke every speeding law on the way here, and luckily, I find a parking spot straight away. I won't stop in the loading zone again after my car was towed last time. Although I have a feeling Barb, aka cranky Nurse Ratched, may have been responsible for that.

I make my way around to the doctor's entrance and use my swipe card to let myself in. A few nurses eye me sceptically, but I keep walking until I find the room I'm looking for.

Mady's laugh pulls me in the right direction, and I slip into her room before someone finds out I shouldn't be back here. Four sets of eyes stare at me, and I smirk back.

"What?" My tone is short, but I'm worried about my girl.

"How did you get back here?" Caleb asks.

“You really think the hospital security could keep me out?” I turn my attention to Mady. “Sorry I took so long, I had to make one of these,” I say, holding up a swipe card. “Especially after they made me wait outside for an hour last time.”

“Do you know how much trouble you could get in for doing that?” Caleb lectures. Always the goodie goodie.

“Calm down, Daddy. No harm done,” Lochlan says.

Since when does he stick up for me? Lochlan and I rarely see eye to eye. I don’t hate him, though. I just don’t understand why he treats Mady the way he does. It’s obvious he loves her, and he has a functioning dick. He could have Mady anytime he wanted, if only he’d get over the whole “Mady being endgame” bullshit.

“What’s going on? Can someone fill me in?” I ask, moving in closer to Mady and putting myself between her and Chad. If that guy did something to compromise her health, I will rack him up so much debt it will cost him more to find his way out of it. I usually stay on the good side of hacking, but I’d love the opportunity to put my black hat on for a change and create some chaos. I crave being in control, but sometimes even I enjoy letting loose a little.

Mady goes to open her mouth when Carla, one of the decent nurses here, walks into the room.

“Hey, honey, your Irish boyfriend is here.” She winks at Mady and turns to me. “How did you get in here? Actually, don’t tell me. What I don’t know can’t hurt me.”

I nod at her. Carla is one of the nicer nurses here at New Hope Private. Barb, on the other hand, hasn’t forgiven me for setting her up an online profile on a sugar daddy website after she was rude to me the first time we met. She didn’t find it amusing that a bunch of old men started contacting her.

Caleb goes off to find Mady’s doctor and see if her test results are in yet. I wish we were closer to knowing what is wrong with her. Each time they have theories but nothing concrete to go on. I have spent many hours researching and there are so many things it could be. Doctor Google hasn’t

been any help to narrow it down, and neither have the real doctors. It kills Caleb that he can't figure out what the cause is.

A worried-looking Shamus strides into the room, and he comes to stand beside me, moving the Chad guy further away from Mady. This will be a good test for him. I want to see how he handles everyone being here, doting over our girl.

“Hey guys, sorry I'm late. Mady, these are for you,” Logan announces, walking into the room and holding out a bouquet of flowers.

“Did you decide to add him to the alerts?” Mady asks, and I shake my head no. There is no way I would add Logan when everything he does irritates me.

“I will have you know, I'm good in a crisis situation. Just now I managed to find these flowers that some old person didn't need—they had like twenty in their room—and I flirted my way back here. I get things done.” His ridiculous claim has me rolling my eyes, but I bite my tongue. Now is not the time.

The room is small and overcrowded, yet none of us are willing to leave her side. With Shamus squished up beside me, I feel claustrophobic, and I move to the back of the room to take a seat. Lochlan and Logan make jokes, distracting Mady from being trapped in a hospital bed. They may be a couple of idiots, but they come in handy at times. I would never say it out loud—we all know it would just inflate their egos.

This is the first hospital visit for Shamus. Since he demanded he was part of the harem, I added him to the 911 list. I've gotten to know Shamus since the app launched, and he was instrumental in making it work by providing the information I needed to ensure the drivers and restaurants were complying with each customer's needs.

I watch Chad and notice the way he has moved back closer to Mady; his hand holds hers, his thumb stroking her skin. I'm not entirely convinced he will fit in—our dynamic isn't one you can easily wrap your head around.

Caleb works so much he feels guilty about the lack of time he can give to Mady. We know it won't be forever, but right now he is on the home stretch with his degree. He needs to focus on getting it done.

Lochlan is a perve, or sex addict, as he classifies it, and he isn't wrong. He will screw anything with two legs and a heartbeat. Actually, heartbeat and adult human are the only standards he has, but he still refuses to have a sexual relationship with Mady.

Then there's me and my damn limp dick. I know I'll need to talk about what happened when I was younger, but I haven't found the courage to do it yet. I'm not sure Mady will want me around when she finds out the full story.

Our dysfunctions aside, we all seem to have a normal relationship with her, bar the sex.

A nurse walking past catches Logan's eye, and he leaves the room. Ugh, one-track mind, that guy. At least there is some kind of quiet now. Mady has drifted off to sleep, and we all sit in silence, watching her. I know they feel as useless as I do.

It's not creepy, right? Just four guys in a tiny-ass hospital room staring at the girl they love, no biggie. It's too soon for Chad to love Mady, but he will—she has that effect on people.

Caleb finally comes back, and we all look up at him, but he shakes his head. We all—besides Chad and Shamus—know that once again we won't get any answers.

“I'm sorry, Mads, but nothing out of the ordinary is showing up on the tests. Did you eat anything on the list of prohibited foods?”

“Of course not! I'm not an idiot,” she snaps.

She is frustrated and gets short with us when she is upset. Plus, the pain meds can make her a little loopy and irritated. The one and only time I ever needed morphine, I tripped hardcore, so I don't know how she can even string together coherent sentences.

“I have to ask, since so many visits are around food. What did you eat? Maybe it was something in a sauce?”

“I had sandwiches, but they were fine, and a dessert taco with cream and berries.”

“I can call the restaurant and get a list of ingredients,” Chad offers.

“Please,” Caleb says. Chad nods and leaves the room to make the call. God knows if they’re even open still, but at least we are doing something. Caleb moves in closer to Mady and takes her hand in his. “I promise we will find out what’s wrong with you.”

“I know you will,” she whispers. Caleb lifts their hands and places a kiss on hers.

Mady’s actual doctor, Sean, comes in and lists off everything we have already heard before, and like always, the tests show nothing. Every fibre of my being aches with the feeling of uselessness. There isn’t anything I *can’t* find on the web . . . except for what’s wrong with the girl I’m madly in love with. Go figure.

Once the doctor leaves to go order more tests at Lochlan’s insistence, Chad walks back in with a piece of paper.

“How did you go?” Shamus asks.

“The restaurant was closed, but I have a friend who is very persistent. He tracked down the chef’s mobile number and we have a list.”

I stand and take the list, running over every ingredient. “They cooked the damn chicken in French onion soup. Jesus, Mady, you should have been able to taste it. And you,” I say, turning to Chad. “I sent you a list of restaurants that are Mady approved. I even attached lists on food items that she can’t eat. The ones we know for sure make her sick.” My anger is evident in my tone.

“Calm down, mate,” Shamus says, placing a hand on my shoulder, which I shrug off.

“Calm down? Once again because someone is careless, Mady ends up in the hospital, and it will take days for her to recover.”

“Enough!” Mady yells. “I’m tired of you all micromanaging my life. I’m an adult, and if I want to go on a date with a nice lumberjack—I mean person—and try new things, I will. I don’t need your permission or your damn ‘Mady approved’ lists.”

Mady may be high on meds, but she has a point. I can’t help but worry about her though. It’s a compulsion.

Guilt washes over me. I look at her, but she avoids eye contact, instead ripping at her cannula. Caleb says nothing as he helps her get it sorted.

“Now, let me tell you what’s going to happen: Caleb will sort out my discharge papers, and I’m going back to Chad’s, and that’s final.” She slides out of the hospital bed as if it’s nothing, but I see her wince. Chad rushes to her side and takes her bag as she thrusts it into his chest.

“Mady,” Lochlan says.

“No, save it. I don’t want to hear it.” She turns her back on us and storms from the room, wincing with every step. Chad follows behind without a backwards glance.

When Mady goes into one of these moods, we have to wait it out, or we’ll push her too far and who knows what will happen then.

But . . . *fuck*, I wish it was me she was choosing to stay with tonight.

I don’t wait around for them to come up with a plan on how to deal with this. I head back to my car, pissed off that I didn’t think of contacting the restaurant, pissed that she chose him over us, and jealous as fuck that she will be in his arms tonight. Lastly, I’m worried this guy could take her away from all of us since he can give her what we can’t.

Anyone who says sex in a relationship isn’t important is a fucking liar. It’s in the top three most important things for sure, along with respect and communication.



After escaping the hospital yesterday, I have a handful of overprotective and pissed-off guys on my case. It might have been stupid, but what was the point in waiting when I get the same spiel every time? Just a lot of “It might be this,” or “We have to run more tests.” I live with a doctor, for shit’s sake—I’m better off at home. Granted, I didn’t go home, but took the chance that Chad could look after me if I got worse overnight. Thankfully the meds mostly worked, and the pain and nausea settled.

Caleb sent me an angry text telling me we will talk about it when he gets home, and Chad made sure to bring me back in time to talk with him. I didn’t want to, but Chad made some good points, and here we are. As much as I loved staying at Chad’s, I missed my own bed. But I knew if I came home Lochlan would have ended up next to me, Isaac would have moped around after I yelled at him, and Logan would have wanted to cheer me up. Though now they’re all tiptoeing around me and waiting for the emotional breakdown that usually follows.

“I can’t come in right now,” Chad says in a whisper yell. “Just because, okay? Can’t you handle it until I get there? Let

me call you back in five.” He hangs up his phone and slips it into his pocket.

“What’s going on, brother husband?” Logan says, slapping Chad on the shoulder, and Chad shakes his head at Logan’s name for him.

“Ella was supposed to open the bar, and she’s in the middle of something called a ‘red frog crisis’—don’t ask because I don’t understand either.”

“It’s your lucky day! LoLo can hold down the fort until she gets there.” Logan grins like the cat that got the cream, and Chad eyes him warily as Lochlan steps up beside Chad.

“We honestly have nothing better to do. You have other staff coming in, right? We just have to unlock the door and make sure no one is unruly until that chick gets there. I promise everything will be fine,” Lochlan attempts to reassure Chad.

Isaac half chokes on a cough; lucky for them, his phone rings. I get distracted wondering if I should message Shamus and ask him for food, then think better of it.

“Fine,” Chad says reluctantly, handing Lochlan the keys. Smart move really, Logan is the least trustworthy. And it’s not like he does it on purpose, he just acts first and apologises later. What do they say . . . It’s easier to ask for forgiveness than ask for permission? Or some crap like that.

LoLo practically run out of the house like excited teenagers.

“I just made a huge mistake, didn’t I?” Chad grimaces.

“Yup,” Isaac says. “Who knows how much trouble the Bro-gans will get into while being left unsupervised in a place with an endless supply of alcohol.”

“It should be fine if Lochlan is there. It’s Logan on his own you have to worry about,” I amend, trying to ease Chad’s mind. I’m a little emotional that he chose to stay here with me, when it was obvious he should have gone into work.



“Lochlan forgot to mention he is on call today,” Isaac adds, not helping the situation.

“Isaac, don’t you have a meeting to go to?” I shoot him a pointed look.

“I do. Chad, I just forwarded you our schedules. I have added yours to the rotation and included a suggestion on a roster for the bar. I also uploaded all our contacts into your phone and sent everything else you need. Your emergency protocol has been activated, and now you’re linked to us.” Chad just nods as Isaac overloads the poor guy with information.

Isaac leaves and I apologise to Chad—they can all be a little too much. I tell Chad to quickly look through what Isaac sent him because there will most likely be a quiz when he gets back, so Chad spends a good ten minutes reading over everything.

“I don’t know what I should be more worried about: the fact they actually have a Mady schedule, how he managed to get my number, or how he has fixed my roster so I get the occasional night or weekend off that doesn’t conflict with anyone else’s work schedules. Isaac really covers everything.”

“That’s Isaac. He’s a control freak and weirdly stalkerish, without being creepy.”

We decide to watch a movie on Netflix, since my schedule for today says rest and Chad seems like he wants to impress the guys. Halfway through the movie, Chad’s phone rings, and I already know it’s something to do with Logan—it’s always Logan.

“Hello? Yeah, this is he . . . What do you mean by noise? . . . Okay, let me see what I can do.”

Chad looks at me and dials another number.

“Ella, what’s... why is it so noisy? It’s not funny, stop laughing. Karaoke? Are you serious? It’s 11 a.m., Ella, and when I’m not there, you’re in charge . . . IT. IS. NOT. FUNNY.” Chad’s beautiful face turns frustrated as he ends the call.

“What did he do?” I ask, anxious to find out what mess Logan now has to dig himself out of.

“Apparently, Lochlan had to leave when Ella got there, and Logan has started up some karaoke. But not just any karaoke—he has dug out the Hawaiian gear we had in the back storage room, and now he’s wearing a skirt and coconut bikini while singing Moana songs. Do you think Shamus could come over and stay with you until I get back?”

Chad starts pacing in front of the couch just as Jarred lets himself in. Jarred is our lawn guy, and he lives across the road with his parents. He is only eighteen, but he’s the biggest stoner out there; he brings me what I refer to as nighttime brownies because I always feel nauseous at night, and they are the only things that seem to help. I have also been known to occasionally have some during the day if I need to take the edge off.

“Hey, Mady. What’s crack-a-lackin’?”

“Not much. Chad was just realising I’m a big girl and can stay home by myself while he goes and checks on his bar.”

“They might kill me if I don’t stay.” Chad legitimately looks concerned about what the guys might say if he leaves me unattended.

“I tell you what, Chad, I’ll stay with Mady and keep her safe, and once you get back, I can do the lawns.”

Chad raises a brow at Jarred like he isn’t too sure, but I can tell he is worried about what Logan is up to.

“If it makes you feel better, you can give me a tip when you get back.” Jarred smiles at Chad and plops down on the couch next to me.

“Fine, I’ll go straight there and come straight back.” Chad leans down and places a kiss on my cheek, then hurries out the door.

“New dude?” Jarred asks with a chuckle.

“Yeah, the guys think I need dick.”

“I thought you were porking the doctor?”

Trust the kid to be crass. He may only be six years younger than I am, but it's times like this he makes me feel old. Who the eff says porking?

"I thought you were sneaking over to bring me special brownies."

I bat my eyes at Jarred and he holds out something wrapped in tin foil. I take it from him and it's still warm as I unwrap it. Snapping it in half, I hand some back to Jarred. He takes his, and we put on *Aaahh!!! Real Monsters*—it's our thing. When we hang out, we watch random cartoons I haven't seen since I was a child. Thank god for streaming services.

I wait as my body starts to relax, and after twenty minutes, we're laughing at the show. After half an hour I wonder if Chad will come back—if I were him I probably wouldn't.

I'd be running for the hills.

I have a lot of baggage, and I don't know how or why someone would want all that. My stomach rumbles—I really need to eat.

Me: Are you bringing lunch today?

Shamus: I thought Chad was with you.

Me: He is, I'm hungry.

Shamus: Liar, the schedule says Chad is taking care of lunch.

Me: So you're saying I have to starve. What if Chad can't cook : (

Shamus: Chad owns a bar, one that will deliver him food.

Shit, I should have looked at the damn schedule. Bloody Isaac and his planning.

Me: Don't you dare dob me in, I won't talk to you ever again.

Shamus: Too late, Caleb finishes in half an hour.

Shamus: And don't lie, you will talk to me as soon as I bring you food.

Me: Damn you, why did you snitch on me?

Shamus: Because that weirdo threatened to sink me in financial debt if I didn't report to them.

Me: Don't listen to him, he won't do that.

Okay, so he probably would, but I can't tell Shamus that. I need to find a way to get him on my side.

I turn to Jarred. "So, food is a no go."

"What food do you have here? I can probably make something."

"Healthy things that Caleb tries to force us to eat."

"Let's go see."

We both get up and head into the kitchen. I sit at the table and watch as Jarred goes through the cupboards to find some food. A rap on the door startles us, and we look at each other, shrugging. No one ever really knocks. Whoever it is does it again.

"Come in," I yell. Chad walks in with a bag in his hands and my face lights up. He came back! And he has food. My saviour.

"So, how much damage did he do?"

"Not much, but I had to shut down karaoke, make him put clothes on, and explain that day drinking isn't for staff. He did manage to bring in three times the amount of people that are usually in during the day, so I can't really complain. Ella has it under control now."

Chad walks into the kitchen and places the bag on the bench. "I also made a call on my way and asked the kitchen

staff to make you some food, since I read on the schedule that I had to take care of lunch.”

“Great, I need food ASAP.”

“Why?” Chad asks.

“So, I think that’s my cue to leave.” Jarred makes his exit out the back door. Big chicken—he supplies the brownies and dips when we get busted. That’s what I get for hanging out with a kid who is barely eighteen.

“It’s a funny story, actually. Jarred brings me nighttime brownies to combat the nausea, but only Isaac knows. Caleb will be home soon, thanks to Shamus tattling on me, and I need to be less stoned when he gets here or it’s a one-way ticket to lecture town.”

Chad looks at me, and I see when realisation kicks in that the brownies are laced with weed.

“Shitshitshit! I’m a dead man. They leave you with me for the first time and you get wasted.” The panic in his voice is comical. Okay, so that’s the brownie talking, but I can’t stop the giggle that escapes.

I giggle again when Chad places all the food down in front of me. “All of this is on the approved list. Start eating, and fast.”

Chad spends the next half an hour sobering me up. Which works because after I eat the mashed potatoes, I end up bringing it all back up, brownie included.

I guess food is a no for today. Looks like Caleb will get his way and I’ll be drinking some horrible kale concoction for dinner tonight.



I must be certifiably crazy—today is moving day. As much as I appreciate Arden letting me stay with him, he has some shit going on, and for some strange reason, I have a connection with Mady. Her whole group dynamic also intrigues me enough to move in and see where it goes.

Not to mention the fact that Ella keeps reminding me I'm not getting any younger, and this could be my last chance to have any spontaneous fun. It's also the reason she has forced me to wear a damn YOLO T-shirt, and saying no wasn't worth the fight. Ella is like a little sister to me. You know, stubborn, annoying, and always gets her way because you can't say no. Poor Ella has been through some crap, and I've watched her battle health issues the entire time I have known her—maybe that's why Mady's condition doesn't scare me off.

“Is that the last box?” Ralph asks, and I nod. I had little here, and most of the rest of my stuff was damaged when my apartment flooded.

“It is. Am I making the right decision?” I ask my older brother, having a last-minute freak out.

I have always lived on my own until staying with Arden, and normally everyone there is either at uni or work, but living

with Mady is going to be vastly different. Someone will always be home, according to the schedule.

“It’s not like you can’t leave if it doesn’t work out. Do you think she could be the one?”

I shrug. “She might be, but it’s way too early to tell for sure.”

It’s possible with how fast my heart races every time I’m in the same room as her, but she has a lot of baggage in the form of other men. I have never had to share a girl before . . . What if I can’t accept them? I’m the last to come into their dynamic, so would I be the first one shipped out? This train of thought really isn’t helping.

“You could always move in with Brad,” Ralph jokes. He knows there is no way in hell I’d live with my twin brother.

I groan at the mention of his name. I’m the responsible twin—he is far from it. And who names their twins Brad and Chad? Parents who hate you, that’s who.

Come to think of it, Logan and Brad would get along great. The whole karaoke fiasco would have been right up his alley.

“We would kill each other just trying to outdo one another. You know how it is.” Ralph has had to step in many times over the years to prevent us from taking our competitiveness too far.

“Yeah yeah, you better get going. See you for dinner on Sunday.”

Sunday dinners are something my brothers and I have always done. No matter how busy we are, or even if we are in a fight—and when I say we, I mean Brad and me. We are identical in every way, except personality, which I put down to him possibly being dropped on his head one too many times as a kid. He would argue that I was the one throwing him on his head, but it’s all the same to me.

Regardless, we always show up for dinner.

I wave off Ralph and head to Mady’s. Caleb has a day off today, and apparently that’s a rarity.

When I get there, I reverse up the driveway, hop out, and pull down the back of my ute. Grabbing a box, I head in through the front door, not bothering to knock. I have learned fast that the only people who answer doors in this house are those who don't actually live here.

I stop dead in my tracks as soon as I step into the living area.

"Welcome," Logan says, waving from an inflatable kiddie pool with goggles on. Lochlan is also in the pool, along with the ugliest dog known to man and a bearded dragon.

"Do I even want to know?" I ask Mady, who is laying on a sun lounger beside an inflatable palm tree.

Did I mention this is all happening inside the house?

"It's better to not question the insanity around here," she says with a laugh.

"Where is Caleb?" All things considered, I doubt he would have let this go down.

"Taking a two-hour power nap," she replies. "The guys cleared out Lochlan's room for you, and that's kind of how this happened."

"You had all of this in your room?" I ask Lochlan, and he nods.

Before he can elaborate, Shamus comes barrelling through the door. "Where is Chewbarka?"

I snort at the name as Shamus storms over to the pool and picks up the small dog from the floatie, cradling it in his arms.

"Stirling dropped him off this morning, mumbling something about the fact that you're now part of this bizarre harem, so I get to babysit your dog," Mady says.

"Who does the lizard belong to?" I'm almost afraid to ask.

Right then, Isaac walks in the door and notices the lizard perched on a speedboat in the water. His face goes red, and the guy launches himself at Lochlan, which isn't the best idea, as water splashes everywhere and the poor lizard rides a wave,



landing outside the pool. Logan jumps out of the water and runs after the lizard who has darted across the room.

“What in the hell is going on?” Caleb stands just inside the room with his hands on his hips. “Two hours! I left you alone for two hours to clean out the room, and instead, our lounge room looks like you’re setting up for a frat house wet T-shirt contest!”

“Why didn’t we think of that?!” Logan adds, slapping himself in the forehead.

“Shut up,” Isaac snaps, standing up from the pool and storming over to Logan to snatch his lizard back. “Welcome to hell,” he says, looking over at me, and disappears down to his room.

Logan stands, dumbfounded, in his bright pink board shorts and goggles. “Why is everyone looking at me?”

“I’m leaving,” Shamus says, retreating to the front door with his dog right as Jarred walks in and looks around the room. He removes his shirt and smiles. “Looks like I’m just in time.”

Before anyone can say anything, Jarred belly flops into the small pool, sending water splashing over Caleb.

“If you don’t live here, leave,” Caleb snaps. Logan shrugs and goes to walk past him, but Caleb grabs him by the arm. “*You* can leave once you have helped clean up this mess.”

While Caleb chastises Lochlan and Logan, Mady takes me into my new room and flops down on the bed. I walk over and put my box on a desk pushed against the wall, then turn to face her.

“Is that bed safe?” I ask her.

“It is,” she nods. “We have an agreement that Loch doesn’t bring girls back here. I think he has broken the rules only a handful of times over the years, but I removed the mattress protector and threw it in the wash anyway.”

“It’s not too late to back out now,” Isaac says, walking into the room in dry clothes.

“Nah, the dude bros don’t scare me.”

“I would ask what skeletons you’re hiding in your closet, but you don’t seem to have any, so I’m guessing Mady has trapped you with her voodoo like she did the rest of us normal ones.”

I’m not even surprised Isaac looked into me, with everything Mady has told me about him. He did, after all, get my phone number and bar schedule.

“Normal is overrated,” Lochlan says, joining us.

“I thought you were helping clean up,” Mady says to him.

“I was, but Caleb had to save Logan from Mrs Greenberg. He was throwing buckets of water over her fence and she isn’t happy about him trying to murder her roses. I came to ask Chad if he wanted us to bring his boxes in.”

I stand from the bed. “Sure, I’ll come help.”

“Actually, first I wanted to let you know I have made some changes to the original 911 plan you read,” says Isaac, which makes me pause. “I needed to tweak some things now that Shamus demands to be a part of the crazy. I linked the tracking apps in your phone, and you will have the updated schedules. Moving forward, there will be a new schedule every week to account for Caleb’s and Lochlan’s ever-changing rosters. I’ve also started adding in my scheduled work. Now that there is an extra person here, I can take on more projects. Your adjusted roster is set, and I took the liberty of fixing your staff roster as well. Your old system just didn’t make sense. The amount of extra money you’ve been paying out in wages is crazy. I’ve had a look at your books—don’t worry about how, but also, you are terrible at it—and I’m not even sure how you are making a profit. I also contacted your suppliers and managed to negotiate some discounts and better delivery days.”

I stare at him with my mouth hanging open.

Lochlan leans into my side and whispers, “Just say thank you. If you argue with him, you will be stuck in PowerPoint hell for the next few hours.”

“Thanks, I guess.”

“You’re welcome. I’ve already forwarded you the new contracts with the suppliers. Let me know if there is anything else I can do to help.” Isaac turns on his heels and leaves the room.

Shaking my head as I replay everything Isaac said, Lochlan and I head outside to retrieve some of my boxes. Caleb is nowhere to be seen, and the elderly next door neighbour is hosing Logan.

“Come at me, old lady,” he yells. “I have these goggles.” Logan looks ridiculous.

The water shuts off and Caleb walks over. “Mrs Greenberg, I apologise about his behaviour.”

“That boy needs a good spanking. Maybe I should teach him a lesson,” threatens the old lady—easily in her eighties—as she runs around her fence.

Logan laughs and starts zig zagging. “Missed me,” he taunts, cackling like a nutter.

“I will help you bring some boxes in once I get Logan to leave,” Lochlan says, and I nod.

I quickly go to the ute and stack two smaller boxes on top of each other, then take them into the house. Mady is making the bed when I walk back into the room.

“I didn’t know if you had your own sheets, so I gave you a set of mine. I hope you don’t mind.” There is a slight hesitance to her voice.

“I don’t mind, little pink flowers are my favourite.” I keep my tone light to reassure her.

After placing the boxes next to the other one, I walk up behind Mady and spin her around to face me. She smiles up at me.

“Hi,” she whispers, looking at my lips.

“Hi.” I smile back, leaning down and placing my lips softly against hers. This seems to be our thing: our little private hellos.

“What was that for?” she asks once I pull back.

“Just because we finally had a quiet minute to ourselves.”

Maybe all the crazy she attracts will be worth it, especially when just a simple kiss sends butterflies to my stomach, like I’m experiencing falling in love for the first time.



We have settled into a good routine since Chad moved in. I'm glad he took the plunge and wasn't scared off by the crazy shenanigans that happen here. More often than not, it's a fairly quiet household.

Caleb and Lochlan work a lot, and Logan only seems to pop up when Lo is home.

Isaac is normally downstairs in his man cave doing whatever it is that he does. Every time one of us asks what his work entails, he says it's too complicated to explain and blows it off as tech stuff.

Chad had a shift at the bar today, and it's left me enough time to process a last-minute order that was placed via my website. My small business gives me something to do. With me being sick a lot over the last few years, I had to quit my job as a medical receptionist. It wasn't exactly what I wanted to do with my life anyway, but it paid the bills and put food in the house—or paid the Uber driver.

Lochlan moved to New Hope with me when we turned eighteen and finished school. He's been with me since before I got sick, but when I started getting worse, he didn't know how to help during my episodes, despite being a qualified sonographer and radiographer.

That is how we acquired Caleb; Lochlan called him to come check on me one day when I refused to go to the hospital, and not long after that he moved in. With them both living here, they insisted I reduce my work hours, with their full-time careers easily covering the bills.

I always loved making arts and crafts as a kid, so I started making candles. Once Isaac moved in downstairs and found my boxes and boxes of candles taking up space, he helped me start Mady's Thingamabobs.

He created a website for me, and I eventually added slogan tees, mugs, and other random items. It's not enough to write home about, but it gives me some spending money, so my small inheritance sits in an account as a safety net.

"I'm going downstairs to work on a few things. Just dance if you need me," says Isaac, who popped in to check on me.

"Okay," I reply, bagging up the last of the order. Dancing around is one way to set off the motion detectors in the house. We have them everywhere, including one at the front door for when we get packages. No one that visits us actually knocks. Well, besides strangers.

There's another motion detector in the bathroom in case I need them in there, for whatever reason. I know that sounds weird, but Isaac would never invade my personal space unless he thought something was wrong. Again, that sounds so weird considering how we met, but it's the truth. His intentions are noble and stem from a place of genuine care and concern.

If I'm in real pain, no dancing is needed—I have emergency buttons on my phone and bracelet. Isaac has all the things covered. To outsiders it would come across as too much, but for him it's peace of mind that I'm okay, and I would do anything to help ease his mind.

Jarred walks through the back door with a Tupperware container in his hands. "Freshly baked brownies," he announces.

"I still have some frozen, hidden in the freezer," I tell him.

“I know, but Zacky likes them fresh when he has a project, and he pays good money for them.”

Isaac isn't against me and the special brownies, he just prefers to be here when I eat them.

“I wouldn't let him hear you calling him that, but you can take them downstairs.”

Jarred walks into the kitchen and comes back out with a plate and sets some down on the coffee table in front of the couch before he heads downstairs to see Isaac.

I take a seat on the couch and flick through the channels. With no more work to do now, and hours before any of the guys get home, I decide to find a movie after the order is picked up.

I settle on watching *Superbad*, since Jarred will probably stay and chill with me for a while. He finished high school last year, and so far, he sells pot brownies for a living. He tells me his mother wants him to go to Tafe and do something around baking so he can open his own shop one day. Not sure she actually knows what goes into his baking, and it would be illegal to openly sell them anyway.

The front door flies open and bangs into the wall. “Oh shit, sorry. I'm the damn she-hulk today. I almost ripped off my car door handle earlier,” Ella says, closing the door.

“Chad isn't here,” I tell her. Chad explained their history to me and how they are best friends. He didn't go into much detail, saying it's her story to share, and I like that about him. He respects his friendships.

“I know, I ordered some tees from you,” Ella says.

“The order didn't come up under your name. It came up as Ralph.”

“Yup, he owed me one.” She grins and winks conspiratorially at me. “I hold the secrets, and he doesn't want me to tell someone that my cookies are better than her muffins.”

Ella doesn't make much sense, but I go with it, nodding my head as she plops down onto the couch beside me, like she's right at home.

This is weird—I have never really interacted with many females. Even in school, most of my friends were male. Girls always thought I was overreacting about my pain and hated when I'd cancel plans last minute. Boys didn't seem to care; if I was there, I was there, and if I wasn't, I wasn't. Simple. And so much less drama involved.

Don't get me wrong, though. I spent a lot of time weeding through the fake bitches that were only trying to be my friend so they could have a shot with Lo. The girls were jealous and treated me as if I was his keeper.

Spoiler alert.

I have zero say when it comes to who Lo sticks his dick in.

“Oh, brownies,” she says, taking one and shoving the whole thing in her mouth. Two chews and a swallow, and it's gone. My jaw drops, and I'm too stunned to speak. “What, do I have chocolate on my face?”

I shake my head no. “I don't know how to tell you this, but you have about half an hour to get home, or you're bunkered down here for a few hours.”

“What? Why?”

“You just ate my famous pot brownies,” Jarred says from behind me. I turn to look over my shoulder, and Isaac and Jarred stand behind the couch.

Ella just starts laughing. “I love pot brownies.”

“Are you okay?” I ask Isaac, and he nods.

“I was checking who bulldozed into the house. Do you know her?”

“Does she know me?!” Ella exclaims as she brings her hand to her chest dramatically. “Dude, *you* have met me, more than once. Am I that forgettable?”

“What? hmmm,” he says, squinting his eyes at her.



“Isaac, where are your glasses? You really need to get your eyes checked again.”

“No I don’t,” he argues.

“Man, it’s nothing to be ashamed of. Everyone gets old,” Jarred adds.

Isaac pinches his lips together and briefly closes his eyes. “I’ll be downstairs,” he finally says to me, and I nod before he retreats.

“Who wants mashed potatoes?!” Jarred asks. He knows I always have a stash in the fridge.

“Me,” I say, and Ella nods. While Jarred is in the kitchen making one of my pre-approved snacks, I eat half a brownie. I know how strong he makes these for Isaac, and poor Ella is about to get very wasted.

When Jarred comes back out with a tray of snacks and places them on the table, Ella reaches out and takes a bowl of mixed lollies. Jarred hands me my bowl of potato, and he has gone all out, even adding gravy—one that’s homemade because spices try to kill me all the damn time. Why does everyone insist on putting onions in everything?

“What are we watching?” Ella says, turning to me, and I lose it. She has lolly teeth up in her gums over her actual teeth. She turns and smiles at Jarred, and we all devolve into fits of giggles.

The front door opens once again and Chad walks in, takes one look at us, opens his mouth, closes it, shakes his head with his eyes shut, then looks at us again.

“Ella’s stoned,” I blurt out, and Ella smiles at him with her gummy teeth.

“I’m not safe anywhere,” he says, taking his boots off at the door and placing them on the rack. A few days ago, Caleb had a mini breakdown about everyone being slobs, and I think Chad took it personally.

Occasionally Caleb gets grouchy after a long shift, but it’s not Chad’s fault Lo owns so many pairs of shoes they take up

the majority of the rack. Now that we share a room, he has them all out here, and Caleb tripped over Chad's boots, which triggered his grouchy-pants persona.

"How come you're home early?" I ask as he comes to stand behind me. Leaning down, he places a kiss on my forehead.

"Awww," Ella says from beside me before she giggles again.

"Someone was supposed to be at the bar half an hour ago and wasn't answering her phone, so Ralph suggested I look here. Logan is working today with Grace, which will be interesting. She might murder him by the end of the shift."

Ella snorts. "Grace is an older barmaid, and she doesn't take shit from anyone. I wish I was a fly on the wall."

"Why are you stoned?"

"Funny story, I came here to pick up the T-shirt order. Turns out I've ordered all my shirts from Mady."

"Wait, you have?" I ask, and Ella nods.

"Yup, under Unicorn Enterprises."

"Oh my god, that's you!" I gush. Unicorn enterprises is my biggest customer and has been for the last year. I knew her T-shirts were familiar.

"It is, but back to my story. I came to get my shirts and there were brownies. I didn't ask, and here we are."

"Did you not learn your lesson from Doc? Never take food from anyone unless you ask first."

"Who is Doc?" I'm super curious now.

I like observing Chad and Ella interact. I've only ever seen how he is with us, but he and Ella have history, and I can tell he really cares about her.

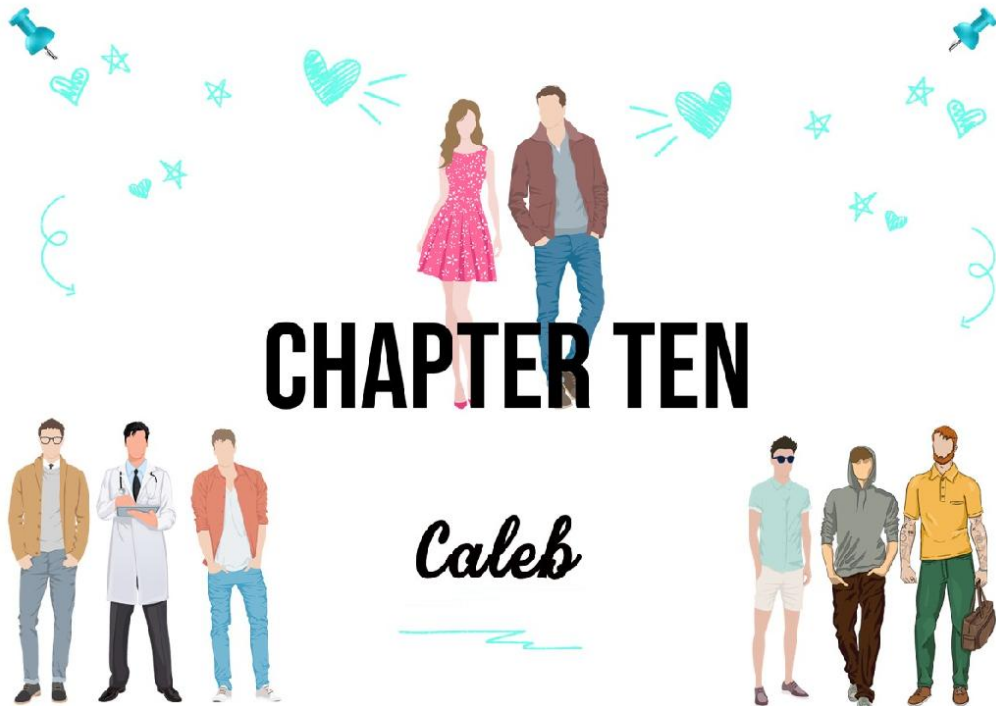
Chad jumps over the back of the couch and sits directly beside me on the left. "Doc is our resident patron. He is harmless, but he likes to spike his food with mushrooms. Everyone knows not to take food from him, and considering

he looks homeless, most don't take it anyway, but Ella did once. She locked herself in the office and barricaded the door because the ATF were coming to get her."

Suddenly Ella drops to the floor and peeps over the couch cushion. "Are the ATF here?" It seems Ella is a paranoid stoner.

"No," Chad laughs.

Once Ella re-settles herself on the couch, we all sit back, and I press play on the movie. We stay on the couch for the rest of the day. At some point, Chad pulls me into his side, and I snuggle in, letting him calm me more than the brownie did.



Exhaling, I try to gather the energy to go inside. I've been sitting in my car for the last fifteen minutes. After a fourteen-hour shift from hell, I'm not in the mood to be social—not that anyone would be awake at six a.m.

A flicker in the window catches my eye. Who could be up already?

I finally make my way to the front door, and I'm greeted by Mady. She looks like an angel; her hair is in a messy bun on top of her head and she's wearing one of my university tees. It's long enough that it sits mid-thigh on her. She doesn't have a stitch of makeup on and is still the most beautiful woman in the world.

"What are you doing awake?" My voice is quiet and strained. I can feel a tension headache starting. But no matter what is going on in my life, I always have time for her.

"A little birdie messaged me and told me you might need me this morning." Her voice is soft and soothes my soul.

"Who?"

Instead of answering, she takes my arm and pulls me down the hall to my room. Without saying a word, she closes the door and unbuttons my shirt; her fingers are soft and take their

time exploring my chest as she goes. Slowly, my shirt slides from my shoulders and drops to the floor. Meeting my eyes, she makes quicker work of undoing my pants and pushing them and my underwear down my legs.

I kick off my shoes and step out of my pants, waiting to see what she does next.

I haven't been with Mady since before Chad moved in two months ago. It's not that I haven't wanted to be with her, I've just been busting my ass at the hospital so I can finish my rotation and finally go into specialist care. Once I'm there, I'll have more flexibility with my hours and will finally get to spend more time at home with my family.

Family—how did this strange dynamic we all have here become family?

Mady's eyes don't leave mine, and her love for me is clear—I just hope my eyes are telling the same thing despite my exhaustion.

She drops to her knees.

“Mady—”

Her warm mouth envelops my cock, derailing my train of thought. I stare, transfixed, as my length disappears into her mouth before she pulls back, sucking firmly. I gasp, and she moans softly as I grow rock-hard from her skilled ministrations. Fuck, I have missed her—*us*. Together.

Mady doesn't stay on her knees for long, which is admittedly for the best—I wasn't going to last otherwise. Once she's standing again, she gently walks me backwards and pushes me down onto the middle of the bed. I shuffle back and rest on my elbows as she reveals her amazing body to me. Mady has curves in all the right places; her hips are soft, her breasts are the perfect handful, and her legs are the type that guys would fight to have wrapped around their waist.

She's perfect for me.

My stomach clenches from the heady anticipation of watching her crawl seductively up the bed and straddle my waist. She pauses for effect, then grins, lifting slightly.

Reaching down between us, she wraps her petite hand around the base of my cock and guides it into her tight, wet pussy. As she leans down, her hands come to rest on my chest, and she pushes further down on me. She doesn't hold back her moan once she is fully seated. I move to brush her lips with mine, letting her know what I need while leaving her in control. She's looking after me in her own way.

"I love you, Mady," I whisper, as the intimate sounds of our bodies connecting surround us.

A dazzling smile lights up her face and it's the only warning I get before her lips are on mine and she's kissing me like her life depends on it. She tastes of grape Hubba Bubba, and I can't get enough. I pull her scrunchie out of her hair, letting the long tresses cascade around us. Holding her close, I deepen the kiss while her pussy squeezes my cock every time she lifts herself up and down. I make love to her, half-starved for moments like these, and let her take away all the stress from my shift.

It isn't long before I'm close—lack of sex will do that to a guy—but the way Mady is moaning and grinding herself against me tells me she's on the edge of release as well.

Placing my hands on her ass, I help lift her up and down, increasing the pace.

"Come, Mady. Please."

Her blue eyes lock with mine again and I lose myself in them. "Only if you come with me."

My sweet girl—I'm probably to blame for her requesting that. It only happened a few times, but it *has* happened, where we'd been having sex and because of the exhaustion from my shift at the hospital, I'd fallen asleep once she came.

She's always been my priority; so as long as she's gotten what she needs, I'm okay. I don't need to finish. Showers and my hand have had to cut it lately.

"Please, Caleb, I need to feel you come." Her words are punctuated with breathy moans that echo in the room, and they are my undoing.

*Fuck*, I love this girl.

I grab her ass tighter and thrust up into her hard and fast.

“Yes, more! Please!” Her pussy tightens and her body shudders as she cries out, “Fuuuuuck, Caleb!”

I slam her down onto me one last time before I follow her orgasm, groaning through a mind-blowing release. She drops to lie on my chest, breathing rapidly, and my cock pulses in her still-clenching pussy. It feels like it’s trying to squeeze every drop from me.

“I’ve missed you.” Still trying to catch her breath, her voice comes out barely a whisper, but it’s laced with sadness.

“Sorry, Mads. I know it’s been hectic lately, but I thought Chad was helping you?”

I wasn’t a fan of finding a regular guy for Mady to be with, but the idea eventually grew on me. It was what she needed, and I knew it—she’s always had a higher sex drive.

But it’s also more than that.

Mady is someone who has so much love to give, and it would be a shame for only one person to experience it. It’s part of the reason I’m okay sharing her with the others—even Shamus, Jarred, and Logan. Her relationships with those three are purely platonic, but she loves them no less than she loves me, Isaac, and Lochlan. I’m going to assume she may be on her way to loving Chad as well, but that relationship is a little too early to tell for sure.

“Chad has been looking after me, but I still miss you.” Her words end on a sigh.

Wrapping my arms around her, I stand so I can pull down the blanket on my bed. My cock slips from her wet pussy, and I already miss the connection—there is nothing like the intimacy a couple shares when they are literally joined together.

I carry her to my bathroom and put her down in front of the toilet. “Pee, you don’t need a UTI.”

Her laugh is music to my ears. “Yes, Daddy.”

I hate the nickname when the boys say it, but when it comes from Mady, it makes my cock stir.

After I crawl into bed, it isn't long before Mady returns and curls up beside me. Her naked body just moulds into mine. Our legs tangle, and I hold her in my arms.

“Do you want to talk about what happened at work?”

I want nothing more than to tell her everything, but I haven't fully processed it. “Not yet, when I'm ready I will. I promise.”

She nuzzles closer, and I gently kiss the top of her head.

“Who messaged you to tell you?” I have a feeling I know, but I'd like it confirmed.

My door opens before Mady can answer me.

Lochlan takes one look at us and smirks. “Oh good, you're finished. I thought for sure I'd walk in and cop an eyeful of Daddy's ass again.”

He drops onto the other side of Mady and makes himself comfortable in my bed. It's not the first time he has slept in here when Mady has fallen asleep next to me. Lo has issues with sleeping and needing to be with Mady, so it's just expected he will find his way to wherever she has bunked down.

“You could try knocking,” Mady throws back at him.

“And miss the potential show? No way.”

I ignore him, realising that he is still in his plaid pyjama pants. “Why aren't you getting ready for work?”

“Carla called. Apparently, she's worked her voodoo magic and we both get to play hooky today. She said you might need us, and I won't say no to getting a surprise day off work.” He smirks and holds his hand out to Mady. “Here, Mads. If you're going back to bed you need to take your meds.” He gives her the tablets, and she awkwardly gets them into her mouth before taking the bottle of water he's grabbed from my bedside table.



“Carla shouldn’t have done that. I’m fine.”

“Caleb, you lost a patient. You’re allowed to have a moment,” Lo says reassuringly. I’ve known him for a few years now, and unfortunately, this isn’t the first patient he’s helped me grieve.

“You lost a patient?” Mady bolts upright and turns to stare at me. As if on autopilot, my hand rubs her bare back, and she lets out a soft moan.

“I did. I assumed Carla had told you that when she messaged you.”

Lo is watching my hand with a look in his eye I can’t quite decipher—maybe . . . longing? He loves Mady and I think he has since they met as kids. He is just too stubborn to admit she is it for him, so he hides behind his self-diagnosed sex addiction, when in reality there’s something more he isn’t admitting. Instead, he stupidly watches the girl he loves with other men. I just hope he doesn’t regret it when he finally comes to his senses because none of us will walk away from her.

“She just told me you had a rough night, and you may need me to help escape for a bit.”

I guess Carla felt like she was protecting Mady from the hurt, and I appreciate her a little more, even if we need to have words about her reporting to home every time something happens. Carla is the mumma bear of the hospital, always looking out for everyone—even when we don’t realise we need her to.

Mady snuggles in again and lets me hold her.

“I promise I’m okay. It was just hard, but this is helping.” I hold her tight, and Lochlan sees the fight leave me. I just really need to hold Mady and get some sleep, so I close my eyes as exhaustion sets in, but crack them open again when Lo speaks.

“I know just what we need. Get some sleep and I’ll see you in a few hours.”

I nod and let my eyes drift shut again. I don't know what he's planning, but I trust him.



A knock at the door has me untangling myself from Caleb, and I blink a few times as Lo walks into the room still dressed in his PJs.

“Everything is ready,” he says with a smile. This could go one of two ways with Lochlan, and it really depends on whether Logan was also involved.

The hard-working, best friend Lochlan is dependable and thoughtful, but the “LoLo” Lochlan is a fuckboy, and it’s like he magically loses every working brain cell. One could say he stops thinking with his brain and starts thinking with his other head.

Caleb sits up and stretches his arms over his head. “What time is it?”

“Two in the arvo, and if you don’t get up now, you will mess up your body clock.” Lochlan knows all about that. Last year, he got rostered on for six months of night shifts, and it messed him up badly.

Lochlan stands in front of the door as Caleb and I get out of bed. I don’t miss that his gaze follows my naked body as I pull Caleb’s shirt back over my head. It’s not the first time he has seen me naked—I tried shock value first. Back when we

were in high school, we kissed, but he told me it was a mistake and it shouldn't have happened. Once we moved here and the flirting continued, I tried sleeping naked knowing he would end up in my bed.

He still wouldn't have sex with me, and it all backfired because his naked chest ended up pressed against my back night after night, and every morning I would wake up so damn horny.

That's the same year he gave me a vibrator for Christmas, and he got the recommendation from my mother. Her and Lochlan are close; he is the son she never had. My parents didn't hesitate to let Lochlan in the day he showed up on our doorstep. After that, he was just part of the family.

I made the mistake of telling my mother I was sexually frustrated, and she knew how I felt about Lo. She told me if it's meant to be, it will happen. Apparently, Lochlan is a delicate flower and needs time to blossom—her words, not mine.

My mum is a sex therapist and relationship councillor. She's been seeing Lochlan professionally since he was sixteen, so I'm trusting she knows what she's talking about.

When I make eye contact with Lo, he swallows hard. I know he feels this too—he's just being damn stubborn. "Both of you close your eyes," he says while trying to clear his throat.

I take Caleb's hand in mine and close my eyes. Lo leads us out of the room and it's hard not to peek.

"Okay, open," he says excitedly, and when I do, I can see the trouble he's gone to. He has moved all the living room furniture and made a massive blanket fort.

He gets on his knees and crawls through the small opening. Both Caleb and I follow, and I'm sure Caleb cops an eyeful of my ass—I didn't exactly put underwear back on. I was too focussed on Lo's eyes on my body.

Inside, we find Chad and Isaac. It's very rare that Isaac will hang out with everyone as a group; it's no secret he and

Lochlan put up with each other because of me, and he loathes Logan.

“Come on,” Lochlan says. “It’s Disney movie day.”

We started Disney movie days a couple years ago. There was a little girl who needed an ultrasound, but was so scared, Lochlan promised he would make her a fort and watch *Beauty and the Beast* with her. We knew the little girl was sick, so when she made Lochlan promise that every time he was sad he would watch Disney movies, he upheld it. Because she was right, they make everything better.

That’s how our tradition started, him and I watching Disney, then everyone else joined in. It’s our comfort—no one fights, and we just enjoy each other in honour of that little girl.

“What are we watching?” I ask, taking a seat beside Isaac.

“Caleb is sad, so he gets to pick. Those are the rules.”

“*Mary Poppins* it is,” I say. It’s Caleb’s go to for his sad days.

“A spoonful of sug—”

“We know all the words, Caleb.” Isaac laughs while he pulls up the app on the TV, and we all get comfortable as the movie begins.

Caleb sits to my right, and I snuggle into him. I couldn’t imagine how hard it would be losing a patient.

Once the movie starts, Caleb pulls my head down into his lap and strokes my hair, and I curl my legs over Isaac’s lap. Lochlan lies on his stomach and sings along to every song. Every now and again, I glance over at Chad to see how he is doing. This is his first time joining us for a Disney marathon to reset from life, and it’s really the first time he is seeing me with all the guys.

He hasn’t run from our crazy yet, so I don’t know why I’m so worried. He is sitting in one of Isaac’s bean bags and that is a major deal—Isaac isn’t exactly the sharing type with the other guys. He is weird about people touching his stuff. Chad smiles at me when he catches me watching him, and he winks.

As the credits play, Chad's phone rings.

"Just answer it," Isaac sighs. "Logan is working at the bar, and who knows what he's done."

Chad nods and pulls his phone from his pocket. "Shit," he says under his breath.

"Hey, I need to cancel . . . because I have a thing with my girlfriend and her boyfriends... Brad don't start..." Chad sighs. "Fine, I'll ask them."

Chad turns to us. "There's no pressure to say yes, but my brother wants to know if you would like to come to our family dinner. I have to warn you though, Brad is a lot."

Isaac snorts. "Is he worse than Logan?"

"No one is worse than Logan," Chad says with a laugh. "Mady, if it's too soon or you want to continue movie day, I'll tell him I can't come."

I smile at him. "I would love to meet your brother."

"It will be my *brothers*. Ralph will also be there."

"Caleb, are you up for dinner?" I ask.

Caleb nods. "Hell yes, I don't think I've eaten in twenty-four hours."

Chad confirms with his brother that we will be there, but today we have to meet at Grumpy's, so there is a Mady-approved menu. Brad agrees because that means it's Chad's shout.

"So let me get this straight," Isaac says, standing. The whole fort collapses around us, and we all fight our way out of the sheets. "You are Chad, and your brother is Brad. If you tell me you're twins..."

"We *are* twins, and yes, our parents named us Chad and Brad. Save the jokes for Brad, though. He really loves to hear them."

Isaac nods. "Good, I will compile a list."

I have no doubt he'll follow through on that. Isaac may seem to be the quiet type, but he always has a good one liner.

Everyone agrees to shower and be ready to leave in an hour, after Chad explains to me they do an early dinner or late lunch because they all work night shifts, and this time best fits their schedules.

Ninety minutes later, our group walks into Grumpy's, and Chad stops dead in his tracks when he spots Logan in his coconut bra and grass skirt. The karaoke lights are up, and an older lady is attempting to sing a Cher song.

I follow Chad to the bar.

"Hey, Bossman! Can I get you a drink?" Logan sing-songs.

"I thought I told you no more random karaoke days. Thursdays are your day, and no more damn coconut bras. Your abs shouldn't be on display."

Logan scratches his head and his brows furrow. "But you just said I could."

"When did I say this?"

"Fifteen minutes ago."

"Hey, brother," comes from beside us, and a carbon copy of Chad appears next to me. Not only are they twins, but they're identical.

Logan's mouth falls open, and he rubs his eyes before he turns his head to look down the bar. "Doc, did you give me your special mushrooms again? I'm seeing double."

Doc looks up from his beer and shakes his head.

"Logan, this is my twin brother, Brad."

Logan's megawatt smile makes an appearance. "You're Chad and Brad. Brad and Chad."

"Get back to work," Chad says. "And put on a shirt."

Logan salutes him but can't stop laughing.

We find the rest of the guys at the table, and Chad is introducing everyone to Brad when I see Ella walk into the

bar. She's wearing her unicorn slippers and is accompanied by an older-looking version of Chad.

"Why are you wearing slippers in the bar?" Chad asks Ella when she gets to the table.

Logan drops off a tray of beers, and a vodka and soda water for me.

"I'm not working. When Ralph said you were bringing your girlfriend, I invited myself along. I have been your best friend for years and I have never gotten an invitation."

"Because Mady and I do things you and I don't."

"Excuse me, we kissed once. Surely that should have gotten me an invite."

Chad chokes on his beer and looks at her with wide eyes.

"You what?" Ralph says, glaring at his brother.

"She kissed me, big difference."

"You can always kiss me," Brad says, and Ella flips him off.

"I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole."

Brad laughs. "You could live out all your Chad fantasies."

Ella pulls off one of her slippers and launches it at Brad. He catches it with a laugh.

"I don't have Chad fantasies, Brad," she huffs. "It was one kiss to make sure I didn't have feelings, and no offence to Chad, but it was not a great kiss."

Brad snorts. "It's always a pleasure to see you, Ella." He hands her back her slipper before dropping a kiss to the top of her head.

Isaac reaches out and squeezes my hand; social situations are not his forte. He nods his head towards Caleb, who is having an in-depth conversation with Ralph, and I smile, seeing how carefree he looks at this moment. I'm glad we could get him out of his head and avoid a spiral. His job is so



mentally and physically draining that I worry about him, even though I know being a doctor is his passion.

For the rest of the afternoon, we all eat and spend time with friends and family, enjoying each other's company.

Everyone looks comfortable, and it makes me happy to be surrounded by the people I call family.



“Shit, shit, shit,” Isaac says, pacing the floor. He has a last-minute interview for some big job he won’t tell me about. The guy is so tight-lipped about what he does that I have started to think he works for some secret government organisation.

“Just go, I will be fine on my own. Maybe Jarred can come chill for a bit.”

I refuse to tell him I haven’t been feeling great today. I’m fucking over feeling sick, so the second he leaves I swear I’m going to make myself vomit. It’s the only way I will feel semi-normal again.

“He isn’t home, Caleb and Lochlan are at the hospital, and Logan is MIA, so Chad has to be at the bar and Shamus’s phone is off.”

“I’m a big girl, I can look after myself.”

Isaac’s pointed stare reminds me of the first time they left me alone—when they came home, they found me unconscious on the bathroom floor. In my defence, the pains were so fucking bad that I thought maybe going to the toilet would give me some relief. I thought I had maybe eaten something bad, and if I was lucky enough, it would go straight through me.

Except I tripped over a box I left in there—some shit I ordered online and was trying to hide—then hit my head and passed out. Now they never leave me alone because of my own stupidity. I love that they care, but sometimes it can be suffocating.

“Fine,” I sigh. “Maybe I can call Ella and see if she wants to have a girls’ day. She can help me sort through some orders I have.”

Isaac thinks it over and nods, so I pull out my phone and dial Ella’s number. Chad had mentioned she wasn’t working as much anymore. He wouldn’t tell me why—he said it’s her story to tell, which makes me swoon just thinking about how much he cares for his friends.

“Mady, please tell me you’re going to save me from this boredom! Steve is no fun, always hiding in his room.”

“Steve?” I ask.

“Yeah, pain in my ass, he is. Anyway, you called me, so what’s up?”

“I have a favour to ask. Isaac needs to work, and everyone else is busy, and apparently I need a babysitter.”

“Oh, so I’m the last resort, hey?” she says, and I pause. Crap, did I just offend her? She laughs and I sigh in relief. “I’m just kidding, I’ll get Ralph to drop me off. I know what it’s like to have men breathing down your neck all the time like you’re a fragile little flower. Chad is just as bad with me, and now apparently so is Ralph—maybe it’s a family trait.”

“Thank you! I’ll see you soon.”

When I hang up, I convince Isaac I will be fine until Ella arrives. He reluctantly leaves but tells me I have to keep my phone in my hand and call if I need him to turn around.

Ella comes bouncing into the house; she doesn’t knock, and I love that about her. She has wholeheartedly embraced our open-door policy. Her friend Yasmin comes in behind her, and they head over to me, Ella dumping her tote bag on the couch.

“I hope you don’t mind, but I brought Yasmin with me. Ralph had to go run an errand, and Yasmin’s blood sugar keeps crashing. So, I brought her stash of red frogs, and she needs to hurry up and eat them.” Ella gives Yasmin a death glare.

“Yes, Mum,” Yasmin teases. Taking a seat on the couch.

“See?” Ella says. “You’re lightheaded and need to lie down.”

“We can go set up in my room and watch a movie. I feel like death today and the blackout curtains keep the room dark.”

Ella nods. “Which room is yours?”

I point to my door as my mouth waters—the first sign that everything I ate for breakfast is about to exit my body. I beat Ella to my bedroom and race into the en suite, just making it in time to throw my head over the toilet. Ella comes flying in and helps pile my hair on top of my head, pulling a scrunchie from around her wrist.

“Thank you,” I whisper.

“You’re welcome. Do you have a bucket?”

I nod and point to the shower. I keep a bucket close for this reason, but once everything is up, I’m usually good to go.

Ella helps pull the comforter on my bed down, and Yasmin gets in on Lochlan’s side of the bed while I slip into my side.

“Who sleeps on this side of the bed?” Yasmin asks. “It smells like a male stripper at a hens night.”

I snort. “Lochlan. It’s a long story, but he always finds his way into my bed at night. Chad now has his room, and Lo bunks with me. Lucky I have that massive closet for all his clothes.”

Ella snorts. “You’ve seen nothing. Arden has the most ridiculous wardrobe, sans most of his bow ties now, since I cut them all up.”

Ella goes quiet and places a hand on the dresser that my TV is on.

“Are you okay?” I ask, and she buckles over. Both Yasmin and I jump out of bed and stand by her side.

“What can we do?” I ask, and she laughs.

“I’m supposed to be looking after both of you. Ain’t we the damn trifecta?! Diabetes, your undiagnosed illness”—I told Chad he could tell Ella about me, not that I know what is wrong with me yet—“and my endometriosis.”

Yasmin snorts. “Isn’t that the truth? My blood sugar is slowly coming up, so I will get your heat pack, and you two get into bed. Then we can watch some TV until someone less pathetic comes to look after us.”

“You’re out of luck in this house.” I laugh. “Our best bet is with Jarred, the kid across the road who brings pot brownies, or Chad, but Chad would call the others and we would be screwed.”

Once Yasmin is back with the heat pack, we all pile into my bed and start watching *Criminal Minds*. We laugh over the relationship between Derek and Penelope. What’s a girl gotta do to get someone to call her “baby girl” like Derek does when he calls Garcia?

“What do we have here? All of my favourite girls in one place!”

We turn towards the voice, and Shamus is standing in the doorway holding a bag of food.

“Our saviour,” I say, sitting up, and he brings the bag to the bed. “I didn’t order anything though.”

“I’m on the schedule, remember? Honorary harem member, your not boyfriend.”

Ella laughs. “Hey,” he says. “I worked hard for that title.”

“Don’t tell anyone, but you’re my favourite,” I fake whisper, and he laughs.

“Only because I bring you food. I can’t stay though, Stirling is in a crisis. Chewbarka ate some very expensive lashes and right now we are waiting for him to poop to avoid a vet visit. My life is a circus.”

“Go! Deal with your crazy life. We have TV, bed, and now food.”

Shamus says his goodbyes and leaves. I love when he brings me food because I get a bit of all my favourites, since we never know what I will be able to keep down at any given time. Hell yes, there’s mashed potato, and it’s one of the safest foods for me to eat. Ella is curled up in a ball and refuses food, but Yasmin takes the slice of pizza and a can of coke. Her sugar level still isn’t great, and Ella said if it drops below 2.5 to call an ambulance. I’m almost tempted to call Caleb. Her app shows she’s barely sitting at 3.5, and that’s after she ate a handful of red frogs.

The mashed potato wasn’t a good idea after all, and I end up back in the bathroom. I’m about to return to the bedroom when I hear the front door slam open.

“Where is she?” Lochlan’s voice carries through the house. Moments later, he reaches the bedroom, followed by Shamus the traitor—I can see the guilt written all over his face.

Caleb enters right behind them and takes in the scene. He looks at me hovering in the bathroom doorway and then to my bed. Yasmin gives him a wave, but Ella is still curled in a ball.

“What the hell, Mady! Why didn’t you call me?” Caleb chastises as Chad comes running into the room. He looks at Lochlan, who is now holding me in his arms, and races over to the bed.

“Ella, are you okay?”

“No,” she whines. “It hurts so bad.”

Isaac is the last to arrive. He glances over at me, and I see the guilt in his eyes as well. His shoulders sag in relief when he realises I’m okay.

“We need to get Ella to hospital,” Caleb says, and my stomach cramps again. I push out of Lochlan’s arms as a pain

stabs me straight in the gut.

“No,” I hear her protest. “I’ll be fine when the pain meds kick in. I’m not leaving my friends when they are in pain.”

“Ella,” Chad says in a soft tone. “You don’t have to be strong all the time.”

“What the fuck is that noise?” I hear Isaac ask before more pain hits me hard. Lochlan picks me up and takes me back out into the room.

Someone else I don’t recognise is now in my room, leaning over Yasmin.

“Chase, I’m fine. It’s just a bad day.”

“Thanks for calling me, Chad. I’m going to take Yasmin home.”

Chase carries Yasmin out, and she waves at us before letting her head drop to Chase’s shoulder.

“I swear to god, Mady, I don’t know how you deal with all these men,” Ella grits out. “Especially when they don’t listen!”

“If it’s any consolation, they mean well.”

“They need to read my shirt,” she snarls, holding out her shirt that just has “BACK OFF” in bold black letters across the front. I snort and shake my head. I loved making that one. “This is how it’s going to go down,” she says, pointing to Caleb. “You will get us all the pain meds, and the rest of you will back off. We are going to wallow in our pain alone for a little bit. Sometimes we just need space. If we need you, we’ll call out.”

All of my guys look at me. “You heard her, scram.”

They all start to pile out of the room and my mouth falls open in shock. “I think I’m going to keep you.”

Ella laughs at me. She is right though, sometimes when you’re in pain and there’s nothing you can do, having people fuss and hover over you just makes it worse. Especially when they plaster on their sympathetic expressions. Then you feel bad because your illness is affecting them just as much as you,

and the last thing us chronic pain sufferers need is to feel guilt on top of everything else.





“Slow down, Ralph. I have no idea what you’re trying to say.” I can sense the urgency in my brother’s voice through the phone, but he’s making no sense.

“What? When?” My concern is hard to hide, and Mady notices from the couch beside me. I stand on autopilot and grab my keys. Mady doesn’t ask questions, just quietly slips her shoes on and follows me out the door.

I hang up my phone before I get into the car.

“What’s going on?” She asks, putting her seatbelt on.

“Ella’s in an ambulance. Shamus found her barely conscious in the bathroom.”

“Where’s Arden? Isn’t he supposed to be home today?” I’m not surprised Mady knows more about my friends than I do—she and Ella have gotten close recently.

“He was waiting for her at uni, and when she didn’t show, he contacted Ralph and then Ralph sent Shamus to check on her. Shamus is following the ambulance. Can you call Caleb?”

She doesn’t even hesitate, putting her phone to her ear, and I hear Caleb answer before the second ring. “Hey, you . . . I’m fine. I’m with Chad, and we’re on our way to the hospital. Ella

is about to come in via ambulance. Shamus is following behind it, and Arden is on his way. Can you meet her please?" Mady's voice breaks while she fills Caleb in on what we know.

I promised Ella all those years ago I would be there for her no matter what, and I've kept that promise.

Until now.

I should have made her go to the hospital the other day when she was hanging out with Mady. I've done many hospital trips with her, but they all end the same way.

Today feels different though—she's never completely lost consciousness before.

Mady reaches over the console to hold my hand, and she gently squeezes it, trying to reassure me.

"She'll be okay, Caleb is meeting her ambulance. They'll figure out what's going on."

"I don't know, Mads. I have a bad feeling about this. Something isn't right."

"We have to stay positive for her. Ella would kick your ass if she heard how you are talking right now." A small chuckle escapes before I can stop it. She's right, Ella would be telling me off right now if she were here.

The drive to the hospital is quick. We make our way through the emergency department and the nurse Carla waves us through. "She's been taken to radiology and will go straight to theatre. You can head up to the waiting room. Caleb should be there." I don't really know Carla, but she has a soft spot for Mady, and both Caleb and Lochlan seem to like her, so by default I trust her.

"Thanks, Carla. There may be more people coming, so can you send them through?" Mady asks while grabbing my hand to lead the way.

"Of course, Caleb has given me the list, although I noticed Logan isn't on it—usually where you guys are, he isn't far behind. Have you finally kicked him to the doghouse?"

Mady laughs. “Not yet, but he’s working today and I’m pretty sure Arden doesn’t need Logan here right now, especially after what happened before he went to rehab.”

Arden spiralled out of control when his sister slipped into a coma. He started drinking to lose himself. We stepped in to have an intervention, which wasn’t working at all, until Ella showed up and dropped a bomb in front of everyone. Apparently, Ralph suggested they get married one night when Arden was intoxicated at Grumpy’s. Arden owns Ella’s apartment and was pissed off she was part of the contract of sale. She was allowed to stay for as long as she liked, which infuriated Arden, who was used to getting his way, and a bunch of stuff went down between them. None of which Arden remembered at the time.

Anyway, long story short, Ella agreed to marry him, but he had no idea they were actually married until she showed up at the intervention and then had him involuntarily admitted into rehab less than two hours later.

“Girl, you holding out on me? You better come find me to fill me in on all the goss when everything settles.”

“Deal, thanks Carla.” Mady doesn’t wait for Carla to respond—she takes the lead and heads deeper into the hospital. I have no idea where we are, or where we are going, but Mady knows the way.

My phone buzzes and Isaac’s name flashes on the screen.

“Why the hell are you at the hospital?” His voice echoes through the quiet hallway the second I answer, which causes Mady to stop walking and roll her eyes. She takes the phone from me. Isaac is incredibly overprotective of Mady, and I forgot that he gets alerted when she’s near the hospital.

“I’m fine, we aren’t here for me. They brought in Ella via ambulance, and it sounds like she’ll be having surgery soon, so we’re on our way to find Caleb . . . No, Isaac, it’s okay. You don’t need to be here . . . Yes, I know Chad, Caleb, Lo, and Shamus are all here, but Caleb and Lo work here. Shamus works for Arden and was the one to find her, and Chad is

Ella's best friend. I'm just here for emotional support at the moment."

Ever since Ella threw everyone out of Mady's room, Mady has started to stand up for herself. It's nice to see that even during a crisis, she will put us in our place. And, case in point, I can't hear what Isaac is saying anymore, which means Mady has calmed him down.

"Fine, if you'll feel better being here, come to the hospital, but I have no idea what we are about to walk into." She hands me the phone once they've said their goodbyes. "I swear to god, you guys are going to be the death of me. Isaac needs to up his brownie intake."

I stop dead in my tracks. "Isaac eats the brownies too?"

This shocks me. Isaac is an enigma I've yet to crack, but he has started to warm up to me recently. He just never came across as the type to do drugs.

"Yep, he needs weed to help him slow down. His brain goes a hundred miles an hour, and most of the time it's hard for him to shut it down, so the pot brownies help do that. Without them, I don't think he'd ever sleep."

"I had no idea..."

"It's not common knowledge, so maybe wait for him to tell you."

I nod and take her hand again. We've stopped outside a waiting room, and I can see Arden through the glass in the door. At a glance, he looks better than he did the last time I saw him, but the longer I observe him, the more I can tell how stressed he is. His bow tie is loose, his hair looks like he's been pulling at it, and he's pacing. I haven't seen him pace like that since his sister, Julia, was in a coma.

I take a deep breath to prepare myself. As much as this is killing me, I know Arden, and I know what he told Ella before he went to rehab. He's here as her husband, and he won't be leaving without answers.



It's been hours, and Ella is still in surgery. Mady went to find Carla for a chat, and Arden is going to put a hole in the floor if he doesn't stop pacing soon. The little waiting room is really crowded at the moment—I'm used to it just being Ella and me, so this is a foreign experience.

Chase, Rhys, Yasmin, and Ally are all sitting on the other side of the room with Ralph and Shamus. Lochlan and Caleb are chatting quietly in the corner, and Isaac is sitting on the uncomfortable chair beside me. It's like both my worlds have collided. I've known Arden and his friends for what feels like forever. Ralph has been Arden's security guard since I was seven or eight, so I pretty much grew up with them.

It wasn't until I bought Grumpy's that I stopped seeing them as often, but I always knew they would end up in New Hope. They are not just my friends; they are my family. I missed them, but then Ella showed up at Grumpy's one day and refused to leave. She wanted a job and was stubborn as hell.

I obviously gave her a chance, and as time went on, she became more than an employee; she was like my little sister. I've been there through it all with her the past four years, and it's no surprise Ralph took an instant liking to her as well.

I'm still upset Ella and Ralph excluded me from their plans to get Arden admitted into rehab. I was hurt that they kept the secret from me. I know it was for all the right reasons, but its implications mean that today I have to take the backseat and relinquish my overprotectiveness of her. I have to trust that Arden will make the right decision.

“Why do you look like someone kicked your puppy?” Isaac asks from beside me.

Isaac doesn't see the world like we do; he sees it in black and white, void of emotion. The only time I've ever seen him show any hint of emotion is when Mady is around. The rest of the time, he's shut down. He's always watching and taking everything in, but social norms are not his thing.

"I'm worried about Ella," I tell him honestly.

"You shouldn't be. She's in surgery with the best doctors working on her."

"How do you know they are the best doctors?" I ask curiously.

"I ran the background check on Dr Jay a few weeks ago." His response makes my head spin.

"What? Why?" I'm thoroughly confused.

"Ralph had me run the check when they were looking at specialists." His no-nonsense response isn't helping the situation.

"Why would you be the one to run the check?"

Isaac's eyes dart around the room, looking everywhere else but at me. "I've worked with Ralph for years. I had no idea he was your brother when we came to the bar to meet you."

"I don't understand."

It's now that Ralph chooses to make his way over to us. "Maybe I can explain it better. I hired Isaac's company to run all our security checks. Casey at Dory's PI recommended him a few years back. He did a good job on the project we initially needed him for, so I kept him on the payroll." Ralph takes the seat on the other side of me.

"Why didn't you say something sooner?"

"Because it never came up. I do more for Arden than just drive him around."

"I know that, but I just feel like everyone has been keeping secrets from me." My voice cracks.

I'm holding it together, but barely. When your best friend is rushed into emergency surgery after being found

unconscious on the bathroom floor, you can't help but worry.

"She didn't want to keep it from you, but we had to. If Arden found out before it was time, it wouldn't have worked."

"You're right. It wouldn't have worked," Arden comments. I look up, and he's right in front of me. I have no idea when he joined us. "I remember everything now that I'm sober. You'll always be her best friend, Chad, but it's time to let someone else look after her. She's my wife, and I plan on sticking around."

"It's not as easy as it sounds," I admit.

"I, of all people, know how hard it is, but you know me. As long as Ella will have me, I'm not going anywhere, and I would *never* hurt her."

"I know, it's just hard. It's been the two of us for so long, and now she has all these people here for her. It's a lot." I look around the room again and let Arden's words sink in.

He's right. I need to let him do what he needs to do.

"She's out of surgery..." Caleb announces to the room after checking the alert on his phone.



“Here you go, Mady,” Isaac says while handing me a bowl of curly spaghetti, aka two-minute noodles.

I forgot the name once and asked one of the guys for curly spaghetti, and the name just stuck. It’s another one of my safe foods, as long as I have it without the seasoning packet added. Because, you know, onion. In everything. Being allergic to onions sucks. Some days I wish I was dairy intolerant or gluten intolerant—at least they are common things most places cater for. Unfortunately, though, onions seem to make their way into almost every dish.

“I’m not hungry.”

As if my stomach knows what’s going on, it chooses now to start churning. My mouth waters, and I know I won’t make it to the bathroom. Passing the bowl back to Isaac, I reach beside the couch cushion and pull out a vomit bag. It’s one of many we have stashed around the house for these types of emergencies.

I barely open the bag before I’m hurling up everything I ate five hours ago. A gentle hand rubs my back while I continue to vomit. I’m lucky none of my guys are scared of seeing a girl puke, and I love that they don’t ask me if I’m okay.



How is one supposed to respond to that when they just finished heaving up everything they've eaten or drank? "*Yes, Karen, I'm peachy. Thanks for asking!*" I don't think so. It's obvious I'm not okay, otherwise I wouldn't be vomiting.

The thing about me bringing up my food is it actually makes me feel better. It's hard to explain. But after I eat, I get this building pressure in my stomach—sometimes it happens straight away, other times it can happen hours later. The nausea is always there, but the meds usually keep it subdued. Once I vomit though, I'm good to go, as long as there isn't too much pain prior.

A few minutes pass and I think everything has come up that needs to. The rubbing on my back stops and Isaac takes the vomit bag from me, holding out his free hand. I take it and he pulls me up into a cuddle. I let him calm me in a way only my guys can. It's like they are my own personal Valium.

"Thank you. I'm sorry you're the one that has to see this the most," I whisper, my voice a little hoarse from being sick.

"No need to thank me, Mads. There's nowhere else I'd rather be. I *do* have to get back to work though. Will you be all right up here on your own?" Isaac has most of the day shifts with me because he mostly works from home.

"Of course. I'm going to clean up, then eat my curly spaghetti in bed with a movie. I feel okay. It was just one of those times I needed to bring up breakfast to make room for lunch." I squeeze him tight before letting go and stepping back, then head towards my room.

Walking out of my bathroom, I can't help but smile. Isaac has set up my bedside table. It has my remote, phone, anti-nausea meds, a glass each of water and Hydralyte, my bowl of noodles, a lolly jar, and a block of chocolate. All the things one such as me might need for an afternoon of movies in bed.

I caught up on my orders this morning, so I have nothing to do this afternoon. All the guys are working, and I miss them. Especially Chad. It feels like the last few days I've barely seen him, and your girl has needs.

Settling in against the cushions, I put on *Hercules* and grab my phone to message my girls' group chat with Ella, Yasmin, and Ally. Ella's been out of hospital for a few weeks now and seems to be doing well. Arden really stepped up and has been looking after her.

Me: How long does it take of not having sex before you become a virgin again?

Ella's response is immediate.

Ella: You just made me spit my drink all over Arden. You are not a virgin. If anyone is a virgin again, it's me.

Ally: Or me . . .

Yasmin: Chase made me wait over six months so you all need to quit your bitching. Mady you have a gazillion boyfriends. How are you not getting laid?

Ella: I have a HUSBAND and I can't get him to sleep with me. I'm allowed to complain.

Ally: Your husband isn't sleeping with you because you are recovering from MAJOR surgery AND Arden won't budge until you get the all clear. You should know this by now.

Ella: I know, it just sucks. I need sex dammit.

Me: Me too . . .

Ella: Why aren't you getting laid? Where's Chad?

Me: At work. He's been doing the close the last few days. Logan's been a bit MIA while he's sorting out the family drama.

Ella: Sorry Mads, I know he's working more because I'm not there.

Me: Pfft, what are you apologising for? It's not your fault. My boyfriends just need to realise there are other times to have sex. It doesn't need to be at night OR in a bed.

Yasmin: Ever had sex in a pool?

Ally: YASMIN REALLY? WE ALL SWIM IN THERE!

Yasmin: Not even sorry, it was good.

A laugh escapes me, and I smile. If it wasn't for Chad, I wouldn't have these girls in my life. And although I'm still getting to know them, I can already tell they will be lifelong friends.

The girls continue to banter, and Yasmin informs them of all the places in the house that she and Chase have had sex. I love how open their friendships are. Like there are no secrets.

Just before my movie ends, Chad appears in my doorway, his eyes filled with lust. Stepping into my room, he closes the door, then makes a beeline for me.

“What are you doing home?”

“Ella called me. She got someone to cover the bar for a few hours, and I was told to go straight home and give my girl lots of orgasms.”

“Oh—”

He crashes his lips into mine, cutting off the rest of my sentence, then lowers himself down over me, filling my entire view with handsome man as our kiss becomes more frenzied. *Thank you, Ella!* I will have to make sure I say it to her in person later. Maybe I can get Chad to talk to Arden and convince him that some oral never killed anyone after surgery.

I grip the bottom of Chad's shirt and start to slide it up. He pulls back from our kiss and sits up on his knees, yanking it the rest of the way off and throwing it somewhere behind us.

He lowers himself back down and presses a soft kiss to my jaw, then moves his way down my neck, stopping to pull off my oversized shirt. He smiles when he realises I am sans bra.

“God, I love your boobs.” I giggle at his use of boobs as if he is an inexperienced teenager. “Oh, you think that’s funny?” he quips, then takes my nipple into his mouth and I moan.

“Nope, not funny,” I gasp out. “So not funny.”

As Chad explores my body, kissing and licking his way down towards my belly button, I thrust my pelvis up, needing some relief. Chad ignores my subtle attempt at getting him to take my underwear off, instead kissing across the material. The heat from his mouth sends a different kind of heat right to my throbbing clit, and he lets out a muffled laugh at my lame attempt to once again push my pussy into his face.

“You’re killing me,” I groan.

“Do you need me to do this?” he asks, hooking his fingers into the sides of my underwear and slowly dragging them down my legs. The sensation of his fingertips lightly brushing my skin creates a wave of goosebumps, and a shiver runs down my spine.

Before I get a chance to beg, Chad lowers his head between my legs and sucks my clit into his mouth.

“Oh, fuck!”

He doesn’t let up, moving his tongue in a way that has me seeing stars and screaming out incoherent words.

My door slams open, and Chad pops his head up. We both glance over at Isaac standing in the doorway. He looks at me, then at Chad, and his eyes widen, relief washing over him.

“Don’t just stand there, man,” Chad says, moving to cover me a little.

“Shit, sorry,” he blurts out. “Mady’s sensor was going off, and I couldn’t see from the camera, and she was screaming . . . Shit.”

Isaac goes beet red and darts his hand to his crotch as he turns from the room, shutting the door.

Chad looks up at me. “There are cameras in here?”

I nod. “He only checks them when the sensor picks up rapid movement. We have a system. If I’m really sick, I wave my hands around and he will come. Normally I ask him to turn them off if I’m expecting company.”

Chad chuckles as he gets up to lock the door. “Well, I guess he knows now.”

I’m relieved when Chad doesn’t make a big deal about the cameras. Lochlan wasn’t impressed when he found out and said it was an invasion of my privacy, but Isaac didn’t put them up without my consent. After I had a bad fall, it made him feel better, and back then I wasn’t having sex in my room—we always used Caleb’s because of Lochlan needing to sleep in my bed.

“Now where were we?” Chad says, diving back down between my legs. He hooks his arms around my thighs and spreads them apart, holding me in place as I squirm under his skilled mouth until an orgasm has me screaming his name.

For the rest of the night, Chad keeps me right where he wants me, giving me mind-blowing orgasms. We don’t leave the room until Lochlan comes home and declares he will sleep in Chad’s room if we don’t open the door, and he will use his freedom to masturbate in clean sheets. That has Chad throwing me over his shoulder and taking me to his room—after he tells Lochlan to go flog his gherkin to the smell of sex like a good weirdo. I tried to protest—I don’t want him to touch himself in my bed—but Chad persuaded me with the promise of another orgasm.



My bladder is screaming at me—I’ve put off opening my eyes as long as possible. Body heat suffocates me from both sides, and I realise it’s not just Chad and me in bed. I slowly open my eyes and see Lochlan has made his way in here as well. Why am I not surprised?

As much as I want to witness Chad’s reaction when he wakes up, I have to pee. I crawl over Lochlan—nothing could wake him before his alarm goes off. Even when he doesn’t have to work, he will still set an alarm to get up. In that respect, he’s a creature of habit.

I slip out of the room and bump straight into Isaac, who instantly diverts his eyes to the ground.

“Morning,” I say, while stepping from foot to foot, trying to avoid doing a full “I need to pee” dance.

“Morning,” he mumbles back and takes off. I turn to watch as he heads straight towards the living room. Huh, that’s weird. Is he pissed because he walked in on me and Chad? Or maybe embarrassed? I try to recall if he’s ever walked in on Caleb and me before, but I don’t think he has.

Anyway, I don’t have the brainpower to deal with Isaac until after I relieve myself and wake up properly.

I quickly pee and brush my teeth—it's handy that Caleb keeps spare toothbrushes in their bathroom. I head back to check on the guys, and when I step in the room, I have to slap my hand over my mouth to stop myself from laughing.

I retreat silently and run to my room, grab my phone off the charger, and sneak back to Chad's. I pull up my camera app and snap a few pictures of the two sleeping men. Lo has rolled over and has his arm around Chad. They're spooning and don't even know it.

Chad's eyes open and he smiles up at me. It only takes him a couple seconds to notice me holding up my phone, topless, and his eyes zero in on my breasts. I stand and wait for the penny to drop. Suddenly his eyes go wide when Lo moves behind him.

“You have got to be kidding me!” Chad booms, throwing Lochlan's arm off him and jumping from the bed. Lochlan wakes up and sits, blinking a few times.

“What's going on?”

“Man, you were spooning me, and your cock was poking my ass. Why the hell are you in my bed?”

“Mady was in your bed. I can't sleep without her.”

Chad throws his hands in the air, and I giggle like a schoolgirl because I find this extremely amusing.

“You realise how insane that sounds? You don't want a relationship with her, but you can't sleep without her?” Chad shakes his head at Lochlan.

“I don't need to explain myself to you. You've been here all of two minutes and have no idea what you're talking about,” Lochlan states, irritation lacing his tone. “Nice tits, Mady.”

Chad looks back at me and takes a step so that he is standing in front of me. “Get out of my room. Maybe rethink the whole ‘I can't date Mady’ thing, and we can re-evaluate you being in here, but never put your cock on me again.”

“Your boyfriend is a dickhead, Mady,” Lochlan snaps. Before I can reply, Chad’s door slams.

Chad turns around and places his hands on my shoulders. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to snap at him, but he seriously thrust his cock into my ass and my brain short-circuited.”

I smile up at him. “It’s okay, sometimes Lochlan needs to be put in his place. He’ll get over it, and like you said, he doesn’t want to be with me. That means when I’m in bed with my incredibly sexy boyfriend, he can’t just invite himself in.”

“You think I’m incredibly sexy?”

I push up on my tippy toes and hover my lips above his. “I was talking about Caleb.”

Chad snorts and pulls me in so that my lips press against his, and he runs his calloused hands down my ribs.

My phone vibrates in my hand. I step back from Chad and see that it’s a video call from Ella.

“Hey,” I say, answering the call, making sure to only show my face. Ella and I have gotten closer, but I’m pretty sure flashing her my boobs first thing in the morning might be pushing the friendship.

“Puleeese come and visit me today. I’m going insane with Arden mollycoddling me.” Chad smiles, and I turn around so Ella can see that Chad is in the room. “Oh, did I interrupt something?” she says, wiggling her eyebrows.

“Yes,” Chad retorts at the same time I tell her no.

“Well, too bad, I’m bored. I have bribed Ralph to drag Arden away for a few hours. I tried to call Ally, but she was in bed with some guy named Justin—she didn’t tell me how hot the guy was! Yasmin is being boring and has to go to uni, and did I mention how hot Ally’s fuck buddy is? And I can’t tell Rhys because we both know he has more issues when it comes to Ally than Lochlan does with you.”

“Will you stop talking if we come and visit?” Chad asks and Ella nods. “Fine, Mady and I will get dressed and bring food. Any requests?”



“Something greasy. Arden has been making me eat a balanced diet so my bowel movements are easy on my stomach. Can you believe that? He even tried to get me to drink green sludge this morning.”

I laugh. “Caleb.”

“What about him?” she asks.

“The green sludge. Arden has clearly been talking to Caleb.”

“Bye, Ella. We’ll be there soon,” Chad says, leaning around me to hit the end call button.

It doesn’t take us long to get dressed. Once we’re ready, we head out, and Chad stops at Zazu’s, a little burger place near Arden’s. He orders Ella’s favourite and triple checks the ingredients in the burgers to make sure I can eat them as well. By the time we get to her door, she all but drags us inside.

She has herself set up on the couch with a heat pack and blanket. Chad takes a seat beside her, lifting her legs and resting them on his lap, and I take the seat to his right.

“Holy shit, I love you,” she says, opening the bag of food. “I have eaten so much healthy crap I think my body was going into shock.”

“I’m sure your colon would be thanking me,” Arden says, walking into the room, and Ella jumps, trying to stuff the takeout bag behind her back.

“I thought you were out,” she blurts.

“I was, but a delivery has come in. I came up to check on you first.”

Ella rolls her eyes at him. “Chad will help you with your delivery so us girls can gossip about you while you’re gone, chop chop,” Ella demands from her couch throne.

I want to be her when I grow up. From what I’ve heard from Chad, she’s really come out of her shell with Arden. Apparently she’s always been bossy with Chad, but because of her medical and family issues, she really struggled to make any real friends in school.

But now she's surrounded by Arden and his friends, and she's doing great.

Chad stands, and Arden opens his mouth, but shuts it again when Chad shakes his head. Both men vanish, and Ella turns to face me.

"So, how was your sexy time? Tell me all the details. I need something to tide me over."

"It was great, even with the interruption of Isaac walking in on us."

"What?" she gasps. "How does that work? Do they get jealous?"

I laugh at how fast she talks when she gets excited. "Sometimes we deal with jealousy, but for the most part, we don't. I'm not sleeping with Isaac or Lochlan, remember?"

"I do, but why? I mean, from what I can gather, they both are stupidly in love with you."

I turn sideways on the couch and cross my legs so I'm sitting and facing her. "Lochlan and I have been friends forever, and he doesn't want to ruin that. And Isaac has some impotence issues, but I swear last night when he walked in, he got a boner." I give her the condensed version of the story.

"You should have asked him to join in."

"What? No. I couldn't do that."

Ella finishes chewing her food and reaches for her water bottle. "And why not? Don't guys like that kind of thing?"

"I'm pretty sure the kind of threesome they like involves two women."

"You should at least think about it. What fun is having that many men if you can't have all of their hands on you at once? Imagine all the places you could be touched at the same time."

I laugh at her; she needs to get laid ASAP. We both giggle as Chad and Arden walk back into the room, with Arden looking flushed and mildly annoyed.

“What’s wrong with *you*?” Ella asks, narrowing her eyes at him.

“Chad made me help unload some boxes and I have dirt on my hands, and sweat . . . Do you know how much this shirt cost me?”

I sit there with my mouth hanging open. Is he serious? I can’t really tell.

“Go and shower, pretty boy. A little hard yakka never killed anyone,” Chad teases.

“I’m pretty confident someone *did* kill the last person who said hard yakka,” Arden throws back as he walks out of the living area.

“So, what were you girls laughing about before we walked in?”

Ella says “threesomes” at the same time I say “nothing.”

“Were you just,” Chad says with a smile. “Well then, maybe we can talk to your other boyfriends.”

Is that something he’s into? He seemed a bit put off by the thought when we first met; I wonder what has changed his mind.

“Maybe Caleb could bring his stethoscope, and you could check their pulses and play nurse,” Ella jokes. “I’m living through you right now.”

We spend a few more hours with Ella and Arden before having to head back home. Chad has a shift at the bar, and I need to check in with Isaac and Lochlan. Both might need a little of my attention.



The house is eerily quiet when I get in after work. Mady went to bed a few hours ago—she texted me to say goodnight. Normally I’d bump into Lochlan on his way in after a night out, or even Caleb after a shift at the hospital. I know Lochlan is home tonight though. Mady sent me a picture of her in bed and I could see Lochlan’s arm wrapped around her.

I can’t believe how easily I have fallen into a relationship, and I never could have imagined that it would be in a situation like this. Brad would always joke that by this age, I would have met a newly divorced woman, and we would fall madly in love, and she would come with kids, and I would treat them as my own, and we would live happily ever after. Maybe even have a couple of mini-Chads—well, he said Brads, and assured me they would get their good looks and charm from him.

He was close; I have fallen madly in love with a woman. And while she isn’t divorced, she does come with some baggage in the form of man children and Caleb. Which, if you think about it, is pretty fitting—he seems to be here as often as an ex-husband.

I snort at my own joke as I throw my keys in the key bowl, one that Caleb put on the kitchen counter so that Lochlan

would stop losing his keys. Guess who doesn't use the key bowl and still loses his keys every other day?

I don't flick the light on. Instead, I relish the darkness as I open the fridge, grabbing some deli meat and an open packet of salad greens to make a sandwich. I didn't have time to eat tonight, so I'm starving. When I step back, supplies in hand, I almost jump out of my skin—Isaac stands beside me in his Star Wars pyjamas.

“Jesus, you scared the crap out of me.”

“Sorry.”

“Don't be sorry, just make some noise next time,” I say, putting the meat and salad on the kitchen counter. “Flick the light on.”

Isaac does what I ask, and I finish getting everything I need for sandwich assembly.

“Want me to make you one too?” I offer. I haven't really spent any one-on-one time with the guys, and maybe I should, since I don't plan on going anywhere anytime soon.

“Sure,” he says. “Just no butter.”

“What do you mean, no butter? That's blasphemy!”

Isaac laughs and takes a seat at the dining room table. “Just not a huge fan of dairy, plus the mayo will help.”

“Makes sense.” I turn back to the fridge and pull out the mayonnaise, as I wasn't planning on using it with my ham and salad combo.

“Can I ask you something?” he says, not looking up at me.

“Sure,” I reply, adding the mayo to his sandwich.

“The other night, when you and Mady were . . . you know.”

I walk over to the table and place his sandwich down in front of him. “Yeah?”

Mady has told me about his issue—not in detail, of course—but it's why they are not intimate.

“Well, I kinda got...”

“A semi,” I answer for him, since he seems to struggle with the word. He nods. “Man, it would have been the same for me if I had seen Mady naked with someone between her legs. I’d probably be jealous too.” I grab my plate and join him at the table. “She has noticed you’re avoiding her.”

He looks up at me and takes a deep breath. “It’s not for the reasons she’s thinking.”

“So, you’re not jealous?” I ask before taking a bite of my sandwich.

“Of course I’m jealous—I love her and can’t be intimate with her. I’m just trying to process why I never get hard, not unless I’m watching...”

“Do you ever go down on her, or do any kind of foreplay? Maybe that would work?” I throw it out there casually before digging in—damn I was hungry.

The poor guy sighs. “After our many attempts, I’ve been too embarrassed to even try. What if I can’t please her?”

“Trust me when I tell you she would be just as happy with your head between her legs while she screams your name. And, worst-case scenario, someone else can finish the job. Easily fixed. There are enough of us here to help you.”

Shovelling the last bite of sandwich into my mouth, I push back my chair and take my plate into the kitchen, rinsing it off and placing it in the rack. “Think about it, there are plenty of other things you can do with her instead of hiding behind one issue that you have.”

Isaac remains seated, looking thoughtful. “Thanks for the chat.”

“Anytime, mate,” I say before heading to my room.

I kick off my boots inside my bedroom and gather everything I need for a shower. Once I’m in the bathroom, I turn the shower on and wait for the hot water to steam up the room before I get undressed and step under the spray, eager to wash off the stale smell of beer and sweat.

I used to love doing the night shift—it always keeps you busy—but since I’ve started dating Mady, I find myself counting down the hours until I can be back here with her.

Tonight, I was off with the fairies, and Grace slapped me upside the head a few times, but honestly, I can’t stop wondering when the right time to tell someone you love them is. We haven’t been dating for long, but I know without a doubt she is it for me. Grace says not to say it yet or I will scare Mady off. She accused me of having a hero complex, using Ella as example A, and Mady as example B. At least I have feelings; my brother Ralph is locked up tighter than Fort Knox, and Brad has the emotional maturity of a teenager.

But what if she’s right? Or if I tell Mady now, and she doesn’t feel the same way? I’m man number four in this weird not-harem thing we have going on. Lochlan and she have history, Caleb is a doctor for fuck’s sake, and Isaac has been around longer. Shit, now I’m wondering if we have a pecking order in her life . . . If we do, I’m at the bottom.

“What are you thinking about in there?”

Shit! My feet almost slip out from underneath me, my life flashing before my eyes. Mady pokes her head into the shower and laughs when she realises she startled me.

“Not much, just a long night at work. Why are you up?” I ask, and she steps into the shower. “I take it back, I don’t care why you’re up.”

She giggles, stepping into my body, and I wrap my arms around her. “I wasn’t feeling great. I threw up and got vomit in my hair, then I couldn’t shower in my bathroom because it stunk, so here I am.”

“Are you okay? Do you need anything?”

“Not anymore. Just standing here with you is nice.”

I keep her wrapped in my arms until our skin wrinkles.

Finally, I turn the water off and step out of the shower first, wrapping a towel around my waist and holding one open for her, which she steps into.

I gather our things and we sneak back into my room quietly. This time I engage the lock on the door, so I don't wake up with another man's morning glory poking me in the ass again. If that's something you like, go for gold, but I prefer a nice set of boobs pressed up against me.

Once we are both dried off, we crawl into my bed naked. I lay down on my back and Mady curls up at my side, putting her head on my chest. I don't normally sleep with the TV on, but Mady does. We have started falling asleep to some crime documentary, and it's very disturbing that she finds it comforting. Multiple times I've ended up watching for over an hour after she's out for the count, and I have to turn it off because it creeps me out that someone could just break in and kill me in my sleep.

"I've seen this episode," she mumbles sleepily. "The wife kills her husband and chops him up, then feeds him to her lover."

"We need to find a new TV series to watch. Seriously, these keep getting worse."

Mady giggles. "Okay, put on anything you want to watch. I'm beat after today." She yawns, highlighting her words, and runs her fingers along my chest comfortingly.

I still have a niggling concern over her explanation of why she joined me in the shower. "How many times have you been sick today?"

"Three."

I shift my body slightly so that I can see her better. "Is that normal?"

She shrugs. "Define normal. Normal for someone who isn't sick, no. Normal for me? Recently, yes."

I pull her back into my body. "Have you spoken to Caleb?"

"I don't want to bother him. I'll be fine in a few days . . . I always am."

I get the feeling she isn't telling me the full truth and just wants me to stop questioning her, so I do, but I will ask the



guys tomorrow if this is a regular thing. Honestly, unless someone has food poisoning or the stomach flu, I don't think vomiting multiple times a day is normal, even for Mady.

After ten minutes of me running my fingers along her arm, Mady is lightly snoring. I place a kiss on her head and whisper, "I love you."



“Another tequila please, not Chad,” Logan yells down the bar at Brad. He’s been calling Chad’s identical brother Brad “not Chad” all night just to piss him off, and it’s been amusing. However, I’m not sure Brad hasn’t spat in his drink. We’re at Happy’s tonight because Logan wanted to go somewhere he didn’t work. I would much prefer to be at Grumpy’s.

But I find it amusing Chad’s identical twin opened a bar on the other side of town named Happy’s. Not only are their names Chad and Brad, but they own Grumpy’s and Happy’s. If you’ve seen *Snow White* as many times as I have, you’d find it funny as well.

Actually, Mady could be Snow White. With me, Caleb, Isaac, and Chad, plus her not-harem members, Logan, Shamus, and Jarred, Mady has seven men in her life. All of which love her. Maybe we should start referring to each other as dwarves.

Logan guilted me into coming here tonight, so here we are. Scanning the room, I realise the bar is packed full of uni students. There are kids everywhere. Geez, when did I get so old?

Maybe that’s why I prefer Grumpy’s these days—it’s a more relaxed atmosphere, when Logan isn’t throwing a party,

that is.

“Here, drink this. It’ll get you out of your mood.” Logan passes me a shot of tequila. Eyeing it suspiciously, I glance at Brad. He gives me a subtle nod to let me know the drink is safe.

Without further hesitation, I throw back the shot, the clear liquid burning on its way down. I’m still a few drinks from being sloshed, so I welcome the burn and let the warmth take over.

“Are you going to tell me what’s wrong?” Logan asks from beside me. Usually by this point in the night, Logan would be off making out with some girl, but tonight he’s sticking close to me.

“There’s nothing wrong.”

“Uh huh, and I’m a virgin.”

I choke on a laugh, then clear my throat. Logan is far from a virgin. “I swear there is nothing wrong.”

“So why have I barely seen you?”

“Work has been busy . . .”

“No, work has always been busy. You’ve been avoiding coming out with me.”

Logan’s words hit me harder than he intended. I didn’t realise I hadn’t been out with him. Logan and I have been friends since I moved to New Hope.

It was bros at first sight.

We were each other’s wing men.

Always up for a night out.

But then things started to change. When Chad moved in, I started to see Mady with someone. Yeah, she’s been sleeping with Caleb for a while, but I rarely saw them together. With Chad it’s different. They act like a couple—stolen kisses, cuddles on the couch, and he sleeps in her bed almost every night. Which means it gets a bit crowded when I inevitably crawl in beside her at some point.

I decide honesty is the best course of action with Logan. He's like a dog with a bone otherwise. "I don't know what's going on. I've been spending more time at home."

"You've been third wheeling it?"

What the hell? "No, I live there as well," I retort, my tone a little snarky.

"I'm aware, but you've lived there since you moved here, and you didn't start spending more time at home until Chad moved in. Are you jealous?"

Logan's comment stuns me.

I was all for Chad moving in. Mady deserves someone who can give her what she needs. As much as it kills me, I know I can't be that person. She's my best friend. I don't want to hurt her when I eventually fuck up.

My phone beeps on the bar, and Logan reaches for it before I do. He knows it's the GPS tracking notification.

"Looks like Mady and the Doc are at the movies, around the corner."

Mady had to be close for my phone to ping. We only get alerts when she's near the hospital or close to one of our locations. Isaac set it up, but we don't want to invade her privacy, so they are the only alerts we receive, although we can check her location.

"I know," I deadpan. "It's their turn for date night."

"Let's go spy on them."

I recognise the tone. He's planning something. "No."

"Hey, not Chad, you got any coveralls?" Logan yells over to him. "Or something we can use as a disguise?"

"Will it get you out of my bar?"

"Maybe..."

"I honestly don't know how my brother puts up with you," Brad huffs, rolling his eyes.

“I’m sexy and he knows it.” Logan stands and gyrates his hips while humming the song he adapted the lyrics from.

“Please stop,” Brad pleads and throws something at Logan. “Here, take these and leave.”

“Not Chad, these are perfect!” He passes me a camouflage coverall.

“Do I even want to know where these came from?” I question Brad while kicking off my shoes and pulling on the outfit. If I don’t do as Logan requests, he’s bound to make a scene.

“I take the staff to paintball regularly.”

“Not Chad, you are fucking awesome. Can I work here instead of Grumpy’s?”

“No, absolutely not. Get out of my bar.” Brad’s only joking. The corners of his lips twitch as he tries to hide a smile. As much as Logan is a pain in the ass, he has been on his best behaviour tonight.

I must admit, since he started working, he has calmed right down when we go out. It’s almost as if he has a newfound respect for the establishment and the staff, now that he’s been on the other side. And he’s been dealing with a lot of other shit as well. Which is another reason I agreed to come out tonight.

“Fine, we’re going. But we’ll be back,” Logan taunts.

“I’ll tell security not to let you back in.”

“It’s okay, we have these super awesome disguises. Security won’t know it’s us,” he says, waving his hand up and down his front to highlight the camouflage.

I grab him by the arm and drag him out before Brad can come and do it himself.



Once we arrive at the cinema, it doesn't take a genius to figure out which movie they are seeing. A pang of jealousy shoots through me—I wanted to be the one to take Mady to see this movie.

We grab seats at the back of the theatre and spot them sitting towards the front. Caleb has his arm draped over Mady's shoulders and Mady is cuddling up to his side. Another stab of jealousy hits me. Why am I suddenly feeling like this? Mady and Caleb have been sort of dating for over two years, so I'm not jealous of them together . . . I think it's because I can't do these things with her.

A message distracts me. My eyes drift away from them as I yank the phone from my pocket to check who the text is from.

Isaac: Why are you at the cinema?

Not surprised Isaac is getting his creep on.

Me: Stalker much?

Isaac: Mady isn't answering my texts. Go remind her she can't have caramel popcorn anymore after the last incident.

Isaac is like an old mother hen, Constantly worried about Mady. I'm surprised he hasn't given himself an ulcer.

Me: I'm not interrupting their date.

Isaac: Please Lo, you remember what happened last time.

Memories from the incident he is referring to flash through my head: Mady leaning over the toilet, vomiting all night. Caleb was on night shift, and she threatened to castrate us if we told him. She was in so much pain, and the only thing that she had eaten that night was caramel popcorn.

"I'll do it," Logan whispers in my ear. Obviously he's been reading the messages over my shoulder.

“No.” This is a bad idea. We should go.

“C’mon, it’s fine. I’ll sneak over, remind her, then disappear. It’ll be like magic.” Logan worries me sometimes, and clearly my expression reflects that. “Stop worrying, I’ve got this.” Logan heads to the aisle, drops to the ground, and army crawls down the aisle.

I take that as my cue to leave.

I’m not witnessing this. Who knows how Mady will react?

I lunge from my seat and sprint out of the theatre, slowing down once I get to the lobby where I wait for my crazy friend.

Five minutes later, Logan appears covered in raspberry slushie.

“Your girl is nuts,” he says while shaking his hair. Red syrup drips down his face.

“What happened?”

“I told her what Isaac said and then she flipped out on me before dumping her drink on my head.”

“How did she reach your head?” Logan is over six feet tall, and Mady is much shorter.

“Uh, I didn’t exactly stand up.”

Laughter bubbles up, and I can’t stop it, so I give in and lose myself to the hilarity of it all. Wiping tears from my eyes, I slap Logan on the back in a friendly manner. I can just imagine him army crawling over to them, scaring the shit out of them, then proceeding to pass on the message while dressed in camo.

Oh, to be a fly on the wall.

“You really are crazy,” I wheeze out, trying to get myself under control. I wouldn’t change him for the world though.

“Only sometimes. Let’s go, I need a drink now.”

“Brad isn’t going to let you back into Happy’s.”

“I know, that’s why we’re going to Grumpy’s. Chad won’t say no after he finds out I saved his girlfriend’s life.”

“You didn’t save her life.”

“Technically, I did. If she ate the popcorn and got sick, you guys would smother her to death, so I saved her life.”

Staring blankly at Logan, I ponder how his brain works. Then again, I have a feeling it’s a dark and disturbed place not even I want to go to.

“Let me have my hero moment. You can thank me with a beer. Let’s go.” Logan turns and starts off in the direction of Grumpy’s.

It’s a twenty-minute walk, but it goes by pretty fast with Logan talking incessantly about his latest conquests, while my thoughts keep stubbornly circling back to one woman in particular.





The bar has been busy most of the night, and it's finally quietening down. I roll my eyes when I see Lochlan and Logan saunter in wearing camo gear. *Fuck my life.* And just when I thought I could close soon . . .

Logan's laughter pierces the air, and Grace comes up beside me. "Want me to kick them out? I'll do it," she says. I believe her too; Grace can be scary as fuck when she wants to be.

"Nah, I have to live with one of them and apparently he's Mady's best friend."

She laughs and salutes me, grabbing out a dishcloth and some cleaning spray from under the bar.

"Hey real Chad," Logan says, taking a seat directly in front of me. Lochlan takes a seat to his left.

I grab two pots and fill them with beer. "Have you two been out playing army men?"

Lochlan snorts. "No, just another one of Logan's bright ideas."

I slide the beers across the bar and Lochlan picks his up, taking a gulp and looking down—it's not like him.

“Yes, my bright idea,” Logan says, raising his voice louder than needed for indoors. “You wanted to spy on Mady, and we needed a disguise. Not Chad lent us these,” Logan says, pulling at the coveralls.

“You were at Happy’s? And you spied on Mady . . .”

Oh man, if Mady finds out, Lochlan is going to be in for a world of shit.

Logan nods. “Yeah, I didn’t want to shit where I eat, so we went to Happy’s, then to the movies, and when I went to tell Mady not to eat the popcorn, she wasn’t happy. Tipped her slushie on my head, the nutter!” Huh, I hadn’t even noticed the wet patch down the front of him. “I had to wash my head in a bucket at the servo. You know, the one for cleaning windows.”

Damn, that’s gross.

I shake my head at him and look at Lochlan. “I don’t want to be you when you get home.”

“I don’t want to be me when I get home, either. Logan couldn’t leave well enough alone.”

“Excuse me,” Logan says, throwing his hands up in the air. “Isaac said to remind Mady she can’t eat the popcorn. I saved your girlfriend’s life, Chad. You should thank me.”

“Should I? Because from where I’m standing, all I’m hearing is you telling me my girlfriend is going to be pissed off unless Caleb can get her into a better mood.”

“How does that even work?” Logan asks, leaning forward on the bar.

“I’m not talking to you, of all people, about my sex life.”

Logan laughs. “I’m not asking about the sex—I know how that works, and I’m always happy to watch and give you pointers.” I pick up a slice of lemon from the bar and throw it at him. “Hey, that could have damaged this face! *I mean*, how do you not get jealous? She has a date with Caleb, Isaac is probably at home pulling his dick to her tracking device, you’re at work knowing she is out, and Lochlan is clearly jealous. How do *you* not get jealous?” Logan rambles.

“I’m not jealous,” Lochlan snaps. “Mady and I are not together.”

“Eh, I hear the words coming out of your mouth, but I don’t believe you,” Logan jokes, and Lochlan grabs him in a headlock.

“Okay boys, enough of that,” Grace says, spraying them with table cleaner.

“You know you want me,” Logan throws at her.

“Boy, I would break you and make you fall in love with me, and I don’t want the likes of *you* pining after me.”

Lochlan’s phone rings, and when he pulls it from his coveralls pocket, his brows dip.

“Hey,” he says, after tapping on the screen and holding it out in front of him. Must be a FaceTime call.

“Hey, beautiful boy! I’m trying to get ahold of Mady, and she isn’t answering.”

Logan moves in closer and puts his face against Lochlan’s. “That’s because she is at the cinema with Caleb.”

“Oh, that explains it. He is such a handsome doctor,” she gushes, and Logan scoffs. “Who might you be?”

“I’m Logan, the best part of LoLo.” He puffs his chest out, loving the attention.

The lady giggles. “I have heard *all* about you, and it sounds to me like you could use my help.”

“Ohhh, a cougar, I’m down.”

Lochlan whacks Logan. “Man, that’s Mady’s mum.”

Logan just shrugs. “Still doesn’t change what I said.”

Lochlan sighs, and I keep wiping down the same spot on the bar, loitering to hear all the gossip.

“Child, you are extremely good looking, but I mean sex therapy, like Lochlan does with me once a week.”

Logan’s smile couldn’t get any bigger, like the cat that got the cream. He looks at Lochlan. “That’s why you’ve been

dipping on me? Not cool, bro. You're trying to fix something that isn't broken."

"How about you give me one session? If you hate it, there's no pressure to have another."

Logan thinks it over for a long second. "Well . . . there is a girl I'm willing to change for, but I have to wait until after Christmas."

"Sounds great! Lochlan can give me your number. How is my girl? I'm getting worried about her. I really expected you two to be together by now and giving me grandbabies."

Lochlan chokes on his spit. "I've told you we are just friends," he splutters.

"Ahh, huh." Mady's mum's response has me chuckling.

Logan's brows furrow, and I can practically see the wheels turning as he tries to piece together all the information. His mouth opens, and before I can throw something at him, he says, "Mady has a boyfriend."

"Are you serious?" she squeals. "What is he like? Is he handsome and tall? I should call her for a session and make sure the sex is good."

"He is right here," Logan says, and I screw up my nose and flip him off.

Lochlan angles the phone and I smile, giving her a wave.

"Oh, you *are* handsome, and with that slight rustic vibe, yes, you'll do nicely."

After Mady's dad appears on the screen to agree I am indeed handsome, they both say they need to go.

Once Lochlan hangs up the phone, he turns towards Logan. "You really want Mady to murder me, don't you?"

"What did I do?"

Lochlan shakes his head at a very confused Logan. "Mady doesn't like to tell her parents she is dating. Her mother is like a dog with a bone when it comes to Mady's love life. I love her parents like they are my own, and it's why I do the weekly

sessions with her mum. She is amazing and helped me a lot when I was a teen. Mady knows I have the sessions; however, she thinks it's just therapy, not sex therapy. It would mortify her that her mother knew our business."

"How was I supposed to know, since Mady won't let me in the harem, and no one tells me anything?"

I shake my head and leave them to their conversation, as riveting as it is. I wipe down the bar and get the young uni student we hired to load the glasses into the industrial glass cleaner.

"Chad," I hear Ella whine, and I'm instantly confused. I look around the bar—she shouldn't be here. I thought she was away with Arden. Maybe I got the days wrong . . .

Oh. Logan has his phone held up in the air, and Ella's face is on the screen. Jesus, what's with the FaceTime calls tonight?

"Why are you calling Logan's phone?" I ask, snatching it from him.

She rolls her eyes. "Because yours is on silent in your pocket, which it shouldn't be, by the way. What if Mady has an episode?"

"Mady has four other guys at her beck and call. One would call the landline—they still exist, you know."

"Not the point, and not why I'm calling. I need you to remind me why it's a good idea to stay married to Arden." Ella is whining, and clearly needs to bitch about it. I get it—Arden can be a lot.

"I can't answer that for you, Ella, but the health care is a bonus."

She sighs. "It was a rhetorical question. He infuriates me! The sex is great, but he won't let me wear my slippers to dinner, yet he can wear his ugly bow ties. How is that fair?"

I listen to her ramble on and on about Arden. I really don't know how they will last. Ella is headstrong and outspoken, and likes things her way. Arden is OCD and a control freak.

It's going to be a monumental disaster, or a match made in heaven. Only time will tell, I suppose.

I hand Logan back his phone once I convince Ella she really can't wear her slippers to a restaurant—it's a health and safety issue, not an Arden issue. How did my night go from busy to hectic? There is never a dull moment anymore; between Ella and Mady, some kind of drama follows.

They're just lucky I love them both.

The bar remains dead, so Grace offers to close up tonight, freeing me up to drive Lochlan and Logan home. Logan tries to convince me to let him crash on the couch so he can watch Mady blow up at Lochlan in the morning, but I drop him at his apartment and take Lochlan home to face the music.

Logan is on the opening shift tomorrow, so he really should get some sleep anyway.



I wake up overheated again. I have a body pushed up behind me and a body pressing into the front of me. Since I can see Caleb, I can only assume it's Lochlan laying at my back.

Figures he'd find me in Caleb's room. It pisses me off because after Lochlan and Logan gate-crashed our date last night, they are both on my shit list.

Technically, I didn't see Lochlan at the movies, but Logan wouldn't have been there without him, and there is no way Logan would have known about the popcorn incident unless Lo told him.

It took me half an hour to calm Caleb down; he was super annoyed none of us had told him. But his tendency to overreact is the exact reason why we didn't.

Wiggling my way carefully down and off the bed without waking them, I head to my room to have a shower. Taking my time, I wash my hair, and avoid leaving my room for as long as possible.

Once I'm ready to face Lochlan, I head out to the kitchen but stop in my tracks when I hear people talking. I recognise the voices of Lochlan, Isaac, and Caleb. And I can only

assume Chad is probably in the room too, since they are talking about me.

They are telling Caleb about the popcorn incident, then Chad chimes in about my increased vomiting.

The guys are literally talking about me like I am an invalid, and I've had enough. Sometimes when you are sick, you just need somebody to tell you everything's gonna be okay—not treat you like a patient.

My anger boils over and it's only a matter of moments before I'm going to blow up. A girl can only handle so much. You know, the straw that broke the camel's back, and all that jazz. Well, the camel's back is broken and there is no turning back now.

After I finish preparing what I'm going to say and running it through my head, so they will hear what I really need to get across, I walk into the kitchen.

All eyes turn to me.

*"Enough!"* I scream like a banshee at them.

That feels a little better, even though they had already stopped talking. I didn't need to raise my voice at all, but I did it to make an impact, and it was also cathartic. Everybody in the room is shocked. I take each of them in, looking pointedly around the room. I can see I have surprised everyone; I'm not the timid Mady that they think I am.

"I've had enough of you all micromanaging my life. If you want to be a part of it, you need to realise, yes, I am sick. But no, I *do not* need you to hold my hand. I can do it myself. I've just seriously had enough of you guys suffocating me. Between Lochlan and his jealousy, Isaac and his stupid spreadsheets, Caleb not being around, and Chad who charges on in here thinking he can fix everything, I'm done. You all need to leave. I need some space. Get out of my house."

I'm pretty sure I've stunned most of them into silence. Well, everybody except for Lochlan.

"Mady, it's my house too, you know," Lochlan responds calmly. Which further pisses me off.



“I just let you stay here,” I yell back.

“That’s a low blow and you know it.”

At this point, I don’t care. My aunt may have left the house to me, but she was pretty much his aunt as well. She treated him like a nephew.

“When are you going to pull your head out of your ass and realise I’m not going anywhere? And that you actually want to be with me? Because you aren’t fooling anybody anymore, Lochlan. We’ve been best friends forever, and I haven’t run away yet. I know exactly what you’re like. I’ve watched you grow up. But I can’t do this anymore.” I pace around the kitchen, my voice still louder than it needs to be. “Either you want to be with me, or you leave. Because you’re ruining my other relationships.”

I take in each of them again. Isaac looks like somebody’s kicked his cat, Caleb just looks sad, and Chad looks surprised. But it’s the look on Lochlan’s face that has my stomach sinking.

I don’t know if he’s actually going to come back. Something needed to be said, even though it was a risk yelling at them. I needed to do something. Especially after checking my phone and seeing a text message from my mother stating that I’m in trouble because I didn’t tell her I’m in a relationship.

There’s a reason I don’t tell my mum these things. And I can only assume something happened last night after Lochlan and Logan left the cinema, and one of them told my mum.

“Mady, please. You need to have somebody here with you,” Isaac pleads.

“No, no I don’t. Today I just need some space. When you have all figured out that I’m a big girl and can look after myself, I might consider letting you back in. Except for you,” I say, pointing at Lochlan. “You need to figure out what the fuck it is you want. Because I can’t keep doing this with you. Every single night you crawl into my bed, and every single night you spoon with me. Yet, I have to watch you walk out that door

every single day knowing that you're going to go sleep with some random woman and then still come home to me. I'm done. This is obviously not a conventional relationship, and that's fine. I've done what these guys have wanted me to do. I followed your rules. I followed your schedule. I've done everything I can to make you guys happy. But what about me? When do I get to be happy? Please, just *leave!*"

None of them say anything as they grab their stuff and walk out the door. I know that was harsh. But sometimes you have to be brutally honest to get what you need.

I don't want to bother Ella while she's away, and Shamus is with her. Logan's probably at the bar, which leaves one person I can message, and it's not because I'm afraid to be on my own.

I *choose* to ask for some company, so I grab my phone and send Jarred a quick message.

Not even twenty minutes later, he's walking through the door with a fresh plate of brownies. "Can you explain why you're home by yourself?" he asks suspiciously.

"I may or may not have yelled at everybody and thrown them out of the house."

"Oh, I know. I could hear you from across the street. I just didn't think they would actually leave you."

"Isaac has cameras in the house, so I know he'll be checking in, but I didn't really give them much of a choice. It's time for them to all man up."

"That's fair, I wasn't expecting you to message me," he says, plopping down on the couch next to me.

I have to roll my eyes when he puts his feet on the table—and he's wearing unicorn slippers. He's obviously been talking to Ella. It seems everyone is getting their own pair eventually. I pop my feet on the table next to his and wiggle my unicorn-clad foot at him to show we are twinning today.

"Well, you don't smother me like they do," I say, and he hands me a brownie. It's not ladylike, but I shove the entire damn thing in my mouth.

“That’s because you’re like a big sister to me,” he replies with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Thanks for that,” I respond sarcastically and launch a cushion at him.

“You’re welcome.” He catches the cushion and wedges it behind his back. “Now, what are we doing today?”

“Well, I was thinking it’s time to do some rearranging.” I motion with my arms around the room.

“Is that a good idea?”

I nod yes, but decide to give him an honest answer.

“Probably not. But we’re gonna do it anyway.”

“Well, you know I’m down for anything, Mads.”

I believe him too.

I first met Jarred when he was an awkward pimply twelve-year-old going through puberty. He started mowing our lawn for pocket money, but over the years, he actually became a friend. I’d definitely miss him if he wasn’t around.

“Are you eating the brownies because of the pain, or because you want to get stoned?” He narrows his eyes at me.

“I’m not answering that question,” I shoot back.

Taking a bite of my second brownie, I let out a moan. Jarred really makes the best brownies. I should probably ask him to make me some without the weed, so I can share them with the girls and not risk the wrath of Arden and Chase, who are just as overprotective of their women as my guys are of me.

“Good enough for me,” he says while grabbing his own off the plate. “Do you think they’re gonna come back?”

I take a moment to think about it, and it makes my heart hurt. I can’t imagine life without all of them in it. “Chad will. Isaac will. Caleb, possibly. It’s Lochlan I’m worried about.” Tears sting my eyes and I blink them away.

“Why?”

“Because he can’t figure out what he wants. What if, when he does, that person isn’t me?”

Jarred reaches out for my hand and gives it a squeeze. I let him comfort me in his own way.

“Mady, he is head over heels in love with you. Everybody can see it.”

I believe him, I do. But I can’t sit around and wait for him to be ready for us. The picture he has in his head of our happy ever after won’t be the same if he keeps me at arm’s length when I need him the most.

“Yeah, but why can’t he?”

“You know why—he doesn’t want to hurt you.”

I go to take another bite of brownie and Jarred snatches it from my hand. When I try to take it back, he leans over and removes the entire plate from the table, jumping to his feet.

“Yeah, yeah. Save the spiel. I’ve heard it before,” I say, turning around to watch him walk into the kitchen.

“Just trust he’ll be okay, and that he will come around.”

Since when did Jarred go from the stoner kid across the road who mows our lawn, to someone who gives half-decent advice, and who I trust to vent to? I suppose stranger things have happened. The kid will make a girl happy one day.

“Yeah, but I’m sick of waiting,” I huff, and it’s true.

I’ve known Lochlan since primary school, and we’ve been inseparable since we were ten. I’m pretty sure I’ve been in love with him since the day he beat up a kid because he pushed me over in the sandpit.

For the record, I had already tackled the kid. Mum always taught me the bigger they are, the harder they fall. So take them out at the knees. I did that, then Lo stepped in and broke his nose.

It was Love at First Fight.

Well, for me anyway.

“Maybe this was the kick in the ass he needed,” Jarred says, taking his spot back on the couch, but this time he turns sideways, kicking up his legs and placing them over mine.

“I sure as fuck hope so,” I sigh.

If not, I could have just lost my best friend, and I don’t know what’s worse: the thought of him moving on to someone else, or not having him in my life at all.



We all stand outside for a few minutes, stunned that Mady has kicked us out. I mean, I don't blame her—everyone worries about her and treats her like she can't make her own choices. Even I'm guilty of following what the others have done without even asking how she felt about it.

I'm an idiot.

Lochlan is the first to get into his car, his back tyres screeching as he takes off.

“What the hell are we going to do about this?” Isaac asks, running a hand through his hair.

“Nothing we can do,” Caleb sighs. “We need to let her cool down and regroup. I'm going to go to a friend's house and crash. I have a shift this afternoon. No matter what you do, don't go back inside. Let her have her moment.”

Caleb gets into his car and drives off. At least he is being rational, but from what I can tell that's just what he does.

“What the hell are we going to do?” Isaac asks again.

“Let's hang out at the bar. Worst-case scenario, we can sleep there tonight. I have swags in the back.”

Isaac reluctantly agrees, and I can tell what Mady said to him about his “control issues” is playing through his mind. He climbs into the passenger seat of my ute—guess I’m driving.

Once we get to Grumpy’s, we head over to the bar, and Isaac takes a seat. When I try to go behind and serve us drinks, Logan appears and puts his hand on my chest. I give him a pointed look, and his hand drops straight away.

“Sorry, Bossman. It’s just, well, you’re not working today, and when you walked in you had a really sad face. Just take the day off. Hell, I will make sure you have the best day. I’ve been trying out some new drinks and want you to taste them before we add them to the menu.”

Usually, I would shoot his ideas down, but I don’t have the mental capacity to even argue with him right now. I already know he will have a list of reasons why it’s a good idea for him to have a signature cocktail menu.

“Fine,” I say, and his face lights up like he can’t quite believe I agreed. “Just bring us two of everything.”

“You won’t regret it,” he says, clapping his hands together.

I’m sure I will, but for now, I’ll try to help Isaac out. I doubt Lochlan would listen to reason from me; anyone with eyes can see how he looks at Mady like his world begins and ends with her. Caleb will wait for Mady to call him—he is honourable like that—and really, I can’t help him with much. He is a doctor, and they are overworked, and Mady knows this and would never ask him to change that. I get how it just all boiled over and got too much for her.

I should have been better at asking her what she wanted, rather than just falling into the routine.

I go take a seat with Isaac; he has relocated to a corner booth away from everyone, which suits me just fine. “Be prepared, Logan is bringing us his specialty drinks. He wants one named after him, and we are now official taste testers.”

“And you left him in charge of doing that by himself?”

I shrug. “I planned on saying no, but he is like a damn kid. He has one shot to change my mind and if it’s a disaster, then

that's on him."

Grace walks over and places a bowl of chips down in front of us. "You're going to need these if you're tasting his drinks. Rocket fuel comes to mind just thinking about it."

"Thanks, we could use something strong after the morning we've had."

She laughs and walks away.

Logan quickly replaces her at the table with a shit-eating grin on his face as he places a cocktail in front of each of us. "I call this the Loganmeister."

Isaac pulls his drink closer and inspects it. I have to admit, it looks nice, all orange and shimmery. I bring my glass up to my nose and sniff. It smells of Bacardi and mangoes, maybe even some pineapple.

"Since everyone here knows me for my coconut bra, I went with a tropical feel. But this collection of cocktails is called 'Mady and her Seven Men.'"

"Mady doesn't have seven men," Isaac says, removing the slice of pineapple and the mini umbrella from his cup before taking a tentative sip.

"It's a party in your mouth, isn't it? And she does, if you think about it. You two, the Doc, Lochlan, Shamus, that stoner kid, and of course, me. So I have created eight drinks."

"This isn't half bad," I say. "Keep them coming."

Day drinking has never really been my thing. It seems today is a day of firsts.

By the time we get through the first cocktail, the next is placed down in front of us. This one is lime green and has whipped cream on top.

He waits for us to taste it, and Isaac braves the first sip again. His face screws up and he looks at Logan. "What the hell is that? It tastes weird."

It seems we were lulled into a false sense of security with his first drink.



“It’s whiskey and Kahlúa, but I needed to make it green.”

“Why does it need to be green?” I ask before I take a sip, then shake my head. “This one needs work.”

“Because Shamus is Irish, so his drink colour needs to be green.”

I honestly wonder how his brain works sometimes. I can see his logic in this instance, but there are better choices.

“Maybe stick with Midori, or even the green fairy if you are feeling a little adventurous. Just make sure you add some sort of mixer to the fairy—we don’t need to be handing out vomit bags with the cocktail.”

He nods. “Thanks, Bossman. I’ll work on it later.” He heads back to the bar, leaving Isaac and me alone again.

“Do you think Mady will ever want to be with me if I can’t perform?” Isaac asks randomly. We’ve already had a chat about him being able to please her, so it’s clear her comment today about his control issues has really gotten under his skin.

“I think you need to have a conversation with her, and ask her if she will be happy with no sex. And you need to stop shying away. Like I said before, there are other ways to pleasure a woman, and Mady loves you. I am almost one hundred percent certain she’d be happy to have you in any way you are comfortable.”

He hangs his head and stirs the drink with his straw. “I’m scared, man. I’m still traumatised.”

“Over what? Eating pussy isn’t rocket science. You’re a smart dude.”

He snorts just as Logan comes back with another drink. “This one is the Sex Machine. I was going to name mine that, but Lochlan is my best friend so he can have the title.”

This drink shimmers just like the previous concoction, except it’s pink and tastes a bit like strawberries and champagne. With my nod of approval, he skips back off to the bar. Not what I’d choose for a drink called the Sex Machine,

but it would have appeal with the ladies. Maybe Logan's idea isn't terrible after all.

"I'm not afraid of not knowing what to do, I just had a terrible experience. I was seventeen, this older girl let me go down on her, and she farted on me. I gagged and fucking vomited on her pussy. I was mortified."

I have to laugh; we've all had bad sexual experiences. "I'm sorry, but that's pretty funny. Believe it or not, we all have epic fail stories, but between us, you're missing out. Mady's pussy is divine."

Bloody Logan turns up right at that time.

"Tell me she comes champagne and it's a gold-plated pussy. Seriously, she has some voodoo magic going on, which is how we have gotten to her drink." I'm seeing a theme; all the drinks so far besides Shamus's shimmer. This one is purple. "I call this the Voodoo. Grace wouldn't let me play with dry ice—I wanted it to smoke at the top."

I send a silent thank you to Grace. We all know it would have ended badly.

"Keep them coming," I tell him.

"These are strong as fuck. We are definitely sleeping here," Isaac says and laughs before taking a large sip of the fruity drink. I can't quite put my finger on the flavours, but it's good.

"Back to my Mady issue . . . After I walked in on you guys, I've found myself down a rabbit hole on a porn site, and I don't see a way that Mady would like me if she found out."

"What is it? If it's anything to do with feet, you're on your own. Feet are gross."

Isaac laughs and takes a few mouthfuls of his drink before he looks back up at me. "I think I like watching people have sex."

Okay, so it's really not as bad as I thought. "Don't we all? That's what porn is for."

“No, well yes, but I think to get hard, I need to be watching.”

“Ohhh, well it really isn’t that bad. You are a voyeur. It’s not as uncommon as you think. Plus, you are forgetting we are in a damn harem. I’m sure Mady has run those kinds of scenarios through her head, especially if Ella has spoken to her about it.”

His brows furrow, and I can see the wheels turning in his head. “Why would Ella talk to her about it? She has one husband.”

“Ella likes to help and give people advice, but she is also nosey and keeps drilling me on our sex life, saying it’s a waste of dating multiple men if Mady isn’t getting multiple dicks at once.”

Isaac pushes his glasses up his nose. “How would you feel about sharing?”

“Me?” I ask. “At first, I was not for it, but I don’t hate the idea. Wouldn’t you feel more comfortable with one of the others? You’ve known them longer . . .”

Isaac snorts. “If you can’t tell, I tolerate Lochlan—we don’t always see eye to eye. And Caleb, I don’t know, I feel like sex with him would be stiff. Or clean almost. And I think I might actually like you, even though I had my reservations at first.”

“You didn’t like me?”

He runs his hand through his curly hair. “I didn’t *not* like you. I could just see Mady falling for you and ditching the rest of us because we are all flawed in some way, while in *you* come, all perfect with the rugged look and perfect jawline, and the biceps. You’re hot in all the ways a woman wants.”

“Thanks, I guess. But let’s be clear, I won’t fuck you.”

Isaac’s eyes go wide and then he smiles. “Noted, but I’m straight. I went through a stage where I thought I must have been gay, since I couldn’t get an erection, but dudes don’t do it for me. Logan tried to touch my dick once, thinking it would

help, but it didn't." He chuckles and I join in. The guy gets a gold star for effort, in that respect.

We spend the rest of the day tasting Logan's drinks and coming up with a plan. I don't know if it's the alcohol or if it is a good plan, but time will tell.

We just need Mady to forgive us first.



Jarred lightly snores on the couch, and I survey the room, happy with how it looks. We spent most of the day moving everything around. I didn't go as far as rearranging the boys' rooms though. Unlike them, I actually have boundaries.

Guilt has set in; I wish I was a little more level-headed and had sat them down and talked to them. I miss them being here, which really sucks because I don't know if I could live without them.

The front door lock clicks open and Caleb steps through the door.

"I'm sorry, I had to come and get my work stuff. I thought you would be asleep."

I rush over to him, jump into his arms, and bury my head against his neck. "No, I'm sorry. I should have sat you down and spoken to you about how I was feeling. I'm an idiot."

Caleb places me back down on my feet. "You're not an idiot, Mady. You have an undiagnosed illness and four overbearing men in your life who have treated you like a child for way too long, but it's only because we care about you."

"I know that, I do. I'm just mentally exhausted from being sick all the time. I want answers."

Caleb leads us into his room, then he pulls out his work bag and places it onto the bed. “I know you do, and one day you will get them. Just please don’t hide it from me anymore.”

“As long as you promise not to go all doctor on me and try to force me to go to the hospital. I know how much my body can take, and I will go when I need to—not a second before. You’re my boyfriend, Caleb. Not my doctor.”

He pulls me into his arms and smiles. “I don’t know if you have ever called me your boyfriend to my face before.”

“Well, get used to it. It’s time we all get on the same page and stop pussy footing around everything. We are either doing this or we’re not. So, all I need to know before you go is if you’re all the way in, or if you’re out.”

“I’m all the way in,” he says, spinning us in a circle. “But I have to get to work. One day it won’t be like this, and we will have more time together.” He steps back from me and grabs his bag.

“I know, and I do like the idea of telling people my boyfriend is a doctor.”

He leans in and places a kiss on my lips. “And I like the way it sounds coming from your mouth. But I really do need to leave.”

I follow Caleb out into the living area, and he looks around. “I like what you’ve done. It gives the room a more open feel.”

“Thanks, now go before I drag you back into yours.”

Caleb leaves after giving me another kiss.

Jarred stirs, but rolls over and mumbles to himself. I don’t know when I became friends with an eighteen-year-old, but watching him sleep, I realise with certainty that is exactly what he is, a friend. I’m thankful he was here with me today. Even if he didn’t do much.

I make myself some breakfast for dinner and sit at the table, staring at my phone. I want to call Lochlan so bad; we have never gone this long without talking. I can’t remember

the last time I've woken up with him not in my bed, and I can confidently say I hate even thinking about it.

The night drags on, so slowly that I have cleaned and sorted out the entire kitchen. I'm avoiding going to bed alone. I'd rather be out here where I can hear them come home.

If they come home.

It's early morning when Jarred finally wakes up and says he needs to go. Something about watering the plants before the sun is fully up.

When the front door opens, I am half inside the pots and pans cupboard. I jump up and smash my head on the small corner shelf—that is useless, mind you. Who puts a corner shelf in that is so tiny it barely holds the cheese grater? I slide myself out, and both Chad and Isaac are standing there watching me.

“Is it safe to talk?” Chad asks and I nod. He strides over and pulls me into his arms. “We are both so sorry for how we made you feel.”

“Thank you, I appreciate that,” I say earnestly, then the fumes hit me. “Um, why do you smell like a brewery?”

Isaac snorts. “A very long day and night with Logan.”

“Do I even want to know?” I ask, and Isaac shakes his head, so I leave it at that.

We all end up sitting around the table. This is how I should have handled things to begin with, but what's done is done. I can't take back what I said.

Not that I want to, anyway.

Chad and Isaac both take one of my hands. “We promise to try not to baby you as much,” Chad offers. “I didn't even think to ask how you felt about the way the guys were. I just tried to fit into the system they had. But Isaac and I brainstormed some ideas last night, and we want your opinion on them, to see if they help make this arrangement a better fit for you.”

Isaac runs and grabs his tablet, then pulls up a page, and holds it out to me. I look down at it and back up to him. It's a

handwritten note, and it's not readable. He laughs and I notice he's more at ease around me. Whatever they talked about last night must have helped Isaac work through some of his stuff.

"Clearly, I drank way too much last night. It's just written confirmation of us backing off. I have removed a lot of pings to our phones. The only one set to go off is if you arrive at the hospital."

"I can agree to that," I tell him.

"We have changed the Mady-approved list of restaurants to just the ones we know to avoid because there is nothing you can eat on the menu."

"And . . ." Chad prompts Isaac.

"And, I have deleted the schedules. Your time is yours, and we don't get to dictate how or who you spend your time with. Though we should all agree that Caleb doesn't need to know how often Jarred brings us brownies."

I laugh. "We one hundred percent agree on that." Both of the guys go quiet, and I have a feeling they need to say something else. "Out with it," I prompt them.

They are compromising with me in a way I like. I won't be unreasonable; I know they will worry, so I'll check in with them regularly. But the thought of being able to make plans with the girls and not needing an escort makes me a little giddy.

Isaac fiddles with his fingers, and I give him my full attention. "You, um, know how when you kicked me out, you mentioned my issues."

I sigh. "I shouldn't have said that to you. I was angry and had verbal diarrhoea."

He reaches out for me and takes my hands in his. "No, you should have. I've been hiding behind it for way too long, not willing to even touch my past trauma, and I'm still not really ready to deal with it, but I think we've found a workaround."

"A workaround?" I question sceptically. If he says his workaround comes in the form of a little blue pill, he knows



how I feel about that.

“I . . . I . . . ,” he stutters.

“He likes to watch,” Chad blurts out. “And with your approval, of course, we were thinking we could experiment a little, let him watch a few times and then he can try to join in. If he wants to.”

I arch my brow at them. Are they asking me what I think they are? Before Chad came along, it’s something I always wished might happen but quickly realised it never would. Lochlan doesn’t have a sexual relationship with me, Isaac has some issues from childhood that have affected his sex life, and Caleb isn’t into anything wild like letting someone watch us or join in. He’s happy to share me with the guys, but I don’t think he’d like to share me in the bedroom. Daddy Caleb has some control issues in that area. I would never complain, though. He is who he is.

I honestly didn’t think Chad would be willing to share me in bed either, especially after the first conversation we had when he was considering moving in. But I guess things have changed for him. Again, I’m not complaining.

“You want to have a threesome?”

Isaac shrugs. “We don’t have to . . . It’s just when I walked in on you and Chad, things started to work, and . . .”

“Say no more! Are we doing this now?” I jump up, all excited. I need this—more than I realise.

The guys look at each other, and Chad grimaces. “Can we shower first? I don’t know about Isaac, but I’m still sweating alcohol. We had to catch a ride share home, and the poor girl driving must have thought we were hobos.”

“Yes, let’s all shower,” I rush out, and Chad laughs.

“I guess we are showering together, you cool with that?” Chad says, looking at Isaac.

“As long as it’s downstairs in my shower. It’s bigger, and we won’t accidentally touch dicks.”

I clap in excitement, and I'm pretty sure I'm the first one downstairs. I head straight to the shower and flick it on, then Isaac walks in.

"Are you sure you're okay with this?" he asks, and I nod. I'm more than okay with this.

"Don't you know I would do anything for you? If this is how we get things started, it's no hardship on my behalf. I couldn't think of anything better than being in the middle of you and Chad."

"I think you've got yourself a keeper with him," Isaac says, and I think he is right. The fact Chad will do this has me swooning for him even more.

Chad walks into the bathroom and winks at Isaac, and I think my knees buckle.

SWOON.

I waste no time getting naked, while both men stand frozen, watching. Chad finally snaps out of his trance and removes his clothes. Both Chad and I step into the water, leaving Isaac to move at his own pace. I step up to Chad and his lips fall to mine. I melt into the kiss. He feels like home. Just like kissing Caleb did last night.

I let my hand roam down his stomach, to his erection, and he moans against my lips as I run my fingernails up and down his length. He's enjoying this as much as I am. My pussy clenches just thinking about what may happen next.

I pull back from the kiss and lower to my knees, looking up at Chad as I lick my lips. Chad's back is pressed up against the tiles, and I lean forward to close my mouth around the tip of his cock. Chad places one hand on my head as I take him in as deep as I can, evening my breathing out, then I lean in more and take him down the back of my throat. He makes a guttural noise, and his shaft pulses in my mouth.

"Shit, Mady, I need to fuck your throat."

I hum around his length, and Isaac steps into the shower. My eyes zoom straight to his hard cock. Holy shit, it worked! I have never seen it hard before, and I'm not disappointed—he's

got a decent-sized cock. Chad pulls back and his dick pops from my mouth. I look up at him and he nods his head to Isaac, who is standing there, unsure of himself. I spin around and look up at his smiling face, and my pussy clenches again. Fuck me dead. These two may be the death of me.

I gently touch him, running my hand up and down, then begin jerking him off slowly, making sure he is comfortable. I eventually lean forward and take my time licking and kissing his shaft. Easing him into it.

“That feels so nice,” he whispers.

If he thinks that feels nice, I’m about to rock his world.

Leaning forward, I take him all the way down to the base, my throat already primed for him after Chad. Speaking of . . . I glance over and he is stroking himself, watching me.

Pleasure builds between my legs, and I feel powerful having two men watching me. I work Isaac over with my mouth until his body starts to tremble, and he pulls from my mouth. Both men step in close to me, hands fisting their cocks, and I look between both of them as they come almost simultaneously.

If this is how Isaac and I have to have sex, I can confidently say I’m all in. And from the look on Chad’s face, he doesn’t mind one bit. I’m going to have to thank him later.



No one has heard from Lochlan in three days, not even Caleb. He said when he asked Carla, she told him Lochlan asked for some personal days off. Why did I have to force his hand?

Tonight is one of those rare nights Caleb isn't on night shift, so Chad is cooking us all dinner to celebrate. Isaac has been more touchy feely since our shower, and I love every second. Just small, subtle touches, like right now, for instance. He has me on his lap at the table while Caleb is showing me his shifts for next week on the tablet, and he's running his fingers up and down my inner thigh. If he keeps doing it, this will turn into a gang bang really quickly. But dirty thoughts aside, this all feels really domesticated.

“So how did you manage to get your shifts changed like that? This new system actually gives you more time to rest, and there's even some personal time.”

Isaac snorts from behind me.

“You did this?” I ask, shifting on his lap.

“Are you going to yell at me again if I say yes?”

“Haha, I have one mini breakdown and now I won't ever live it down,” I joke, slapping his leg.

“Okay, so I may have hacked the hospital from a private server and kept fixing the horrible system they had. They would override me every time, so I sent them the proposal on how to implement things better, and how to save them money and not have their staff leaving as zombies. All anonymously, of course, and they thanked me in the end. After threatening legal action because I did illegally find a way into their network, which I also gave them pointers on.”

“I, for one, am grateful, even though I didn’t just hear that,” quips Caleb.

Chad brings a plate of steaks to the table. “Food is ready.”

Caleb jumps up and gets a few beers from the fridge, and we load our plates. He has made a small feast. I’m enjoying spending time with them, but I miss Lo.

“Are we expecting anyone?” Isaac asks, holding up his phone, and Caleb and Chad shake their heads.

I take the phone from his hand and look at the front door surveillance feed. *Oh no.* “My parents are here.” I watch them get out of the hire car, and another car pulls into the driveway behind them. “And Lochlan is home.”

Now I know where he has been hiding the last few days. The idiot went to my parent’s house; the one place he knew I wouldn’t look for him.

Lochlan opens the front door, and we all play dumb, looking up at him in surprise. He doesn’t react, just glances towards the table, then heads into our room. Not sure how I’m going to explain that to my parents.

“Mum,” I say as she walks through the door. “What are you doing here?”

“Oh, you know, checking in on my only daughter, since I had to find out from a lovely boy that you’re dating and didn’t tell me. So, I had to come and check on my girl myself.”

She rushes towards me, pulling me into her arms, and I wrap mine around her. I miss her and Dad a lot. Speaking of, he walks into the house dragging three suitcases.

“Woman, I have told you that you don’t need to bring this much stuff for a few days away. Mady owns a washing machine.”

“I know she does, Paul. That one”—she points to the carry-on sized suitcase—“is full of toys. You can’t have a healthy relationship without getting to know each other’s wants and needs. And what better way than with this?” She pulls out a dildo the size of my arm.

“Mum! Please put the weapon away.”

She *pffts* me but shoves it back in her shoulder bag.

“Hey, Daddy.”

My father is one of my favourite people.

“Hey, princess. I hope we’re not imposing. First, I think you should introduce us to these strapping young men.”

Shit, I forgot everyone was at the table. I clear my throat. “Mum, Dad, that is Isaac.” He gives them a little wave. “And Caleb, they’re my . . .”

“Roommates,” Isaac says, standing from his chair and offering my father his hand.

“Nice to meet you,” my father says. “I’m Paul and that’s Dina, but you can call us Mum and Dad.”

“And this,” I say, moving around to Chad, “is my boyfriend, Chad.”

I have to throw one of them under the bus now, and they are about to find out why I didn’t want to tell my parents.

“Oh, Chad, it’s so nice to meet you in person. We have so much to talk about. Being in touch with your partner’s body is such an amazing thing,” my mum gushes.

I groan and roll my eyes. This is exactly what I was trying to avoid.

Chad graciously offers my parents his room. My mother insists she helps change the sheets, dragging him away, and I use the opportunity to sneak into my room, slipping through the door and closing it behind me.

Lochlan has his back to me and is putting some clothes into his suitcase.

“Why did you go to my parents?”

He doesn't bother turning around. “Why does it matter?”

“I guess it doesn't. So, you're moving out?” I ask, watching as he zips up the suitcase.

“I don't see what other choice I have, Mady. You've made yourself perfectly clear.”

“Is it so bad that I want you, Lochlan? That I have been madly in love with you since we were kids? That I have had to watch you fuck your way through girl after girl, thinking that there must be something wrong with me? Then you start with the endgame comments, and that's all well and good, but do you realise the endgame you had in mind no longer exists? Because my heart now also belongs to those men out there, and not just you anymore.”

Lochlan storms towards me and brings his hands to my face, his fingers gripping the back of my neck firmly. Pressing his lips to mine, he thrusts his tongue into my mouth, and once the shock wears off, I match the intensity of his kiss. Until there is a knock at the door.

He pulls back swiftly, looking me in the eyes, and I can see the regret shining back at me. “Shit.”

Lochlan and I have only ever kissed that one time in high school, and it doesn't even compare to the kiss we just shared.

He uses the interruption to storm off. I pull the door open, and Chad is standing there. “I didn't mean to interrupt, but you need to save us.”

I chuckle. They will all realise why I love my mum, but also why she is best in small doses.

“Let's get wasted,” is all I say.

“Honey, what's wrong with Lochlan?” my mother asks me from her position in the lounge room. She is already fluffing my couch cushions. “I thought he seemed jealous of your new boyfriend. But Chad tells me you and Lochlan share a room.”

My father scratches his head and looks between me and Chad. “Are you having one of those new age three-way relationships? Is Chad the meat?”

I choke on my saliva, and Chad hands me a beer, dramatically patting me on the back, while Caleb and Isaac both snort at the table.

“No, Sir, Lochlan is not in a three-way relationship with us.” Technically, he isn’t lying.

My mum looks up from fluffing pillows—of course her ears prick up at the word three-way. “Don’t rule out adding another person into your relationship. It really adds some spice and keeps things interesting, doesn’t it, Paul?”

“Mum,” I whine. “Please, no. I don’t need to hear about yours and Dad’s sex life.” I quickly finish my beer, and this time Caleb replaces it.

I send a quick group text to everyone.

Me: I’m so sorry, this will happen the entire trip. I won’t blame you if you hide.

Isaac: Your mum is funny.

Caleb: Your face was priceless.

Chad: Fifty bucks says her mum figures out Mady is with us all by the end of their trip.

Isaac: A hundred that her mum gives us all a lengthy sex talk with that dildo tomorrow.

Caleb: Two hundred that Logan turns up and makes friends.

Me: Will you all stop betting on things? This is serious.

I’m relieved that after an hour of cleaning my house, Mum decides she and my father should get an early night. Once they disappear into Chad’s room, we all get comfy on the couch to watch a movie.



Caleb sits on my left, Chad on my right, and Isaac settles in his bean bag in front of me, pulling my legs over his shoulders and leaning his head back so I can run my fingers through his hair.

“Are they going to get freaky in my bed?” Chad asks, and we all laugh.

“Probably.” My parents have a very healthy sex life.

“Lochlan is moving in there now. He forfeits his space in your room,” Chad declares.

I don't tell him that Lochlan is moving out; I still hope he changes his mind. I don't know how I'm going to handle him not being here. It's always been *us*.

The boys all actually agree that I should pick the movie, so I stop on one called *Why Him?* Seems fitting.

I hear them laugh during the movie, but my mind is on Lochlan and why he hasn't taken his suitcase yet . . .

Nothing will be the same without him, but I know I have to let him figure this out on his own.



Laughter from the kitchen drags me out of my sleep. I tossed and turned most of the night. Apparently not having Lochlan in my bed is affecting my sleep as well.

Poor Chad.

I kept him up most of the night; he did the best he could to help, but even in my sleep I miss Lo. It's hard not to, when he has been such a big part of my life. He didn't come back for his stuff, and I don't know if anyone has heard from him.

"Morning, beautiful," Chad whispers, his lips touching mine in a soft kiss.

"Morning, I'm sorry about last night," I croak as the last of my sleep disappears.

"No need to apologise. I just wish there was more I could do to help." His strong arms envelop me, and I let myself relax into his hold. Chad makes me feel safe.

"I'm scared he will not come back, and I'm pissed he went to my parents."

"Lochlan loves you. He'll be back once he sorts his head out. Trust your history." Chad squeezes tighter.

“You didn’t see the look in his eyes yesterday after he got angry and kissed me.”

“Has he ever kissed you before?”

“Nope, nothing more than a quick peck on my lips.”

“That’s because he knows once he’s had a taste, he’ll never be able to kiss another girl again. Mads, you’re addictive. One kiss from you and I was hooked.” Looking up into Chad’s eyes, I can tell he means every word.

There’s a soft knock at the door before Isaac comes in and quickly closes the door behind him.

He says nothing, just crawls onto the bed, and Chad transfers me to his arms. Isaac’s hold is different to Chad’s; it’s more tentative. He’s nervous, but I’m so freaking proud of him for giving this a try.

His lips touch mine and it’s electric. Where Chad’s kiss was soft, Isaac’s is frenzied, and I’m so fucking here for this. We’ve been playing this song and dance for over eighteen months, and I am ecstatic he’s finally figured stuff out and is comfortable enough to try with me. He should know by now I’m not going anywhere.

I lose myself in the kiss, and Isaac shifts so I’m lying on my back and he’s hovering over me. My moan fills the room as his weight shifts on top of me. His tongue explores my mouth in a way he’s never done before, then his lips glide across my skin as he peppers kisses down my body.

Chad helps him remove my sleep shirt, and the brief moment both their hands are on my body, I moan even louder. Chad quiets me with a kiss, while Isaac continues his assault on my body.

His mouth is sweet torture as he takes his time kissing and licking every inch of my breasts. He bites down on my nipple, then quickly takes away the sting with his tongue. Wrapping my legs around him, I desperately seek any sort of friction for some relief.

Isaac is literally driving me insane with need.

He descends further and then hesitates. I meet his gaze, and the uncertainty is obvious as day.

Chad breaks the kiss to assess the situation and offer the encouragement Isaac needs. “Go on, I promise it’s okay,” he reassures Isaac with a gentle tone, and flutters explode in my stomach. Chad is helping Isaac, and I’m grateful they have found a trust with each other.

“Please, Isaac, I need to feel your tongue on my pussy.” I’m not above begging at this point, and that seems to help because he shifts his body further down the bed and spreads my legs wide.

“Do you want to watch him?” Chad whispers in my ear. I nod because I don’t think I can find any more words right now. My body is humming in anticipation, and waiting to see what Isaac will do is making it hard to stay still.

Chad sits me up slightly and moves behind me. His legs are on either side of mine, and he pulls me back so I’m inclined on his chest. He teases his fingers down my body, leaving a trail of goosebumps in his wake, while Isaac watches intensely. In this moment, I feel like I could burst into flames between these two men, who only have eyes for me.

Eventually, Chad works his way to my thighs, and he spreads them wide. “Go on, Isaac, have a taste. You’ll never want another pussy again after you taste Mady.” Chad’s gravelly voice has me trying to clench my thighs together, but he senses what I’m going to do and pins my legs down beneath his. I whimper, the anticipation almost too much.

Then I’m breathless.

Isaac’s tongue touches my pussy and I’m done for, the warmth of it sending a shiver through me. Between his mouth and Chad’s hands, there is no way I’m going to be able to hold back my orgasm.

Isaac might be on to something with the whole voyeur thing. Watching them work over my body has me quickly losing myself to the sensations. My orgasm comes hard and

fast, and Isaac doesn't stop. He keeps licking my pussy like it's his last meal.

Chad brings a hand up to cover my mouth and stop me from screaming the house down—we sure as hell don't need my parents knowing what's going on in here. But his hand on my mouth and his legs pinning me to the bed has me coming again. I never imagined I'd ever have two guys worshipping my body, but these two are unlocking things inside me, and I'm so giddy to explore it all with them.

“One more,” Isaac growls before he explores my pussy again, this time his fingers joining his mouth. My body relaxes, and Chad takes my weight while I let myself enjoy everything Isaac is giving me. What a way to wake up.

Three orgasms and two incredible blow jobs later, I'm stepping out of the shower, sort of ready to face my parents. There's a sharp pain in my chest as I think about Lochlan again while I'm getting dressed.

I miss him so fucking much.

I want to be able to tell him about Isaac and Chad, and I want him to touch me the same way they do. I'd love to be with Lo, but at this point I'd settle for just having my best friend back.



Nothing prepares me for what is happening in the kitchen.

Logan is sitting at the kitchen table wearing a bright pink strap on. “Mady, use this on Isaac. It might help remove the stick from his ass,” Logan jokes, but I glare daggers at him at the same time the TV remote hits him in the back. Chad's also glaring at him.

Mum's eyes meet mine. “Why would Mady be using it on Isaac when she's with Chad?” She knows. I don't know how,

but I know she knows.

Fuck.

“Oh, she wouldn’t, I just think it’d be funny because he’s so uptight.” Logan tries to cover up, but it’s too late.

“Good effort, Logan, but I saw Isaac sneaking into Mady’s room earlier, and when I went to knock to let them know breakfast was almost ready, I could hear Mady moaning. So, I know my daughter is sleeping with two of the four men living here.”

Dead.

I’ve died.

This is not the conversation I want to be having with my parents at nine in the morning.

“Good for you, Mads,” my dad says from the stove. “You deserve all the dick.”

“Dad, *please*.” Covering my face with my hands, I wish desperately for the floor to open up and swallow me whole.

“The question is, though, are *you* also making my daughter happy?” My mum asks someone in the room. I spread my fingers just enough to see who she’s talking to and hope to god it’s not Logan.

“Uh...” Caleb hesitates, and Dad comes up and pats him on the back.

“Good for you, son. A hard-working doctor like you needs to have someone who will help take care of you after you’ve spent all day taking care of other people.”

“I never said I was.” Caleb tries to recover.

“You didn’t need to. The look was written all over your face,” Dad responds before going back to flip the bacon in the pan.

“Well, now Lochlan coming to visit makes more sense,” Mum says as she brings plates of food to the table. She has to make room, as it’s covered with sex toys. Great, we’ll be eating bacon and eggs with a side of butt plugs and anal beads.

“I have been shipping those two since they were twelve years old,” my dad says. “I have always been Team Madloch.”

“No, nope, not happening,” Logan says, whipping around in his strap on cock to face my dad. “The only shipping with Lochlan is me, Team LoLo. Bros before hoes, brovaries before ovaries, pals before gals—”

“Team LoLo has a magnificent ring to it, but unless you plan to use that thing with Lochlan,” my father says, looking down at the gigantic cock strapped to Logan, “I’m still Team Madloch. Oh no, now I need to make one for everyone—this won’t be easy. Chaddy and Madleb are good, but I’ll need to think of your ship name, Isaac.”

I’m stuck in the same spot, shock preventing me from moving. What the hell is actually happening right now? Chad wraps his arms around me, and it breaks my trance.

“It’s okay, Mads, they were bound to find out eventually. At least we don’t have to tiptoe around them now.”

“But...” is all I manage to say.

“It’s fine, honey. Poly relationships aren’t as taboo as they used to be,” Mum assures me.

I won’t tell her the reason I didn’t want them to know wasn’t because I have multiple boyfriends, it’s because she is going to insist they do a sex therapy session with her. Do you know how embarrassing it is that she will want to teach them how to please her daughter? My first boyfriend ran for the hills—I’m not sure that his parents were all that pleased when she suggested sessions.

“I think they actually call it a ‘reverse harem’ these days,” Logan says before sitting back down at the table.

“Actually,” Isaac interrupts, “it’s just referred to as ‘why choose’ now.”

Mum stops to think for a moment before giving Logan a nod. “I think you’re right. Are you part of this why choose harem?” she asks him.

“Oh no, Mady told me I wasn’t allowed to be a part of it, but I’m part of her *not* harem.”

Great, Logan, thanks. Throw me further under the bus.

“Her *not* harem?” Mum moves everyone to the table.

“Yeah, her not harem. It includes me, Shamus, and Jarred. We are a part of her harem, but *not* romantically involved with her. So, we’re her not-harem members.”

“Logan, shut up!” My foot meets his shin under the table. It doesn’t stop him, though.

“Oh no, honey. I want to hear this. There are no secrets now. Does that mean Lochlan is part of the not harem?” Mum asks curiously.

“Nah,” Logan says around his mouthful of bacon and eggs. “He’ll eventually be part of the actual harem when he figures out his shit. He’s a sex addict like I am, but he knows Mady is the endgame. I never believed him until I met my angel, and now I know she’s the one I’ll be with. She’ll be my fifteen hundredth woman and the last woman I’ll ever need.”

“Logan, you don’t know what you are talking about,” I respond to his ridiculousness.

“Actually, honey, Logan isn’t wrong. Even though I don’t believe he or Lochlan are actually addicted to sex, it’s more they are afraid of commitment and being hurt. However, in the sex addicts community, I know there can be that one person who brings out the wanting more than just sex feelings, and most of them do exactly what Lochlan is doing and run away,” Mum says while plating her food. This is not your typical breakfast conversation. Gone are the days we talk about the TV show we are watching or what the weather is like.

“So why won’t the others in this not harem become actual harem members?” Dad asks Logan, genuinely wanting to know more.

I’m still trying to figure out why Logan is even here when Lochlan isn’t . . .



“Well, Shamus is dating Stirling, and Jarred is only eighteen.”

“Shamus is also very gay,” a strong Irish voice says from the doorway. I turn to see Shamus standing there looking around the room, confused. My mum jumps up and introduces herself to him before ushering him into the spare seat at the table.

My cheeks flush. Logan knowing about my sex life is one thing, but I don't think Shamus needs to be here for this conversation.

“Wait, hold up a second,” Logan says, looking bewildered and still wearing his dildo. “You're gay? When did that happen?”

“Sometime around fifth grade when Susie Myers tried to stick her tongue in my mouth, and it was so gross I wished it was Matthew Peters instead.”

“What brings you here?” Chad asks, while stroking my thigh under the table. Isaac does the same on the other side. They are trying to ground me, and I appreciate their efforts, but the aftereffects of the orgasms Isaac gave me earlier are fading and I'm getting irritated.

“I came to see what was up with the schedule. When I checked it this morning, I saw no one was on lunch duty today,” Shamus says while dishing up a plate of food and making himself at home.

“What schedule?” Mum asks at the same time the front door slams shut.

All eyes turn to the door, and there stands Lochlan.

He does *not* look impressed.



“Lochlan, come and sit down, join us for breakfast,” Mady’s dad says, breaking the silence in the room.

I look around and see all my friends sitting down, enjoying themselves, like they don’t even care I’m not here with them.

It annoys me Logan is here, but I knew he’d be obsessed with Mum and Dad. They insisted I call them that when I was ten. I showed up on their doorstep cold and shivering after my mum had locked me out of the house one day. I pretty much lived with them after that.

Which I guess is the reason I ended up going to them when shit hit the fan here. I just wish I had the courage to tell them what’s actually going on.

My eyes zone in on Isaac’s hand resting casually on Mady’s thigh.

Interesting. I was expecting to be hit with a pang of jealousy from him touching her—it’s the first time I’ve seen him do that. But it’s just like when I see her with Chad or Caleb. I don’t feel jealous towards them because I know they love her. I feel more anger than anything else. I know Logan calls it jealousy, and Mady even referred to it as that, but it’s not.

I'm angry at myself for not being able to give her what they do.

She looks at me in a different way. I know how she feels. I just don't know what to do with those feelings.

The only love I received growing up was from Mady and her parents, and that wasn't until I was a pre-teen. Mady's mum has been talking to me a lot about past trauma and how it has strange ways of manifesting into other things. She believes that's the reason I am the way I am when it comes to women.

I haven't really processed it all because they decided it was time to come and spend some time with us here.

Everyone is still staring at me.

"No thanks, Dad. I'm just here to grab some clothes."

I don't wait for a reply, heading straight down the hall to Mady's room. As soon as I enter, I'm assaulted with the memory of our kiss last night. It's haunted me all night, living rent free in my head, and I really wish I could shake it because all it makes me want to do is kiss her again.

The door opens and closes behind me and I expect it to be Mady again, but it's not. "How are you doing?" Chad's deep voice cuts through the room.

"Shit, but I'll be fine. I just need some clothes." My tone is short, and I know it's not his fault, but he's the one who came in here.

"Lochlan, she's hurting just as much as you are."

"I doubt that," I snap.

"Trust me, she's not sleeping. She needs you just as much as you need her. Tell me, when was the last time you went more than one night without sleeping in her bed?" he asks casually.

"I haven't since I was ten."

"Exactly, you both look like shit. Can I ask you a favour?" I turn to face him, wondering what it is he wants. "Give me today. I think we need a boys' day out and Mady could benefit

from some one-on-one time with her mum. Logan just spilt the beans about the harem and the not harem. I think we all need to let off a bit of steam.”

It’s not a bad idea. I can’t remember the last time I did something with Caleb outside the hospital, and I don’t think I’ve ever really spent time alone with Isaac. Plus, it’d be good to catch up with Dad.

“What do you have in mind?”

“Meet us at Grumpy’s in an hour. I’ll make the arrangements,” Chad says before leaving the room.

I pack my bag and leave through the back door, so I don’t have to see everyone again.

After showering at my hotel, I go to Grumpy’s and park out the back. Heading in, I say a quick hello to the lady behind the bar, whose name I can never remember, as I scan the area and realise I’m the first one here.

Within minutes, Chad, Caleb, Isaac, Dad, Logan, Jarred, and Shamus all walk in and crowd around me. “So, what’s the plan?” I ask again, hoping this time Chad will tell me.

“The plan is war,” Brad says from behind the group. I didn’t even see him walk in.

“Sup not Chad, you coming along today?” Logan asks right before Brad slaps him over the back of the head. Chad laughs, which results in Brad throwing a punch to his arm.

“Who’s ready for some carnage?” Ralph says from behind the bar. He’s decked out in camo gear and has some goggles sitting on top of his head.

I think I know what we’re doing today. Logan clicks on too.

“Are we going paintballing?” Logan asks hopefully.

“Yep, and then we’re getting drunk,” Chad says, patting me on the back.

“Fuck yeah!” Logan yells with a fist pump.

“I have to work this afternoon. I can’t get drunk,” I protest. They would fire me on the spot if I was to show up intoxicated.

“Not anymore,” Isaac says sheepishly. “I logged in and changed the roster so you could join us. Chad asked me to change yours and Caleb’s shifts so you had the next two days off.”

“Isaac, you can’t keep hacking the hospital system,” Caleb scolds.

“Well, if they listened to me and fixed the network security issues, I wouldn’t be able to get in so easily. Essentially, it’s their own fault,” he says, justifying his reasoning.

“Whatever, let’s do this!” Dad says excitedly. “I’m keen to kick your asses and then get drunk with my sons-in-law and their friends. I want to be on that guy’s team,” he says while pointing at Ralph. “He looks like he knows his way around a gun.”

We make our way to the cars and head to the paintball park.



Chad’s brothers, Brad and Ralph, are made team captains. Ralph’s team consists of Chad, me, Jarred, and Dad. Brad’s team is Shamus, Logan, Isaac, and Caleb.

Ralph and Brad try to explain how it will all work, until Chad gets impatient. “Just point and shoot at the opposite team, pretty simple really. If you get shot, just sit and set your timer on your phone or watch for five minutes and then you can start again. Once you die three times, you’re out and we meet back here.”

Brad and his team are sent to the other side of the, whatever this is called, area, park, fuck knows. All I know is

my balls are sweaty as fuck in these coveralls and I'm regretting agreeing to being here. This isn't helping me with my Mady issues at all.

“Okay, now we know the plan, so let's get out there and kick Brad's ass,” Ralph says, and I'm left wondering what this grand plan is.

Chad claps me on the shoulder. “Go after Brad, that's Ralph's plan. It's always his plan.”

“Got it, Thanks.”

I use the pause between us to run into the trees. I can hear someone yelling but I keep to myself for most of the time, having only shot Jarred once. I find a place to hide behind a makeshift barricade and peek around the side. I see Logan wandering through the open space, so I aim and wait for him to get closer, but movement catches my eye and I reposition the paintball gun to see Isaac sneaking up on him. He opens fire, and Logan screams and drops to the ground. I laugh when Isaac keeps shooting and Logan curls up into a ball. Somehow, I don't think you're supposed to shoot your teammate at all, let alone at close range.

I move from my spot, hoping that by the time I get back to the meeting place, it's time for this game to be over. A splat against my back comes out of nowhere, and I turn to see Caleb with his paint gun pointed at me. And it's not just him, Isaac steps out and shoots me as well. I guess both of them are pissed at me, but they don't understand, what Mady and I have isn't like what they do. We have history—fourteen years of friendship that we could lose if things don't work out. She is my lifeline, and she doesn't even know it; without her and her family, I have no one.

I surrender and sit down, waiting out my five minutes. They both disappear into the trees while I sit, until a siren sounds and relief washes over me. Thank god, now we get to the good part, the drinking. I can forget about everything for tonight and turn my brain off.



Logan has pulled out his signature drink range, and I can't believe he convinced Chad to let him make our drinks for the night, but Logan seems super excited about it.

He slides a Sex Machine—apparently named after me—across the bar, and Chad already sips on his The Chad drink.

“I think I need to change the name of yours,” Logan says, taking his seat next to me. I look at the shimmering pink concoction in front of me and shrug.

“And why is that?” I finally ask him.

“Because you're no longer living up to your sex machine status. I mean, you gave it a good run, but old age must be kicking in for you.” I take a sip of my drink to avoid having to answer him, but he just keeps on talking. “Maybe your dry spell is your mid-life crisis, though I feel like buying a car would be the better option.”

I place my drink back on the bar. “What do you mean mid-life? I'm only twenty-four.”

Chad sighs from beside me. “Real smooth, Logan.”

“What?!” Logan exclaims. “If we use the M word he gets all pissy. I was trying to get him to realise he hasn't screwed

anyone for so long, I lost count after three weeks. He always gets worried about M word and goes home.”

“Bullshit, last week you were with that redhead and I—”

“Nope,” Logan says, jumping from his chair. “You passed out in the living room before the busty blonde could blow you, which was a real shame if you ask me. She had cock-sucking lips.” He moves back behind the bar and starts pulling out fresh glasses.

Chad leans into my side more. “How is *that* your best friend?” he jokes.

“I wish I knew,” I laugh. Logan is a lot for most people, but he is harmless and good value. He also knows how to have a good time.

“I have had to pace myself,” Logan rambles on. “My angel is going to be my 1500th girl, so I have ruled out threesomes and should be able to hit my target by Christmas. I already have a bow ready.”

I laugh at how ridiculous he is, as if giving it all up is just that easy. Is he not worried about cheating or screwing things up? And all this is for a girl he doesn’t even know?

“How are you so sure she will even want you with all that baggage?” I ask.

“Pfft, all of this is worth it,” he brags, indicating up and down his body. “I’m like a good classic car. I might have a lot of miles, but fuck I look good, and my engine still runs better than any of those hybrid cars.”

Chad roars with laughter. “You two are fucking idiots—I now know why you are friends. Logan, sorry, but Julia and you don’t have a chance. Her brother won’t let you anywhere near her.”

Logan scoffs. “That’s the guy who went to rehab right at the intervention? Whatever, he will love me. Julia and I are destined to be together, the stars aligned.”

Chad laughs again. “And you, your future is right in front of you, but you are running in the opposite direction.”



It suddenly occurs to me—this is a damn intervention.

“Hey, son, taste the Voodoo. It’s sooo good,” Dad says, stumbling into my chair and laughing.

Logan snorts. “That’s what we’ve been trying to tell him. He needs to taste the Voodoo.”

“Why don’t you take Paul and set up the karaoke, Logan,” Chad says, trying to give me a reprieve.

Logan almost skips out from behind the bar and drags Mady’s dad to set it up.

Turning back to Chad, I can’t help but question, “Is this my intervention?”

“Is it working?” he asks. “Because I’m getting good at this matchmaker stuff. Isaac’s issues are getting better.”

“You mean he got a boner?” I ask, and Chad nods.

“Yep, and back to the original topic, do you really want to lose her? Because that’s what will happen if you walk away.”

“I don’t want to lose her, but I also can’t watch her with everyone.”

“Jealousy can be hard to work through.”

I take a deep breath in. “I’m not jealous, I get pissed at myself. I had a shit childhood and Mady and her parents are my family. What if my addiction screws it all up?”

Chad reaches out and places his hand on my shoulder. “Mate, you’re doing a good enough job on your own at screwing it up. Do you really think so low of Mady that if you were to give it a shot, and it didn’t work out, she wouldn’t still be there for you? And I hate to break it to you, but lots of people have trauma.”

“Amen to that,” Brad says, coming up beside Chad. “I’m off, bro. Some uni kid got wild and threw his cup into the bar and smashed a heap of bottles.”

“Shit, I hope it costs you a fortune to fix,” Chad says with a laugh. Brad flips him the finger.

“The best thing for trauma attached to fucked up parents is to do the opposite of what they did in life, and surround yourself with good people,” Brad offers.

“Leave before people start to think you’re the smart brother. We all know it’s me,” Chad says and Brad laughs, turning his back on us and walking away.

Music starts, Cyndi Lauper’s *Girls Just Want To Have Fun* fills the bar, and I turn and see Dad singing. I forgot how much he sucks at karaoke, but I chuckle when I notice he and Logan are both dressed in skirts and coconut bras. Mady’s dad isn’t a shy man—her parents are very relaxed in their parenting and very open-minded, and still a little wild. I use my phone to snap a picture and laugh as I bring up Mady in my texts. I hesitate for a second, so Chad snatches my phone from my hands and hits send.

“Stop being a pussy, this should be an intervention,” he says, handing me back my phone. “I just gave you an olive branch, use it.”

Isaac walks over, and he is acting less awkward around everyone, even though his choice of outfit is jeans and a Yoda shirt that says: “My Yoda shirt, this is.”

“Is it too early to leave? I like you enough to have turned up, but Logan has used all the fucks I had to give today, and I want to go home and see . . .” He pauses, refraining from saying her name.

“You can all stop tiptoeing around me. I appreciate what you are trying to do, but only I can work this out,” I say, raising my voice slightly, and Caleb joins us.

“Lochlan, they’re only trying to help,” Caleb says in his doctor voice.

“I didn’t ask for help. I’m trying to do the right thing. None of you have any idea what I’ve had to go through to get to where I am now.”

I push up from my seat and a tiny figure jumps up from behind the bar and scares the life out of me. I take a moment to realise it’s Ella.

“Bullshit,” she snaps. “Here is the world’s smallest violin playing just for you. Newsflash, some parents are pieces of shit, so go to therapy and sort that shit out. You’re using your trauma as a cop-out excuse for your so-called sex addiction and commitment issues. You and Logan have no addiction to anything besides your own egos. Mady is amazing and caring and one of the best people I know. You are afraid that she will leave you, admit it, but guess what? She has been there for you, even when you fuck other women and end up in her bed. She’s laying there knowing that the boy she loves has been balls deep in another woman. NEWS FLASH! You hurt her daily and yet she is still there. Grow up, Lochlan. The world doesn’t revolve around you.”

She finally stops yelling at me and all I can do is blink.

“Ella, what are you doing here?” Chad asks, and Ella smiles.

“We thought you would be at Happy’s, so we are meeting the girls here.”

“We?” Chad questions and two more pop up from behind the bar. Yasmin and Ally give me a wave. “Get out from behind my bar,” Chad says, and Ella folds her arms over her chest and raises her brow, challenging him.

Maybe Ella is right . . . I never considered me sleeping around and coming home and into Mady’s bed was hurting her, and in hindsight, it’s such an egotistical assumption that she wouldn’t care.

That my best friend, my endgame, was hurting as I laid next to her, needing her to comfort me and keep my nightmares away. All those years she was there for me, and where was I? In bed with other women, imagining they were her—how sick and twisted is that? I have been the worst best friend, and she deserves better from me.

“Tequila time!”

I look back over my shoulder and see Mum walk into the bar. She shakes her shoulders in a shimmy and heads towards Dad, who is still on stage. Mady is behind her, and she shakes

her head. She scans the bar and smiles when she spots Chad, Caleb, Isaac, and me at the bar. She heads our way, and we all watch her; it drives home the point that I'm not jealous of the other men in her life. I just love seeing her smile.

"Fancy seeing you here," she says in a cheesy tone, trying to lighten the tension between us.

"I'm just leaving," Isaac says. "I can't take any more of Logan."

Mady giggles and steps into Isaac, who wraps his arms around her and hugs her. I watch as they say their goodbyes. Once Isaac is gone, Mady bites down on her lip.

"Can we talk?" she asks, and I nod.

"You can use my office," Chad says. Mady takes my hand and leads me towards the employees only area.

"No sex on my desk," Chad yells over the music, and I flip him off.

Mady closes the door behind us, and I turn to face her. I hate that I have made her feel this way, that she is unsure on how to approach me.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I shouldn't have forced your hand. It was stupid."

I step closer to her. "Don't be sorry for telling me how you feel, but you're right, I need to decide what I want. I just need time." Mady nods and tears well in her eyes. "Please don't cry, you're my best friend."

"I miss you," she whispers.

"I miss you too," I say, pulling her into my body. Her being in my arms always feels right, but as usual, something holds me back—fear that I will lose her if I screw up, that I will end up just like my parents. I have worked so hard to not be like them, but one wrong move with her and I could lose it all.

Her head rests against my chest. "Will you at least come home tonight? I can't sleep without you."

I place a kiss on the top of her head. “Of course I will.”

“You will?” she asks, surprised.

“I would do anything for you, Mady. All you have to do is ask.”

She pulls away and looks up at me. “We should get back out there and save Chad from my parents.”

I laugh and agree with her. Mady’s parents are a little wild when they’ve been drinking, and if we leave them unattended for too long, who knows what will happen.



When my mum is in the mood for tequila, you always know things will take a turn for the worse. Sometimes it's her, other times it's Dad, and tonight it's me.

“Come on, Mady, you're up.”

Whose idea was lick, sip, suck again? That's right, my mother's. I sigh, there is no way to get out of this.

“Where do you think you're going, big boy?” my father says to Lochlan, grabbing him by the arm and forcing him to sit back down. I step up between Lochlan's parted thighs, and he slightly tilts his head to the side. I lean down and lick the column of his neck, his body shivering when my tongue touches him. Ella hands me the salt packet with a wink, and I tip it across his skin.

When Ella passes me the lime, Lochlan opens his mouth slightly so I can place it in.

“Ready?” I whisper, and Lochlan nods. I don't know why I whispered, something about this feels like we are about to cross lines that we never have before.

I pick up the shot of tequila, lick the salt from his neck, down the shot and lean in to take the lime, Lochlan's eyes never leaving mine. The lime drops from his mouth and our

lips touch, everything around us disappears, and it's just us. Lochlan doesn't pull away this time. His hands grip my waist, and he holds me against his body.

"The first Uber is here, who wants it?" Grace yells from the bar.

Lochlan pulls back from our kiss. "We do." His eyes are heated and warmth pools between my legs. Lochlan is throwing caution to the wind.

No one says anything as he gets up from the bar stool and pulls me outside with him, the fresh air sobering me up slightly.

Once we're in the Uber, Lochlan's hand finds my leg, and he runs his fingers along the middle seam of my jeans. The drive back to the house is torturous. I want nothing more than to swing my leg over his lap and have my way with him in the Uber, but I use all my self-control to let him dictate this, afraid one wrong move will send him running.

The car pulls up to the kerb and we both slide out, Lochlan grabbing my arm and pulling me in for another kiss. He moves us backwards as we get lost in the moment, until my back hits the front door. Lochlan fumbles for his keys while I run my hands under his shirt and along his stomach. I push my hands under the waistband of his jeans, and he grins when my fingers skim the hot flesh of his cock.

*All my fantasies are coming true.*

The amount of nights I would touch myself thinking about him . . . Wanting him from a distance, never able to get this close. The door finally opens, and I stumble back with a giggle. Lochlan kicks the door shut behind us, not bothering to lock it.

We pause halfway into the living room and Lochlan lifts his shirt over his head first, then helps me do the same. We both shuck our pants off, and after two seconds of taking each other in, I'm wrapped in his arms, our kiss heating up once again. Lochlan pauses long enough to scoop me into his arms, then his lips crash into mine as he carries me to our room. He

pauses next to my bed, and breaks our kiss. The next thing I know, I'm airborne for a split second, and I laugh as I hit the mattress and my breasts jiggle. Lochlan stands back and admires me, his face awash with a myriad of emotions. I feel beautiful, like he is finally seeing me as Mady, not his best friend who he can't touch.

“You're so fucking sexy, Mads. I have wanted to do this for so damn long.”

He doesn't wait for a reply, just grabs my ankles and pulls my ass to the edge of the bed. Hooking his fingers into the sides of my underwear, he yanks the lacy material off in one swift movement before his head descends between my legs.

“Oh, *fuck!*” I moan, and my back arches from the bed when his tongue swipes up and circles my clit. He doesn't take his time, his tongue frantically working me over, making up for lost years. He licks, sucks, and does this thing I can't even explain, but it sends waves of pleasure through my body.

“I need you inside me,” I whisper, afraid if I speak up, he will realise this has all been some huge mistake.

His head pops up, and he smiles at me, using the back of his hand to wipe my juices from his face. He stands and walks to the bedside table and pulls out a condom. I don't need to tell him I'm on birth control; he was there with me when I got it.

He must be able to read my thoughts as he slides the latex over his length. “I want to get tested again before I take that jump with you, Mads. I know I'm clean, but you can never be too safe.”

I nod, insecurity washing over me. How the hell can I live up to all the women he has been with?

He moves back towards the bed and crawls up from the end, spreading my legs so he can fit between them. He looks down at me with glassy eyes, but the sincerity in them has me pushing up to press my lips against him. He thrusts inside me and pauses, pulling back from our kiss and resting his forehead against mine.



Something has just changed from the frenzied kisses and the eating me like I'm his first and last meal. His thrusts are slow, and he locks eyes with me. I know what this is; he is showing me how he feels. The heat between us, and the chemistry I have always known we had—he just needed to get the memo.

We move together in perfect unison as he tells me how beautiful I am and how he is glad he waited until now. That I have always been his endgame.

At his whispered words, my orgasm builds. With each thrust of his hips, the friction of my clit pressed tight against his cleanly shaved skin has me so worked up, within moments every nerve ending in my body combusts around him. Lochlan's release quickly follows mine, but he doesn't pull out of me; he rolls us to our sides and keeps himself buried inside of me, needing that connection. He runs his fingers through my hair and whispers, "I love you Mads."

My eyelids grow heavy, but I find the words to whisper back before I fall asleep with his arms wrapped around me.



Stretching out in bed, I realise I'm not overheating today, and my body hurts in all the right places after a wild night with Lochlan. It was messy and beautiful, just like our friendship.

Once my brain has caught up, I process the reason I'm not overheating.

I'm in bed alone.

The asshole left me to wake up alone.

I check my phone to see if he messaged, and he didn't.

Fucker.

He ran again.

I'll show him. I storm out of bed and throw on his tee from the night before. His scent lingers on the shirt and it's intoxicating. My pussy clenches as the memories from last night come crashing back.

Grabbing his suitcase from the corner of my room, I put all his clothes away before taking the case downstairs to hide it from him.

Good luck moving out when you don't have your bag.

Isaac is working away at his desk when I come down to his room, and one look at me has him keeping to himself.

I'm sure I'm a sight. Just fucked hair, a guy's baggy shirt on, and crazy eyes.

How the hell did I catch not just one guy, but four?

As soon as I open the cupboard Isaac lets me use in his room, I regret it. Everything comes tumbling out and spills onto the floor.

“Shit!”

“I told you to get rid of that crap, Mady. You don't even use it.” Isaac's hands find my hips and he turns me to face him.

This is where I keep all my late-night shopping I often forget about buying. We'll blame the brownies.

“Don't even start,” I snap at him. I take the sting out of my words with a quick kiss before I pull away and continue with my mission: operation hide the suitcase.

Isaac leaves me alone while I hide the bag at the back of the cupboard and start strategically placing everything back inside. I know I'm being irrational, but after what we've been through this past week, can you really blame me?

Heading back to my room, I grab my phone before crawling back into bed. I hit the video icon next to Ella's name and wait for her to answer.

“New Hope Morgue, you kill 'em, we chill 'em.” Ella's face pops up on the screen at the same time her unusual

answer fills the room.

“Really, Ella?” I roll my eyes and she lets out a pained laugh.

“Yes, really. I thought I’d try something different. What’s up?”

“That stupid, selfish, asshole left me again. Can you believe that? We have an incredible night together and I wake up to an empty bed. Who does that?” I ramble.

“Wait, who are you talking about? Which boyfriend left without waking you up to at least two orgasms?” she asks while holding up two fingers to the phone screen to emphasise her point.

“Lochlan.”

Ella’s expression changes and I can’t quite figure it out. “Uhhh, you mean this one?” She turns the camera around to show Lochlan standing beside her, holding an ultrasound probe.

I quickly hang up. That was embarrassing—Lochlan just heard me bitching about him. And I unintentionally revealed the vulnerable side I’ve been keeping from him until I knew where his head was at. *Good job, Mady!*



It's not long before my phone is ringing again, and I answer without looking. I just assume it's Ella calling me back.

It's not.

"Mady..." Lo's smooth voice washes over me and I panic.

"New number, who dis?" I say before quickly hanging up again.

I pull the blanket over my head and wish for the bed to swallow me whole.

Why did I have to blurt out my insecurities to Ella before checking who was in the room?

Ugh, rookie mistake.

Someone should write *A Girl's Guide To Sleeping With Your Best Friend*. I'm sure it'd save lots of girls worldwide from the embarrassment I just endured.

My bed dips and Lo wiggles his way into my blanket cocoon before he pulls me into his arms.

"Mady—"

"I'm sorry," I cut him off before he can continue. If he's about to tell me last night was a mistake, I'm not sure I'm

strong enough to handle it. Not yet anyway.

“You have nothing to apologise for, Mads.”

“But I do.”

“You don’t. You just can’t freak out every time I leave the house. I realise now I should have left you a note, but you’ll have to forgive me. This is all new to me. I’ve never needed to do that before. I know it’s my fault that you have this new insecurity. All of this is new for us.”

I’m quick to break down. My walls crumble and I scoot closer to him. “I was worried you ran.”

“I got that from what you said to Ella. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you where I was going. Arden called me early this morning. Ella was having pain, and she was refusing to go to the hospital, so he asked if I could do an at-home scan just to make sure nothing was seriously wrong. You missed her outburst last night, but Ella handed me my ass on a silver platter and gave me a lot to think about. That girl has some serious fire and I really hope I’m never on the receiving end of one of her lectures again. Don’t tell Arden, but his wife scares me.”

I chuckle at his rambling. It seems it’s his turn now. “Ella is harmless.”

“To you, maybe. To me, though, she was brutal. But I should send her a present as a thank you. If it wasn’t for what she said, I don’t know that last night would have happened.” His voice changes; he’s showing me the vulnerability I used to see when we were kids.

“Do you regret it?” I whisper.

When he doesn’t answer, I wonder if he actually heard me. It felt so right being with him last night, but I also know how he has felt about it, so I’m worried it might have been too much for him too soon.

“Yes,” he finally replies.

“Oh . . .”

“But not the regret you are thinking of,” he hurries to add. “I regret not trying with you sooner. Mady, last night was everything I didn’t know I needed. We may have been drunk at the beginning, but I was sober by the end. I had no idea sex could feel that way. Being with you was different to anyone else I’ve ever been with.”

“Really?” I sit up and turn so I’m looking at him.

“Really really?” We used to play this game growing up, and the fact he is playing now has me smiling again.

“Really really really?”

“Really really really really. Mady, I can’t guarantee I won’t fuck up at some point, but I’m in. Just promise to be gentle on me if I do screw it up. Stick with me.”

I spit in my hand and hold it out to Lochlan, just like I did when I was eleven.

“Not this again.”

“Yes, this. We’re doing this. I promised you that day that I’d never leave you, and thirteen years later, that promise is still true. I just need you to promise me the same thing now. You may want to run at times, and that’s okay. Just tell me first, so I know you are taking some *you* time and haven’t finally packed your bags to run for the hills.”

He stares at my hand for a long time before he finally spits into his own and places it in mine.

“There, we’ve sealed it with a spit promise,” I say with a laugh.

Lo’s stare darkens and my pussy responds immediately. Before I know what’s happening, Lo is pushing my body into the bed and his lips are on mine.

I wrap my legs around his waist and pull him closer.

I’ve waited *years* for this, and I’m sure as hell not letting him get away now.



Lochlan and I have been lying around cuddling for a few hours. We've been talking about everything and anything. He's laid his insecurities on the table, and I put mine right there beside his. I love Lo with my entire being, and I couldn't imagine him not being in my life. But at the same time, I love Chad, Caleb, and Isaac in a similar way. It hurts to think about what my life would be like without them.

Mum barges into my room—honestly, I'm surprised she took this long to come. She wasn't awake when I was on my rampage earlier. We can thank the tequila for that.

She flops down on the bed beside me and turns on her side so she can look at us. Her smile is infectious, but I can tell she wants to say something.

"Spit it out, Mum," I prompt her, while trying to prepare myself for what may come out of her mouth.

You never really know what to expect with Mum. "Is this finally happening? Am I finally getting grandbabies?" she asks excitedly. I roll my eyes, and Lo chuckles.

"Yes, it's happening. But—"

"Paul, come here! *Quick!!!*" My mother shouts out the open door, and I hope everyone else is awake.

If not, they are now.

My dad comes rushing into my room and does a double take when he sees Lo and I cuddled up together. I catch the wink he gives Lochlan before he fist pumps the air.

"Hell yeah, I knew Madloch would get their act together." His smile slips and he turns serious for a second. "If you hurt her—" he says, but Lo cuts him off.

“You have permission to hurt me.” His voice is dead serious, and Dad knows it.

“Good, now come on, woman. Leave these two to get cleaned up. Breakfast will be ready in ten minutes.” Dad doesn’t wait for Mum to reply; he leans down, grabs her around the waist, and hoists her over his shoulder. He gives her ass a playful smack when she wriggles around.

“I want to be like them when I grow up.”

Lochlan’s words surprise me, but I realise that’s the same thing I want. I grew up in a home that was filled with love, and although my parents are very open and unconventional, I always knew I wouldn’t settle until I found what they had.

I just didn’t know the love I sought would come from seven different men, all bringing something unique to the relationship.

I may only have a platonic relationship with Shamus, Jarred, and Logan, but I love them just as much as they love me.

We should definitely start appreciating the friends that are more than friends. They are family. You don’t have to be romantically involved with someone to have a relationship with them. We need to normalise this ASAP, because I’m surrounded by people who love me, and I wouldn’t change a damn thing.

“What’s on your mind?” Lo asks, dragging me from my thoughts. His fingers are drawing circles on my lower back. I don’t think he realises what he’s doing.

“Just thinking about how lucky I am to not only have four incredibly hot boyfriends, but to have Shamus, Jarred, and even Logan. They all bring something different to our friendship, and I don’t know if life would be the same without them.” Lo nods, so I continue. “If you ever tell Logan I said that, I will tell Mum you have some sort of erectile dysfunction and make her plan one of her three day sex retreats for you.”

“Ouch. You wouldn’t . . .”



I playfully slap his thigh. I could just imagine Mum and Dad trying to teach Lochlan how to use his penis. “Try me,” I deadpan, and he sighs.

“Fine, I won’t tell Logan you love him. But promise me something?”

“Anything.”

“Go easy on him. The last few months haven’t been great with all the crap his dad did. I feel like a shitty friend because I wasn’t there for him as much as I should have been. I’m thankful Chad was there to give Logan something I couldn’t.”

“What did Chad give him?” I ask curiously. Nausea comes in waves, and I blanch. Lo doesn’t miss it, and starts rubbing my back, trying to soothe me.

Chad really is everyone’s hero. He’s the reason Isaac is facing his fears, he brought us all closer, and because of him I have new friends.

“Chad gave Logan a purpose. I know he wasn’t one hundred percent on board with letting him work at the bar, but he took a chance and now that Ella is cutting back, Logan is being promoted. Chad is even letting him stay in his old apartment now that it’s been fixed.”

“Wow, I had no idea.” I’ll have to thank Chad later.

“Neither did I, not until Chad came clean last night and told me. I realised then just how much we needed Chad. I honestly don’t think we’d be here right now if it wasn’t for him.”

“I have a feeling Ella’s matchmaking may have rubbed off on him over the years.”

This has us both laughing. I wonder what Chad will think when he realises what he’s unintentionally done.

*“Put your dong away, breakfast is ready!”* Dad’s embarrassing announcement echoes through the hall, forcing us to leave the comfort of my bed and face everyone else.



“Right, who here hasn’t had sex with my daughter?” Mady’s mum says to the room, pointing the spatula at each of us.

“You, you, and you don’t count,” she adds, pointing at Logan, Shamus, and Jarred. I’m not sure why they are all here, but my guess is Mady’s parents invited them for breakfast.

“Uh... Mum, that’s none of your business,” Mady retorts, trying to save me. I am, after all, the only one that hasn’t had sex with her.

“It is my business. Before I leave tomorrow, I need to know you are being taken care of and everyone here is looking after you. This relationship will not work otherwise. You are my princess, and you deserve to have these men worshipping your body every chance they get.”

I clear my throat, which is my first mistake—it draws Dina’s attention to me.

Shit.

“You, come with me now,” she says, waving the spatula again. The woman better be careful, or she’ll take someone’s eye out with that thing if she doesn’t stop swinging it around. “You too Mady.” She grabs her daughter’s hand and drags her down the hall towards the stairs that lead to my bedroom.

“Come on, Yoda, we don’t have all day.” I let out the breath I was holding and follow them down to my room.

“Okay, so I’m not stupid,” her mum continues when we get to the bottom of the stairs. “I know you’ve done stuff with Mady, but I also know there is something holding you back from sleeping with her.”

I eye Dina suspiciously. I don’t think anyone would have told her about my issue, but she does this thing for a living, so maybe she just picked up on it. Regardless, I admit defeat. I desperately want to sleep with Mady.

I want to feel her pussy squeeze my cock when she screams my name. I want to be able to give her everything she wants and needs.

Maybe it’s time to talk about what happened.

Decision made, I realise we need to add one more person to this conversation. “Do you mind if we bring Chad down here? He needs to hear this as well.”

“*Chad, here now!*” Dina shouts towards the ceiling. Damn, this woman is loud—now I know where Mady gets it from. Footsteps above us indicate Chad is making his way down here.

I catch Mady shifting slightly out of the corner of my eye, and I know what’s going to happen. I’ve watched her enough to learn the signs—she’s about to bring up breakfast.

Grabbing a vomit bag off my desk, I lead her over to sit on the side of my bed. She leans over the bag while I hold her hair back and wait for her to finish.

“How long has it been this bad?” Dina’s soft voice carries through the room. I didn’t realise until now that Mady has only been sick in private the last few days. She either comes down here or goes to her room, whereas prior to her parents’ arrival, she had no issue doing it out in the living room.

Mady’s been keeping it from her mum.

“A while. She has good days and bad days. But the bad days are happening more often now.” I don’t hear Chad enter

the room, but I catch him going to my mini fridge to get a bottle of water. He takes a seat on the other side of Mady and holds the bottle to her mouth. She takes a sip and swishes before spitting it in the bag.

When she sits back up straight, we know she's done for now. I don't understand how she bounces back so quickly. But she said once that it's like the pressure eases the moment she vomits, and she can usually just carry on doing whatever she was prior to the episode.

Chad takes the bag and disposes of it in my bathroom before coming back to the bed.

Dina's expression is hard to decipher. I have a feeling she is worried about her daughter, but also may be shocked that we don't run for the hills when she vomits.

"I'm okay, Mum. It's just a part of my life now. I vomit. Sometimes it's once a day, other times it's multiple times a day. You don't have to worry though, everyone here knows what to do and how to look after me. *When I need it.*" She emphasises the last part. We haven't had a chance to trial the no schedule thing yet, since her parents have been here the entire time.

"Thank you for looking after my baby for me." Dina wipes a stray tear before she composes herself and gets back on track. "Right, so this is a safe space. There is no judgement, but I'm also not going to force you to talk."

"Thank you." I let her hear the sincerity in my voice. I am grateful for the push from a professional. Mady knows some of the stuff that happened, but she doesn't know the complete story, and it's well and truly time to lay everything on the table.

I take a deep breath and prepare to spill the secrets I've kept for years.

"My mum used to make me have sex with random women. Much older women. I was only thirteen the first time it happened, so I didn't know how wrong it was at the beginning. I was excited these older women were interested in me. I

finally figured out that this wasn't normal. The women used to beat me. They would make me do things I didn't want to do and then if I got nervous, I couldn't get an erection, so they would punish me more." A soft gasp from beside me breaks the trance I'm in. Mady laces her fingers through mine and gives my hand a gentle squeeze, encouraging me to continue.

"When I was fifteen, I stopped getting an erection altogether. My mum was furious I was losing her money, so she disowned me. By then, the damage was already done. For years I struggled to even let a woman touch me. Mady was the first person who I let get close to me. I've never had consensual sex with someone..." I let my words drift through the room. The tension inside me eases slightly when I look around and see the love and understanding shining in everyone's eyes.

I don't know when Lochlan and Caleb joined us down here, but I'm not angry they are hearing my story. If we are going to make this work for Mady's sake, they need to know everything as well. It's only fair. We're all in this together.

Now that Lochlan has pulled his head out of his ass and is diving in with the rest of us, I am willing to cut him some slack.

"What happened next?" Dina asks softly, gently pushing me to continue.

"I was failing school, so the guidance counsellor pulled me out of class one day to find out why my grades had slipped. That's when I told him what had been happening. The rest was a blur. The police were called, Mum was arrested, and I testified at her closed hearing. She's doing life in jail with no option for parole. It turns out I wasn't the only child she was pimping out."

"I've lived here my whole life and never heard about this," Chad says from beside Mady. I'm not surprised. That's when I really learned how to hack. The judge sealed the case to protect me and the other kids involved. There was only ever one news article published, and it was written by a husband

whose wife paid to sleep with me. He was pretty upset when he found out and decided to go public.

“The judge kept it out of the news, and I buried the only article that was ever written about it.”

“I’m sorry I pushed you,” Mady apologises from beside me.

I had told Mady that something happened when I was a teen, and that my mother was involved, but I never went into detail about it. I’ve never been able to talk about it out loud.

“You don’t need to apologise, Mady. If anything, I should thank you. Not only do you let me be overprotective, but you didn’t freak out when I realised there was a way for me to get an erection.”

“I always knew there was more to why you needed to be in control. I’m honestly happy to have you any way I can get.” I feel the truth in her words, and they are imbued with her love and encouragement.

I take a deep breath and let everyone else in on what Chad and I discovered recently. At this point, I don’t even care that Mady’s mum is in the room.

“So everyone else knows, I accidentally walked in on Chad going down on Mady. I was too shocked to move at first, then, when I noticed I was sporting a semi, I ran from the room. Turns out, watching Mady with someone turned me on. After Mady went nuclear, Chad and I spent the day drinking and talking. He was prepared to try something to see if he could help. When we came home, I watched them together for a bit, and since then, I get hard every time I see them together. Chad made me realise I was an idiot for not at least doing other things with Mady. I know now it’s not all about sex. There are other ways to please a woman. But I didn’t see it at the time because it was ingrained early on in me that sex was the ultimate goal.” There. I let my demons out into the world.

“Have you been able to get hard without watching Mady and Chad being sexual?” Dina asks me.

“Yes.” I look around, slightly embarrassed. “I’m more relaxed when someone is in the room with us. It’s like I trust Chad will stop Mady from hurting me, so I let myself feel the pleasure I’ve craved.”

“I’d never hurt you,” Mady sobs out.

“I know, and I hope one day we can be together, just the two of us, but it’s not easy to recover from the psychological part of what happened. I need to work through it slowly. Chad has offered to help.”

“I’m happy to help you as well, if you’ll let me,” Lochlan says sheepishly.

We’ve never been close, but that was my fault. I kept him at a distance. I could see how he was hurting Mady, and I didn’t like it. He has his own demons, but the fact he’s willing to help me work through mine means a lot. “Thank you.”

“Me too,” Caleb adds. “I can’t promise I’ll join in, though. It’s not really my thing.” That causes Lochlan and Mady to laugh.

“Oh, I know Daddy Doc doesn’t share well with others.” I try to lighten the mood with my comment, and it works.

Everyone laughs, and it feels like, for the first time in a long time, everything is right in the world.

“Now that we have all this out in the open, we’re going to leave you, Mady, and Chad here alone. You guys need to jump over this last hurdle, and you need the privacy to do it. So, I’m taking my other sons-in-law, including the three upstairs, to do an escape room. You know, family bonding and all that,” she says with a laugh before standing.

Dina comes over and gives Mady and Chad a quick hug, then she tentatively leans towards me and waits for me to meet her in the middle. I appreciate that she’s not pushing this. I let her hug me and it’s nice. “You can do this. Trust Mady and the guys. They won’t hurt you.” She gives me one last squeeze before leaving the room, with Lochlan and Caleb following behind.



The three of us stand awkwardly in the room. It's one thing to have sex as it naturally progresses, but when it's your mother or girlfriend's mother telling you to get freaky, it's weird.

“Is anyone else weirded out that my mother just ultimately set up this fuck fest for us? It feels like one of those sleep overs your parents organise when you are a kid with the weird neighbour kids because they don't have any friends.”

Isaac laughs. “A little, but I'm game to try if you both are?”

Chad unbuttons his flannelette shirt, and I never in my wildest dreams imagined that a man in flanno would do it for me, but the whole lumberjack fantasy is one he will need to play out for me for real one day.

“You don't need to ask me twice, I'm always down to have sex, just name the time and place and I will be there.” I love Chad's confidence both in and out of the bedroom. Hopefully that will brush off on Isaac, eventually.

That makes both Isaac and I laugh. Chad continues to strip while we watch. Once his flannel shirt is off, he does that sexy man thing where they grab the back of their T-shirt by the neck and pull it over their head. In Chad's case, the white muscle



shirt he's wearing gets yanked off too. *Damn, Chad removing layers is hot.*

"I agree," Isaac says. Shit, I must have said that out loud. "And I'm straight, but he has this sexy rustic vibe."

I giggle because he isn't wrong.

Isaac moves behind me. "Keep your eyes on Chad," he whispers, and I nod. Isaac helps remove the oversized shirt I'm wearing and throws it to the floor, then he hooks his fingers into my leggings and underwear and slowly drags them down my legs. My eyes stay on Chad, who has his hard length in the palm of his hand, lightly stroking it up and down as he takes in my naked body.

Isaac gets closer to me, his skin pressing along mine, and the hardness of his cock pushing against my ass. "I have wanted nothing more than for you to feel that."

Isaac slides his hands across my stomach, and he slowly moves one down while the other holds me in place. My head falls back against his chest. This is a huge milestone for him, and I want him to take his time, to trust that I would never do anything he isn't comfortable with.

Chad moves closer and nods at Isaac. "Do you want me to stay?"

"Please," Isaac says as his finger dips between my folds and circles my clit.

"Touch me," I whisper, looking straight at Chad. He looks from me to Isaac before he falls to his knees and lifts one of my legs over his shoulder, while Isaac takes my weight. His hands roam, touching me, tracing every curve, and he explores slowly as if he is committing this moment to memory. A gasp escapes me when Chad sucks my clit hard, making my nipples harden.

My fingers tangle in Chad's hair, gripping it for dear life. All my guys are exceptionally good at this, but Chad's stubble gives it a little something extra.

"Oh shit, don't stop," I moan, pushing my pussy harder against his face while Isaac rolls my nipples between his

fingers.

Chad pulls back, and I look down at him smiling up at me, his face glistening with my arousal. “The first time you come today won’t be from me. I think she is ready for you now.” Chad stands to his full height and looks over my shoulder at Isaac. “Where do you want her?”

Chad takes my hand and pulls me back into his chest so that we are both looking at Isaac, his cheeks tinted in a cute pink hue.

“Um, on all fours. I . . . I don’t know if I can look at you, Mady,” he says, gaze focussed on the ground. Chad releases me and I take the few steps towards Isaac, lifting his chin so he is looking at me.

“We will do this whatever way makes you the most comfortable, and if you need to stop, we will.”

“And I will be here the whole time, mate,” Chad adds which makes Isaac nod. “Looks like you need to get that cute ass up in the air for us,” he directs as he slaps my butt.

I jump into action, moving towards Isaac’s bed and getting myself into position. I don’t look back; the anticipation has me almost coming without being touched.

I feel the bed dip behind me, and hands grip my waist. I close my eyes and focus on the tip of Isaac’s dick sliding through my folds as he lubes himself up. But he stops just before he enters me.

“You can do it, you want this. Everyone here wants to be here. Close your eyes and take a slow breath in and out.”

Chad keeps reassuring Isaac that he is okay, and we are here for him. He presses into me one torturous inch at a time; I hold still and wait for him to push all the way in. Once he gets there, he leans over my body and rests his head on my back, unmoving. He stays like that for a couple minutes, then lifts himself up and starts rocking back and forward, testing the waters to make sure that he is in control.

Chad moves to the top of the bed and leans against the headboard, stroking his cock in time with Isaac’s thrusts.

His pace increases as he gains more confidence, and my arms wobble as my orgasm builds low in my stomach.

“Shit, Mady, you’re so fucking tight,” Isaac grunts. “I swear your pussy was made just for me.”

“I don’t know, it’s pretty perfect for me too,” Chad adds.

Isaac laughs from behind me as a wave of euphoria explodes through my body, and I tremble as my orgasm washes over me. Isaac comes straight after me, and my body slumps onto the bed.

“Are you okay?” Chad asks me, and I giggle, looking up at him and nodding.

Turning my head to check on Isaac, I find him sitting on the corner of the bed, and his soft smile helps to reassure me. I don’t know what it would have been like to go through what he did, but my heart explodes knowing it’s me he wants to conquer his fears with.

“I’m fine, Mady, but you’re not done yet,” he says, wiggling his eyebrows at me and motioning in the direction of our onlooker.

I turn back to lock gazes with Chad, then push myself up so I can crawl towards him on shaky limbs and straddle his waist. His large, calloused hands grip my hips tightly when I slide my fingers around his length, guiding him to where he needs to be, and slowly sinking down until he is fully sheathed inside me. I sit still for a second to adjust to his size; Chad is large and stretches me at this angle.

Leaning forward, with my hands on his chest, I buck my hips, making sure I’m ready. Chad helps move me slowly until we fall into a rhythm. Isaac surprises me by coming up behind me and reaching around to rub circles on my clit as he lightly bites down on my shoulder.

“Oh, *fuck!*”

All sense of reason leaves my body. I arch my back and roll my own nipples between the tips of my fingers while Chad moves my hips and Isaac uses the wetness between my legs as lube to glide his finger across my clit.

A scream peels from my lips as an overpowering sensation crashes through me, like multiple orgasms have rolled into one and exited my body through my lady business. My body convulses and my pussy clamps around Chad so tightly I feel his cock jerk as he comes.

My sweat-covered body collapses once again, this time against Chad's chest.

"Wow," is the only word I can form to explain what we just did.

Chad's chest vibrates beneath me in amusement as he helps me roll to the side. Isaac is standing beside the bed, holding a face washer. He sits down and brings the damp cloth between my legs, wiping away the mess of cum.

"Are you feeling okay?" I ask, and Isaac nods.

"I'm more than okay, I'm fucking ecstatic, Mady," he laughs.

I sit up and wrap my arms around his neck.

"If anyone wants to know, I'm okay too." We both look at Chad and laugh. "I vote we snack and watch some mindless TV."

I nod enthusiastically. What Dina doesn't realise is that Logan is very competitive and takes escape rooms so seriously. Downside is he isn't great at them—it's almost like he self-sabotages so he can stay longer. They will be out for hours.

"I'm down for food and some TV, so long as it's not those serial killer documentaries," Isaac adds.

"I agree, those documentaries are scary as fuck. That one where the woman killed, cooked, and fed her husband to her lover was a lot."

"Hey!" I protest. "They're interesting and give a lot of insight into why people do the things they do. Plus, it gives me ideas if you guys ever mess up. I'll know how to hide the bodies."

“We have nothing to worry about,” Isaac says to Chad. “If anyone messes up, it will be either one half of LoLo or the entire LoLo.”

I snort. “I’m so telling Lochlan the word LoLo came out of your mouth.”

“Oh, no you won’t,” Isaac laughs. He uses his body weight to push me down onto the bed and rests his body on top of mine.

“And what do you plan to do to stop me?” I raise an eyebrow and taunt him. I like this new playful version of Isaac.

“Are you two okay while I get some food?”

Isaac breaks eye contact briefly to nod at Chad.

When Chad leaves, I expect Isaac to get up. I know everything now, and I sure as hell won’t be making it harder for him. He doesn’t move though; he keeps me pinned down and tickles my side. My eyes water from laughing, and I wiggle my body beneath him—his eyes go wide.

“Mady,” he whispers. I panic and my heart beats erratically. I now know how the guys feel when I have one of my episodes. “It’s hard.”

A very unladylike snort escapes me. “I’m sorry, I’m not laughing at you, it’s just I now know how you all feel when I get sick. I just panicked thinking something was wrong, or that I had triggered you.”

“Let’s get back to this hard-on issue,” he says with a laugh, grinding it into my stomach. Both Isaac and I moan at the same time.

“I love you.” I let the sincerity in my voice wash over him, trying to reassure him he is safe. Getting a hard-on is a big fucking deal for him, and I hope this is the start of something new and positive.

“I’ve loved you from the minute you sat across from me at the restaurant on our date.”

His comment has me laughing again. “That night was definitely one to remember.”

“I know, but you didn’t run when I couldn’t get hard. The one who ran for the hills was me.”

I trail my fingers down his naked back and encourage him to keep talking. We never discussed our failed first date; I didn’t want to embarrass him. But when he never contacted me after, my heart took a hit.

“I’m sorry I never called. I’d never felt like that with a woman before, and I freaked. I started to message anonymously because I was scared you hated me. It wasn’t until you stopped replying that I experienced something else I’d never felt before.” Isaac is laying his cards on the table, just as Lochlan did.

“What did you feel?”

“Worry. For the first time since before I was a teenager, I was worried about a woman, and it scared the shit out of me because of what I went through. It was hard to process the feelings. When I hacked your GPS and found out you were at the hospital, it was like I was possessed. I was in the car and speeding through the streets before I knew what I was doing. When I stormed in and you looked up at me with your big blue eyes, I knew you were the girl for me. I swore then and there I would protect you, and that included protecting you from me.”

“That’s why you needed the schedules?” I murmur as my legs fall open and Isaac nestles between them.

“Yes, it’s also why I never tried to date you, or face my demons. I didn’t want to be the one that hurt you, even if it was by accident.”

“What changed?”

“Chad. Seeing you and him together like a normal couple made me crave you more. But it wasn’t until I saw how much Lochlan had hurt you that I knew I could try.”

“Why?”

“Because you still loved him. You fought for him even though you were both hurting. You were so fucking strong and stubborn that I threw caution to the wind and hoped like hell you loved me just as much as you did him. Yours and Lochlan’s resilience gave me the strength to take the leap, then Chad was there to give me the final push.”

“Isaac—” I cut my sentence off as Chad chooses now to re-enter the room, arms full of snacks. He eyes us suspiciously.

Not only is Isaac hard, he is also slowly rocking back and forth inside of me. I was too caught up in his words to notice that he’d taken another first step today.

“Awww, our boy is growing up so fast,” Chad says, and both Isaac and I laugh.

We spend the rest of the day eating crap and watching *The Big Bang Theory*, with breaks for a handful of more orgasms, until my dad sends me a text to tell me they are on their way home.

At least he has the decency to warn me.

I don’t know what I did to deserve these men in my life, but I’m not going to complain about it. I’m just happy Isaac trusted Chad enough to try to be intimate with me, and I will be eternally grateful to Chad for stepping out of his own comfort zone to do this.

I remember when he first moved in and asked if there was group sex, and he voiced his concern that he didn’t know if it was for him. Well, I can confidently say he is good at it, if that even counts for anything.



“You can’t be serious! I’m not wearing that,” Lochlan complains from the lounge.

“I thought Arden was joking with his request,” I add to the conversation.

Mady is standing in the middle of the lounge room wearing pink princess pyjama bottoms, pink unicorn slippers, and a pink long-sleeve shirt with a unicorn on it that says, “It’s too peopley.” Arden supplied the PJs and slippers, but Mady took it upon herself to make us matching shirts for the occasion.

The thing is, though, we aren’t going to a party. We’re going to a memorial service. Ella lost her friend Steve this week, and Arden thought it would be nice to have a service so she could be surrounded by her friends. I don’t know what the meaning is behind the princess PJs, but unicorns are sort of Ella’s thing. We all had our own pairs anyway, but Arden sent new ones for today.

Mady says Ella will appreciate our shirts, as it’s a design Mady created just for her. Ella is one of her biggest customers, after all.



“Next person to bitch, doesn’t get sex for a week,” Mady tells us before storming through the house. “Now get dressed! We’re going to be late,” she throws over her shoulder as she disappears into her room.

Isaac bolts down the stairs to his room, and I laugh. Now that he is getting some, he isn’t prepared to give it up. Lo disappears and then a loud moan comes from Mady’s room.

I can’t help but roll my eyes. Those two are like a pair of horny teens. I don’t know how Mady does it. She and Lochlan have been going at it every chance they get, as if they are making up for lost time. But even though he’s making her very happy, she isn’t completely satisfied until she’s had Isaac, Chad, and I as well.

We’ve fallen into a new routine.

One that isn’t dictated by spreadsheets and rules.

Mady surprised me last week at the hospital and I loved every minute. I had her screaming into the couch cushion in the office in less than ten minutes. The girl is insatiable now that she has us all.

There’s a knock at the door and Chad answers it. Logan stands on the other side, wearing the same outfit as Mady was, with the exception of his shirt being black.

Logan started knocking and waiting to be let into the house a couple of weeks ago. He let himself in one day and apparently walked in on Isaac, Lochlan, and Chad all over Mady in the kitchen. He says now that he’s close to sealing the deal with his angel, he doesn’t need to be seeing that shit.

They were apparently making lunch that turned into the guys having Mady for lunch. I missed out, but the guys have started using the group chat to include me. I did the same thing for them when Mady showed up in my office. Those suspenders were hot as fuck, and we all needed to be able to appreciate it.

“Fuck, Lo, don’t stop!” Mady’s moans echo down the hall, and Logan cringes.

I never thought I'd see the day Logan hands in his "sex machine status" to settle.

"Are they seriously going at it again? I rang Lochlan earlier and Mady answered all breathy. She told me Lochlan was busy, and he'd need to call me back." He shakes his head and makes himself at home to wait for everyone else.

"Lo, you've got five minutes to make her come before I interrupt and finish the job you started," I yell out to them. She was only just telling us we were going to be late if we didn't hurry.

"Promises, promises," Mady taunts. "Yes! Right there." She moans again, and I have to adjust my dick.

I wasn't keen on sharing her at the beginning, but now I don't care. I love that we all have one thing in common: Mady. She's brought us together and I think her mum may be helping as well. She's been having weekly sessions with each of us individually and as a group. She's actually the one who encouraged us to leave the door open, so the others know what's going on and can join if they'd like.

She's also the reason so much sex happens in the kitchen. After watching Dina and Paul cook together, we realised small things like that can be foreplay as well, so we've been cooking at home more often now.

Once Mady and Lo come out, looking satisfied for the time being, we're all ready to leave for Arden's.

Jarred is standing by my car, waiting.

"I'm a dildo!" he calls before jumping into my passenger seat.

"Why did Mum have to teach him that?" Mady asks from beside me.

"Because she's your mum. It's what she does." Calling I'm a dildo is the equivalent of calling shotgun.

"I'm a dildo!" Logan yells a little too loud, and Mrs Greenberg from next door sends a death glare his way. Logan climbs into the front seat of Lochlan's car.

“Looks like you and I get the back seat,” Isaac says from Mady’s other side.

“No fooling around in my back seat.” I glare at them both before getting in and starting the car.



The memorial service isn’t what I was expecting, but we’re having a nice time being out together. Logan and Jarred have gone off with Julia—Arden’s little sister. I was her primary doctor for a while.

Logan has been talking about her for months. She’s his Mady, apparently. The only issue: Julia is seven years younger than he is, and he isn’t the only guy in her life. Not to mention, Julia has some medical issues that are going to prevent her from having “normal” relationships. She has to be more careful than most.

Mady doubles over and we all work in tandem to move her from the main party space into a quieter lounge room on the ground floor.

We do our best to comfort her while she brings up lunch. I’m pacing, frustrated as fuck—we still have no idea what’s going on. But it’s getting to where Mady needs IV hydration because she’s always dehydrated.

Arden asks questions from beside me, which brings my attention back to the room.

Mady does her best to answer them. It isn’t until he asks about meds that I pay attention. Mady confesses about the brownies she sometimes eats.

I know they tried to keep it from me, but now I’m home more, so Mady had to come clean. I was initially angry they kept me in the dark, but eventually thankful she found something that gives her relief.

“Have you considered gastroparesis?” Arden asks me.

“I have, but it’s not likely because it’s not common for a healthy person to get it. How do you know about gastroparesis?” It’s not a common condition.

“They have recently diagnosed Julia with it. She was experiencing similar symptoms to Mady, and we had some tests done. Her gastric emptying study came back, which showed a significant delay in the gastric emptying. Essentially, there’s nothing that they can do, but at least we have an answer and we know why she’s sick.”

“Your sister, the one with diabetes?” Lochlan asks Arden.

“Yeah.”

I interject. “Gastroparesis makes sense in a diabetic. It’s not a common thing, but it is more common for patients with diabetes to get it.”

“It’s not impossible for somebody without diabetes to get it, right? The specialists that we saw mentioned that there are other triggers.”

“What other triggers?” Mady says, wiping her mouth again.

“Things like vagus nerve damage, issues after surgery. Anything, really. It’s one of those things that if the symptoms fit, then the diagnosis could fit. But again, like I said, no miracle cure.”

“Honestly, I don’t need a cure. I just need these guys to know what’s going on, so they will stop freaking out every time I’m sick or end up in emergency.”

“You should look into it,” Arden tells me.

The pieces finally start to click together in my head. How did I not think of this sooner?

“Why did I not think of doing a gastric emptying study?” I say to no one in particular.

Lochlan comes to stand beside me. “I’m the one that should have thought of it. I studied Nuclear Medicine.

Gastroparesis is one of those conditions that can easily get missed. They don't ask for gastric emptying studies often because it's expensive and time-consuming."

"Don't beat yourselves up, guys. This isn't something that I had even heard of prior to a couple of weeks ago. And now we're all learning how to manage it together." Arden tries to reassure us.

"Can I ask a favour?" I whisper to Arden.

"Of course. I owe you for helping with Ella. I have a feeling we'll be needing your help often."

"Can you set up an appointment with Julia's gastroenterologist, please? I could go through the hospital, but I'm sure you've already vetted all the specialists in New Hope and would have picked the best in the field for Julia."

"Consider it done, but just so you know, it wasn't just the gastroenterologists in New Hope. We have the best specialists in the Southern Hemisphere."

"Thank you, I appreciate it, and I'm here anytime you need."

"No thanks necessary. It's what I do for the important people in my life. If you'd like some privacy, feel free to use Ella's vacant apartment outside. Chad will be able to get in. His fingerprints still have access."

"Thanks, Arden." Chad gives Arden a hug before he leaves the room.

"Do you think this could be what I have?" Mady asks from the couch.

"It's a possibility. The more I think about it, the more it makes sense. But Arden's right, there is no cure. There are other meds we can try, though," I tell her honestly.

"Is it bad that I'm kind of relieved? It seems a lot less scary when we're one step closer to getting a diagnosis."

"Not at all. It's been a long road for us, but I think we're finally on the home stretch," I tell her as I sit beside her and pull her into me.

“Thank you for not giving up on me.” She looks at all of us as she speaks. “I honestly don’t know what I’d do without you all.”

“Lucky you won’t have to find out, Mads. We’re all in this together.” I hug her tight and then pass her to Isaac.



If you told me a year ago I would meet the love of my life and she would have three other boyfriends, I would have laughed in your face and asked if you were high.

Yet here I am, waiting in the living room of the house we all share, standing alongside Isaac and Caleb, waiting for Mady and Lochlan to finish getting ready. And by “getting ready,” I mean waiting for them to finish fooling around. Lo has already had Mady screaming twice. If he doesn’t hurry, we will never leave because I’ll be barging in there to join them.

We’re supposed to be going on a group date. Dina insisted we do a group date night as often as we can. She said even though we are all individually dating Mady, we would all benefit from time spent together. And she is right—the only way this can work is if we all communicate openly. We’ve learned to talk about everything, including any jealousy we may experience, new things we want to explore, and our schedules, which are a lot more relaxed now since Mady lost it at us all.

We still have something in place, so we know when each other has a shift at work, or our individual date nights. Mady even makes a point to add in girls’ night and invites Ella, Yasmin, Ally, and Stirling over, and they kick us all out. Arden

wasn't impressed at first, but now he knows Isaac has motion detectors and cameras in place, he doesn't sit out the front of the house in his car the entire time. Instead, we usually end up at his place or Grumpy's.

Isaac looks at his watch. "I swear to god, she better not have his cock in her mouth again, I'm starving."

Caleb snorts. "You're telling me, I just came off a long shift and if anyone needs to get laid, it's me."

"Hey, I was at the bar all day with Logan. It's me who deserves a reward for that."

"If you all play your cards right, you can all be rewarded when we get home."

We all look up, and my mouth falls open at the sight in front of me—I don't know if this feeling will ever go away. I get butterflies in my stomach every time I walk through the door knowing she will be there, and right now she looks stunning in a short, playful, black halter dress, black heels, and her red lips . . . Damn they do it for me. Just imagining her on her knees, and the red lipstick stain . . .

"Oomph," I wheeze.

"Stop it," Isaac whispers. "That mouth is mine."

I snort. Isaac and I have gotten close over the last few months. He has come out of his shell now, and that shy recluse who would scurry away to the basement is now a confident man who no longer needs me as his buffer, but that doesn't stop us.

"What are you all standing around for? We're going to be late for our reservation," Lochlan says, exiting the bedroom along with that smell . . . I don't know if he realises it or not, but his commitment to Mady didn't stop the smell of fuckboy—it really burns the nose, and you can taste it in your mouth.

"You're not serious right now," Isaac deadpans, and Lochlan pisses himself laughing.

"No, I'm pulling your leg, it's so easy to rile you up."



Isaac and Lochlan have a love and tolerate each other relationship. Would they be friends if Mady wasn't a common denominator? No, but they make it work for her.

Caleb yawns and stretches his arms above his head. Mady walks over to him and throws her arms around his neck. "You don't have to come. You were called in and you need to rest."

"I have survived longer shifts before Isaac redid their entire system, I'm not missing a night with my favourite girl and her harem."

"I really think brother husbands works better," Lochlan says and ducks when Isaac throws a couch pillow at him.

"If you don't stop, I will put your number on a sugar baby site and let the cougars get you."

"You wouldn't," Lochlan says.

"Okay," Mady says, interrupting their argument. "Is everyone ready?"

We all nod in agreement and leave the house. I pull the door shut behind me, and Mady yells I'm a dildo, trotting over to Caleb's car and sliding into the passenger's seat.

Caleb throws me the keys. "I can't drive. It's not safe when I'm this tired."

I round the car and get into the driver's side, while the other three get into the back. Caleb sits in the middle, since Isaac and Lochlan can't be trusted to sit together. I don't know if they do it on purpose or not, but those two actually fight like brothers now.

"Can someone remind me why we are going to Grumpy's? No offence, Chad, but going to the bar while Logan is working isn't my idea of a good time," Isaac complains.

"He insisted. Apparently, it's the six-month anniversary since Chad and Mady started dating," Lochlan says.

Mady turns her head back to face them. "How the hell does Logan know when Chad and I started dating?"

“He has access to the shared calendar, remember? It was the only way to shut him up about being part of the not harem.”

Isaac has never been impressed that Logan was added to Mady’s emergency plan and the calendars. But Mady insisted it’s fine, and Logan is part of the family even if Isaac doesn’t like it. Isaac likes to reference him as the annoying stray that he can’t get rid of because everyone else in the house keeps feeding it.

When we pull up at the bar, Logan is waiting out the front and is dressed in a suit. I roll my eyes at his antics. He wouldn’t tell me what his plans were, just that we all had to be at the bar by seven for dinner.

“Welcome to Fantasia,” he says, and I raise a brow at him. My bar is Grumpy’s.

Logan holds a hand up at the makeshift sign he has taped to the archway of the alley that leads to the beer garden. He has even gone as far as getting the neighbouring building to turn their spotlights on and angle them this way instead of at the large dumpster.

“If you would all follow me,” he says, turning his back and walking down the alley. Mady follows directly behind him, her arm linked with Lochlan’s. Logan disappears into the beer garden and Mady stops dead in her tracks, Isaac nearly running into her.

“Holy shit, Logan, it’s beautiful.”

I have to admit he has outdone himself—the fairy lights add a magical touch, and he has cleared all the furniture and made one large table for us all.

We spend the evening eating, drinking, and chatting. I can’t remember the last time I felt this content. Pulling my phone from my pocket, I shoot off a quick message to Ella.

Me: Thank you.

Her reply is instant; ever since she stopped working at Grumpy's, our relationship has shifted again. She's the little sister I never had. I know Ralph feels the way I do, and as much as she riles Brad up, he also feels the same about her too.

Ella: What for?

Me: For answering the ad on behalf of me.

I never thanked Ella for what she did. She pushed me into this, and I hate to think that if she didn't, I wouldn't have met Mady.

Ella: Remember this next time I do something you don't like :P

Ella: But you're welcome. Put your phone away and enjoy the night with that stunning girl of yours. I can promise you'll like what she has underneath that little black dress.

Ella: If you want my advice, ask her to leave the heels on later . . .

Fucking Ella, I should have known Logan had her in on this. Now I know why she kidnapped Mady yesterday to take her "shopping."

"Ella really sucks at keeping secrets," Mady says as she puts her hand on my back. I didn't even realise she'd moved to stand behind me.

I spin around on my chair so I'm facing her, and out of instinct she steps between my legs. My hands tease the hem of her dress. "What are you planning?" I murmur while kissing her neck.

"Mmmm, you'll have to wait and see." She tilts her head to the side, giving me more access. I stop my assault on her neck and move her face so she's looking at me.

"I love you, Mady."

“I love you too.” I kiss her until she is breathless and squirming. “Can we go home now?” She says it loud enough for everyone to hear.

“We thought you’d never ask,” Isaac, Caleb, and Lochlan say at the same time.

**Also By Amber**

**New Hope Series**

(Interconnected Standalones)

[Chase and the girl who came back](#)

[Arden and the girl downstairs](#)

**Also By Jaye**

**Gifted. Obedient. Deadly. Students.**

(Complete why choose series)

[G.O.D.S](#)

[Checkmate](#)

[Endgame](#)

**Knox Academy**

(Complete why choose series)

[F\\*ck You](#)

F\*ck Off

F\*ck Yeah

F\*ck Her

**With You I Am Home Series**

Boys like You

Girl like me

[Boxset \(Bonus scene included\)](#)

**Grand Ridge University Series**

[Tens - The Invitation](#)

**Coming Soon**

[Street Rat](#)

(Releases 19th May, why choose Aladdin retelling, co write with Melinda Terranova)

Amber's Stalker Links

[Instagram](#)

[TikTok](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Join my readers group](#)

[Subscribe to my newsletter](#)

## JAYE'S STALKER LINKS

[Bookbub](#)

[Newsletter](#)

[Facebook](#)

[TikTok](#)

[Reader Group](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Merch Store](#)

(All of my paperbacks are for sale on my Merch store. These all come with my signature. Postage world wide.)

Website: [www.jayoprattauthor.com](http://www.jayoprattauthor.com)



## About Amber Davis

Amber Davis is an avid reader who, after lots of encouragement from her friends, decided it was time to put pen to paper and write the book that had been niggling at her for some time.

Amber also owns a direct to garment company which specialises in bookish and author merch (along with non bookish designs).

When she isn't working or reading, she's binge-watching TV shows and re-watching ALL the Disney movies. She's a massive fan of all things Disney and has quite a large collection of books and Disney merch.

Amber is originally from Queensland but has been living in Melbourne for the past 7 years.

## Amber's Acknowledgements

Jaye – Thank you for choosing to write this story with me. We talked about these characters a lot, it was like they were real. Let's hope other people think we are as funny as we think we are.

Steve – Thank you for being my biggest cheerleader. Without your on-going support I never would have pushed through with finishing Chad.

Kelly – Thank you for falling in love with my stories, I'm really happy to have you in my corner making all the words pretty and sentences flow.

To all the readers that read Chase and Arden and are now waiting for Chad's story, thank you! You have encouraged me to continue writing and I appreciate each and every one of you.

## Jaye's Acknowledgements

To my husband for putting up with the hundred phone calls a day that I had to make to Amber because I wrote something funny and needed to tell her or vice versa. You know you love your second wife, you may even miss the sound of her voice when you haven't heard it for a few days.

My children, I love you and you're the reason I work so hard, mainly because you're all spoiled and cost me a fortune to raise.

My grandson, not sure he should be thanked because he is one of my biggest distractions, but he is so damn cute, and I have zero self-control when it comes to nanny hugs.

Amber, we did it, we wrote a book together and we are still best friends. I don't even think there were that many times during the process that you wanted to strangle me.

My alpha readers, Patricia, Cheria, Kristin, Ishta, Lena, Brittany and Rachel, every single one of you is worth your weight in gold. I am so grateful that you stick with me and help me whip my books into shape.

My Arc team, I'm truly thankful to have such an amazing team. Reviews are one of the most important parts of an author's release and having these up so fast is amazing.

To my readers, thank you for taking a chance on my books and loving my characters as much as I do, without you I wouldn't have an amazing career.