

A man in a police uniform, wearing a dark blue cap with a badge and a matching short-sleeved shirt. He is shirtless, revealing a large, intricate tribal tattoo on his left chest. The tattoo features a central circular motif with a face-like design, surrounded by various geometric patterns. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with mountains under a sunset sky.

# *Hand on you*

CALEB MARKS

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# **HARD ON YOU**

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**WINGSTEAD SERIES, BOOK 4**



**CALEB MARKS**



**TRUE BLUE DOLPHIN PUBLISHING**



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Sneak Peek



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## CHAPTER ONE

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### FINN

I know it's only a matter of time for the flashing red and blue to appear in my mirror behind me, but I still push my BMW up to seventy-five. I'm in the middle of deserted ranch land in Wyoming. Why are there speed limits anyway?

A siren sounds behind me and, just for fun, I accelerate up to eighty.

When the extra five miles an hour of speed doesn't actually provide my freedom, I sigh and slow down, coming to a stop and waiting for whatever citation the officer tries to pin me with. A fine will be added to the existing pile and a loss of license will be a mild inconvenience.

I prop my knee up on the wheel and yawn.

A pair of hands drop on my open window pane and the head of the officer is lowered so I can see it. "Hello, Mr. Bartender."

*Perfect.* Evan Lowry. The cop who sits across the room of the bar I work at and eye-fucks me for hours at a time.

“Hello, Mr. Cop. Fancy seeing you here.” I look at him under my eyelashes and grin. “I was just going for a bit of a ride. You want to join?”

Evan Lowry sighs in exasperation and leans his elbows on the window. “This is the fourth time this week, Mr. Merritt.”

“I have a lot of aggression and I thought I’d take it out on the wheels of my car and *not* punching people in the face. I’m actually being a model citizen, if you think about it.”

He sighs. “This will be added to your list of fines. I need you to *pay them* and *stop speeding*.”

He’s wearing dark glasses but I stare at him directly where I think his eyes are. “You know me—I like to go fast.”

“And you know me—I like to make you sweat.”

I hum under my breath. “About that ride—”

Evan pushes off the window. “Pay your fines, Finn. There’s only so much I can do when you have a stack of them on your record.”

He walks back to the squad car but I get out and follow him. “What do you mean?” I gasp. “Are you...?” Is he stopping harsher consequences?

“Pay your fines,” he growls, stepping close to my face. “Or I am impounding your car. Got it?” He turns and continues walking. “*Or* it’ll look mighty fine as the new cop car, don’t you think? You’ve already proven it can go unnecessarily fast.”

“I’ve got something else you can impound.” I hurry to catch up to him and slide in between him and the driver’s door. “In fact, I’ve got an alternative to the fines as well.”

He narrows his eyes. “Are you bribing a police officer with sex, Mr. Merritt?”

“Me?” I put a hand on my chest and drop my mouth open. “Sex? No. I don’t know *where* your mind is going.”

Evan growls. “Move. Go home. Pay your fines.”

I pout and trudge back to my car. “Yes, daddy.”

I yank open my car door and turn to see Evan standing by his door, watching me. He walks closer, looking around us and grimacing. “I know you’re upset about Landon’s engagement, Finn. But *try* not to let your disappointment end up with your car wrapped around a tree.”

I give him a bland smile and climb into the car. “No one will care,” I call out, and I hear a muffled ‘I will’ as I drive past him the other way.

I drive – *under* the speed limit – all the way back to Bar None, the bar owned by Elijah Moore and Lane Young who have graciously given me the apartment above the bar to live in. It was only supposed to be temporary. In *my* head, it was only until I could get my ex back, but Landon had gone and become engaged to his boyfriend, Malcolm, and all my plans vanished with that one bit of news.

The proposal had deliberately been done in front of me at Bar None, where I had no choice but to witness it. I have no

real purpose now and we all know it.

I drag my feet, walking back into the main room of Bar None—a dumpy, run-down bar that is in desperate need of renovations, or maybe a flame-thrower—and give a vague smile at Raya behind the bar.

“Where’d you go?” she asks, brushing some crumbs off the bar top. “I started having a conversation with you and then realized you weren’t here.”

I groan as I sit at the bar. “Went to find something to do. Didn’t find anything.”

She smirks. “*Something* or *someone*?”

“Either way, didn’t find anything.” I lean my elbows on the bar and place my head in my palm. “There’s nothing to do here. Maybe I’ll go back to Chicago.”

*And grovel to my parents to give me my job back.*

Raya purses her lips and scans the room. There aren’t many people here but it’ll only get busy from here on out. There’s a Queer Night on Saturday, which gives me hope. Maybe there will be someone who will at least want to *look* at me. Unlike Landon and Malcolm who look *away* whenever they see me. To be fair, I try and look away from them first.

“Well, how about I practice my drink-making skills on you, and you can sit there and get wonderfully plastered?” Raya says, giving up on finding me prospects in this small, dead town.

I grin, my spirits lifted momentarily. “I’m going to go get my laptop from my apartment and then I’ll be back. What’s on the menu first?”

“Cosmo.”

“Spectacular!”

I run upstairs and get my laptop. I might as well do some work on my novel while I’m getting slowly more and more drunk. Raya isn’t great at measuring drinks. I change into sweats, a loose tee, and a comfortable jacket before heading back downstairs. I want to be relaxed for this experience.

My spirits fall again when I get back downstairs and I see Malcolm, Landon, and Landon’s sister, Sadie, sitting around a table, talking excitedly amongst themselves. Wedding planning, no doubt.

That should be me over there. Sadie knew *me* before she knew Malcolm. I suddenly hate that I look so... trashy.

I sit around the half-circle of the bar so I can’t see them and they can’t see me. Setting my laptop up, open to the end of chapter seven where I was last working on, I accept the Cosmopolitan from Raya.

My eyes instantly water and I splutter out a laugh. “Raya. This is just pure vodka.”

She purses her lips. “Yeah. I forgot what the ingredients are. Vodka, a touch of cranberry juice...”

“*More* cranberry juice. And Cointreau. You want a touch of lime juice, not a touch of cranberry juice.”

She points her finger at me. “Got it.”

While I wait for her to remake the Cosmo, I turn to my laptop and re-read what I’d written yesterday.

My main character, a gay detective from the 50’s, is as out of luck with love as I am.

I sigh and delete all of chapter seven, starting it again, as I hear Landon’s enthusiastic laugh from the other side of the bar. Maybe P.I. David Merger would get a better happy ending. But how am I supposed to write what I don’t know?

I groan as I get the second attempt at a Cosmo.

“I need to get laid,” I mutter.

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## CHAPTER TWO

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### EVAN

**M**y date is already at the restaurant I told him to meet me at, and I appraise him as I approach the table. He's wearing a plain sky-blue tee and blue jeans, which seems like such a waste on the slender figure he has.

"James," I say, sitting across from him.

He gives me a warm smile. "Hey, Evan."

"Sorry I'm late. Had to stay at the precinct longer than normal."

He shrugs and pushes a glass of wine across the table towards me. "Already ordered us wine and appetizers."

"Thanks." I look at the menu. I hate this part of our agreement. The small talk, the worrying about times, the expectation to care about what the other has to say...it's a façade, and a boring one at that.

The fact that I have to sit here at all is boring.

“So, how was work?” he asks conversationally. He reaches over occasionally and touches my hand; I have tried every excuse to get him to leave me alone. I’ve intentionally scratched at an imaginary itch on my nose, taken a sip of wine, and turned the pages of the menu, but as soon as my hand is available, he always tries to grab it.

“It was as good as work can be.”

The waiter arrives with the appetizers, and I relish the silence it creates after I nod at the waiter and he leaves us alone.

“Do anything interest—?” James tries again, but I interrupt with a clearing of my throat.

“How’s Bradley?”

He smiles and eyes me coyly over his wine glass. “Why?”

I meet his gaze. “Conversation,” I say slowly, hoping he understands how boring this whole charade is.

He chuckles. “Bradley is fine. Busy. He’s been away for, I don’t know, two and a half weeks now? He’s gone for another two. He says hello.” He points to his phone. “I just spoke to him. He was the one to suggest this place.”

I give a bored look around the restaurant. I’ve only ever spoken to Bradley over text and have never met him face to face, but Bradley’s many month-long stays up at the mine were taxing on their love life. They’d agreed quite seamlessly to find someone for those in between times and it had been straight forward since then. I’ve never had the moralistic



expectations of relationships and, if an open relationship works for James and Bradley, who am I to complain about it? We're all adults.

*Almost.* James wanted to be taken out each time and that was exactly what I had hoped to avoid by agreeing to this sort of plan.

James ends up talking about his job or his dog or something or other I'm not paying attention to, and he's well aware that my focus is elsewhere.

We continue like that for the rest of the dinner: me asking boring questions that I know will get a lengthy response, all while thinking of other things.

I'm confused more than anything of the thoughts that enter my head when I'm distracted. Finn Merritt, with his severe indifference to the road laws and his sharp mouth that I want to feel on me, is constantly hovering at the edges of my brain. He's younger than me by eight years—if his driver's license is correct—which is an age difference I would not ever entertain.

He seems too fragile. So unsure about what he's doing. It's a trouble I can do without, if only he would stop forever being in my way.

I turn back to James as he questions if I want dessert, even though we both know I don't.

"You want to come back to my place?" James asks and I resist the urge to use sarcasm.

"Sure. Let's go."

It's the same thing as always when we get back to his place. James urges his dog to stay in the backyard, mumbles something about offering a glass of wine or a glass of water or a mug of tea. I say my polite "no, thank you" and help him out of his shirt as he grimaces through it, as if this is something *he* didn't ask for.

And every time, I tell him I can leave and we can forget all about it, but he turns and kisses me, trying to draw out a romantic response.

I let him go until I feel his shoulders relax under my arms and his erection starts pressing against the fly of his jeans. He wants me to be Bradley, home from the mines, and honestly, his eyes being shut for the whole process makes it better for me, too.

I don't speak—it'll ruin the fantasy. I let him sink to his knees and suck me off with closed eyes and a different man in his head. We'll move to the guest bedroom when I grunt to indicate I'm close, and he'll lie on his stomach on the bed, away from any mirrors or reflective surfaces. When I'm done, I'll vaguely try to finish him off, but he'll smile awkwardly and go to his bedroom, preferring to do the job himself, sometimes while calling Bradley.

He always offers the guest bedroom for me to stay the night in, but I prefer to leave when he's occupied, ready to be called back whenever James needs that connection with someone and his boyfriend is too far away.

Tonight, I barely wait for him to leave the room before I put my clothes back on. He looks startled but doesn't say anything, instead giving me a small smile. "Uh...thanks. I'll speak to you soon."

"Yeah. Sure."

We don't normally speak at this point and it's thrown us both. "Have a good week."

"You, too."

He's standing there naked, an erection pointing due north, and he's trying to make awkward small talk.

"I can help with that, you know," I say, nodding to his dick. "I have a mouth."

His mouth drops open in surprise and pink colors his cheeks. "Oh, no, that's okay. I'll...I'd rather do it myself."

I nod once. "See you later then."

"Right."

I push past him and walk quietly down the hallway until I get to the front door. There's a photo of Bradley and James on the wall by the door and I study it for a second.

Not my problem.

I'm still worked up, so I go to the twenty-four hour gym in the hopes of relieving some of my energy. Truth be told, sex with James is never truly satisfying. We're as good as toys to each other, and it's getting a little boring.

I'm through my second set of weights when I spot a very pale and sweaty Finn Merritt coming out of the bathrooms and going over to a bench press.

He's got a good body, without question. He's young and slender, no hair in sight and spectacular muscles that dip into his shorts. He has a tattoo of a flower on his hip and I hate the directions of my thoughts. The shorts are tight and not very long, and I have to put the weight set down as he bends over the bench press to pick up his water bottle from the floor. I scowl at myself.

I'm not satisfied with James anymore. That must be what it is. I need something—someone—else.

Finn lies on the bench press face down and I can hear his groan from over here.

He doesn't move for a while and I slowly make my way over when no one else does.

I stand near his head and he makes a strained noise at the back of his throat. "If you want to use this, fuck off. I'm dying."

I chuckle. "I'm here to see if you're okay."

He opens his eyes and cranes his neck to look up at me. "Mr. Cop."

"Mr. Bartender. Can you move or are you *actually* dying?"

"Jury is still out," he mumbles. Despite his words, he lets his legs flop over the side of the bench and he collapses onto

the floor, staring up at the ceiling. I sit on the abandoned seat and reach down to force his gaze to mine.

“You’re high?”

“Drunk. *Was* drunk. I thought I’d get the hangover out of my system early.” He squeezes his eyes and whimpers. “Now I’m dying.”

I squint at him. “So, it’s working then?”

“No. I feel like I’m being fucked by Satan. Which is surprisingly not as fun as it sounds.”

I exhale a laugh and reach down again to try and haul him to sitting. “Come on. I’ll drive you home. I don’t think you’re getting out of this hangover, I’m afraid.”

He grumbles under his breath as I manage to get him to his feet, his arm around my shoulders and my arm around his waist. He’s leaning all his weight on me, but there isn’t a lot of him to be concerned about—I could lift him with ease should I need to.

We make it back to my car and drive swiftly towards home. I’m a little relieved to see his car is still in the Bar None parking lot. He must have walked to the gym. I open the bar with the key Finn hands me and guide him carefully up the stairs to his apartment.

He sits on the edge of his bed and watches me as I get him a glass of water and hand him some Advil. “I’ll come by the bar tomorrow to check on you,” I say shortly. I don’t really know

what to do next. He's staring at me with a blank expression. "What are you doing?"

"Looking at you in my apartment," he murmurs, a small smile on his face. "It's so weird."

I sigh. "Well, lie down and get some rest."

"Yes, sir," he mutters. At least he's not calling me daddy again. He stands up on shaky legs and I reach out to grab him as he nearly topples over. We're close now, his lips only inches away from mine.

I lean forward to kiss him, but he whispers out a shaky, "I wouldn't." Then I move back in alarm. "I've just vomited a lot," he clarifies. "And I'm either about to pass out or vomit again. I'm not sure which yet."

I take a second to get a hold of the rise of rejection in my throat before nodding and forcing him to lie down.

"Stay with me," he breathes as his eyelids flutter closed and he drifts off to sleep.

"Yeah," I whisper. I sit on the chair on the side of his bed and watch him sleep for a moment, making sure he's still breathing. When I can tell he's sleeping, I slide his shoes off carefully, cover him up with the covers from his bed, and use his key to get back out of the bar.

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## CHAPTER THREE

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### FINN

I wake with the biggest hangover I've ever experienced. Well, it's probably not the biggest I've *ever* experienced; there had been too many stupid nights in college I had woken from, feeling a similar way.

There's a note sitting on the nightstand and I pull it towards me, squinting at it through my painful headache to figure out what it says.

'FINN, PAY YOUR FINES – MR. COP'

I chuckle and slowly sit up, trying to steady my wobbly stomach. There's another note sitting on the armchair by the bed.

'YOUR KEYS WILL BE DOWNSTAIRS. MAKE SURE YOU PICK THEM UP. I AIN'T RESPONDING IF YOU GET LOCKED OUT'

My grin gets wider and I make it to a standing position. There's yet another note taped to the back of the door and I unstick it.

‘CALL ME WHEN YOUR AWAKE SO I KNOW YOUR ALIVE’

Other than using the wrong ‘your,’ I can’t help but feel something in my chest at the notes. I place all three of them carefully in my nightstand drawer and grin, my headache temporarily forgotten.

I climb back into bed and grab my phone, finding Evan’s contact and hitting call.

“Lowry,” he answers gruffly, and just that one rough word causes a stirring in the front of my athletic shorts.

“You left me notes. Cute.”

There’s a hesitation on the other end of the phone before he clears his throat. “You’re alive then. Good to know.”

“Look, this is early, okay?”

“It’s one p.m.”

“And? It’s early. This is what I get for letting Raya test her drink-making skills on me. If you want to get hammered, find her and ask her to make you a cocktail.” I flop back into bed and lazily run my hand down into my shorts.

I can’t say I would have previously looked twice at someone like Evan Lowry, but if he’s here... I’ll take it. He’s definitely attractive. He’s built large but strong. Square jaw, buzzcut, serious expression. Whatever he’s doing, it’s working for him.



“Hey, did you try to kiss me last night?” I ask. “How about you come over and we try that again?”

“You’re delusional.”

A slow smile spreads across my face at his instant retort. “Is that a ‘yes?’ A ‘no?’ I can come to the precinct if it’s easier.”

“If you come to the precinct, we’re locking you behind bars until you come up with the money for your fines.”

“Kinky, but I’m pretty open to try new things.”

He lets air out of his lungs slowly, as if he’s trying to hold back his temper. “I’m glad you’re alive, Finn.”

The sincerity in his voice throws me for a spin. We’d spent so long with this flirty back and forth that I’m not used to receiving something that feels so serious.

“Yes, well, you wouldn’t get the money for the fines if I died.”

“I’m not getting the money now. In fact, I’m *more* likely to get the money if you died.”

I chuckle. “But that’s not very fun.” I close my eyes to stop the rise of vomit in my throat. “Now, I have to go vomit with a volume and intensity that will be frankly astonishing. I’m far more used to things coming *in* my body.”

I hear Evan’s even breathing on the other side of the phone, but any further thought is interrupted by me losing grip on my hangover.

“Adios, Mr. Cop.” I hang up and sprint to the bathroom, making it just in time.

It takes a good hour, two showers, and sitting on the bathroom floor for another hour before I get the stability back into my legs and can make my way downstairs. I give a weak smile to Lane behind the bar and slowly straddle the seat in front of him. “*Please* teach Raya how to make drinks. Save my ass from the hangover of all hangovers.”

He smirks. “You didn’t have to drink all the drinks, just ‘cause she made them.”

I glare at him. “I *didn’t*, yet I’ve been hit by a fleet of trucks that turned around and decided to hit me again.”

Lane laughs. He’s wearing a loose flowing shirt that my mom would wear, a pair of skintight skinny jeans, and glittery boots that are eye-wateringly high in an effort to make him taller for once. I have to admit: it’s nice to come to Wingstead after college, to find someone like Lane; someone not afraid to be his most sincere self. All the other queers in our friend group could pass as straight if they didn’t open their mouths. Lane was different, though. Unapologetically proud.

“You coming to Queer Night tonight?” Lane asks. “You’re not rostered to work.”

I raise my eyebrows. “I know. It’s Eli’s first time working behind the bar after the whole ‘nearly killed you in a car accident and went to rehab’ thing.”

“Yeah, *that*,” Lane says with a narrowed gaze.

“How’s he feeling about it?”

Lane shrugs. “Fine, I think.” He looks over his shoulder as the door opens and the man himself walks in, smiling calmly as he walks over to us. “Speak of the devil,” Lane murmurs, leaning over the bar to accept his kiss. “Hello, gorgeous.”

Eli sits next to me. “You were talking about me?”

“Always, my love. I can’t get enough.” Lane smiles and throws a cautionary glance around the bar. “We were talking about tonight.”

“Ah. You coming?” he directs to me and I shake my head.

“I will for the beginning, but then I have a *date*. Can you believe it?” I open my phone and sigh. “Well, I’m meeting him at his place. And he claims he’s just ‘looking for some fun.’”

“That sounds fun,” Eli says. He suddenly frowns when he sees Lane’s wince. “What?”

“It’s code for ‘my wife is away visiting her mother for the weekend,’” Lane explains.

“Or ‘I’m definitely straight, but I love it when gays lick my asshole’.” I purse my lips. “Just be grateful the only gays you were with were Elias and Lane.” I eye him. “Although, I can’t help thinking that maybe you would have been a ‘looking for some fun’ guy.”

“For sure,” Lane says with a laugh.

“Did you?” I squint my eyes at Eli. “Was there someone in between the college fumbling days of Elias and then...

whatever *this* is?”

“The love of my life?” Eli frowns. “And no.”

“I’d be surprised if you had,” Lane says with a smirk.

“Yeah, because I would have *told you*.” Eli rolls his eyes and turns to me. “You’re still going on this date then?”

“Duh. I’m bored and horny. Why not?”

He shakes his head.

For the rest of the day, all I can think about are the notes from Evan sitting in my nightstand drawer. During my date, it’s no different.

All it takes is an awkward offering of wine, a backwards facing photo frame on the mantel, and noticing an indentation on his ring finger, and I’m suddenly wondering if this is not the best way of getting over Landon. It just makes me miss him *more*.

I put it out of my mind and kiss the poor guy—who claims his name is Gerald, but I’d only believe that if I saw a birth certificate—and try and get him to lead me in the direction of his bedroom.

He’s content to stay in the living room, apparently, and he looks appalled whenever I put my mouth near his. I frown when he’s not looking at me, all red-faced and blotchy, and reach for the front of his pants. Fine, we’ll skip the rest of it. No complaints from me.

He continues throwing nervous looks around him even though we're in his own fucking house.

Eventually, I'm on my knees on the scratchy carpet. "Do you have condoms here?" I ask, looking around at the rather empty furnishings.

His red face gets even brighter. "Oh, I don't... do that."

"Condoms?"

"No..."

"Sex?" He nods and I frown. "I wasn't expecting you to bottom or anything. I already sort of expected you'd top. Trust me, I can—"

"I don't do that either."

I sit back on my heels and slowly blink at him. "Fine," I say with a huff. "Blowjobs, it is..."

At least it's something.

I lower my head, but I catch a guilty look in his eye. "You don't do *that* either, do you?"

"I'm not opposed to *you* doing it, though. I like to finish on your—"

"Charming," I snap. I sit back and release him, getting to my feet. "Get a fucking sex toy, dude. Wank on a photo or something."

I'm not even hard anymore. What a waste of a night. He'd dragged me out until close to midnight, was more than content

to let me suck him off, and then he was going to send me on my merry way, as if that was all I needed.

I waltz out of the house, contemplate doing something to his front door so his wife would know I was here in the first place, but decide against it and wander through the dark streets of Wingstead. It's warm and quiet, and I feel surprisingly at ease being alone.

"I hate my life. I hate my life. I hate my life," I mutter over and over as I walk mindlessly through Wingstead to find some sort of amusement. The bar is closed, Queer Night is over, all my friends are on do-not-disturb mode after Queer Night, because they all have fucking partners to fuck all night long, reminding them why they go to Queer Night in the first place.

I amble towards a skate park, sitting on the edge of the ramp and blowing air out of my lips loudly.

I'm not there long when I hear footsteps behind me and a flashlight beam turns onto my face.

"Ah. Mr. Bartender," a familiar voice says, moving to stand in front of me, looking up.

I groan and lie back on the concrete. "Are you stalking me?"

"You mean, am I checking out an individual lingering in a notorious dealing spot? Yes. That's my job description."

With minimal effort, he's sitting next to me, in full police uniform. It contours his body in the nicest possible way, but I

turn to avoid looking at it. I'm not in the mood for more teasing.

"You have a tracker on me and we both know it."

He chuckles, deep and masculine, and I close my eyes.

"You need to stop looking so suspicious all the damn time," Evan says.

"Just working with what God gave me."

He chuckles again and pulls a small bag of Skittles out of his pocket. He offers me some and I eye it suspiciously. "Took 'em off someone earlier," he explains. "Thought they looked odd. Turns out they're just Skittles."

"I don't trust you."

He shrugs and pops one in his mouth. "I then paid the person for it. Along with the rest of my groceries."

"So you... bought them." He offers them out again and I chuckle, shaking a few into my palm and eating them slowly. I watch him in silence for a moment as he studiously eats his candy. "I'm more of a chocolate guy, personally. I had braces as a kid and Skittles were a no-go."

"Ah. Here, then." He reaches into another pocket and pulls out a Hershey's kiss. He rests it on my knee as if it was completely normal and turns back to his Skittles, looking out over the quiet early summer air.

I stare at it in bewilderment before chuckling. "Is everything on you made of candy? Do you *actually* have a gun or is it

made of chocolate?”

“Please don’t put your mouth on it to see.”

The night air, the Skittles, and the Hershey’s kiss still balancing on my knee has made me forget about the torture from earlier.

I’m ready to play.

I say, “I think you’d like it if I put my mouth on your gun.”

A ghost of a smile crosses his lips. “Wouldn’t want to shoot into your throat, Mr. Bartender. It might lead to some unpleasant tastes.”

“Not if you do it right. Or I do.”

He chuckles and stands up. “Enough loitering for tonight. I didn’t see your car. Are you walking around at night being suspicious?”

I stand up and follow him towards the police car. “Do you want to hear about my awful excuse for a date?”

“Not particularly.”

“I’m telling you anyway.” I climb in the passenger’s seat and sigh dramatically. “Was messaging a guy online. He seemed cool. We agree to meet up. Claimed his name was *Gerald*, sure.”

I continue. “He kept putting it off until tonight, but eventually I meet him at his place. He’s married, fine... couldn’t give a damn to be honest. Things are happening, but then he claims that he doesn’t actually ‘*do*’ sex. I say it’s fine



and I'm more than happy to receive, but he says he doesn't do *that* either." Evan isn't particularly listening, but I don't care. "Then he says that really the only thing he *does* do is let me suck him off and if he could come on my face, that would be spectacular."

Evan frowns over at me. "Did you let him?"

I shoot him a bored look. "No. I'm not opposed to a man coming on my face as long as he is anticipating returning the favor in some way, you know? I might be desperate, but I have a *little* bit of self-respect left."

"Mm..." Evan is staring straight ahead, his jaw tight.

I throw a vague glance in the direction of the front of Evan's pants, but the navy blue of the uniform and the dark interior of the car makes it impossible to see anything.

"So, anyway. That was my awful night. I'm stupidly sober, annoyed, and sexually frustrated."

Evan doesn't say anything as he pulls up at Bar None, although I notice he gets out, too. Maybe my night won't be *so* bad. Has my flirting actually worked?

I pat my pockets for my keys, before groaning and resting my forehead on the closed and locked door.

Behind me, Evan sighs. "You never picked up your keys from the bar, did you?"

I slowly turn to face him and purse my lips. "*You* said you wouldn't respond if I got locked out."

“Maybe I’ll leave you here,” he growls.

“*Maybe* I’ll wreak havoc around Wingstead until you help me?” I clasp my hands together and squeeze my eyes shut. “Please? Just drop me at Lane and Eli’s. I’ll borrow their key.” I pout when he doesn’t say anything. “I’ll get on my knees.” I let a smirk cross my lips. “To beg, of course.”

Evan continues to stare at me, his breathing even and heavy, before rolling his eyes and turning on his heel. “Come on.”

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## CHAPTER FOUR

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### EVAN

*C*hrist, Lowry, what the hell are you doing? I think to myself as I drive in the opposite direction of Eli Moore's house.

"Where are we going?" Finn asks, frowning around at his surroundings.

"My house," I say curtly. There's no use beating around the bush about it. "I've got to stop at the precinct first, though."

Finn sits up straighter in the car and he clasps his hands in his lap in excitement, a boyish grin crossing his lips. "Wow, you really *do* go above and beyond for the citizens of Wingstead. If I'd have known that, I'd have been locked out of my apartment months ago."

*Boy, am I in trouble.*

I ignore him for the most part. He's making my focus on the current task mighty difficult.

"Yes, well, I didn't want to leave you out in the night like that. It's charity, nothing more."

He hums through a grin.

I shift in my seat, the beginnings of an awkward silence coming on. “And I’d be the one to get called if you’re sleeping by a dumpster, so I’m really just saving myself time.”

His grin gets wider and he turns to look at the window. “I’m a stray dog?”

“Precisely.”

“Careful,” he murmurs softly. “I might bite.”

I pull into the precinct parking lot. “So might I.” I smirk at him and get out. “Stay here. Good dog.”

He lazily says ‘woof’ before lounging in the seat and winking at me.

I walk into the precinct, my blood thrumming in my veins. The building is small, but it fits the five desks in the center of the room and the office which should be for the chief, if ours didn’t work in Cheyenne most of the time and is only here for maybe one afternoon a week.

That’s the office I have my eye on. The chief is moving up soon and I’ve got the best shot at the job.

A short hallway to the right leads to the officers’ kitchen and break room, although we normally eat lunch at our desks. Off that hallway are a few cells. Tonight only one is occupied by a man sleeping off a drunken night out. Queer Night I imagine. Although this man looks like he’d go anywhere that would supply limitless alcohol surrounded by cheerful queer folk.

“Lowry,” Pepper says, a mug of hot tea in his hand as he comes out of the kitchen. “I just got the water to boil. Coffee?”

“Thanks, but no.” I give him a tense smile and store the belongings I don’t take home into the drawer of my desk. My area of work is closest to the door, with Pepper behind me. To my left is an officer named Tamara, who has a fantastic right hook and a stink eye for the history books. Behind her is Officer Smith, and no one has ever been sure if Smith is their first name or their last. The last desk is empty most of the time, although now it’s being occupied by Malcolm King, who has recently decided he wants to see how he is at enforcing the law all because of one comment I made a while ago. He’s studying for his police exam, but he sits in the precinct and watches the goings-on while he does so.

“I’m finishing up early,” I say to Pepper, who is frowning into his cup of tea as if he’s surprised it’s still hot. “Nothing’s happening out there. Got a... personal issue to take care of.”

Pepper smiles blankly and salutes with two fingers. “You get that loiterer call?”

I wave my hand. “Nothing serious. I’ve moved them on.”

*With the intention of getting them into my bed.* God, Finn has been teasing me long enough and it’s time to act on it. I’m sick of him being constantly in my thoughts.

When I walk back out, my mind on the night ahead, Finn is still in the same place I left him, leg propped up on the dash and typing on his phone.

“Foot off the dash,” I growl. “You’re in a police car.”

“You were in there for ages! I thought you’d forgotten about me or were trying to lure me in, ready with handcuffs.” He pauses and a sexy grin falls over his lips. “That’s a tempting thought. You’d be good with those, right?” His eyes drop to my belt where my cuffs are usually kept, before smirking. “Then I tried to figure out how to turn the siren on, tried to radio for back-up on a murder suspect, and pretended I was in a high-speed chase.”

“Being on *this* side of things would have been unusual for you,” I say dryly, driving faster the more he says and the hornier I get. I haven’t been this excited in ages. Why had I stuck with James for so long? Just *looking* at Finn is making my pants too tight.

“Mmm...” He sits up and looks out the window as I wind the car up the mountain to my hidden driveway between the trees. “Okay,” he says, impressed. “This is very... murderous. Mysterious. I like it. Are you going to kill me? Are you going to tie me up in the basement and beat the shit out of me with a baton? We’ll never know.” He makes a noise through his teeth. “Ah. I really should have known to watch out for police officers, shouldn’t I? They’re always the worst.”

My converted barn comes into view with its bright porch lights. It’s been a labor of love. It had been my father’s, but I claimed it when the old man finally died. People leave me alone, I leave them alone. It’s perfect. I don’t think anyone even knows I live here.

“Oh my God,” Finn whispers, getting out of the car and looking around. “Evan, this is *gorgeous*.”

I grunt and we walk inside. It’s a modern interior, with cozy wood finishings, a loft that contains the master bedroom and bathroom, and a dark, masculine edge to the place.

I watch Finn looking around, eyeing the service medals I placed on the wall. There are mementos of my time in the war all around the place if one was inclined to look. Not that many had ever been here before.

In fact... *no one*.

Finn is rich—rich parents, rich son. He had almost certainly been in better places than this, but he’s studying the place with a scrutiny I can’t fathom.

“They’re not mine,” I mutter as I walk past him to the kitchen and pour myself a drink, eyeing him as he looks at the medals on the wall. “My buddies. We were all on tour together.”

“So why do you have them?” Finn asks, accepting the drink I hand him.

“Not much use to them anymore. Being dead and all.”

Finn smiles sadly. “Oh. I’m sorry.”

I stand next to him and look at the medals. “Two of them dead. Right in front of me. Another one in my place. The last two...suicide.” I nod at one. “Two months after he was discharged. Threw himself off a bridge.” I look at the other one. “Oliver had bad PTSD. Denied it for two years. His wife

was pregnant and he was happy.” I purse my lips and sigh, turning away from the medals and walking towards the staircase. “Sped headfirst into a tree. Left a note.”

I hear Finn’s footsteps follow me, and his voice is soft and sad when he speaks. “I liked the notes you left me.”

He catches up to me in the doorway of my bedroom and his gaze flickers to my lips and then back up to my eyes.

As if there was a magnet pulling us together, his lips gradually meet mine. Immediately, it feels different than with James. There’s no awkwardness or shame attached. Instead, there’s Finn clawing me closer and hungrily urging me to respond.

I growl at the back of my throat and pick him up as if he is weightless. My cock is rock hard, harder than it’s been in months, and when I lay Finn on the bed with very little ceremony, I see a similar strain against the front of his pants. I stand up straight and survey him for a moment, his cheeks flushed and his mouth pink and wet.

He sits up and runs a hand with long, skilled fingers over the tight material over my fly.

“What do you want?” I whisper, wanting to hear him say the words.

“Whatever the fuck you want to do,” he breathes, unbuttoning my pants and tugging them down, in a hurry to get to his prize. When I’m free, his eyes darken with greed and he hums at the back of his throat in approval.



This *might* be a mistake. But fuck, if I'm not going to take advantage of it. The guy is looking at me as if I'm his last fucking meal, and I've never wanted anything more than to give him whatever he desires.

He's staring at my cock, his mouth parted and eyes hungry, but he doesn't move. Instead, he looks at my face and gulps.

"What?" I growl.

"Tell me to." His voice is a breath. His eyes widen a fraction of an inch. "Tell me to suck you."

A slow smile spreads across my face when I get his meaning. I lean down and place his chin in between my thumb and forefinger, hovering my lips above his. "Mr. Bartender, please put this delicious, witty, sharp, beautiful mouth where it belongs." I plant a searing kiss on his lips, before standing up straight again, stepping closer.

Desire burns in Finn's eyes and he wraps his lips around me. The breath leaves my throat as he groans, taking me deep into his throat and pulling back again.

"Fuck, you're good at this," I moan, holding a hand on the side of his face, mainly for balance and not guidance, but he tilts his cheek into my palm. God, I don't know how much longer I'm going to last if he keeps it up like this. "Oh, God, Finn. Okay, stop. *Stop.*"

He pulls away and looks up at me expectantly. He's going to drive me mad, I just know it. I lean down and kiss him, slowly, teasing, a gentle torture with how hard we both are.

I undress him, taking my time, keeping my movements slow and my kisses tender, doing all I can to drive him wild. It's been so long since I've had time to really enjoy this and I can't imagine it'll happen again soon. It *shouldn't* happen again soon.

Once he's fully naked, he scrambles back on the bed, facing away from me and sitting up on his hands and knees.

I chuckle as I pull my undershirt over my head. "On your back. I want to look at your face."

He looks at me in pleasant surprise, before smiling wide. "As you wish."

I strip, grab a condom and the bottle of lube from the bathroom attached to the bedroom and return to see him lazily jerking his erection, gazing around my room with that same scrutiny from earlier.

"What do you want?" I ask softly. He turns to look at me and beams.

"Whatever you—"

I climb on the bed, hold his face in my hands, and kiss him slowly to interrupt him. "What do *you* want?"

He searches my expression. "I... don't know," he whispers.

I study him for a second. "Okay." There are desires there he's not admitting. It looks like I'll have to screw them out of him. I kiss him, slowly making my way down his body, pushing his legs up to his chest and planting a kiss on his ass

cheek. “How prepared were you for your date this evening?” I murmur and he laughs breathlessly.

“Oh, *very*. You could fuck up into my bowels and won’t find anything.”

I smirk and put my tongue to good use, drawing out low sounds from Finn’s throat that are bringing me closer than I’d like. *Get it together, Lowry*, I growl at myself. I’m thirty-four years old. I shouldn’t be nearly getting off at eating someone out.

I ease off and find the condom that has been dropped into the covers, and once we’re both ready, I hold myself above him, enjoying the fluttering of his eyelids and the exhale as his body accepts me.

I have the absurd desire to hold him close, to know what it’s like to have his hands roam over my skin, but I don’t ask for it. I brace myself back on my knees and hold his hips, using him as leverage.

He’s holding back somehow and I fold forward, letting his legs go around my waist. I scrape gently with my teeth along his jaw and feel his arms go around my back. “You can moan if you want,” I whisper, my voice husky. “Don’t hold back on my account.”

It clicks when Finn gives me a confused smile and tries to be louder. He *wants* me to tell him what to do. I decide to test my theory.

I still inside him and the breath leaves his throat. I lean down and run my tongue up his neck until I get to his earlobe, taking it between my teeth and causing a delicious yelp to come from his lips. “I changed my mind,” I breathe. “Shh...”

I hear his mouth pop open in surprise and I lean back to look into his expression. He’s as hard as a rock and when I lean back to ease one long stroke into him, his hands clutching the bedsheets, his lip held tight between his teeth.

“Well done,” I croon, leaning down again and kissing him slowly. “Apparently, you *can* listen to orders. That’s good to know.”

He frowns a little and opens his mouth, but I start a rhythmic thrusting into him and all remaining thoughts leave his head.

I don’t want to think anymore than he does, so I curl up on top of him, balancing my weight on my forearms, and murmur that he no longer has to keep quiet, letting the sound of his gasps and moans fill my head instead.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

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### FINN

I wake with the feel of a heavy arm over my waist, one under my head, and a hand resting a whisper away from my morning wood. I blink my eyes open and rotate my hips forward, hoping to make contact with that hand. It won't work unless I move, and I don't want to move just yet. It's been so long since I've woken up next to someone I don't detest, and I want to savor the moment for as long as I can.

Evan's bedroom explains a lot about him if you look long enough. There's a framed photograph of him and some friends in military uniform, but nothing of his family. There's a toy police car sitting on his nightstand and an old pocket watch that looks as though it must have come from a grandparent. An office clock hangs on the wall and everything is very sparse. I imagine his closet is practical and neutral. The room itself is white walls and wood accents, while the bedding is a neutral grey.

Hanging in the corner of the ceiling is a little hand-painted army plane, painted in rainbow colors, and I stare at it, lost in

thought. My detective in my novel was coming back from World War II, but I can already admit that my knowledge of the topic is limited. I have to check when the rainbow flag came to be used in queer circles, because I don't mind my David Merger having his own little rainbow-painted army plane.

The arm on my waist is getting heavy, so I pretend I'm just waking and pitch my hips forward to get contact with that hand. It doesn't work. Evan is immobile behind me. Instead, I shift my ass back and see what I can find there.

Bingo.

Evan grunts at the contact and shifts so that he's holding me tighter, his hand brushing down my erection before continuing along my thigh. He yawns and slowly lifts his head to look at me.

I'm half-tempted to pretend I'm asleep, but I won't last too long doing that. I twist my head as he drops his back on the pillow we're sharing.

"Good morning," he says sleepily. "Sorry, must have fallen asleep."

I chuckle in confusion and line my body up with his again, intertwining my fingers with the ones near my head. "That's what one is expected to do when lying in bed late at night."

He smiles and presses his lips to my shoulder blade. "How are you feeling this morning? How's this?" He trails his fingers around my hip to rest on my ass cheek.

I grin and wiggle it against the steadily growing cock I can feel pressed against me. “It’s feeling the effects, sure, but it is very happy—as am I.”

“Good,” he murmurs. He drops his head back down and pushes his hips so his cock is resting against my crack. “You have a gorgeous ass. Have I told you that yet?”

I hum at the back of my throat and meet his sleepy thrusts.

“Feeling the effects, right?” he mumbles, and I push harder against him.

“Not enough yet. I don’t want to be able to walk for at *least* a few more hours.”

“Deal,” he breathes into my ear before nibbling at my neck, making me yelp. He kisses the skin he just bit and whispers the wonderful words that got me as hard as I’ve ever been last night, with barely little effort. “Shhh, now. Not until I say.”

His hand lazily brushes against my cock and I arch forward to get more contact, but he resists, moving his hand away. He gets a condom from the drawer next to his bed and it’s not long before I feel the overwhelming presence requesting entry.

I breathe out noisily and his teeth find my earlobe. “Be quiet, Mr. Bartender. Feel every inch without the benefit of sound masking it.” He nuzzles into my neck as my body gives in. “Don’t tense up so much.”

I try to relax, but I’m consciously aware of every nerve in my body and every sound that is in the room. His fingers are

still dancing around my cock, never quite touching it, leaving me desperate.

It stings a bit until he's fully seated, and starts to move, gently rocking us both and filling my mind with pleasure. My breathing starts to get heavier until Evan whispers again in my ear.

"You look so good like this, Finn."

I involuntarily cry out at him using my name, just as he starts to move firmly.

"I said, *shhh*. Didn't I?" He stills, his hand moving far away from my aching erection.

I want to whimper in my desperation, but I don't want him to draw out of me completely and leave me like this. I nod furiously and he continues moving again.

"You like it when I'm in charge, don't you?" He's moving properly again, his hand circling me and putting enough pressure to short circuit my brain.

I nod again, biting down on my lip to stop the sounds of my own pleasure, a variety of sinful sensations exploding in my brain.

"You get to switch off for a moment," he continues "Hand it over to someone else." He grips me tighter before using his other hand to tilt my face back until our lips meet. The feel of his lips on mine, the grip on my aching cock and him moving firmly in my ass is all it takes for me to gasp as silently as I know how and to come more violently than I ever have. Thick



ropes of it shoot up and hit my neck, my chest, and all over my side of Evan's bed.

"Christ, you *do* love it," Evan says appreciatively. "Hold on, let me catch up. You can make noise. Tell me if you want to stop."

I nod, trying to get my breath back, and he starts to move faster, pumping in and out of my sensitive hole. As if he knows my arousal is starting to subside, he lowers his head and licks the splatter of cum that made it to my neck and I moan loudly. He thrusts wildly for a few more seconds, before holding me tight against him and stopping, breathing heavily in my ear.

He pulls out and relaxes onto his back, trying to get his breath back. "Fuck," he moans, lazily looking at the clock on his nightstand. "I have to go to work."

I roll onto my stomach and groan. "Sorry about your sheets."

He smiles at me and sits up, removing the condom and getting a box of tissues to help clean up. I settle onto the pillow and watch him.

"How'd you know I liked... you know?" I frown. "I don't think *I* knew I liked that."

I can hear an exhaled laugh, but his back is to me so I can't see his face. "There was something that needed drawing out of you. Just needed to find what it was." He slides on a pair of briefs and turns to look at me, raising his eyebrows. "Looks

like the date with the married man went well. You look ravished.”

I chuckle, but deep down, I know what that means. To everyone else, I went on the date with the married man and that was the end of my evening. I wince as I sit up, dangling my feet off the edge of the bed. “Yeah, well, apparently that jackass from Grindr managed to give me the best sex of my life. Twice.”

Evan steps in between my legs and tilts my head up to look at him. “Let’s get you washed up,” he murmurs. He lowers his lips and plants a gentle kiss to mine, before holding my shoulders and forcing me to stand. “We’ll see where your limits are.”

I whimper at the thought and let him lead me to the bathroom.

We don’t get close to figuring out where my limits are, as Evan gets a call on his work phone to say that they need him. Evan looks almost frustrated at the news, but he drops to his knees and sucks me off in a head-spinning kind of way, before driving me towards Bar None as soon as he is ready for the day.

Gone is the relaxed, sexy Evan Lowry and in his place, the serious, non-smiling Officer Lowry.

“You can drop me here,” I whisper at the apartment block that houses Toby Lyle and his husband, Mac McCarthy.

And he does, leaving me with a simple nod of acknowledgement and an ass persistently reminding me of what happened last night.

Toby grins when I knock on the door before his gaze drops to my neck and a smirk crosses his face. “Queer Night was good for you then?”

I want to say that, actually, Queer Night was confusing and I’m not sure what to make of it, but instead I wiggle my eyebrows. “I don’t kiss and tell.”

He moves to the side and lets me in, but my spirits fall when I see Malcolm sitting on the sofa next to Mac, deliberately looking at the game on the screen and not at me.

“Is Landon here?” I quietly ask Toby and he nods his head. I breathe out and follow Toby to the kitchen where Landon is sitting, looking awkward. There’s another knock at the door and Toby goes to answer it, leaving me and Landon sitting in silence.

I’d met Toby in college, and he’d been quiet and entirely under the thumb of Damon McCarthy, a hyped-up jock who thought he could get away with anything. It’s not a surprise that his supposed invincibility had come to a swift halt when his car plowed into another one last year, everyone involved dying, including Eli’s wife, Lily. I’m still impressed that the quiet introverted I.T. whiz who is Toby managed to pick up Damon’s gorgeous, estranged half-brother. And *at* his funeral too. It’s a skill I would have loved to pull off. Especially when

Mac looks like *that*, and Damon looked as if he'd crawled out of bed at any given point of the day.

“Woohoo! Yeah, *sports*,” I hear Lane say and I chuckle as Eli walks directly to sit next to Mac, while Lane appears in the kitchen. “Ooh. Finn’s here. How was your date?”

“Married, as expected, *but* very open to some new experiences. And for that, I thank his wife for being boring as fuck. *Also*, I left my keys in Bar None, so I’ll need to borrow yours.”

Lane pours me a glass of champagne and clinks his own against it while he fishes his keys out of his pocket and throws them to me. “Cheers for reminding bisexual men what that *really* means.”

Eli gives a grunt from the sofa, reminding us that he’s listening, and Lane smirks.

“Don’t mind him. He’s probably still a little sore,” Lane whispers seductively.

I grin and stretch my shoulders with a wince. “As am I. It’s what I get for not getting laid in so long, I guess.” Landon stays quietly out of the conversation, but it’s not as awkward as I thought it would be, at least not for me. Landon looks tense as though he’d rather be anywhere else—or at least for *me* to be anywhere else.

“A fuck a day keeps the chiropractor away,” Toby says with a completely straight face. “That’s my motto.”

“It’s true,” Mac says from the couch.

We all burst into laughter before Landon looks between them. “Was today’s before or after we got here? Just want to know how early we’re expected to be out of here.”

Everyone breaks into chatter and laughter and it hits me that I was never invited to this. I’m the odd one out. Toby, Lane and Landon all have their men who like sports and I’m the lonely one, making it painfully obvious that Landon chose someone else. One night with Evan isn’t changing anything about my place here in Wingstead. In the friendship group that had been *mine* first.

I gulp down the champagne and slip out of the apartment when no one is looking.

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## CHAPTER SIX

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### EVAN

I'd opened my texts several times with the expectation that I was going to text Finn, but there was nothing I could think of to say, so I didn't.

Our night together had been well over a week ago and we'd had no contact since. I kept an eye out for his BMW, but it was mysteriously staying within speed limits and out of view. It's not even in the police logs, so he's *actually* staying out of trouble. I'm annoyed, if I'm honest.

I hover out the front of Bar None, knowing he'll be in there. What is it about this kid that has me drawn so intensely to him?

I straighten my shoulders and walk in, my eyes tracking Finn immediately. He's behind the bar, serving a customer, and hasn't noticed me yet. Good. I want to watch him unobserved for a moment.

He has a big smile that lights up his entire face when it's genuine, and there's a deft quickness to his fingers as he does

his job that makes me recall our night together.

The customer moves away and Finn looks up, his eyes locking with mine. He stops suddenly before letting a satisfied smirk cross his lips. I continue up to the bar, fully aware of Eli and Lane's presence. Lane is sitting at the bar, going through what looks like accounts and Eli is reading something on his phone, behind the bar, his brow furrowed in thought. It's not very busy in here and Finn leans on the bar with a smirk as I step forward.

"Mr. Cop," he says flirtatiously.

"Mr. Bartender." I do my best to stop the hungry searching of his face. I've missed looking at it. Now, since I've seen just how nice that body is that goes with it, his face isn't enough. I need more than standing on the other side of the room and watching him bend over the table or bar.

"My usual. Please," I say shortly, my brain is lost in a weird lusty fog. I've forgotten how to act and it's throwing me off.

"Can't offer you something... different?" The dark seduction in his eyes is tempting me to draw him over this bar and take him right now, regardless of witnesses. "We've got a Brunette Slut... normally a Redheaded Slut, but..." He stops making my drink and gazes in my eyes. "I'm not a redhead."

"I've noticed."

"Sure you have. We've got Tie Me To The Bedpost... satisfying if you know what you want. Or we've got a Blowjob." He pauses to let it sink in. "The shot, of course."

I'm aware Eli and Lane are looking over in amusement and I'm not about to give them the satisfaction of getting all bent out of shape about it.

"Do you have a Pay Your Speeding Fines? It goes well with a shot of I'm Going to Impound Your Car and a You Will Lose Your License."

He waves a hand delicately through the air. "I don't play nice to threats."

"No?" I murmur, keeping my eyes trained on him. "You positive about that? I'm sure with the right amount of pressure, I can make you do whatever I want. I *am* an officer of the law, after all."

He pauses, his mouth widening slightly, before chuckling and pushing my usual drink towards me on the bar top. "You'd better leave a good tip. I've got fines to pay."

I hand him a twenty dollar note and smile blankly. "Keep the change."

I take my drink over to my normal table where I can watch Finn in peace, and he appears in front of me within a few seconds.

I take a slow sip of my drink, keeping my gaze on his face. "What can I help you with, Mr. Merritt?"

He opens and closes his mouth a few times, before frowning. "I was just wondering what that was?"

"I'm sorry? I thought I made it perfectly clear. You need to pay your speeding fines. It is the law. You broke it and now



you have to pay the consequences.”

He waves his hand. “I know about *that* part of it. I was just wondering about all the other parts... it was almost like you were admitting that we...”

“That we what?” I demand.

He blushes and folds his arms. He looks disappointed more than angry. “There are elements of my... life that I’d like to keep secret from my *colleagues*. I’m sure you do, too.”

“Have no fear,” I mutter, looking down at my drink. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Finn studies me for a moment, his expression dimming, before nodding slowly and walking back to the bar.

*Damn.* That’s not what I wanted. Almost the opposite, actually. I watch him make it back to the bar, leaning his hip against it to talk to Lane. I don’t know what they’re talking about, but I can’t imagine it’s me. Finn has more sense than that, and he’d just asked me to keep our time together quiet.

He gets distracted by a customer walking up. Young, male, hot, and has eyes only for Finn. I frown a little, before trying to remind myself that I don’t care. Finn isn’t mine and he never will be. It was one night—one *great* night—but we’d agreed that was it. So why can’t I stop thinking about it? It’s been on my mind since it happened, distracting me from everything I’m supposed to be doing.

I clear my throat and take a large gulp of my drink, doing everything I can to keep my gaze away from the conversation

at the bar. Does Finn have those sorts of flirty conversations, dripping with innuendos, with everyone? Does he go back to anyone's house, make them feel good for a night, pretend to be desperate enough for a good fuck, and *get* it? No questions asked?

Maybe I was just another notch on his bedpost.

I curse under my breath and drain my drink, the burn of alcohol down my throat not doing its job like normal.

"Evan!" comes a cheerful voice and I turn to see Malcolm walking towards me. I sigh at my empty glass.

"Mr. King," I say dryly. "Have you lost Landon again? Just wait for him at home and I'm sure he'll turn up."

He chuckles and stops in front of me, standing directly in the way of my view of Finn and the stranger standing as close to each other as they can get with the bar between them.

"Actually, no, that's not why I'm here. Landon is at home. See?" He opens his phone to show a map with a little blue dot with 'LC'.

I sigh. "I'm going to assume he gave you permission to track him."

"Of course. Look..." He moves the map and I see a blue dot with 'MK' above the bar. "He can see where I am too."

I stare at him blankly and he grins.

"No, what I want to talk to you about is the police exam..."

I tune him out as I see Finn's demeanor change over Malcolm's shoulder. The smile has dropped off his face and as I look closer, I see that the man has his fingers wrapped around Finn's wrist as he placed the customer's glass on the bar.

I can't see the man's face, but I can see the forceful movement of his shoulders as he talks to Finn. Eli is chatting to a customer on the other side of the bar, not paying them any attention, and Lane has moved to a booth with headphones on to continue the accounts. The man reaches into his jacket pocket and I get a surge of fear in my stomach.

"Excuse me," I mutter to Malcolm, sliding out of my seat and walking quickly over to the two men. "What's going on here?" I demand and I watch the flicker of Finn's confusion as the man removes his hand from Finn's wrist and looks over at me in surprise.

"Evan... did you need another drink?" Finn asks, stepping away from the bar and frowning.

"No, I—" I stop when I notice the stranger has pulled a pen out of his pocket and is writing his number on the back of the receipt Finn had given him for the drink.

The man sees me watching him and his eyes widen. "Oh, I'm sorry! Are you two—"

"No," Finn says quickly with a laugh. He makes eye contact with the stranger and lets a slow grin cross his face. He reaches over and slides the number towards him, making a big

show of putting it in his pocket. He flashes a bored look at me.  
“Did you want another drink or not?”

“No,” I say shortly, my ears going red with embarrassment.  
“I... I thought I saw... something else. Excuse me.”

I walk quickly past Eli, who has turned in alarm, and out into the night.

I sit in the car and try to breathe through the jealousy that is rising in my stomach. *He's not mine*, I think. I don't *do* relationships. Finn Merritt, with his sexy mouth and bright eyes, is not going to stop me from getting what I want.

I start the engine and drive home, hating the feeling in my veins that is trying to convince me to turn around and stop Finn from getting anyone else's numbers.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

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### FINN

Sleep doesn't come easy, not with Cody's number burning a hole in my nightstand where I placed it, and I wake up already in a mood, not helped by the fact that Landon is sitting at the bar when I get downstairs, working on the guest list for his wedding. I already know I'm not on that list.

Surprisingly, he smiles at me as I walk down. "Hey."

"Hey." I walk past him without saying another word and get to my car. I don't have anywhere to go, but wherever it is, I plan to go fast.

I drive within the speed limit while in Wingstead's town limits, but once I hit the ranchland, I edge the accelerator up to fifty, sixty, seventy... There's a corner coming up and I feather the brakes, the tires squealing as they spin the car around the curve, relishing the rush of adrenaline I've been craving.

I grin and keep driving. Sixty, seventy, seventy-five... I'd hit eighty when the siren sounds behind me, and just for the fun of it, I spin the car down the next road I find and head

back towards Wingstead. If I'm getting my car towed, I might as well be within walking distance to home.

There's only one cop car behind me and they haven't called for back-up, keeping pace with me, so I assume it's Evan. It must be strange for him to do the chasing, and I grin.

When we're back in town limits, I take a few quick turns to confuse him before slowing to a stop and pulling to the side of the road of an abandoned street. It'll be a walk home, but I'd rather not have an audience for having my car forcibly taken away.

I get out of the car and lean against it, waiting for him to catch up. When he does, he gets out of the car, looking less than impressed.

He strides towards me, his eyes dark. "Turn around," he barks. "Hands on the vehicle."

I hesitate and he places a hand on my chin, gripping tight enough that I have no choice but to look at him.

"Turn around," he says evenly. "Hands on the vehicle."

I gulp and slowly do what I've been ordered to do. I twist my head to find him.

"Face forward." I snap my head back, my heart pounding in my chest. I can't see what he's doing or where he is, so when his hands land on my shoulders, I jump. "Don't move, Mr. Merritt. Not an inch. If you so much as make a sound, you're not going to like the consequences. Clear?"

I deliberately don't nod. I don't respond at all, and Evan makes an appreciative sound at the back of his throat. His hands trail down my spine, his long fingers spreading out over my ribcage.

"Now," he murmurs, continuing his exploration of my body. Up under my shirt, over my stomach, my chest, teasing at my nipples. I grip the warm metal under my fingertips tightly and resist the urge to make noise. "You just evaded police, wasted resources, resisted arrest, sped through rural and suburban areas, and you've *still* got outstanding fines." His hands move over my hips, sliding over my ass and down onto my legs. He stands up and leans over me, pressing his hands into my hips and leaning into my ear. "What are we going to do about that?"

I bite my lip to stop from saying anything.

"I should arrest you, you know? Make you sit in the cells near my desk so I can watch you closely."

His hand brushes over the front of my shorts and he stills, letting his fingers grip my obvious hard-on.

"Something tells me you *knew* I would find you speeding." He slips his hand into my shorts and I pant, his warm hand tightening around me. His other hand winds into my hair and tugs me backwards so I can see his face. It's dark with desire and I know there has to be a similar look on mine. I've never been so turned on in my life. "Something tells me you'd *love* for me to push you up against your car and fuck your brains out as a lesson."

My mouth drops open and lust bursts behind my eyes. *Yes*. Yes, I want that. I try and communicate that with my eyes, and he smirks.

He lets my head go and every nerve in my body is vibrating for the next touch.

It doesn't come.

He leans next to me on the car and folds his arms. "Go on. Tell me you want it."

I look into his expression, but it's glittering with something that looks a lot like revenge. I clamp my lips shut and a grin crosses his lips. "Wow, Mr. Bartender. You *do* love when someone else is in control, don't you?" He grips my face, his thumb stroking my cheek gently. As wired as I am, the touch has a direct link to my cock, straining desperately for attention. He leans in and I think he's going to kiss me. Instead, he turns serious. "I had to scrape Damon McCarthy off the inside of his car like old wallpaper. He had *several* outstanding speeding fines and I repeatedly told him to stop speeding."

My eyes widen in surprise.

"I didn't give a damn about Damon McCarthy, but seeing his car dissolve him into nothing is one that will stick with me forever. *This*..." He grips my face again and stares fiercely into my eyes. "*This* is too pretty to go in such a way. I didn't give a damn about Damon McCarthy, but I give a damn about you. You are smart, clever, funny, witty and handsome... all things Damon wasn't. *Do not* go out the same way he did."



Tears spring to my eyes and Evan lets go of my face. Even if he gave me permission to talk right now, I don't know what I'd say.

He clears his throat and pushes himself off the car. "Right, how's this going?" He slides his hands back in the front of my pants and I groan at the contact. He pauses and moves his gaze around to look at me. "Was that a noise, Mr. Bartender? Did I *say* you could make a noise?"

I breathe out slowly, body primed for whatever the punishment was likely to be.

Before anything happens, there's a voice behind us. "Officer Lowry?"

Evan's hand whips out of the front of my pants and he turns in surprise. "Malcolm." His voice is weak and he clears his throat. "What... what can I do for you?"

I brave a glance at Malcolm and his eyes widen in alarm at the tear that had broken the surface and is trailing down my cheek. "What did he do?" Malcolm asks Evan quietly.

"Nothing," Evan says quickly. "Er... I was... he was driving erratically so I had to check he wasn't on anything."

"And that involves making him cry?"

Evan turns to me in alarm and I give them both a vague smile. "I'm not crying. It's the..." I grimace. "I'm just coming down."

Malcolm frowns and Evan winces before gesturing me to the car. "You can go," he mutters.

I stare at him, not brave enough to take my hands off the car. If I turn around, Malcolm will see the giant boner I'm still sporting. Evan gives me an evil smirk and I breathe out slowly, before making my way across the car and climbing back in the driver's seat.

"Should you really be letting him drive?" I hear Malcolm say, but Evan mutters something I can't hear and I drive slowly off.

My balls are going to burst. I've never had such a case of blue balls before. Evan had definitely not considered that Malcolm was going to appear, but he was going to use that to his advantage.

I get back to Bar None, sprint quickly through the near empty bar—thank God—and make it up to my apartment, tugging my shorts down to my thighs and furiously taking matters into my own hands. I groan out my climax and relax against the door I only just walked in.

"Oh fuck," I whisper. "Oh shit."

I get a text message as I'm still trying to recover.

**Evan:** *I would not have let you go or come that easy. Be grateful.*

I groan at what could have been and send him one back.

**Me:** *I came a lot. Apparently there's something else I can coat the inside of my car with. Maybe you'd like to see the new detailing sometime? While I still have my car.*

**Evan:** *Don't be a tease. You'll regret it. I have to work, a high speed chase around Wyoming or not.*

I grin and sink onto my bed, tugging my pants all the way down.

**Me:** *So you wouldn't want...*

**Me:** *A photo?*

**Me:** *Something to get you through the long day of work?*

I wait for a response but pull my shirt up to my chest and snap a photo anyway. I'm hard again. Not surprising.

**Evan:** *My day at work will be long regardless.*

It's not a "no."

**Me:** *Have no fear, daddy's got you.*

I attach the photo and send it through, grinning like a schoolboy.

**Evan:** *I said don't be a tease. And don't be a liar.*

**Me:** *What can I say? I'm not very good at listening to instructions.*

**Evan:** *Don't worry. I'll make sure you learn.*

I shiver with desire and wonder what all this means for me and Evan.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

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### EVAN

I certainly hadn't anticipated leaving Finn—or me—like that, and it just added to the torture of a long day.

I'd sat in the squad car after Malcolm left, on one hand horny as hell, but on the other, *confused*. Finn *had* been crying and I was suddenly terrified that I'd pushed him too far.

I'm catching up on paperwork tonight, which just adds to my frustration as I sit alone in the police precinct, trying to focus on my work and not Finn's delicious body. I close my eyes and breathe out as Pepper walks in, stretching his shoulders. "Hey, Lowry."

I look over briefly, before looking back at the computer, trying to focus on the blurry letters and numbers.

"Quiet night," Pepper says with a grin. "It'll be just you here." He nods towards the cells. "And not even a friend to keep you company."

"I'm sure I can amuse myself. Smith will be here in a few hours." *I'm sure I can get Finn begging from here.* The texts

we'd sent earlier opened a whole new playground for us and I was looking forward to experimenting. I suddenly notice that Pepper is wearing a nicer outfit than usual. He would typically wear gym shorts and an old tee with holes in it to leave work. "Going out?" I say, even though I really couldn't care less about what he does after work.

"Yeah, big night! I'm proposing to my girl."

I look at him in alarm. "Oh, wow. Congrats."

He grins. "Thanks. It's been a year of us dating now, but..." He waves his hand and packs his things into his desk. "I knew from the second I saw her I wanted to be with her for as long as I could. Just had to wait out the time, you know?"

I smile and turn back to my computer, lost in my own thoughts. I don't think I've ever met anyone who automatically caught my eye.

I frown at myself. That's not true. I'd known the second I met Oliver that I would have lived or died by his side. I thought we *had*. Until his arrogant wife left me a voicemail that had shattered everything forever.

I smile a vague goodbye to Pepper and am left alone. I haven't felt the same way about Oliver until I met Finn.

The realization is unsettling. I look to the empty cells again, looking for a distraction. After a few long moments, I smirk and get my phone out of my pocket to take a photo of them.

**Me:** *It's all ready for you, Mr. Bartender.*

His reply is almost immediate.

**Finn:** *What would you have me do if I was in there?*

**Me:** *The possibilities are endless*

I decide that's not detailed enough and I want to make him squirm.

**Me:** *I don't like to be bored, so I'd need to find some way that you could entertain me. Can you sing?*

**Finn:** *No, but I'm pretty damn good with my mouth*

I grin and look around me, making sure I am alone. There aren't any cameras here, but I still find myself looking just in case. I unzip my fly and pull out my hard-on, taking a photo of it and sending it to Finn.

**Me:** *I've got just the thing then*

**Finn:** *Who's the tease now? And I've got a place for that. A few actually. You want me to show you?*

**Me:** *I'm allowed to be a tease. You're not.*

He doesn't text me back and I put my erection away, realizing how stupid I was. Anyone could walk in at any second. Officer Smith could start his night shift early. Almost as soon as I think it, the door to the precinct opens and my heart lurches at how close I came to nearly being caught.

The door latch is locked, and the visitor steps out of the shadows, with hooded eyes and a dangerous smirk. Finn leans over my desk and slaps a whole lot of cash in front of me. "There," he hisses. "Fines paid. Now *fuck me*."

I lean back in my chair, my heartbeat going back to normal. “I don’t think you get to make the rules, Mr. Bartender.” I give him a vague smile. “Besides, this is a police station and I have work to do. You can wait until after hours.”

He slinks around the desk, perching on the edge of it. He’s still wearing the same shorts, the same plain grey tee, although he’s added a cap this time, sitting backwards on his head. He looks like a rich, popular college kid and it’s a fantasy I didn’t realize I had. He looks at the computer screen and clicks his tongue against the roof of his mouth. “Looks mighty boring.”

“Yes.”

“I thought you didn’t like to get bored. We’ve discussed this.” He leans forward until his lips are at my ear. “I still can’t sing.”

I twist suddenly and pull him off the desk, forcing him onto the floor.

“Mm... finally something I can do.” Finn frees my erection and stares at it hungrily. He opens his mouth to put it to good use, but I stop him with a thumb on his tongue.

“Get undressed,” I say calmly. Finn closes his mouth around my thumb and sucks it suggestively, making my dick bounce in front of him. “But keep the hat on.”

He looks around us nervously, before looking into my eyes. I try not to give anything away. I want him that little bit nervous, especially after he chose to deliberately lead me on a

chase earlier and then stood there with a cocky grin as if he'd won.

It's payback time and we both know it. He takes in a deep breath and pulls his shirt over his head, replacing the cap as I asked him to. He shifts to sit on his ass and pulls his shorts over his hips, and rests there, looking up at me, hoping I'd tell him I would let him keep his underwear on. They're tight, red, and show off his gorgeous ass perfectly, and as much as I want him to leave them on, he'd feel better without them, which means they have to go.

"Don't make me tell you again," I warn and he slides them off too, whimpering at the back of his throat. He looks up in alarm when I don't tell him off for making noise, but I want to hear him talk for a moment longer. So much of our time together has been spent hearing my own voice and I'm sick of it.

I pile his clothes up on my desk, folding them neatly, before leaning back and studying him as he tries to hide his cock behind his hands.

"Shuffle closer and put your hands behind your head."

"But—"

"But *what*? You don't trust me? If I'm found like this, I'm losing my job."

That eases him a little and he looks around one more time, before moving in between my legs and slowly putting his hands behind his head, letting me see every bit of him.



“Spread your knees wider.” He does as suggested and I roll my chair back to study him. “Oh, fuck, Finn. That is a sight.” His prick jumps in acknowledgement. He’s throwing nervous looks towards the door and I know I need to do something before he gets overcome with nerves. I roll back and place my cock at his lips. He automatically opens his mouth, but I keep hold of his face and make him wait. “Do you want this?”

“Yes,” he breathes, straining against my hands.

“I should probably check that all the money is accounted for.” I release my hands and pick up the stack of money on the desk. I smirk down at him. “Now this *is* boring.”

He gets my meaning and leans forward, opening his mouth and taking me as far as he can into his throat.

“Slowly, Finn,” I growl. “We wouldn’t want this to be over too soon.”

He moans his appreciation and proceeds accordingly with light licks, sucks, and the occasional hard suction with his lips to keep me on my toes. He knows what he’s doing, and I feel as if I don’t have to tell him anything. He brings me right up to the edge several times, but backs off expertly, knowing how to draw it out of me to make this last. God, this man is going to drive me insane—although, I wouldn’t be surprised if he already has. I’m in my workplace with a naked man at my feet, servicing me to the best of his ability and I don’t give a fuck about the consequences.

“Okay,” I say, my throat hoarse. “Up. To your feet. You can drop your arms.”

He stands up, his mouth pink and breath heavy, awaiting his next instruction.

“Your turn. Sit on the edge of the desk here.”

“I really don’t mind if you—”

“Sit. Desk. Now.”

He sits down and places his feet on either side of me on the chair. I slowly draw him into my mouth, making him groan, before pushing his chest to lie down, his head hanging over the edge of the desk.

“Keep your hands on the edge of the desk here.” I plant them where I want them and he uses all of his core strength to lift his head to look at me. “If you’re getting too dizzy from being upside down, pinch me. *Trust me*, I will not be far away.”

He nods and lets his head drop back as I return to sucking him for a moment, enjoying the way his breath comes out in gasps.

I lick down his balls and sigh. “I don’t have a condom here. Sucking is all we’re going to be able to do, I’m afraid.”

“I do,” he gasps. “Shorts pocket. Lube, too. Although I’m clean and on PrEP. But... no need to trust me if you don’t want to. Condoms. Shorts pocket.”

I’m thrown for a second, before reaching down and taking out a condom and the bottle of lube. “We’ll talk about that later. I’ll use a condom now.”

Finn looks as though he couldn't care less and his head drops back down again as I step back in between his legs, lining myself up with his delicious ass.

"You came here and begged for this, remember?" Finn hums but it comes out strangled. "You came *here* and begged for it, after running away from me earlier." I push into his body, feeling his muscles make way for me, and he groans loudly. It wouldn't be feasible for me to ask him to be quiet while his head is upside down, so I don't try. I've pushed him enough by having him naked and lying across my desk, while I'm still fully clothed. We're in direct view of the door, should anyone come through, but there's nothing that could make me stop right now. Not when he's squeezing around me and gasping like he is. "You managed to get away through divine intervention earlier, but then *you* came *here*."

He whimpers and lifts his head to look at me. His face is red and I hope he's going to tell me if he wants to stop. I'd rather not fuck him when he's passed out.

"Fuck me," he growls, his gaze narrowing.

"Beg me." I still inside him and grin as evilly as I know how. "Why should I fuck you?"

"*Please*," he hisses. "Fuck me. Harder."

"*Why*?"

"Because I'd run away again if I could. Because—*fuck*—I want you to do whatever you want to me. Because I love

playing with you, teasing you, driving you wild, knowing that you can give it all back and *more*.”

“Very good reasons, my bartender,” I breathe. “Now, say please aga—”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake.” He uses the edge of the desk as leverage and hauls himself towards me, pushing me past the point of control. God, I want to punish him for that, but there’s nothing that can stop me from gripping a tight hold to his waist and pumping a fast and hard rhythm into him. He drops his head back and moans loudly, curses flying out of his mouth, punctuated by groans and all sorts of other delicious sounds.

Any plans I had at drawing this out vanish when he takes his hand off the desk to jerk himself off, finishing not that long after. I slump over him as the remainder of my orgasm shoots through me.

He lifts his head and groans loudly. “Don’t get cum on your uniform. It’ll be hard to clean,” he mutters and pushes me up with his other hand. I grunt with the effort and draw out of him, flopping back into the chair and helping him sit up.

“Holy *fuck*, Finn.”

“I agree.” He’s still panting and is red in the face, but the color is starting to fade back to his normal, tan self. “That was...”

“Too much?” I whisper.

“Oh, fuck no. Perfect. *Hot.*” He holds a finger up as I pinch the tissue box from Pepper’s desk. “*Terrifying*, but hot. I’m not lying when I say you give me the best sex I’ve ever had.”

I chuckle and hand him his clothes once I’ve helped him clean up.

He smiles nervously as he slides his shorts on. “You know, I’ve never... realized *why* sex felt boring. Or really had anyone that would want to... mix things up a bit.” He winces. “On the few times I’ve tried, everyone just wants to hurt me. I don’t like pain. Fine for those who do, but... it’s not for me.”

“I don’t like inflicting pain,” I say softly. “I’ve seen enough pain and suffering without adding it to my sex life.” I walk over and hold his face gently. “If anything is too much, let me know and we’ll never do it again. It’s not pushing your limits if we don’t know where they stop, okay?”

“Okay.”

I kiss him slowly, enjoying the soft flicks of his tongue and the faint moan in his throat. “You’re the best sex I’ve ever had, too,” I breathe. “I didn’t know I liked to be more dominant. So... if we work together, we’ll always have fantastic sex.”

Finn grins and nods. “Just sex, though?”

I let out a breath I hadn’t realized I was holding in. “Just sex.”

“Easy.” He gives me a wolfish grin and stands up. “I should go. I left Raya in charge of making drinks and she’s

notoriously bad at it. *Your* job will be harder if I don't get back. This place will be crawling with raving drunks."

I grab his hand before he can leave and pull him back, letting our mouths meet once more. "*This*," I say, pointing to the desk. "Will *not* become a habit. I *will* get fired and that is the last thing I want."

"I don't want that either." He walks towards the door. "I'll just have to drive you wild over text until you finish work and you have to walk out of here with a great, big boner."

"And you *will* pay for that."

He turns and winks at me. "I'd fucking hope so."

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## CHAPTER NINE

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### FINN

I yawn and stretch my neck as I pour a beer for some uncultured member of my community. When he disappears with his piss water, I deliberately lean over the bar to call out to Lane sitting at a nearby booth to ask a question, knowing full well Evan is sitting on the other side of the bar, watching everything I do.

When I stand up, there's a message on my phone.

**Evan:** *You would look so nice in handcuffs*

**Me:** *Then you'd better supply them, Mr. Cop*

I flex my shoulders distractedly before holding my arms behind my back and clasping them, pretending to be stretching as I wait for a customer.

**Evan:** *Don't tempt me*

I grin and walk over to him. "Anything I can get you? You look like you need a... drink."

His pale blue eyes stare impassively at me, but I know the thoughts behind them. I slowly roll my head on my neck, but before I can say something laced with the innuendos that Evan and I are so good at, Mac and Toby appear, standing at the bar and grinning.

“Still sore, Finn? Are you still seeing that married guy? Christ, he must be good.”

I blink at them for a second before smiling. “Married guy. Yes. I am. His poor wife. She must be wondering where all his energy has gone.”

“Or why he’s sitting funny at dinner,” Mac says with a smirk.

I laugh and get them both their normal drinks. “No, actually he’s a top. Have never even broached the idea about switching.”

Toby raises his brows. “It’s not for everyone, I admit. My ex was a top.”

Mac grins at his husband. “As someone who has seen you switch, that guy missed out.” He sweeps his gaze over me. “I bet Mr. Married would say the same if he gave it a try.”

I lean on the bar and grin. “Mmm...”

Mac picks up his drink and goes to speak to Lane, and Toby leans over the bar. “I feel as though I haven’t seen you properly in ages. Can we... hang out sometime? Come to our place. We’ll watch movies or something. Do what we did in college.”



I grimace. “I’d rather not relive my college days if it’s all the same to you. But sure, we’ll hang out. I’ve just been... busy.”

“Of course.”

He walks away to join Mac and I slowly turn to look at Evan.

“I’ve never been fucked before,” he says quietly, hiding it behind his drink.

“I’m not asking you to.”

He looks around us and clears his throat. “I realize you don’t get the same opportunities.”

“To fuck someone? I’m more than content with my... position. It suits me, wouldn’t you say?”

He drains his drink and stands up. “We’ll discuss when I pull you over next.”

I smirk. “I’ve been a good boy, haven’t I?”

“No, Mr. Bartender, you have not.”

The thrill I get when he calls me that is ridiculous. It’s literally my job description and yet it never fails to spark naughty thoughts entering my brain—

—So much so, that I order two pairs of handcuffs that night.

When they arrive a week later, it has been several days since I’ve seen Evan and almost a week since we’ve slept together, and I’m ready to burst.

I know it's Evan's day off and I'm excited to try out my new novelty handcuffs. Sure, they won't be like the real thing, but the real thing is intimidating, and I can't surprise Evan with them.

**Me:** *I've been real good and I think it's time for me to get my reward.*

Normally we go to his house, but it's the middle of the day, the bar is dead, and I can't wait for the things that he's going to make me do when there is the potential for other people to hear us. I'm already tingling with excitement.

**Evan:** *I'll be there in half an hour. Are you sure you want a reward?*

**Me:** *I mean I've been real bad and I think it's time for me to get my punishment.*

**Evan:** *That's more like it. Hold tight. I'll get there as soon as I can. Get nice and ready for me. You're not to cum until I say so. You've been warned.*

I grin and place my phone on my dining table, before picking up the two pairs of the handcuffs and crawling over to the bed. The instructions seem pretty straight forward, so I make sure the door is unlocked, strip off my clothing, give myself a decent rub, stopping before I get too close, and then latch one of my wrists to the top of my bedpost. I bring my other arm up and use my already cuffed hand to attach the other one and before long, my arms are above my head, my cock is as hard as a rock and I'm horny as all hell. The breeze through the open window tickles, but I'm in no position to

move anymore. Not since the keys to the handcuffs are on the table still, next to my phone.

My phone vibrates with a call and I suddenly start to panic. *Fuck*. What if that's Evan saying he can't make it anymore? What if I'm stuck here with no way of getting out, tied up to my bed?

I start to panic. Big time. I am covered in a thin layer of sweat and I tug at the supposedly cheap handcuffs, but they seem indestructible.

"Lane!" I yell, hoping he can hear me through the closed door. "Lane! Fuck, *Lane!*"

There's no noise from downstairs and I whimper. How could I be so stupid? I should have waited for Evan to get here and we could have done it together. Now, I'm stuck here and there's no way of knowing if I'll ever get free.

"*Lane! Eli!*"

Finally, there are footsteps on the stairs and a tentative knock sounds on the door. "Finn?"

I groan. Landon. "Is Lane downstairs?"

"Uh, no. It's only Raya."

"Fuck, fuck, shit. Piss *fuck*."

"Is everything okay?" He sounds alarmed, and honestly, I don't blame him.

I whimper. "Just... can you promise not to... freak out? You've seen my dick before. You've had it in you. Just

remember that.” If I can get the upper hand in this embarrassment, I’m going to take it.

Landon doesn’t respond.

“If you’re still out there, can you come in and get the fucking keys to these fucking handcuffs that I’ve accidentally locked myself to the bed with and release me? Yes, my cock is out. Deal with it.”

I think he’s left until the doorknob turns and his wary face peeks in. His eyes widen in alarm and he steps in, leaving the door wide open and stands with his hands on his hips at the end of the bed. A smirk crosses his face.

“*Landon*, enough staring. I offered you this again and you turned me down, remember? Over there, on the table are the keys.”

He doesn’t move, his grin getting wider. “See, this is funny. I think this is the perfect time to have a chat, now that you’re completely at my mercy.”

“*Landon*, just let me go,” I hiss. This is nothing like the pleasurable torture that Evan allows me to have. This is just humiliating. Not only do I have to grovel to my ex-boyfriend, but he has the audacity to laugh at me while I do so.

He folds his arm and scowls. “No. I’ve got some questions for you and I’d like you to answer them.”

“Fuck you, Landon.”

There’s a noise from downstairs and Landon looks out the door. “Up here,” he calls out.

“*No*, no.” I frantically try and cover up my penis with the blankets, but they are too far away and too heavy for my legs to pull up enough to be hidden.

Toby, Mac, and Malcolm appear and all of their eyes nearly bug out of their head as Mac roars with laughter. I’ve never hated them more than I have in this moment. Mac looks like Damon and that is *not* a compliment. “What’s going on here?” Mac says, as he stops laughing.

“Finn here got himself into a little pickle,” Landon says with a grin. “He wants us to get him out. Well, he wants *me* to get him out.”

“The keys are on the table,” I hiss. “Anyone. Get the keys and get me out of here. Or at least cover me up. *Damon*. I mean, Mac, you shit. *Help me*.”

Toby looked to be on the fence about the whole thing, but his eyes narrow at the last sentence. A reminder that Damon and Mac were related is not welcome apparently. I’m not surprised. There’s a reason I said it. “Who are you waiting for?” Toby asks stepping closer. His hands remain well away from the covers and I furiously tug on the stupid plastic, willing for it to break.

To make matters worse, another face enters the mix and Lane laughs in surprise. “Finn! This isn’t an exhibition of the bar!”

“Charge ten dollars and you can see a man who accidentally tied *himself* up,” Malcolm says, bursting into laughter and placing his arm around Landon’s shoulders.

“Seems like we got it for free,” Mac joins in, still salty from the comment about his brother. I don’t give a shit.

Everyone is laughing and talking about me and no one is actually *helping me*. So much for friends. Not a single person has thought to help me.

“What the *fuck* is going on in here?” comes the serious gruff voice that I’ve never been more relieved to hear.

I break down in tears as soon as the room falls silent and Evan steps in. No one wants to speak and Evan walks over to me, assessing the situation with a somber gaze, before pulling the blankets to cover me, like a decent fucking human being should.

“Where are the keys?” he asks loudly.

“The table,” Landon whispers.

Evan makes a big deal of storming past everyone in the room, somehow making eye contact with all of them at once, before coming back to me and releasing my arms one at a time. I curl up into a ball and don’t look at anyone else as I sob. I’ve never been so humiliated in my life. I thought these people were my friends, but I would never have known they’d be so heartless. Evan stands near the head of the bed, and I can *feel* the anger radiating off him.

“*Get out,*” he yells, so sharply even I jump. “*All of you. Out.*”

“Evan, we—” Toby tries, but he stops, assumedly when he sees Evan’s gaze.

“Shut the door on the way out,” he snaps. “If I see anyone in the next ten seconds, I’m arresting you on whatever charges I can think up.”

The door shuts quietly, and I hear Evan try to calm his breathing down before I hear the fabric shift as he turns his body around to look at me. He sits on the chair next to the bed and gently places a hand on my shoulder.

“What happened?” His voice is tender, unlike anything I’ve heard from him before, and I realize what a sight I must look.

“It’s stupid. Nothing. Just... forget it.”

He brushes the hair off my forehead and sighs. “I’m sorry if this is my fault.”

“*Your* fault?” I sit up and wipe my nose on the back of my hand. “It’s fucking *Landon’s* fault. I called out for help because I was stuck and I started panicking, and then he just stood there and *laughed* at me. He called everyone else in. I’ve never felt so...” I wrap my arms around myself and burst into a fresh wave of tears. “... So ashamed.”

Evan’s arm goes around me and he sits behind me on the bed, pulling me into his embrace.

“That was humiliating,” I sob. “I thought they... I thought at least *one*...” I look up at Evan, his concerned gaze turning to anger in front of me.

He gently wipes the tears off my face and plants a light kiss on my lips. “Sorry I didn’t get here sooner. Now, you stay up here and get your breath back. Have a shower or something.

Or wait until I get back up here and we'll go back to my place. I have a tub you can soak in."

I smile weakly. "I just... want to forget the whole thing ever happened."

He gets up, before looking back at me, a horrified expression on his face. "No one... hurt you or anything? They didn't physically touch you?" I shake my head and his shoulders relax. "Oh, thank fuck. Okay. Get dressed. I'll be up in a bit to collect you. I am going to go tear a new one into those so-called friends of yours."

I want to tell him it's not necessary, but I give him a smile and let him walk out the door without saying anything at all.



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## CHAPTER TEN

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### EVAN

The whole group of them are at a booth on the far end of the bar, eyes wide as I walk determinedly towards them. I'm furious and I'm trying to remember that I *shouldn't* care. I shouldn't be so mad that Finn was lying there, crying as five men stood around him laughing. The reminder gets my blood boiling again and I glare as I approach the circle.

"Landon Collins," I snap. "Explain in thirty seconds."

He looks startled before blushing deep red. "I heard him calling out and went up to see what was going on. He asked if Lane was nearby and when I said no, he said he was naked and needed me to come get the keys off the table so I could unlock him."

Landon doesn't look as if he's going to continue.

"And then what?" I hiss. "Don't make me wait. I don't have the patience."

He shifts nervously in his seat. "I thought it was good revenge for the shit from a few months ago. So, I—"

“Teased and humiliated a bound, naked, crying, helpless man?”

His eyes widen even further. “I didn’t... he didn’t *seem*... he wasn’t crying. He was angry that I wouldn’t help him. That’s all. And Finn’s never *helpless*.”

“He was,” I say bluntly. “He was in the middle of a fucking *panic attack* when he called out for help *in the first place*. And *you* called for a fucking *audience* to witness it!” I turn to Lane. “*You*. Why didn’t you help him?”

“I wasn’t there!”

“But when you were—Finn called out for you first for a reason and you threw every bit of trust in his face.” I turn to the whole group. “You all did. You *all* knew the keys were on the table, didn’t you?”

Everyone slowly nodded.

“You all knew the covers on the bed were there to at *least* cover up his nakedness, but you *didn’t*. None of you did.”

Eli walks in, his expression turning to confusion when he sees the somber look on everyone’s faces. “What’s happening here?”

I ignore him and point viciously to the group. “*That* was behavior I’d expect of idiotic college boys. *Not* grown-ass men with responsibilities and *common fucking sense*. That was an appalling thing to walk into and if Finn wants to press charges, you’d all better believe I’ll back him on it. Consider this a warning.” I turn to Malcolm. “*You* are trying to become a

member of our police force, which means looking out for the fucking members of our community. What the fuck was *that*? You *deliberately* laughed in the face of someone that was *asking* for your help. That's not going to look good on your record, is it? This isn't something you can blame on childish behavior or not understanding consequences. You should all be *ashamed*."

Eli is staring wide-eyed at everyone, but Lane waves his hand to indicate they'll talk later.

Toby sighs. "I'll go up and apologize. I didn't realize he was in that much distress."

"No. You won't. Not yet. He doesn't want to see you. He'll stay somewhere else until he's comfortable." I growl and start walking back to the staircase. "Clear out. All of you. I don't want Finn to see a single one of your faces when he leaves. What an appalling way to treat a friend."

When I make it back up to Finn's apartment, he's sitting on the bed, fully dressed, with a backpack next to him. "Thanks," he whispers. "I heard everything."

"Yes, well, I could've said more." I exhale loudly. "I *should've* said more."

"You said more than I thought." He smiles awkwardly, his cheeks still red from crying and his eyes puffy.

"Come on, let's get you..."

I trail off as I realize I was planning on ending that sentence with *home*.

We don't see his friends in the bar when we leave, but I can still see their cars in the parking lot, so I know they're around somewhere. I don't question it.

Finn stares out the window of the cruiser as I make my way up the hidden drive that leads to my house.

"I'm sorry," he whispers. "Christ, that was a fail. Didn't expect to ruin everything quite so spectacularly."

I frown at him. "What exactly do you think you ruined?"

He blushes and throws a quick glance at me as I pull up to my house.

"Finn, the only thing you ruined was your own expectations. When we are together, I take *away* your expectations. That's how it works. You leave me in charge and I handle everything so you don't have to." I take his chin gently in my hand and make him look at me. "When I take away your control, I do it in a way that still feels safe, right?" He nods quickly and I smile, leaning forward and kissing him gently, not letting him deepen it. "What you just experienced then was what happens if you *don't* feel safe and I don't want that to ever happen as a result of something I've done."

"I trust you."

I press our lips together again. "Good. Now let's get you inside and relaxed."

I run the bath for him, placing in a bath fizzer that my sister thinks I like, which has resulted in a drawer full of them. I let him soak for a while alone before climbing in behind him. He

leans back against my chest and sighs, releasing all the tension that he's built up in his shoulders. I run a sponge across his chest and take my time washing every inch of him, working my way down his arm until I get to his wrist. I inspect it gently, noticing where he'd scraped the cheap plastic as he tried to get it off, before circling it with my thumb and forefinger.

"The real thing would have hurt you so much more," I murmur in his ear.

"I thought I would be able to snap it. I didn't think I'd be so..."

"Trapped?"

"Vulnerable. I had nothing left to offer. I had the worst thoughts in my mind."

"So did I," I whisper, holding him tight. "God, Finn. Walking up those stairs to laughter..." I chuckle wearily. "I thought you'd invited me over and were going to deliberately keep me waiting to see how long we could play." I shake my head. "But... when I saw what the laughter actually was about—Well, I've never been so close to murdering people before."

He smiles and tilts his head to look up at me. "I'm glad you didn't—and I'm glad you showed up when you did. I was convinced you weren't coming."

I chuckle and kiss his cheek. "You should know by now that if you call, I come running. It's a weakness of mine."

He slowly sits up, leaning forward onto all fours until his ass appears at the top of the water line. “A sexy weakness?”

“Very.” I lean back and watch him as his magnificent body is put on display. “I take it you didn’t come earlier.”

“No.”

“Damn. I was hoping you’d been bad.” I lean forward and tug him back so his spine is flush against my torso, my arm keeping him steady around his chest, his frame perched on my lap. “*But...* I promised you a relaxing bath. So, sit up on the edge of the tub there.”

He looks over his shoulder in surprise as I let him go. I give him a bright smile and he moves to do as instructed.

I love him looking up at me, but I also love the flash of defiance that crosses his eyes when he’s looking down. I want him to enjoy this unashamedly, and I want to feel his eyes on me, so I don’t give him any more instructions and get down to the task at hand.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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### FINN

I slowly push open the doors of Bar None and brace myself against the barrage of apologies I'm expecting from Lane. I'd spent two nights with Evan, enjoying every second with him, and then every second I had to write my novel when Evan was at work. It felt like a mini vacation. But stepping back into Bar None makes everything rush back, the blood rushing up my neck.

Lane is sitting at a booth, working on ordering new stock, and he looks up, his expression falling as I approach him. He takes his AirPods out and sighs.

I sink into the chair opposite him. "No incidents?"

He shakes his head. "No. As normal."

"Good." I stand up, but Lane reaches out and puts his hand in mine.

"I'm so sorry." He gulps. "I completely abused your trust and you don't know how badly I regret it. If... if you want to

find somewhere else to work, or press charges, or slander me to hell... I understand.”

I drop my shoulders. “I don’t want to do any of that.”

Lane smiles sadly but I notice he looks relieved. “If it’s any consolation, Eli is furious. Everyone who was involved is on a ban from entering Bar None. The length depends on the day. I’m allowed here, but I’m stuck doing all the accounts we’ve been putting off for months.”

I chuckle. “I’ll talk to Eli. Mainly because they’re all our biggest customers?”

Lane smiles and turns back to the accounts.

It takes me a week, but I manage to get Eli to allow our friends back in the bar. Except for Landon. He doesn’t even try, much to my relief.

The coal mine nearby has amped up its demand, which involves more people going back and forth between it and Wingstead. Bar None being the closest to the outskirts of town limits means it’s the number one pit stop for miners needing a beer, a rest, and a chat with a fellow co-worker. We’ve been non-stop busy for a week now, as has Evan.

“It’ll be over soon,” Eli says confidently as I take a breather in the backroom. “The shifts swap every two weeks, so this lot will be out and the new lot will be back at work.”

That didn’t sound to me like it was going to be over, but I smile weakly at him and go back out.



Lane grins at a customer who appears at the bar. “Hey, James.”

“Lane, my love. Not working too hard?”

“Never. Who told you I was?” Lane grins and gives him his full attention. “What can I get you?”

“I’ll have a... Cosmo. Why not?”

“It’s Saturday night.”

“Damn straight. And I’ll also get a Cuba Libre with only one or two ice cubes in it for my date.”

My hands freeze as I’m in the middle of making a drink. That’s Evan’s order. Lane continues chatting to James, but I can’t spot Evan in the crowd.

Maybe more than one person doesn’t like their Cuba Libre’s watered down so much.

I get a weird sensation in my stomach as James picks up his drinks and walks to the booth away from the bar and hands it to none other than Evan Lowry, who is deliberately sitting in the seat as far away from me as possible.

*For my date*, James had said. I force a smile to my face and hand the wrong customer the wrong order. “Sorry,” I mutter.

Lane looks over at me and sighs. “Take a second?”

I clear my throat. “I’m fine.” I get back to work and try my hardest to ignore it—to ignore that entire section of the bar, actually.

Evan and his stupid fucking *date*, James, stay for ages.

The bar is relatively quiet now, numbers dwindling slowly, but I have to stand over here and watch James smile brightly at whatever fucking hilarious story Evan is telling him.

“You okay?” Lane asks softly and I jump. I turn away from them and try to busy myself with putting bottles of spirits away while I’ve got the chance.

“Fine.”

“Have you spoken to him about—”

“Drop it, Lane. It’s none of your business.”

Lane chuckles. “I know it isn’t. I was just wondering if there’s any reason I should go and stop it.”

I glare at him. “Everyone can do whatever the fuck they want. You, me...” I gulp and look at my feet, angry at the jealousy that is sweeping through me. “Evan... whatever.”

I push past him and disappear up to my apartment for a few seconds alone, not brave enough to do it in the breakroom. I put my hands in my hair and try to get whatever this sensation in my stomach is *out*. Evan and I have never said that we’re together. We’re in a sex-only relationship. It had been established from the beginning.

*Fuck*. I hate that Lane asked me about it. It means he knows more than I want him to. More than *Evan* wants him to.

I move to the bathroom and stare at myself in the mirror, the feeling coming clearer. Evan doesn’t want *me*. He wants someone that is more than happy to let him have his way. He wants to fuck me into submission in private but go on dates

with other men in public. Men who probably have stable jobs and no speeding fines and aren't left humiliated by their friends while being handcuffed to a fucking bed.

I squeeze my eyes shut and avoid my reflection. He doesn't want *me*. The thought stings into a part of my heart that I thought had closed over. He doesn't want me, Landon doesn't want me, my parents couldn't care less if I'm in Chicago, Wingstead, or the fucking Himalayas. My friends all think I'm a joke and there's no one who wants to actually *love* me. Without thinking about it, I pull out my phone and message Cody, the guy who gave me his phone number a while back.

I take another minute to breathe out the betrayal and heartbreak and loneliness that threatens to drown me before flinging my door open with the intent to go back downstairs. Instead, I come face to face with Evan.

I jump before composing myself. "You shouldn't be up here. I need to go back to work," I mutter, trying to push past him.

He doesn't let me.

"Evan."

He pushes me lightly backwards and shuts the door behind him. "Finn." We stare at each other impassively before he smiles. "Is there something you wanted to say to me?"

I shake my head. "Nope. Not that I'm aware. Did you need to speak to me?"

He chuckles and leans against the closed door. He makes sure I'm watching before he reaches down and locks it, with a definite click. "On your knees."

I *want* to defy him. I *want* him to explain what the hell he thought he was doing going on a date in my bar. He lifts his jaw and his eyes narrow. I wet my lips and sink to my knees. I don't want to think and Evan knows that better than I do. Maybe I don't want to hear the answers.

"Unzip your pants," he orders. "Cute outfit, by the way. You wanna know what I like about it?" He reaches down and palms my ass. I'm wearing plain black pants, a navy blue Bar None t-shirt, and an oversized black blazer rolled up to my elbows, but I blush at the compliment. "These pants make *this* very appealing. Enough that I might make you keep them on. They'll look just as nice around your thighs." He pulls my already stiffening erection out of my pants and gives me a lazy tug.

"Don't you have a date to get back to?" I blurt out.

He stills behind me before standing in front of me and lifting my gaze with a strong hand under my chin. "Ah. So that's where the problem is."

"You knew very well where the—"

"Shhh now, my bartender." I shut my lips and he keeps his gaze on my face as he unzips his pants with his spare hand. "Now, I'm going to tell you something, so listen closely. James has a boyfriend who works at the mines. The three of us

have an agreement where if Bradley is away for long periods of time, James will call me.”

I can’t figure out how I feel about that information. He must notice because he chuckles.

“Tonight, I’d invited him here because I wanted to tell him we’re putting an end to our agreement.” He crouches in front of me so we’re eye level. “And now you’re jealous. Why are you jealous?” I keep my lips shut and he runs his thumb over my cheek. “Answer me.”

“I’m not,” I whisper.

“No? You’re not thinking about how I have sex with him?”

I don’t answer and he stands up moving out of sight. He hasn’t told me I have to stay put, but something makes me stay put anyway.

*“Finn.”*

“I’m not! I’m not jealous!”

He stands in front of me. “Then what—”

“I don’t know why you want to be seen with him and not me,” I say quickly, the words tumbling out of my mouth without warning. Evan looks alarmed. “I don’t want to be your secret.”

I’ve thrown Evan, and he moves out of sight for a second.

I groan. “I’ve done it again. Ruined it.”

He moves to the door and unlocks it, opening it wide.

“No, wait, Evan...”

He turns and I'm confused by the smile on his face. I can hear people downstairs, talking and laughing. Lane's voice drifts up from the supply room and I'm suddenly hyper aware I have my dick out and I'm kneeling on my floor in direct view of the stairs.

"You'd be needing to get back to work soon, won't you?" Evan says softly.

I nod slowly.

"People might come to look for you."

I nod again.

Evan gives a sly grin. "Perfect. Then you'd better be quick and you'd better be quiet."

He pulls his cock out of his pants and steps towards me. "Evan, I—"

"I think I said you'd better be quiet. Or do you want someone to come and investigate?"

I throw a cautionary look towards the door and sit up higher on my knees, opening my mouth as he steps closer. He holds a hand under my chin, as he slides past my lips, overwhelming all of my senses with his presence. *This* is what gets me to stop thinking and I'm desperate for it, but I can't stop looking at the door.

"Are you still lost in your head?" He runs his fingers through my hair, making me groan. He pulls out of my mouth and twists to the bed, sitting on the edge. "How about we don't

let you look at the door at all. Now you'll never know if there's someone there. Come over here."

I crawl over to him and he stops me with a searing kiss and makes me look in his eyes.

"Let me be in charge, Finn."

As I stare into his eyes, I relax. This is exactly what I didn't know I needed right now. I settle on my knees in front of him and get to work.

We end up shutting the door, Evan making me press my palms against it while he did his previous suggestion; my pants lowered only enough to give him access while I try to keep as quiet as possible and to stop the door from rattling against its frame.

I'm close when Evan suddenly stops. "Don't make noise," he growls low in my ear and a second later, a knock sounds on the door, directly under my hand.

"Finn?"

I turn to look at Evan, not sure what to do, but Evan pinches me lightly on the hip and I wince. "Yeah? Sorry, just give me a minute."

"Is everything okay?"

Evan slowly starts pushing his hips back and forth again, pinching my hip a second time so that I answer Lane's question. "Yes. Everything's fine. I just needed a second." I close my eyes to keep my voice even. "Do you need some help?"

“You mean, do I need you to come and do your job? Yes, Finn, I do.”

“Right, yes. I’m sorry. I’ll be there in two minutes.”

Lane grunts something on the other side of the door and I hear his footsteps fading. I breathe heavily at nearly getting caught so indecently.

“He was right there,” Evan murmurs in my ear. “And you were like *this*. How did that feel, Mr. Bartender?”

I pant my response and Evan winds an arm around my waist, hauling me backwards until we’re sitting on the bed, Evan still deep in me. He pats my leg to get me to place it next to him on the bed.

“Alright, Mr. Merritt. Use me to bring yourself off. No time to waste. You have to go back to your job. I have to go back to my date.”

I groan low in the back of my throat and do as he asks.



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## CHAPTER TWELVE

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### EVAN

I send Finn back to the bar, his eyes wild but his shoulders relaxed, and I sit and wait a designated amount of time in his apartment before returning to where I awkwardly left James.

*I don't want to be a secret.* No. I don't want to be *your* secret. That's what he'd said. He didn't want to be my secret.

The words are turning over in my head as I spot Finn's phone, sitting amongst the bed covers. I frown and pick it up, reading the messages that appear on the screen.

**Cody:** *I'd love to, babe. Tomorrow night? I know a great place I can take you.*

I stare at the message, a sinking feeling in my chest.

I unlock his phone, having watched him unlock it for a few weeks now, and find several other messages from various men. Men who would probably love to have a pretty face like Finn's out in public with them. They'd probably have no problem going out on dates with him, with being *seen*.

*I don't want to be your secret.*

I slide the phone in my pocket and make my way downstairs. Finn doesn't look at me, but I know he's well aware of my presence. I go to walk towards where James is still sitting, but Lane is suddenly in my way.

"Officer Lowry," he says, a bite to his tone that suggests he's not impressed. He's short, wearing heels to compensate for it, but I get the effects of what makes him intimidating.

"Mr..." I hesitate on his last name.

"Young." His eyes narrow. "Officer Lowry, it would be *appreciated* if my employee doesn't disappear in the middle of his shift. Especially when we're as busy as we are. Wouldn't you agree?"

There's a threat in the stress of his words and I square my shoulders. "Then you should talk to him about that."

"Oh, I will. I'll make sure to remind him of my stance on everything." He turns away from me, but I'm trying to get my thoughts around his words.

I follow him to the bar. "What's that supposed to mean?" I whisper.

He makes me a drink and smacks it heavily on the bar in between us. "Wingstead is a nice place for a break for a couple of months. For some of us, it's *not* a place to settle. I would hate for anything to jeopardize that for some people of our community." His eyes flash and I look over at Finn, laughing with a customer over by a table.

I lean on the bar and smirk. “If you think you have *community members*’ best interests at heart, I’d take a good look at your own behavior, Mr. Young.”

Lane settles a steely gaze on me and braces his arms on the bar, leaning close. “He deserves better,” he says, dropping all pretenses. “He deserves to be seen. To be adored. He’s not going to get that from you. Break him. Shatter him. Destroy his trust in the male species. Set him *free*. Or he’ll be just another lonely grave in Wingstead Cemetery.”

His face morphs into a grin as a customer approaches and it’s like a switch; Lane is back to his cheerful, flirty self.

I start to walk away back to James before stopping and turning back, waiting until the customer turns away.

“What about me?” I say softly.

Lane freezes, before raising his gaze to meet mine.

“You’ve already marked my grave, haven’t you?” Lane swallows. I step forward and narrow my eyes. “Maybe I’m tired of not being seen. Of being the person who does the adoring. Maybe I’ve been broken and shattered and had my trust in the male species destroyed. Maybe I’ll never be set free because this is the path I’ve been forced into. Imagine having a *choice*.”

Lane’s eyes are wide, and he doesn’t move an inch when I lean on the bar, lowering my voice.

“Bold of you to assume we’re the same, Lane.” I lean fully over the bar to whisper in his ear. “When I look at Finn, he’s

the *only* thing I see. He's *already* broken, shattered, destroyed, and I'm trying to put him *back together*." I lean back, but he doesn't look at me. "You don't know me. Remember that if you try to tell me how to approach my life."

I stalk away, leaving Lane scrambling for the last word. He's not going to get it this time.

I sit down heavily in front of James and take large gulps of the drink Lane made me.

"Everything okay?" James whispers. He seems nervous about the amount I just drank in front of him. The routine is different and he's not happy with it.

"No. I've... I'm sorry. I've just found out I have to work."

James studies me without expression, before throwing a brief look over at Finn and Lane behind the bar. "Does *work* have anything to do with that sexy brunette guy behind the bar who has been staring over at us all night?"

I resist looking over at Finn. "No."

"Right," he says slowly. "So the three Cuba Libre's you've had tonight, including the one you just drained in a matter of seconds, are really going to help with your job."

I close my eyes to get my anger under control. "I don't have to explain myself to you, James. That was part of our agreement, if you recall."

He clamps his lips together and takes an even breath, before sliding out of the booth. "Our agreement also included sex."

“You don’t even *like* what we do. Why the fuck do you do it?”

James bristles with irritation and turns to look at me with contempt as he slides his jacket over his shoulders. “Because Brad does. And he does it with no hesitation with any number of men.”

I look up at him, a sensation of horror filling my lungs. “You never told me that.”

“I know. It’s... I only... found out recently.”

I purse my lips and turn away from him. “Fuck, James.”

He turns and walks out of the room, leaving me in silence.

I sit in the booth and wait for the room to clear. Eventually, Finn sits in front of me, his eyes wary.

“We need to get tested,” I say softly and his eyes widen with horror.

“*What?* Why?”

“I sleep with James occasionally. He found out his boyfriend has been sleeping around and I can’t guarantee his own level of responsibility. I’d rather be safe than sorry.”

Finn folds his arms across his chest and lowers his eyes. “You... You slept with him while you’ve been with me?”

I look at him in surprise. “No. I wouldn’t do that to you. The night you got wildly drunk at the gym was the last time I was with James.”

“I didn’t get drunk *at* the gym. I got drunk and then went *to* the gym.” Even though the scowl is still on his face, his shoulders lose a little of their tension. “So... there isn’t any real danger? You and I have always used condoms and I’m on other precautions too.”

I gulp and blow air out of my lips loudly. “About that...”

“What? You *haven’t* been using condoms? I know you—”

“No, not that... *why* are you on PrEP? Is there a—”

His mouth drops open in surprise. “Wait, do you think I’m on it because I go around fucking whoever I want, whenever I want?”

“No. Of course not. I was just... *curious* about if—”

“About if I’m a slut who beds the first person to look at me!”

I close my eyes as he gets up, his brow knitted together in fury. “Finn. Sit down.”

“Funny that you’re asking *now*, once you’ve realized that your little *agreement* wasn’t as in your control as you thought it was. That’s what it is, isn’t it? You suddenly realize that not everything you do is straightforward?”

“Sit down, Finn,” I growl. “I wasn’t accusing you of anything.”

“*Yes, you were.*”

I sigh and pull his phone out of my pocket, holding it up. “I was *asking* if you wanted to go out with this Cody guy

tomorrow night or if you're going to answer any of these frankly appalling Grindr messages." The rage that crosses his face is surprising. "*Or,*" I add quickly. "Do you want to be mine?"

He freezes, his gaze searching my face for what I mean.

"I'm already yours," I whisper. "You know that. I thought maybe this could be... something between... just us." I look away, the awkwardness of the situation making me cringe.

Finn slowly lowers into the seat opposite me and I slide his phone over the table. "Can I kiss you?"

I look around the room. Lane and Eli are sitting at the bar, talking quietly to each other, and Raya is busily tidying up after the busy evening. I know Finn needs to get back to helping her.

I look at the table in between us. "No," I whisper. "Not here."

"So we'd be doing exactly the same thing as before, except now we can't message anyone else."

"You can't *meet up* with anyone else. Message who you like. I'm not exactly the jealous type."

His eyes squint and I get the hint of a smirk at his lips. "No?" he whispers. "You read my messages. That's a very jealous thing to do."

"I *happened* to see your—"

“Are you my little jealous housewife?” he purrs, his eyes glittering with humor. “Do you need some more of daddy’s attention, Mr. Cop?”

I scowl at him. “Be careful, Finn.”

He stands two fingers on the table and slowly walks them across the table to where my hand is sitting. “It’s okay, baby,” he croons. “I’m sure I can put these fingers to good use.”

“I’m sure I can, too.” I move my hand and stand up, just as his finger touches my hand. I lean over his shoulder and whisper in his ear, aware of Lane watching me. “In fact, I’ve got a few ideas brewing already.”

I turn my gaze to Lane and draw a line up Finn’s throat with my finger, hooking it under his chin so that he’s looking up at me. “You’re going to be a good boy and finish off your work here. Then you’re going to drive to my house where I can start experimenting with my ideas.”

He gulps under my finger and I get that shiver down my spine whenever the excitement starts radiating off Finn. “What happened to us getting tested?”

I shrug and stand up. “Don’t assume I’ll fuck you. But you were right. We’re probably safe.”

Eli and Raya are nowhere in sight, so I lean down and press my lips to Finn’s in a chaste kiss, leaving him desperate for more.

I smile at him and pat his shoulder. “An hour. We’ll get to see what those fingers can do.”



I walk to the door and wink at Lane, who looks outright murderous.

I chuckle to myself as I make it to the cruiser. Finn wants a game, and I am more than ready to play it.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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### FINN

I blink awake and stretch loudly, kicking the blankets off me in the too-warm house. I'm alone in the bed, the shower running in the bathroom nearby, and I roll over to work out which parts of my body hurt the most. I groan at the reminder of last night and lazily stroke myself, unable to get enough.

Evan definitely had ideas for my fingers, and most of them had been used on *me*. He'd sat back and watched me do everything myself, enjoying the show, calling the shots, as I slowly drove myself mental. Then he'd railed me into the mattress, which was as pleasurable as it was now aching.

I slowly get up and groan, making my way to the shower and enjoying the view of Evan's large body, his back to me. I smirk at the tub, remembering the last time I'd been in it, and come up behind Evan in the shower stall. He grunts in surprise but doesn't turn around.

"Good morning," I murmur, kissing water droplets off his shoulder blades. "An addition to my contract of being a secret

boyfriend: I have to be allowed in the shower with you sometimes.”

He exhales a laugh and I run my fingers over his firm chest as he raises hands lathered with shampoo to his head.

I don’t usually get Evan so vulnerable to my touches, so I’m going to take advantage of it. My fingers explore his abs, the hairy weight to his balls, his stiffening erection. I step back and trail my fingers around to his ass, dipping into the cleft at the base of his spine and trailing down between his cheeks.

He tenses automatically, but I plant another kiss on his neck, up near his ear. “I won’t do anything. I’m just touching. I’d never do anything without your express permission first—the same as you do for me.”

He takes in an even breath and leans further forward, bracing his hands against the wall. At the last second, he tilts his head back, letting soapy shampoo suds run down his spine and coat my fingers. I hum and put a little more pressure into the place that no one has touched before. I brush against his tight rim and the breath stills in his throat before releasing as soon as I return to a safer territory.

“You’ve really never...?” I murmur.

“No.”

“Not even a finger?”

I can see the blush on his neck. “No. I’ve never met anyone I would trust.”

I chuckle and line my erection against his ass, reaching around to lazily start jerking him off. “Understandable.” I rest my cheek against his shoulders, letting the water hit the top of my head. “I didn’t get much of a choice,” I murmur. “I had a boyfriend when I was sixteen. Before Landon. He was a bit older than me and told me he was going to fuck me whether I had a preference or not.” I sigh. “I had to figure out myself how to enjoy it, but he didn’t make it the most comfortable.”

I feel Evan tense up. “You kicked him to the curb, I hope.”

“Not entirely. An ex of his was diagnosed with HIV and he panicked, which made *me* panic. I was sixteen and thought I was going to die. Luckily, I told my parents about the situation and they calmed me down, told me calmly that I *wasn’t* going to die, even if I did have HIV, which I don’t, but they put me on PrEP as soon as it was possible. It’s my own peace of mind now. Not anything else.” I sigh and rest my chin on his shoulders. “*That’s* why I’m on it. No, I’m not hopping in and out of bed. No, I don’t switch partners constantly. When I *do* have one night stands, I’m careful about it.”

He turns in my embrace and smiles kindly, taking my face in his large hands. “I’ve always trusted you, Finn. I asked last night because I wanted to know where you stood.”

“In your shower, apparently.”

He smirks. “I love it. Get in the shower with me at any time. Also, your ex is a dickhead. What happened to him?”

I shrug. “Doesn’t have HIV but had a pretty bad mental breakdown because of it. There was something shady hiding

there anyway. He was more than happy to take from me what I wasn't willing to give, and he didn't even think about me in the resulting chaos. *He* didn't even tell me. I found out through someone else."

Evan frowns. "He's a shithead."

I laugh and wrap my arms around his shoulders. "He was a scared eighteen year old who was suddenly faced with his own mortality."

"No, he wasn't. He was a scared eighteen-year-old who was suddenly faced with his own terrible decisions. I joined the military at eighteen. I know what it's like to be faced with your own mortality at a young age."

"Eighteen, wow," I whisper.

"It beat being in a shitty home with a shitty father and a shitty life." He turns away to finish washing the soap off and then steps out of the shower. "I'd have done anything to get away. Military seemed the easiest."

"How long were you in the military?" I ask, turning the shower off and getting handed a fluffy white towel.

"Did the full eight years. Spent two years in reserves. Was planning to go back, but then Connor died, and Oliver a while later..." He shakes his head and runs his fingers through his hair. "Nothing made sense then. Death was fine, expected, in war. Not at home."

I ponder that for a moment before he turns to me suddenly.

I think I've overstepped the mark asking questions about his personal life until he grins. "Do you want to come to work with me today?"

My mouth drops open. "Really?"

"Yeah. It's a Sunday, so you don't have work, and it'll just be me on patrol all day...It'll be boring, just a warning, but..." He shrugs and looks away. "It might be nice for the company."

I squeal softly. "Yes. Yes, I want to. Ooh! Can I arrest someone?"

"Absolutely not. If anything *does* happen, you're to stay out of sight and out of the way."

This is going to be perfect to get some research for my book. I walk excitedly back to the bedroom to get my clothes on.

A little over an hour later and we're sitting in the police cruiser with breakfast, hot coffee for Evan, and an iced coffee for me as we sit by the highway into Wingstead with the radar gun.

"So, *this*," Evan says with a mouthful of croissant. "Is what I clock you going seventy-five miles an hour on."

"Come on, I've got up to eighty before. Give me credit."

He frowns at me and I hold it up to the next passing car. "Fifty. *Boring*."

"I've told you before, Mr. Bartender. You're too pretty to die in a car accident."

I chuckle and lean my head against the headrest to look at him. “I like it when you call me that. I know it’s meant to remind me that I’m beneath you and that I’m only a bartender, but I like it.”

He chuckles. “That was not my intention.”

I study him for a moment, before a car approaches and I have to check their speed. “Forty-five. Wow. People around here don’t know how to move.”

He rolls his eyes and takes a sip of his coffee.

“Can I ask you something?” I ask quietly. He nods slowly. “I’m assuming you didn’t go to college seeing as you went straight to the military.”

He nods. “Didn’t finish high school either. Sorry if that is disappointing.”

I chuckle. “You speak very... eloquently for someone who didn’t finish high school.”

“You expect me to sound like a hick?”

“I expected you to speak *plainly*. But you don’t. The only thing that made me realize you didn’t is you wrote the wrong ‘your’ on the notes you left me. It’s something Lane does all the time, and he didn’t finish high school either.”

“He didn’t?”

I shake my head and take a mouthful of my muffin.

“I’ve read a lot. Oliver was a reader and he always wanted someone to talk books with.”

I look over at him. I'd noticed the books on his bookshelf.

"Were you and he together?"

Evan shakes his head and nods at a car going so slow that even I can track it with a slow move of my head. "Hold on." He flicks a switch and the siren sounds for a few seconds. Enough for the person driving to crawl to a stop in the middle of the road. "It's Mrs. Everly. Ninety-nine years old and still thinks she can see the road in front of her." He gets out and ambles over to the car. I chuckle and watch as he leans into the window to try and explain to her that she shouldn't be driving. She waves him off with a self-assured grin and starts creeping along the road again.

Evan comes back with a shake of his head.

"You can't charm little old ladies, can you?"

"I don't need to. That's Pepper's job. Smith can talk to younger people, Tamara can rough up the problematics, and I..." He purses his lips. "I feel up hot men on the side of the road and nearly lose my damn job."

I smile. "You didn't though, did you? Nearly lose your job?"

He shakes his head. "If Malcolm saw anything, he didn't say anything to anyone. I don't know how long he was standing there, and he very easily could have witnessed me telling you I was going to fuck your brains out against your car as a lesson for speeding."



I burst into laughter. “We should do that, you know? Here? Now?”

“No. Don’t make me regret bringing me with you today.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. I like being here. This is fun. It’s almost like a date.”

He gives me a bland smile and takes a sip of coffee. “What can I say? I treat my men nice.”

I twist in the seat and look at him better. “So, you and Oliver really weren’t together?”

“No. I’d tried to convince him he was queer a few times, got him off once and he even offered to return the favor, but... back in the States, everything seemed to hyperfocus somehow. Like a weird alternate reality. We were good friends. Brothers.” He stares out the window and takes another sip of coffee. “Would have died for him if I had the choice.”

I feel my heart sink at his words. I doubt even my parents would say the same thing about me. I can’t even imagine feeling that intense about another human being.

Evan clears his throat and starts the engine. “Alright, let’s go for a ride. I believe you offered that before.”

I chuckle and try to ignore the sudden surge of pain in my heart.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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### EVAN

I have to admit, this is the most fun I've had in a long time, on what should have been a boring day of work. Finn is firing question after question about policing, what I would think about being a policeman in different time periods, what I think has changed, how different the military was from policework... and he *listens*. Intently. As though he's in awe of everything that comes out of my mouth.

"Why are you so obsessed with the fifties?" I ask with a chuckle as he asks yet another question about what it was like in that specific time period.

He blushes scarlet. "I just... enjoy it. That's all."

"Why? What's so special about it?"

He shrugs, embarrassed at my interest.

"Come on, Finn. You don't have to be embarrassed with me. It's not as if I'm going to be here condemning you for liking a specific era."

He smiles and swirls his straw around his drink slowly. “Uh... I don’t know. I just like the... *upheaval*. The promise of what’s to come next. World War II was over, and men were coming home, women were being forced back to their homes and were getting antsy, the civil rights movement was starting to take flight, gay rights activists were starting to make noise... television, pop music, an urgent need for a change in society.” He shrugs again and I realize it’s the first time I’ve ever heard Finn be passionate about something. “I like the sixties too—the Stonewall riots, Sexual Revolution, JFK was shot... but I like the fifties more. Everything seemed so... I guess, on edge. And we can only know that by looking *back*.”

I drive around Wingstead, trying to resist pulling over and just sitting and listening to Finn talk for a while. I don’t really know how to respond to him, and I see him nervously swirl his drink faster.

“I know. It’s stupid. It’s not even—”

“It’s not stupid, Finn. Christ. It’s an *interest*.”

He looks intently at his cup for a second before looking at me with a shy smile. “Sorry,” he whispers.

I don’t even deign that with a response and change the subject. “What did you do before you came to Wingstead? Before you became Mr. Bartender.”

He smiles. “Uh, Mr. P.R. Manager. Worked for a time for my parents’ various charities and did some side jobs for really shitty influencers and popstars who thought I could do magic.” His demeanor drops. “Turns out, I kinda can. That was a

surprise. It's amazing how easy it is to put a positive spin on some really shitty people. They only came to me because I could charm my way—*their* way—out of some impossible situations and still come off as the good guy.” He sighs and stares out the window. “I kept taking those jobs, and it wrecked my relationship with my parents because it's almost the exact opposite of how they'd raised me to be. I got *fired* from the charity, which was a fucking blow, let me tell you.”

We drive around in silence for a minute, something becoming clear in my mind. “People did what you told them to do, didn't they?”

“Mmhhh. If they didn't, they'd be slammed by the press or —*gasp*—cancelled.”

“You could walk into the room and everyone would listen to you.”

He frowns at me. “I guess. Why?”

“I'm just understanding why you feel the need to give up your control in the bedroom.”

“Because I was in P.R.?” He smirks.

“Yeah. You could walk into a room and tell a really shitty person what to do to cover up the really shitty thing they'd done, and they'd do whatever came out of your mouth. No questions asked.”

He blinks at me in surprise.

“And you kept taking those jobs because you *liked* the control, to have a person you'd never met before in the palm

of your hand, to do whatever you wished.”

He gulps. “Well, I wouldn’t put it—”

He’s interrupted by the crackling of the police radio, informing me there was some suspicious behavior at some abandoned ruins a few miles north of Wingstead. Finn sits upright, obviously relieved of the interruption, and I decide not to press it.

“Are we going to catch some bad guys?” he grins, like a child at Christmas.

“No. We’re going to *inspect* some *suspicious behavior*.”

“What’s considered suspicious behavior?”

“Underage drinking, graffiti, dealing... that sort of shit.”

“Oh, so boring teenagers.”

I point to him and drive faster towards our destination.

As I expected, there’s no one there when we arrive, but I still make Finn stay in the car until I’ve scouted the area. Finn doesn’t stay in the car, but I knew it had been useless as soon as I’d told him to stay there.

“You are *so* bad at listening to instructions unless you’re naked,” I growl.

He shrugs. “As you said: teenagers.” He frowns and looks around the abandoned ruins. “Although... this doesn’t seem like teenagers.”

“No?” I say with a chuckle, wandering around the crumbling stone structure. There are trees overhead, the dry

floor dappled in sunlight and a gentle breeze playing with the leaves. It's a nice day and I sit on a low stone wall, content to sit.

“No. No cigarette butts, condom packets, trash, or beer bottles. It was...” He studies the ground for a moment before looking around and frowning.

“Oh. Deer.”

“What? What happened?”

I point. “No. Deer. Large animals with antlers.”

He comes over to sit next to me and laughs softly at the two large animals—a female and a male—standing under the tree amongst some bushes and watching us curiously. They turn, not concerned by our presence and amble away.

“Well, we didn't catch some bad guys, but we did warn some pretty suspicious-looking mammals.”

“The life of a police officer is dangerous and not for the faint-hearted.”

His lips twitch before he turns serious. “Those deer could have easily attacked me. Good thing you were here to save me.”

“I live to please.”

“Oh, yeah?”

I knew that would be his response yet I find myself thinking about how no one would ever know if I took a few minutes to enjoy the nice day with Finn. I look at my watch before

blowing air out of my lungs slowly, looking in all directions. The coast is clear, nothing around for miles, so I lean forward and kiss Finn roughly.

He hums in my mouth and he pulls me closer, tangling his fingers into the back of my hair.

“God, you’re so fucking hot,” he moans as I move my lips to his neck. He sounds so sincere, unlike the vague compliments James had said when we started our agreement, and I drag him closer, gripping him so tight it must be painful. I have the strangest urge to hold him and never let him go. I don’t want to lose him. I don’t *want* him to go back to Chicago and have a life. I want him to be mine.

Lane’s little speech has rattled me more than I’d thought it had.

Finn moves slightly, keeping his lips on mine. He forces me to my feet and pushes me backwards, following me as I stumble and hit my spine against the brick wall nearby.

The breath gets knocked out of me but Finn doesn’t let up. He grabs my hands, placing them against the wall by my hips.

“What do you want?” I whisper, noticing a change in the way Finn is kissing me.

“I think it’s about time we swap.”

My thoughts race and he sends a cocky smile my way.

“I’ve got no condoms or lube here, so we’ll have to make do with *you* listening to *me*. Don’t move your hands off this wall.”

I let the relief out of my shoulders and grin. “Oka—”

“Shh, let me see what it’s like on your end.”

“You moaning is normally what’s on my end.”

A devilish edge flickers in Finn’s gaze and he smirks. “I. Said. *Shhh*.”

I grin as he slowly feathers his fingers over the fly of my pants, my hard-on straining against the material. He slowly unzips and relieves me, letting me jut out into the warm air so indelicately.

“I can see why you like this,” he murmurs. “You’re right, it *is* powerful. Maybe it *is* why I enjoyed working in P.R.” He folds his arms and steps back. “What do you think? Should I go back to my old job? Go back to Chicago?”

I stare at him for a moment and understand the fear and vulnerability beneath his eyes, despite the cocky exterior. I slowly shake my head.

“No,” I whisper. “Don’t go.”

A raw emotion floods his face and I can’t help but think it’s something I haven’t even considered yet. *Love*.

I know he’s told me to keep my hands on the wall but I reach out for him and he folds himself into my embrace, his lips finding mine, pouring all of himself into the kiss. I spin and place him against the wall instead.

His leg comes up to hook over my hip and I reach in between us to free him from his shorts, gripping the both of us



together. He places his hand over mine and we work together, grinding hips and sliding hands, moaning and biting and cursing until he cries out my name and angles the both of us towards him, inching his shirt up to his chest.

His grip tightens and he drops his head back, climaxing with a shudder and a deep groan.

I follow him, entranced by the sight in front of me. He looks so... *peaceful*, as if needing my approval had been a strain on his shoulders.

We breathe out heavily, his leg still locked over my hip, our hands still clasped around our softening cocks, and Finn suddenly chuckles. “You’re a naughty man, Officer Lowry. That was not at *all* what I told you to do.”

I exhale a laugh and disentangle myself from him. He pulls a packet of tissues out of his pocket and hands some to me, while using some on his stomach. I notice something in his pocket as he straightens and I squint at him, reaching forward and plucking the small travel-sized bottle of lube out of it.

“You little liar.”

He grins. “Sorry. Just wanted to see what you’d do if you had limited options.”

“*Not* you, apparently.”

He winks at me and replaces his shirt, hiding his sexy abs and tattoo. He bites his lip and looks me over. “You know, if there’s anything you want me to do to you, I’ll do it. We don’t have to *always* do what I want to do.”

I smile and nod my head back to the car. “I can’t think of anything.”

He narrows his gaze at me before jogging to catch up as I leave.

“There *is* something you want, isn’t there? Is it... like *weird*? Do you want to... I don’t know, tape me to the ceiling fan and shit on my head or something?”

I throw him a bored look and wait for him to get in the car before starting the engine.

“*Is* it? How would one even *do* that?”

“You have too big of an imagination.”

“Ah, some would say not big enough.” His eyes sparkle. “No one’s said that about a different part of me though.”

“Mm... your *mouth*.”

He laughs loudly and turns to look out the window. “When we’re in the moment... tell me what you want me to do and we’ll see how accommodating I am.”

I look over at him, surprised to see how serious he is. I shift in my seat and try to get my focus back on my job, made extremely difficult by the man next to me, whom I can’t keep out of my thoughts.

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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### FINN

**T**he answers Evan gave to my questions helped so much with my novel that I've found myself disappearing to write it more and more. I see Evan occasionally and I work at the bar, but all my spare time that would have been spent trying to find something to do has been taken over by writing.

Evan taps the top of the laptop screen where I'm sitting at the booth in the far corner. "Earth to Mr. Bartender."

I look up in alarm and shut the laptop, nervous for him to know what is on the screen. "I'm off duty. It's just Mr. Man at the moment."

He sits next to me and hands me a drink. "You're not often tending the bar when I call you that. I'm not often on duty when you call me Mr. Cop."

I lean on the laptop, blocking the rest of the bar out of view and grin at him. "This is unusual. You're over here, looking like you *like* me."

“I do like you.” He smiles calmly at me. “Actually, I bought you a gift.”

I blink at him. “A gift? Is it sexual?”

Evan reaches into his inside jacket pocket and pulls out a wrapped parcel, handing it to me. “Open it,” he says when I stare at it in surprise.

“I like gifts,” I say softly, unwrapping the thin rectangle. It’s the novel and the movie adaptation of *Anatomy Of A Murder*. My heart beats fast in my chest and I look up at him with a grin.

“I was thinking about your love for the fifties decade and I always think of this movie when I think of that time period. I thought you might like it.”

I look around us quickly before leaning over and kissing his cheek. “I do. Thank you. It’s...” I hold the book in my hands and read the blurb. “I don’t really ever get gifts. I really...”

He rolls his eyes. “Okay. It’s a book. I hardly did anything spectacular.”

I chuckle. “I don’t have a DVD player, but maybe I can watch it on stream somewhere.”

“I do. You’ll have to come over and we can watch it together.”

“It’s a date,” I whisper, before looking around the room again and grabbing Evan’s leg under the table when a customer walks in. “Hey, that’s Grindr-married-come-on-face guy.”

He has his arms around a woman and is looking as awkward as I remember him being.

“Huh,” Evan says with a frown. “That’s my brother-in-law.”

I turn to look at him in pure surprise, my hands flying up to my mouth in horror. “*What?*”

His lips turn up at the corners and he leans back into his chair. “I’m just kidding. I do know him, though. His name is Grant.”

“How do you know him?”

“I’m a policeman, Finn. I know everyone.”

“Oh. Right.”

He looks at me and raises his eyebrows. “What did you think the answer to that would be?”

I shrug weakly and change the subject. “*So*. It’s Saturday today, which means the bar is closed tomorrow. *And* I thought maybe you’d want to stay with me tonight?” I reach under the table and drag my fingers up his thigh. “Doesn’t that sound like fun?”

He chuckles and takes a sip of his drink. “How fun?” he asks behind his drink.

I smirk and brush my fingers over the bulge in the front of his pants, careful to not let the top half of my arm move. As long as I stay leaning forward, no one will be suspicious. The air leaves Evan’s lungs as he pretends to be distracted with

drinking, and I gently ease the zip of his jeans down to slip my fingers inside.

I gasp in delight to find him commando and he smirks at me. “You’re right. That *does* sound like fun. Now stop touching me before I no longer fit in my jeans.”

I hum and throw a glance at him. “Is there any reason I shouldn’t ease that problem right here?”

I look around the empty bar and pull him through the zipper.

“*Yes*. There are a lot of reasons why you shouldn’t do this here.”

“Yeah? What are they?”

He swallows heavily as I slowly move my hand. He suddenly grasps my hand and pulls it off him, tucking his cock away again. “Go upstairs,” he growls in my ear. “Leave your laptop. I need it to hide what you’ve done to me.” He nods in the direction of my apartment. “Take your clothes off when you get up there and be waiting for me.”

I get the same thrill run through me that I always do, but I turn to look at him and smile slyly. “Or what?”

He chuckles. “Or I’ll stand in front of you and refuse to let you come. Think about it.”

“Well, in *that* case, I’ll be naked and ready.”

“Smart choice.”

I stand up and very deliberately slide my laptop towards me, picking it up and tucking it under my arm. “Wouldn’t want to

accidentally leave this here, would I?” I murmur seductively and watch Evan’s control waver.

I walk upstairs, trying to appear casual. As soon as I get into the apartment, I throw the laptop and the gifts on the table and strip naked.

I flop on the bed and wait impatiently, slowly edging myself so that I’m nice and ready for him.

He takes ages. I open my laptop to get the time again and frown. It’s been close to ten minutes. I pick up the book and grin, holding it to my chest for a second.

Suddenly, I hear footsteps on the stairs and I put the book down carefully and sit on the bed, grinning.

He opens the door slowly, his gaze trained on my face, before shutting the door loudly behind him.

“You took *forever*. Nearly came twice!”

“Yeah, well, *someone* made it so I had to wait for my erection to go down, but I kept thinking of you, up here, naked and tortured and, well... that kept me nice and hard. It’s your own fault.”

I laugh and raise my eyebrows. “So, what’s taking you so long now?” I murmur.

He shrugs and walks towards me. “I’m not sure I’m in the mood anymore.”

“Liar,” I say through a grin. “But come over here and let me persuade you.”

Evan chuckles and walks over casually, before standing next to me and looking at the door. “Go over to the door and lock it.”

“What? Why didn’t you do it?”

He gives me the look he gives me when I’m not supposed to question it. “Go lock the door. I want *you* to lock it so you know it’s locked.”

“Why?” I get up anyway and lock the door dramatically. Before I can process what is happening, I have a handcuff on one wrist and I’m facing the bed, the other wrist being locked smoothly behind my back. “What the—”

“I’m a policeman, remember?” he whispers. “And *fuck*, I should have had you in handcuffs before now. Look at you.” He stands behind me and directs my gaze to the large full-length mirror that had been Lane’s when he’d lived here. “Tell me what you see.”

“I see me naked and you fully clothed.”

“Exactly. What else?”

“I see my hands behind my back.” My cock is bobbing at the image of the two of us in the mirror and I desperately want him to do something about it.

Evan hums and leans down to plant a kiss on my shoulder blade. “Let’s see if we can do this properly, shall we?” he murmurs, tugging me to face him and running his hands over my body, purposely avoiding my straining erection. He tilts my head up to look him in the eyes. “Don’t strain against the



cuffs. They'll hurt you. I don't want you hurt." He places a delicate kiss on my lips, leaving me wanting more. "Tell me if you don't like this."

"Always," I whisper. He grins and spins me back to face the mirror. He kisses down my spine and I let my hands run over whatever material is within reach. "Are we playing dirty cop? Because I'm here for it if you are. I'm *very* good at playing a criminal."

His gaze meets mine in the mirror, his eyes glittering with desire. "No, but... maybe one day."

I moan as his hand finally touches my aching arousal and I buck into his palm.

"What can you see now?" he asks, kissing and softly biting at my neck.

"Oh, God... I see me about to lose it already."

"Careful, Finn. I haven't even got my cock out yet."

I moan again and he pulls off me before leading me back to the bed and sitting me down. He stands in between my legs and slowly unzips his jeans. I think he's going to make me suck him, until he drops to his knees and draws me into his mouth. "Oh, *shit*."

He brings me close yet again before rocking back to sit on his heels and pulling his shirt off. "You know how you asked me if there was anything you could do for me?"

I nod seriously.

“Good. Fuck my face.”

My mouth drops open. “What?”

“Use my face. Bring yourself off. You don’t have use of your hands, so I’m still in control.”

As I’m still trying to figure out if he’s serious or not, he helps me to standing and takes me deep in his mouth again. *Real* deep. “Oh, God,” I breathe.

I flex my hips and the air leaves his nose in a rush. He leans back, keeping me in his mouth, and the dark desire in his eyes leaves me as breathless as he is.

“Pinch me if you want me to stop.”

He nods and I pitch my hips forward quickly, filling his mouth again. I groan, lust and need filling my body, and I start moving quickly, enjoying the suction of his lips. His hands trail up under my balls and, combined with me going deep into his throat, I mutter a warning of my imminent climax. He grabs the base of my cock as I finish and draws off me, making me come on his face.

Evan grins wildly, his eyes bright with lust. “Perfect.”

I relax at the confirmation that I hadn’t done something terrible and he gets to his feet, unlocking my wrists. He points to the bed, before disappearing to the bathroom, presumably to wipe his face.

“I didn’t know you’d like doing that,” I call out. I get a chuckle as a response and he soon appears, climbing onto the

bed next to me. The night's activities are surely not over, not when he hasn't come yet.

"I wasn't sure myself," he says calmly, lying back on my pillows and placing his arms under his head.

I crawl over towards him. "God, Evan. You asked me to do that without knowing what your limits were? Isn't that, like, your *thing*?"

He laughs and tugs me so we're spooning. "Do you wanna know why?"

"Yes."

He sighs and I gather there's a reason I can't look at him. He wants that space, that distance. "Every time I have sex with James, I feel... straight. He blows *me*, I fuck *him*... he barely lets me touch him. And even with you sometimes. It's always me calling the shots and making you yield to me."

I turn to face him and grin. "Did I just make you feel your best gay self?"

He smiles. "Nothing says gay like having a cock filling your mouth and come on your face, right?"

"You're so funny." I laugh loudly and straddle him. "*But* I'm more than happy to let you do that whenever you like. That was great. And..." I reach behind me and trail my fingers up his thigh. "If there's anything else you want me to do to help you reach your full gay potential, I'm happy to."

He props himself up and kisses me, indicating the conversation is over. I taste myself on his tongue and I relax

into his hands as they run up my spine.

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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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### EVAN

I wake up with the sight of Finn's ass directly in my line of sight. I trail my gaze up the rest of his body and grin. God, what is this man doing to me? Everything had been going smoothly before he entered my life. I shift forward and press my lips in between his shoulder blades, before wrapping him up in my arms. He stirs and groans, moving his body further into my embrace.

"Good morning," I murmur. It really is — a good morning. I don't remember the last time I've woken up so content; the warmth of Finn's body is waking me up quicker than normal too, and I nuzzle my way into his neck, pressing my erection to his ass as he moves it towards me.

"Someone's happy to see me," he mumbles, still half-asleep.

"Always."

He settles back in to rest and I kiss all the skin I can access. He yawns loudly and reaches up to put his fingers in the back

of my hair, scratching lightly, making all the nerve endings on my scalp tingle. “Let daddy sleep, baby.”

I laugh and place my head in between his shoulder blades, shaking it back and forth quickly until he groans out a laugh. I kiss his lips roughly. “It’s nine o’clock. Time to get up and seize the day.”

“It’s nine o’clock on a *Sunday* and I happen to know neither of us are working.” He rolls over, pushes me on my back and snuggles into me. “Which *means*, you and I are spending the whole day *right* here and the only reason we’ll leave is for essentials.”

“What do you consider essentials? ‘Cause you don’t have food and I think we’ve only got about one more round left with that lube on your nightstand there.” He opens his eyes and gazes up at me. “I mean, I guess it depends on how literally you’d want to scrape the bottle. It’s not my ass that is getting pounded.”

His eyes sparkle and he looks considerably more awake. “Pounded, you say? Maybe I *could* be persuaded to go out and buy us some more lube. I need a preview, though.”

He lies flat on his back and kicks the blankets off, exposing his gorgeous erection, which is standing tall and proud.

I lick a line up his neck. “I thought daddy had to sleep,” I purr in his ear.

“Daddy *also* needs a good morning blowjob.”

I slide my way down his body, kneeling in between his thighs and grin up at him. I am in an extraordinarily good mood, so I take my time, enjoying listening to Finn give his pleasure over to me entirely.

Finn falls asleep again shortly after he finishes, and I curl up next to him and doze. It has been many years since I've stayed in bed for a considerable amount of time, and I'm trying to figure out if I enjoy it or not. I draw little circles on Finn's arm with my finger and switch my train of thought in my head to the prospect of *letting Finn fuck me*. Finn's hinted at the idea a few times but he's never going to push for it. He's said that he's more than happy to always bottom, but that starts a new conversation all on its own: how long is our forever? We were never supposed to be a long-term thing, right?

As I'm pondering this, I suddenly hear voices down in the bar below and I cautiously get out of bed, creeping to the door. Has someone broken into the closed bar?

I crack open the door, my body poised to fight, when I hear Landon Collins' laugh sound up through the stairwell. I relax and move back to the bed.

*Shit.* How am I supposed to get out of here if Landon is downstairs? I assume he's not alone, which means someone who has a key must have let him in.

I gently kiss a line up Finn's body. "Finn. Wake up."

He stirs. "Five more minutes."

I smile weakly. “Your friends are in the bar downstairs. I can’t leave.”

He frowns and blinks his eyes open. “Sure you can. You put one foot in front of the other and then walk out the door.”

I scowl. “I mean, without them seeing me.”

Finn sits up slowly, both of our good moods dissipating instantly. “Are you really still so concerned about being seen with me? Seriously? What’s the big deal?”

What had started out as a wonderful morning has very quickly deteriorated. I fold my arms and put the rest of my clothes on, trying to figure out how I can get out.

“Is there a back exit?” I ask.

“*Evan.*”

I look at him and scowl. “*What*, Finn? You knew this from the very beginning.” His words run through my head. *I don’t want to be your secret.*

He searches my expression in disbelief for a moment before shaking his head and climbing out of bed, roughly putting on clothes.

He hands me my phone and my keys and I think he’s going to make me walk out of here anyway. Instead, he walks to the laptop at the table and switches it on. “What are you doing?” I ask nervously.

“Figuring out how to get out of here, you dumbass. I’m checking security cameras so I know who is here. We



wouldn't want anyone knowing that you fuck someone so *beneath* you, would we?" He yanks open the door and lowers his voice to a whisper. "Stay here until I tell you to go. The back door is at the back of the store room, straight across the hallway. It slams, so be very slow with it." He narrows his eyes. "Or maybe I shouldn't have told you that."

I nod slowly and he shuts the door behind him. I close my eyes and sink into the dining chair. How the *fuck* did I mess this up already? The idea of having the group of men that Finn hangs around with know about us still brings a level of fear to rise in my stomach. It's bad enough that Lane knows.

I look at Finn's laptop and study the security feed. It's the entire fucking group and they've spread out on several of the booths, doing something for the wedding it looks like. Fuck. I'll never get out of here.

I close the security cameras and it opens up to a Word document of eighty-three pages. I catch a line and frown.

*"I was faced with mortality at a young age," David said with a scowl. "This is simply you being irresponsible."*

"Huh," I grunt, scrolling to the top of the document. I'd said similar words to him when discussing his ex.

This is the document Finn has been working on, typing away whenever he got the chance. He'd told me he was doing something for his mother but it looks like a novel he's writing.

Why wouldn't he tell me about it? I look at the still closed door before looking at the document again.

*David Merger, private investigator and flaming homosexual, knew it would be only a matter of time for the police sirens to appear in his car mirror, but he'd assumed it would have been for something a little more exciting than being queer. A high-speed car chase, maybe. Or a bank robbery.*

I chuckle and after another look at the door, I keep reading.

As soon as I hear footsteps on the stairs, I bring the document down to the bottom where I'd found it and shut the laptop.

Finn pokes his head in, his expression distant and tight. "You can go now. No one will notice you through the hallway as long as you don't make any noise."

He's gone before I can say anything and I look back at the closed laptop before tiptoeing out of there. Finn is sitting on top of one of the booth chairs, drawing everyone's attention away from the hallway. He gets a text message and I can see his smile from where I'm hidden.

I hate the rise of jealousy as it swirls in my stomach. *I* just pushed *him* away, not the other way around. I gulp and look towards the way to freedom before looking at Finn.

I already know the decision I'm going to make and I hurry through the doorway, disappearing into the back room.

The feeling of relief when I make it to fresh air without being seen makes everything so much worse.

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

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### FINN

I frown at my laptop screen at the bar and try to figure out how David Merger can get out of the trouble he's found himself in yet again. I'm so focused on it that I don't notice Evan walk up in his police uniform, holding two coffees in his hand and a large box under his arm.

"Finn," he whispers and I jump in fright, coming back to the real world.

"*Wow*. That scared me."

"Sorry." He clears his throat. "Lost in thought? What are you doing?" He nods to my laptop and I close the document to avoid being caught.

"Uh... my dad wanted some help with... something. I don't know. They're more than happy to fire me for not aligning with the company's values yet still need my services."

Evan searches my face. "Right," he says slowly.

I blush and look at the cups in his hand. "Is one of those for me?"

He looks down and nods. “Yes. But I don’t remember which one.”

I gesture them both towards me and take a sip of one before screwing my nose up and handing it to him. “That’s yours. Gross. No sugar and a dash of almond milk. Like a psychopath.”

He chuckles wearily and sits next to me. He looks tired, I notice.

“Look, I... wanted to say I’m sorry,” he says quietly, looking around us. It’s morning and the bar is empty. He’s got nothing to worry about. “I shouldn’t have, you know, reacted that way.”

I take a sip of coffee and narrow my eyes. “Yes, well, it cleared a few things up at least.”

“No, Finn, it didn’t... it just showed how idiotic I am.”

“Yes? I know. That’s what I said.”

He exhales a laugh and studies me for a moment before placing the black box on the bar in between us. I squint at it.

“What’s that?”

“Open it. It’s a gift. To say sorry.”

I slowly take the lid off the box and stare in bewilderment at the contents. I lift out the heavy piece of machinery and frown.

Evan chuckles. “It’s a police radar gun from the fifties. I thought you might... like it.” He shifts nervously. “It was my grandfather’s. He was Deputy Sherriff of Denver in the fifties

but was a private investigator before that.” He smiles sadly. “He died just before I joined the army. I would have *loved* for you to speak to him. I think you both would have liked it.”

I don’t know what to make of it. I gulp down the rise of emotion in my throat. “You... you would have wanted me to meet him?”

“Of course.” He looks around us again, before leaning closer. “Actually, um... do you want to come to dinner at my sister’s house? With me? Sometime soon? I’ll have to check her schedule.”

I don’t know how to respond so I nod my head seriously. I hate that I gobble up just one little morsel of acceptance he gives me. It’s not healthy. “I’d... I’d love to,” I whisper.

“Good. I’ll call her. Oh... and something else.” He pulls a police scanner off his belt and hands it to me. “I have a new one. You’ll be able to keep tabs on me.”

I’m overwhelmed by everything he’s given me, and I gently run my finger over the old radar. “Thank you,” I whisper. “I... don’t have anything to give you in return.”

He laughs. “Don’t be silly. I’m not expecting anything in return. Besides, you give me *you* and that’s more than enough.” He gives a barely noticeable look around the room, before leaning down and kissing me slowly. “Be good. Don’t speed. Don’t get into trouble. I’ll see you tonight.”

“Okay,” I say with a grin. I watch him leave, before turning to look properly at the gifts. The radar looks like it might even

still work with the right attention.

I switch the scanner on and listen to the crackling as it waits for a call.

“Hey.” I look up to see Landon walking towards me. He frowns at the radar in front of me and I get the same sense of nerves at the attention.

“Did you need something?” I ask politely, turning back and fiddling with the dials on the scanner.

“Uh... well, I wanted to ask Lane something but he’s not here.”

“No. Won’t be in until later. Eli will be here soon though.”

Landon smiles awkwardly and the police scanner crackles to life; Evan’s voice humming through the quiet bar. I resist the urge to giggle like a schoolgirl and turn to Landon.

“I’m sorry. You’re either waiting for Eli or coming back another day for Lane. I imagine you’ve got to get to the school soon.”

He nods slowly and stands up. “Are you and Evan sleeping together?”

I look at the police scanner as another voice sounds through, before smiling weakly over at Landon. “No. It’s just nice for some company. A friend.” I run my finger over the radar. “I don’t have many of those.”

Landon closes his eyes and winces. “Finn... I need to apologize for my behavior a few weeks ago. It was... oh, God.

I acted atrociously. I was angry and still hurt by you and I took it out on you in the worst possible way.”

I can’t look at him. “Yes, well, it did some good. It well and truly got me over you.”

He sighs. “That’s good. I mean, you should have been over me long before that, seeing as you cheated on me.”

“I *didn’t* cheat on you. I *lied* about cheating on you so that you would break up with me.”

Landon narrows his eyes at me. “That is *not* better.”

I hold my hands up. “It doesn’t matter anymore anyway. Believe what you want to believe. If you want to keep thinking I cheated on you, fine. I’m going to keep thinking you’re a jackass who left me handcuffed to a bed while you laughed at me. We’re even.” I stand up and haul the police radar off the bar into my arms.

Landon watches me for a second before nodding. He waits until I get to the hallway before calling out to me. I turn and wait for him to say something.

“Do you want to come to my wedding?”

“No.” I turn away before scowling and turning back. “Yes.”

“That’s what I thought.” He purses his lips. “Malcolm said you can’t.”

I growl. “Then why the fuck would you ask that question? God, you’re an assho—”

“I can’t tell Evan who to *not* have as his plus one though.” He holds up the invitation with Evan’s name on the front. I can see by his expression that he knows exactly what he’s asking me. I walk back over to him and take the envelope from him. “Will you give this to Evan for me?” he says kindly.

I nod, knowing I’m answering his earlier question and not the one he just asked.

I take all of it upstairs and open the invite, staring at Landon’s name in elegant gold cursive. I gulp and take Evan’s notes out of the drawer, looking at the two pieces of paper side by side.

Somewhat suddenly, I realize what I’d told Landon was the truth. I *am* over him. And in his place, I have a man who refuses to be seen with me, refuses to acknowledge me as something that could be serious, and thinks about me deeply enough to know that an old police radar and a book from the fifties was the nicest gift I could receive.

I put the invitation on my nightstand and curl up with my laptop and the police scanner, eagerly listening for Evan’s voice; his voice is one I’m beginning to think I might be in love with.



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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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### EVAN

**J**ames: *You busy tonight? I thought we could try the new Italian restaurant near Cheyenne.*

I stare at the message with a sinking heart but get a message from Finn almost directly after it.

**Finn:** *I miss you. So does my ass. It's been a while. I feel like a virgin again I've been used so little.*

His message makes me grin and I look around the precinct, suddenly self-conscious.

I find Pepper studying me curiously. "What's that grin for?"

"Nothing," I say turning back to my desk and blushing. "I... uh, just my sister."

"How is Gemma?"

"Fine," I mumble, turning back to my phone.

**Me:** *We can't have that. If I didn't have Pepper and Malcolm here watching my every move and every smile on my*

*face, I'd get you to come here. Literally. My desk needs a hot man draped over it again.*

**Finn:** *Promises, promises. Do I need to go speeding?*

**Me:** *Never. But if you happened to be somewhere out near those ruins again, maybe I'll have to check it out when I'm on patrol.*

**Finn:** *Maybe? Or definitely?*

I look around me again and keep my phone close to my body.

**Me:** *How horny are you?*

I know I'm going to get a photo as a result of that message. Anytime I ask him how horny he is, I get a photo of his erection, his ass, or sometimes just a sexy selfie of him shirtless. Any one of those are not appropriate for my workplace.

Sure enough, my phone beeps with a photo message and I open it quickly to get it off my screen. He's kneeling naked in front of the full-length mirror in his apartment, his free hand covering up everything of interest. He has a smug look on his face and I can't help my breathy laugh.

"You *are* happy today," Malcolm says close to my ear and I jump in fright, my phone flying out of my hands and lying face up on the desk in front of me. I scramble for it before the image of a naked Finn Merritt is seen by anyone else.

Too late. Malcolm's eyes widen as he works through the glimpse of the image he'd had and he looks at me in surprise.

“Wait, are you *actually*—”

A call comes through of a domestic dispute at a house nearby and the chief, only here for a few hours, comes out of his office to nod at me. “Take Malcolm with you.”

I try to stop the wince. “Yes, sir.”

Malcolm waits until we’re back in the car after breaking up the argument and we’re heading back towards the precinct. Finn has texted to say he heard I was sent to the issue, so I’m not worried about leaving him stranded at some ruins with a hard-on.

“You and Finn, hey?”

“No,” I say automatically, before shifting in the seat and gripping the wheel tighter. “Yes. Casually. Nothing serious.”

Malcolm smirks and deliberately doesn’t look at me, which is a relief. “He’s sending you nude pics at work. I’d say that’s more than ‘casually.’”

My cheeks flame in embarrassment. “That’s my own business,” I say evenly. This was exactly the reason I didn’t want anyone to know: people thinking they have an opinion on my relationship when it has nothing to do with them is my idea of hell. “And I’d appreciate if you kept the information to yourself.”

He looks at me. “Why? I mean... the dick pic at work thing, sure, but you’re making it seem as though you don’t want people to know you’re with Finn.”

“I don’t.”

“*Why?* I get he’s irritating and arrogant and the decision to date him is obviously one made under some sort of blackmail, but he’s kinda hot, I guess. If you can overlook all the rest.”

I feel a rush of anger and I grip the steering wheel tight to stop myself from pulling to the curb and making Malcolm walk the rest of the way. “You really think that about him?”

He throws a glance my way and doesn’t answer.

“You’re wrong. About all of it. And my decision to not tell anyone about it is none of your business.” I pull over to the curb, burning with rage.

“What the fu—”

I turn to him. “You really don’t give a shit about how you treated him that time in his apartment, do you?”

“He *locked himself* up. *No*. I don’t care. I thought it was funny. Still do. It’ll be funny until the day I die.” A slow smile crosses his face. “He was waiting for *you*, wasn’t he?” He bursts into laughter. “Oh God. You like tying him up, do you? I would too. It’s the only way you’d get him to—”

I reach out and grab one hand on the front of his shirt, pulling him towards me and the other hand grips tight to his jaw. He makes a small squeak in surprise, but I snarl into his face. “You shut the fuck up, Malcolm. He’s a better man than you’ll ever be. You’re just pissed because there’s a small part of you that *knows* your future *husband* wants him back.” I push Malcolm back, his breath coming out in angry huffs and his eyes dark and dangerous.

My hands are shaking and I try to calm down enough to drive back to the precinct and finish my shift. It doesn't work quickly enough and I yank open the car door throw the keys to Malcolm and walk briskly away from it.

The fucker. I want to go back and... I take another deep breath and force myself to keep walking forward.

"*Evan!*" Malcolm calls out behind me. I don't turn around.

I keep walking until I see Bar None. It's warm out and I'm sweating up a storm, but I push my way into the bar and make a beeline for Finn, who is sitting at the bar, the police scanner sitting next to him, as he's typing away at his laptop.

He looks up in surprise as I walk towards him, ignoring all the alarmed gazes of the other patrons.

"Evan? What's wrong?"

"Can I see you upstairs for a minute? Won't take long."

He frowns in concern and shuts his laptop. He throws a look to Lane, who looks just as concerned and there's a subtle nod of his head. "Um. Sure?"

I walk up the stairs quickly, knowing Finn isn't far behind. Finn shuts the door behind him and smiles kindly.

"What's wrong, Evan? Has something happened?"

"No. Yes." I shake my head. "No. Take your clothes off."

"What?" His eyes widen. "This isn't because of the message I sent you, is it?"

“Sort of. *Take* your clothes off.” He looks as though he wants to object, but he places the laptop and the scanner down before lifting the hem of his shirt. “No, wait, don’t.” Oh, fuck. What the hell am I doing? I put my hands in my hair and try to get my breathing under control.

“Evan, hon, what the fuck is happening?”

I grimace and suddenly all the pressure of trying to keep him a secret and the anger that I feel towards every single one of his friends bursts out of nowhere and I sink onto his bed, gripping my hair tight and hiding my face from him. I rub at my chest. I think I’m dying. Everything suddenly feels so *tight*.

“Oh fuck,” I sob.

“Hey, hey, hey...” he breathes. “I think you’re having a panic attack. I’m staying right here. Just breathe in and out. Focus on that for me.” I try to stop the dizzying pounding behind my eyes, but everything is spinning round and round, trying to pull me off balance. The door opens and Finn starts talking to someone, but it all sounds very vague and disconnected. I feel it in my stomach, my lunch heaving with the waves. I stumble off the bed and crawl the short distance to the bathroom, just managing to make it to the toilet bowl and vomiting.

I hear an ‘oh fuck’ from behind me but I’m too busy trying to keep myself from vomiting again and I don’t focus on it. Things are becoming clearer again, and I breathe in and out slowly, the worst of it over.

Finn gives me some space until he knows for sure I'm on the other side of it, and then he helps me sit back on the bathroom floor, getting a damp face cloth to wipe off some of the sweat, as well as a glass of water. My hand shakes as I take it and I have to grip it with both in order to get it to my mouth.

No one says anything, and I notice Lane standing off to the side, looking concerned.

"Sorry," I whisper to Finn, still crouching nearby with the cool towel. "I..." I stare at the shaking water and start to sob.

"Can you give us a minute?" Finn murmurs to Lane and I'm grateful. When the door is shut again, Finn moves to sit next to me, holding my hand gently. He doesn't try to tell me how to feel or what to do, he just sits there and holds my hand.

How could Malcolm feel so strongly against Finn? How could *anyone*? How could he be taken advantage of or be kept a secret?

"I stopped taking my anti-depressants," I whisper when it's evident Finn isn't going to say anything. He looks over at me but stays silent. "I thought you would want to be with someone who wasn't fucked up on medication just to get through the day." I hear the ragged breath through Finn's lungs, and I gulp and stare at the water glass, now steady again. "I wanted to keep you a secret until you'd be proud to have me by your side."

He still doesn't say anything, and I brave a look at his face. He looks absolutely devastated. "Evan," he gasps, tears breaking the surface of his gaze and running down his cheeks.

“I’m... I’m *already* proud to have you by my side.” He drops his head back and groans, blinking to stop the tears. “I can’t believe you stopped taking your anti-depressants! *Fuck*, that’s... oh my God, I’m glad that this was the worst of it. When? *When?* Oh, God.” He covers his face with his hands and sits still for a minute.

I gulp painfully, still tasting the acidic aftertaste of stomach bile. “Not long ago. A couple of days ago. Things were going *well* and I thought—”

“Things are going well *because* you were taking anti-depressants, Evan! That’s *why* you take them!”

I look at him in surprise. “Did you know already?”

He chuckles wearily and holds my hand again with both of his. “I saw the bottles in your bathroom. *Yes*, I knew you were on medication. It makes absolutely no difference to me.” He reaches out and strokes my cheek gently. “I’ve been on short term medication before. I’ve self-medicated before, too. Don’t do that. Bad idea.”

I smile weakly and he brings my hand to his mouth, kissing the back of it and resting his cheek on it.

“You scared me,” he whispers.

“I’m sorry. God. Everything just started happening all at once and... *fuck*.”

He shuffles closer and brings his knees up to his chest, leaning on them to play with my fingers. “I’m glad you came here. Thanks for telling me.”



I rest my head against the tiles behind me and close my eyes. “I need to go apologize to Malcolm. He saw the photo you sent me on my phone and everything started spiraling out of control from that. And I need to call the station and get them to—”

I stop when Finn shakes his head. “It’s my turn to take care of you. I’ll call the station and tell them you have to take the afternoon off for a mental health emergency. I’ll call your sister, as I assume she’s the one in charge of your medication, and then we’ll drive back to your house where *you* are going to relax and take a nap.”

I smile weakly and decide, just for today, I’m going to let him be in charge.

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

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### FINN

I wake up suddenly, alone in Evan's bed, and frown. There's a note on Evan's pillow and I grab it to read it:

*I'm going to miss you today. I've gone to see Gemma and then I'm going to go to work. In the bedroom downstairs are all of my grandfather's old things. Feel free to take a look. Thanks for being you.*

*Mr. Cop*

I yawn and sit up, getting my phone and taking a selfie, all bed-hair and tangled in his sheets.

**Me:** *Miss you already. Do I have to be careful sending you photos now?*

**Evan:** *No. Send more?*

**Me:** *Oh God. If I take any more, I'm going to cum all over your sheets.*

**Evan:** *You little tease. You'll pay for that.*

**Me:** *I'd fucking hope so. I don't plan on leaving this bed today so I'll be lying here...ready for you...waiting for you to get home...*

**Evan:** *you're making it awkward for me to go see my sister. Shh now.*

I grin and climb out of bed, trying to figure out the best way to spend my day alone at Evan's house. I wander downstairs to the bedroom mentioned and find the boxes, my eyes widening at the number of old artifacts, case files, journals, memorabilia, and photos of his time on the force. I sit on the bed and start reading.

By the time I'm back in the real world, three hours has gone by and I'm starving. I've gone to get my laptop and a sandwich, jotting down notes and quotes that I'll definitely be able to use in my book.

My phone rings with Lane calling and I pick it up while still with a mouthful of sandwich.

"Do I want to know what's in your mouth?" Lane asks dryly.

"Mm..." I hum. "It's white and long and is nice and meaty. It's also called a *sandwich*."

Lane laughs. "Well, lucky you. That's not what I'd want in my mouth on my day off work."

"It *is* your day off work."

"Oh, yeah." He calls out over the phone. "Eli? You here?"

I laugh and get out of the dusty room. “I’d better get off this phone before it gets gross. What’s up?”

“Oh, right. You got me distracted now. Uh... the rest of the group are going on a hike up the mountain. Want to join? I’m sure... anyone can come, too.”

“*Anyone* is at work today. But, uh, yeah. Why not? Is it fine for me to go?”

“Yeah, of course!”

“Then I’ll be there.”

He gives me the location they’re all meeting at and, after organizing Evan’s grandfather’s things into piles, I brush the dust off and get ready for the hike.

I end up running late, as I stopped to take some naked photos after my shower, ready for Evan’s approval should he ask, and I’m flushed in the face and already tired before we’ve even started. Lane and Eli’s two dogs are sniffing around, happy to be out in the sunshine with everyone. I freeze when I see Malcolm standing there, laughing with Landon about something. Evan relayed the whole event to me last night, including what he said, and I hate Malcolm even more. He had no right to go out of his way to try and hurt Evan like that.

“Phew. Sorry I’m late. Stuck in traffic.” It’s a joke I make constantly but it never fails to get an amused smile out of Toby.

Everyone starts moving towards where the trail starts. I breathe in the fresh air.

Mac hangs back and slings his arm over my shoulder. “Hey, uh, I wanted to say sorry for what happened in your apartment a few weeks ago.” He winces. “You were right. I was acting like my fuckwit of a brother, and that knowledge is... *awful*.”

I smile weakly. “Thanks,” I whisper. “I’m sorry, too. I shouldn’t have said that. If anything, it made you *not* help me.”

I look up ahead and gulp as I look at Malcolm talking and laughing with Toby. If only others would show the same amount of insight.

Mac leaves my side and runs up to his husband, circling his arms around his waist and kissing the side of his face. “Be careful, Tobes. You wouldn’t want to sprain your ankle again.”

Toby jabs him lightly in the ribs before running ahead.

We’re halfway up the mountain when a figure comes down it, with a dog running in front of him.

“James!” Eli says with a grin. “Good walk?”

I look up and regard the man in front of us as he chats to Eli and the dogs yap and play with each other. Knowing what I do about him, I feel sorry for him.

He catches my eye and gives me an awkward smile, finishing up the conversation and urging his dog to continue on the walk.

James places his hand on my arm as I go to walk past him, and he waits until the others are ahead a bit before smiling.

“Hey, uh... sorry, I don’t know your name. I know you’re friends with Evan though, right?”

I already don’t like the direction of this conversation, but I nod. “Uh... Finn is my name, and yes?”

“Right.” He looks where everyone else is before leaning closer. “Is Evan okay? He’s told me he’s busy with work recently and only rarely texts me back.”

My heart plummets. “Oh. Uh... do you still have the... agreement?”

James doesn’t look like he wants to answer that, and he looks around nervously. “He told you about that? That’s...”

“Oh, I mean, it was sort of by accident. He didn’t mean to. I saw you two together and asked about it,” I laugh nervously. Great. I’d just spilled his terrible secret.

“Yeah. I do. Which leaves me concerned that he doesn’t answer me *back*.”

“He, um...” I scratch at my head. “He’s working hard at the moment. He’s trying to become chief. But, uh, you’d have to ask him. That’s all he’s told me anyway.”

James looks relieved. “Right. Thanks...”

“*Finn*.”

“Finn, yes. Sorry.”

I watch him turn and walk down the mountain. James just made it obvious that he has never heard my name mentioned before. It stings deep into my heart.

It's a feeling that sits with me the entire walk to the top and then down again. I wave my goodbye to Toby and Mac, completely ignore Landon and Malcolm, and stop next to Lane and Eli's car as they're getting the dogs clean enough to get in.

"Hey, while you're alone," Lane says from the ground as he rubs the dog at his feet with a towel. "Is Evan okay? He looked pretty fucking distraught yesterday." I glance over at Eli, who smiles awkwardly. "Eli already knows," Lane adds. "Sorry. He won't say anything."

I close my eyes and lean on the trunk of their car. "He, um... he stopped taking his anti-depressants because he thought I would want him to be *normal* and not someone who needs to be hyped up on meds to get him through the day." I exhale slowly.

Lane and Eli both stop in surprise. "Oh, fuck, Finn," Lane whispers.

"Yeah."

They exchange a look before Eli smiles and leans next to me. "I've thought about it. Once or twice. Thought that Lane might like me more if I could rely on my own brain chemistry to do its job." He shrugs. "But then I remember, my own brain chemistry made me slam the both of us into a tree at high speeds and that son of a bitch can't be trusted."

Lane points to him. "Preach it, sis."

I smile weakly. "I don't care if Ev's on medication. That *is* his normal. I want him content and at peace and... *happy*. *His*

happy. Not whatever the fuck everyone thinks is happiness.” I fold my arms and focus on the weeds growing at the corner of the parking lot. “I’m beginning to think I’m making him worse, not better,” I whisper.

I hurriedly wipe the tear that escapes my control and clear my throat. “Right. I’ll see you queers later.”

“Finn...”

I wave them both away and walk quickly to my car. It’s nearly time for Evan to get home from work, so I get all my tears out on the drive, wash my face, get undressed, and climb back under the covers to wait for him.



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## CHAPTER TWENTY

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### EVAN

I lean over the bed and kiss a line down Finn's chest. "You make it very hard to leave for work," I murmur, as he sighs softly and rolls towards me so I have better access.

"You make *me* very hard," he mumbles, still half asleep. I chuckle and move to safer territory, kissing his cheek.

"Don't *you* have to go to work, my favorite bartender?"

"Day off." He blinks his eyes open and smiles up at me. "Stay here and help me enjoy it?"

"Can't. Sorry. Those criminals aren't going to catch themselves. You'll be here when I get home?"

He nods and vaguely points in the direction of the nightstand, which houses the new key I'd given him. He'd spent so much time here in the last few weeks that it would be unnecessarily complicated for him to *not* have one.

I move to the doorway and sigh in frustration when I look back and see Finn's gorgeous naked body sprawled all over

my bed. I want nothing more than to crawl back next to him and make that body feel good.

“Miss you already,” he says, turning away from me, putting his ass on display. He knows what he’s doing. “I’ll be right here.” He trails his hands down his hip until he dips his finger in between his cheeks.

Goddammit. I will *not* be able to concentrate today if I don’t do something about this. That image in my head will plague me all day.

“Okay, *fine*,” I growl, walking quickly back over to the bed and unbuckling my belt at the same time. “I *do* have to go to work today, so no dragging this out for hours.”

“But it’s so *fun*,” he moans, nestling back into me and accepting my weight on top of him. “Don’t you think?”

I growl and nip the skin of his shoulder with my teeth. “Shhh. Or I’ll force you to stay extremely silent later on tonight when I get back here from work.”

“Mmm... promises, promises.”

Despite his big talk, he lets me go as soon as we’re both satisfied. He gets up and follows me downstairs, settling at the table with one of my grandfather’s old journals. I still haven’t gotten him to admit he’s writing a novel, and he avoids the topic every time I see him at his laptop.

I’m beginning to wonder if there’s a reason he’s keeping it a secret or if he doesn’t think I’m worthy enough to read it. I’ve

thought about it ever since I read it and I can't wait to read the ending, if he'll ever let me.

I'm lost in my own thoughts when I arrive at the precinct and sit at my desk, avoiding eye contact with Malcolm. Ever since the incident in the car almost two weeks ago, we haven't said two words to each other. I don't know how to. I know I need to apologize, but apologies mean nothing when the only reason it happened in the first place was that *he* was utterly rude about the man I care for more than anyone else—the man I love.

I close my eyes and breathe out slowly. I know I love Finn. I know I want to have a life with him, but every time that thought enters my head, I remember Lane's words: "*He deserves better. He deserves to be seen. To be adored. He's not going to get that from you.*"

I settle into my work and ignore Malcolm's presence.

I get several text messages from Finn during the day, all tame, much to my relief. He's agreed not to send me any nude photos during work hours, but I miss them. They gave me a reason to go home. Something to look forward to. Now I have to sit behind my desk, or behind the wheel of the car, or trying to haul someone off someone else all while feeling the weight of the humdrum monotony of my job.

The chief is frosty with me and I wonder if Malcolm mentioned my mental breakdown to him. He'd given me a tight smile this morning when I came in, mentioned the time at which I was arriving and suggested I do the mundane jobs

instead of anything more intense. There was a glint in Malcolm's eyes when I get sent to traffic patrol, and I try not to dwell on it when I'm leaning against the patrol car, radar lazily by my side, as I wait for a car to even show up.

When a car does show up, it's the sleek black BMW that I always keep an eye out for. It swings around the corner, before dropping to a crawling speed as it comes closer. I can see Finn's cheeky grin from here and my spirits lift when I see it.

He pulls in front of me and gets out with a smile, handing me a still hot cup of coffee. "Thought you might need a pick-me-up. A *nonsexual* one, although I could do that for you too, if you liked. Do you know how many corners I've sped around to find you?" I throw him a frown and he grins. "I'm joking. I heard you were here on the police scanner."

He leans next to me and sips his own coffee. "How was your morning?"

"Bearable."

He turns to look at me and frowns. "Is everything okay?"

I shrug weakly. "Yeah. I've just been trying to avoid Malcolm. That's all." I kick at the dirt near my feet and sigh. "But I know my apology isn't going to fix anything."

Finn smiles and leans into me briefly, kissing me on the cheek. "You'd feel better if you apologized."

"No, I wouldn't. I'd feel better if he apologized to *you*. His issues with his fiancé shouldn't fall on your shoulders."

“To be fair, I *did* kiss Landon and I tried *very* hard to get them to split up. His dislike for me is warranted.”

I look over at him and wrap my arm around his shoulder. “It’s not like you’re still trying, right?”

“God, no. That’s well over. I have you and I *like* you more, we have better sex, and you’re just generally a nicer person. I’d be going *backwards*.” He grins before pulling something out of his pocket. “Speaking of Landon and Malcolm, you’ve been invited to their wedding. I’m not allowed to be invited, because they think I’m going to try and take Landon from under Mal’s nose, but I *can* go as your plus-one.”

I stare at the invitation, before clearing my throat. “Oh, well, I probably won’t go anyway. Not with the awkwardness of Malcolm right now.”

I take a sip of coffee and we fall into silence for a moment.

Eventually, Finn clears his throat, shifting his feet awkwardly. “You still have the agreement with James, don’t you?”

I turn to look at him in surprise. “What?”

“I’m not saying you’ve done anything, but... you still *have* it, right? You just keep turning him down?”

I gulp and he meets my gaze before dropping it again.

“You... *really* haven’t told anyone else, have you?” he whispers. He waves his hand before I can answer and puts a hand on his face. “Don’t worry about it. I shouldn’t have brought it up. I know why you aren’t. I just thought something

might have changed recently, but James showed up at the bar earlier and asked me about it.”

“I will,” I whisper. “I just... don’t know how. James is...”

“Do you love him?”

I snort. “Do I love *James*? No. I barely call him a friend. No, I don’t love him. Did you honestly think that?”

Finn shakes his head and disappears into his own thoughts. I open my mouth to say that I love *him* and the idea of having any sorts of feelings for James is something that I’d never considered, but he turns to give me a cheerful smile, changing the subject completely.

“Do you think your grandfather would have known that friends of his in the war or the force were queer? I wonder if people would have been open about it at all. I know it was the whole Lavender Scare era, but maybe?”

“Probably not the police. They’d risk getting fired. Especially in government service. I don’t know about the war. I don’t recall knowing any queer men when I was there. Although people wouldn’t have said I was either, and God, do I love sucking your cock.”

Finn hums through a grin before pushing off the car and kissing me on the cheek. “Have a good day. Look at me leaving without you giving me a speeding ticket first!”

I chuckle and wait until he’s halfway between his car and mine. “But I think P.I. David Merger would have been open about it to a few select people.”

Finn stops dead in his tracks, and I suddenly realize I've made the wrong decision telling him I know about his book.

He turns to me, his face a picture of thinly veiled rage. "What?" he whispers.

I gulp and stand up straight. "I... That's just what I think."

"Have you—"

I nod slowly. "A while ago. When I was stuck in your apartment. It was up on the laptop and I—"

"And you fucking *read* it?" Finn steps towards me, his eyes dark and stormy. I knew he'd be angry, but I didn't think he'd be... *this*. "What makes you think you had a right to do that?"

"I... I didn't... I didn't think it was anything—"

"But that was... fucking... a *month* ago! You..." He puts his hands in his hair before turning angrily back to his car and storming away.

"No, wait, Finn." Evan walks towards Finn's BMW, "I'm sorry. I didn't realize it was something that was supposed to be a secret. It's really good! I've been wanting to know what happens."

I make it to his car where he's yanked the door open and is staring at me through narrowed, angry eyes. "That was *not* your business, Evan. If I'd wanted to show you, I *would have*." He turns and pushes me lightly in the chest to get me to step back from his door. "*You* want to keep me a *secret*, remember? Which means that whatever *I* want to do when I'm not with you is none of your business. You don't get to read shit I don't

want you to see. You went snooping into *my* private belongings. How... how *could you?*”

My mouth is dry and I can't swallow the lump in my throat. I've really fucked this up and I didn't even realize I was doing it. “I'm sorry,” I whisper. “I don't get what the anger is for. It is *your* book, right? Those are your characters? You haven't stolen it or something?”

“Why?” he roars. “You think it can't be mine?”

“No! No, that's not at all what I thought! I could tell right away that it's yours. I'm... confused about why you're reacting like this.”

“Because it was *mine*,” he snaps. “I was supposed to *let* someone read it if I wanted to, but you *took* it without my permission!”

I reach out but he moves away from my hand. My heart falls into my stomach at the rejection. “*Finn*. I'm really sorry. I truly didn't mean to upset you.” I close my eyes and run my hand through my hair. “What can I do?” I whisper.

“You've done more than enough.”

“*Please*. Tell me. What can I do to make this up to you? I can't lose you.” I know that it's going to be telling someone that we're together or something, and I try to gulp down the fear that is already threatening to show its face.

Finn glares at me, breathing heavily, his arms folded.

“*Please*,” I breathe.



He looks away from me and twists his lips. “Fine. Tonight. I want you naked and in the cells at the police station.”

I’m alarmed at the order. “*What?*”

“I want *you* on the other side. *I* want to be in control. You took from me? I’m going to take from you.”

A burst of fear floods my stomach, making it twist in knots. “What... what are you going to do with me?”

Finn can read the unspoken question in the air but he doesn’t answer it. He squares his jaw and climbs in his car. “Be there or don’t expect me to even *look* at you ever again.”

He takes off, kicking dirt up under his tire, and I know I could get him with the radar gun at a speed not suitable for the area. But my feet are stuck to the ground, my eyes glued on his disappearing taillights with a pain I’ve never felt before swirling throughout my body and enveloping me in an instant.

*Break him. Shatter him. Destroy his trust in the male species. Set him free.*

I close my eyes and wish I could go back in time so that I didn’t fuck up the one good thing in my life so damn terribly.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

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### FINN

I'm boiling mad. I don't think I've ever been so mad in my life. The anger swirls in my gut and tries to tell me that it's actually betrayal, but I don't want to hear it. I want to stay mad.

I spent the whole afternoon staring at the police radar gun from the fifties that Evan had given me, only now realizing *why* he'd given it to me. He'd given me all of his grandfather's things, and he wanted me to *meet him*.

There's a park across the street from the police station and I sit on a bench and wait for the rest of the cars to leave. I know it's supposed to be only Evan working tonight. My fear is that the second I see Evan, his wide eyes nervous about what I have planned, I'm going to forget every reason I'm mad at him. I've written '*He read your book*' on my hand in an attempt to help me remember, and I look at the words as the last car leaves the parking lot. I feel the twinge of pain as I get up and saunter towards the precinct.

As I'm nearly there, the door opens and Malcolm steps out, almost smacking straight into me.

"Convenient that you're here, isn't it?" he says with a scowl. "Just you and Evan here."

"Fuck off, Malcolm. I'm not in the mood to deal with your bullshit."

I push past him roughly but he grabs my arm and forces me to look at him. I slowly look down at his grip on my arm before pushing him off me with enough force that he stumbles backwards, catching himself on the wall.

"I *said*, fuck off. I'm real pissed off right now and you'd best remember that if you don't want a broken nose. Got it?"

I push the door open and walk towards where Evan is staring at the door, his hands hovering above the keys of his keyboard. "Is everything... okay?" he whispers.

"No. But you knew that already," I snap. He seems to wilt at my words, as though he'd hoped that maybe I would have cooled down during the hours apart and I wasn't going to go through with my threat.

I sit in the chair opposite his desk and wait a few more minutes to be sure Malcolm has gone.

Evan takes in a shaky breath. "Finn, I *really* didn't—"

"You gave me the police radar. And your granddad's things. And the copies of *Anatomy Of A Murder*. I thought it was because you *cared* enough about me that you thought I might

like them, but it was *actually* because you thought I needed the *help*.”

Evan’s mouth drops open. “*No*, Finn. I gave them to you because they were sitting in a storage unit and I’d never considered someone might be *interested*. I had it all to give you way before I read your book.” He clears his throat and faces me properly, folding his hands in front of him and leaning forward. “Your novel is *great*. I loved it. The bit that I read anyway. I get that you’re mad that I read it without your permission, but I didn’t think it was anything to be ashamed of!”

The reminder stings at the corner of my eyes and I scowl at my lap, away from him. “Don’t try to placate me. I know it’s shit.”

“No, it’s—”

I cut in. “You’re trying to say whatever you can to get me to not be angry, but it’s not going to work. Nothing will. I’m angry and I’m going to stay angry.” I hold my hand up. “See? I wrote it here so that you can’t get in my head like you normally do.”

His face falls until it settles into a neutral expression. I hate this look of his more than any of the others; it’s him building walls, keeping me out. I want him *angry*. I want him full of emotion so that I know what he’s thinking.

But he’s a stoic, expressionless statue.

I force myself to look at my hand.

I get up and walk to the door, finding the parking lot completely empty. I lock the door and when I look back at Evan, he stands up.

“What did you want again?” he asks woodenly. His tone breaks me into even smaller pieces but I lift my chin and nod towards the cells.

“Take your clothes off. I don’t want you to have a way out.”

Evan keeps eye contact with me as he unbuttons his shirt, slides his pants off, steps out of his underwear, and pads over to the cells. The flash of his flaccid penis causes a jolt of pain to rush through me and the feel of my own lack of sexual energy makes me question this at all. Neither of us are even remotely into this.

I pick up the cuffs attached to his belt now on the floor and follow him in. He doesn’t say a word, he just turns around, holding his hands behind his back. I cuff him silently and walk out of the cells, shutting it loud enough to see a jolt run through him.

He turns to face me, his eyes dim. “Is this doing what you’d hope it would?” he says softly. “Or is this just research for your book?”

My mouth drops open and I feel the accusation in my stomach. “You think I’ve been using you for research?”

“No. I *know* you have. That’s why you didn’t want me to read it. *That’s* why you’re so angry. I was the only one who had the information you needed.”

I can't speak for the tears that are threatening to spill.

"I gave you the radar and my grandfather's things to speed up the process, yes. There was no need the both of us getting too attached." He looks down at the ground. "You don't belong in Wingstead, Finn."

He lets that settle in the air and the tears in my eyes break the surface. "No?" I sob. "Then where *do* I belong? Because if it isn't here, and it isn't Chicago, and it isn't with my parents, then where is it? If it's not with *you*, where?" He doesn't look at me and that makes the tears fall harder. "I *trusted* you, Evan. You made me feel *safe*. No, you *told* me I could trust you. You *told* me I was safe. But you can't even *mention my fucking name* to anyone."

I shake my head and walk to the desk where I assume the keys to the cells are. I want to get out of here. I want to leave him and never look at him again. I search his pants before opening his desk drawers.

"Where are the keys?"

"The cell keys should be in the chief's office."

I look over at the very securely locked office, before looking over at Evan. Evan gives me a blank look. "The key to the office is in the bottom of Smith's desk and the passcode is seven eight one three five."

I set my jaw, get the key, and then type in the passcode. It comes up red.

"Seven eight one three five," Evan growls.

“That’s what I’m fucking *doing*, Evan.”

I try it again and it still comes up red.

“*Fuck*,” Evan breathes. “He changed the passcode on me.” He nods at his pile of clothes. “The handcuff keys should be there. Unlock me and bring me my phone. I’ll have to call Pepper for the new passcode.”

“I can do it.”

“*No!* No. I’ll do it.”

I pause with my hand in his pants pocket to find the keys. I look over at him slowly. “Why can’t I call Pepper and ask for the passcode on your behalf?”

“Because neither of us should fucking *be here*, Finn. You think a police officer is just going to willingly give you the passcode to the chief’s office? There’s a fucking reason I don’t have it *now*, isn’t there?”

I pick up the phone and walk towards him, holding it loosely in my hand. “So what would you say? As to why you need it?”

He tightens his jaw and stares at me for a moment. “That I worked late, there’s someone in the cells, and I need to get him out.”

I shrug. “Well, maybe I can call him here and he can help get you out.” I unlock his phone and start scrolling through it.

“*No!* Fuck, Finn. Don’t.”

“You said it, *I* would never get access. Which means I need some help.”

I get distracted by the text message thread between Evan and James and I stare at it.

**James:** *Are you sleeping with that bartender? I told you if you wanted to stop the agreement, you needed to tell me.*

**Evan:** *No, I'm not. I've been helping him out with something to do with the police. How about next week?*

Heartbreak sours through me at an impressive rate and I look over at Evan. “Three days ago? Three days ago, you told James you’re totally fine to carry on with the agreement and that we’re not sleeping together? Three days ago, you invited him out?”

He closes his eyes and leans his forehead against the bars. “I wasn’t going to—”

“‘Go through with it?’ Why not? You clearly don’t give a *shit* about me, so why not? Actually—*have* you? I bet you have already. I bet you’ve got the both of us just ready to drop to our knees whenever you ask for it.”

“*No*, Finn. I swear. I haven’t done anything with him since I’ve been with you.”

“How sweet,” I snap. “Such a gentleman.”

I stare at him impassively before hitting call on a name and putting it to my ear.

“No, no, no, no, *no*, Finn! Stop, *stop*! I’ll get in—”



“Hi there! It’s Finn, the bartender. Yeah, the same one who Evan has been sleeping with for the past few months.”

James, on the other end of the phone, inhales sharply. “What?”

“Mmm... Evan is in a little bit of a pickle right now. You’re a locksmith, aren’t you, James?”

I meet Evan’s gaze and he closes his eyes and exhales.

“Uh, yes? I am? I don’t know what—”

“Evan is locked in the cells at the police station. He’s not allowing me to call anyone from the station because apparently, I’m a big ole’ embarrassment and being seen with me is a disgrace. I suggest you come down here and set him free. Then you’re fucking welcome to him. You can have your boring sex all you like.”

“Wait, what—”

“Oh, and I would bring some spare clothes for him. He’s about to not have any.”

I hang up the phone and place it on the floor outside the cells. He doesn’t say anything.

I walk over and scoop up his clothes, before looking over at him. “I thought I...” I stop and swallow down the pain. “I’ve never had anyone tell me that they want *me*. I’ve never felt good enough. I would have let you read my book if you’d given me even a *hint* that I was good enough for you. In fact, I was getting ready to show you because I was falling in love

with you.” I shake my head and laugh. “God, I’m a fucking idiot. Thanks for showing me that. Never trust anyone. Got it.”

I walk out of the room and slam the door.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

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### EVAN

It's an agonizing twenty-minute wait before the door to the station is tentatively opened and James appears on the other side.

He looks completely bewildered by the sight in front of him, and I honestly don't blame him.

"Am I going to get in trouble for unlocking a police cell?"

"No," I whisper. "It'll be all on me." I take a deep breath. "In the drawer of the desk right there should be a set of handcuff keys. Mine are in the pants that have since been stolen from me."

James unlocks the handcuffs through the bars, hands me the clothes that he brought with him, and starts working on unlocking the cell door.

He works in silence and I'm grateful for it. I don't know how to even start explaining what happened.

"Do you, um, need me to go after... Finn? I assume he's stolen more than just your pants and handcuff keys."

I look past him at the desk and notice Finn has left everything of importance there. I slowly shake my head and lean wearily against the bars. “He won’t be stupid with it.”

The door clicks unlocked and he smiles at me as he lets me out. “These are old locks. Easy to pick. Remember that.” He looks around us. “Actually, most of the locks in this place are easy to pick.”

I sit heavily at my desk and run my hands over my face. I don’t give a damn about the building I’m in or the state of the locks; being locked in the cells had its benefits, but I now have to think about the next step.

“So, uh... Bradley and I broke up,” James says, sitting across from me. “I’ve been trying to tell you for a while now.”

“Good. He was a jackass. You should have left him long before our agreement.”

James looks down at the desk in between us. “*You* should have,” he whispers.

“I know.”

“Why didn’t you?”

I exhale slowly and lean back in my chair. “A month before we started the agreement, I caught Bradley with Grant Turner at the skatepark.”

“*Before* we—”

I nod slowly. “I let them both off with a warning due to being out in public. But when you said you and Brad had an

open relationship, I thought I might have had it all wrong.”

“You didn’t,” James whispers.

“No. I knew that first time we slept together. It was Brad’s decision all along and you were just trying to keep him happy.”

James gulps and looks away from me. “So you stayed because you felt sorry for me.”

“I stayed because I thought you wanted that connection with someone.”

“Even though you were very clearly in love with someone else?” I clamp my mouth shut and stare at the papers on my desk. “I *asked* you about it, Evan! I asked if you were sleeping with the bartender and you said no.”

“His name’s Finn.”

“I don’t *care* what his name is! We didn’t *have* a connection. You were as honest with me as Brad was. I’m sick of being treated as if I can’t make my own decisions!” He takes a calm breath and places his hands on his knees. “Now, I’m sorry you’ve had an unfortunate evening, but I’m going to go. Keep the clothes. They’re Brad’s anyway and I’m currently purging everything from an eight-year relationship. Including you.”

The rejection, following so closely behind Finn’s, is a surprisingly hard blow to the chest. “Thank you for coming to get me out. I’ll pay you. Bill me directly and not the precinct. I don’t want any more questions asked.”

James sighs, before nodding and walking to the door. “Whatever went wrong with the bartender, go *fix it*. You’ve imagined I’m him for longer than you think you have.”

He doesn’t wait for a response, and he leaves me in silence.

After making sure the precinct looks as normal as it was before I’d been locked naked in the cells, I slowly drive home, scared every step of the way that I’ll find Finn somewhere—his car wrapped around a tree, or his body lying dead on my doorstep as final revenge.

Instead, when I make it home, I find a large box on my front doorstep.

My stolen uniform is in there, folded neatly, with a whole bunch of clothes and socks and a toothbrush piled in there, as well as the copies of *Anatomy Of A Murder*, and finally, the police radar. There’s a sealed envelope, too, and I sit on the front porch dejectedly, holding the envelope carefully in my fingers. If I open this, it’s over. For good.

I take it inside and notice all my granddad’s things still in the dining room. Upstairs, everything that Finn had left here is gone, the bed made.

I sit on the edge of the mattress and try to stop the pain from searing through my heart. I lost him.

I open the letter, and the spare key to my house falls out, clattering to the floor. I stare at it in desperation for a moment before turning to the letter in my hand.

*Evan,*

*I regret everything about what I just did, but I'm not going to apologize when I discovered that so much of our time together has been a lie. I should've known it was too good to be true, and I'm actually glad that you went through my things now so that I could realize that.*

*I've left everything you've given me. I don't want it. I don't want to see your face again. For the next few weeks until I get my move back to Chicago sorted, stay away from Bar None. I'll have people making sure you comply.*

*Vaguely hope you get out of the cells before someone finds you.*

*Bye.*

*-Finn.*

I close my eyes and try to stop the overwhelming ache that is suddenly filling my bones, managing to pass through the numbing of my medication. My phone rings with my sister calling and I'm tempted to not answer it.

"Hello?" I say tiredly.

"Ev? You want to come over?"

I close my eyes. "How'd you know?"

"A very charming but irate young man called me. Told me you'd explain everything but that I should call you to make sure you're okay."

That makes everything so much worse and I take in a steadying breath. "I fucked up," I whisper, not able to produce

a heavier sound even if I'd wanted to. "God, Gemma. I..."

"I'll be there in ten," she says softly, ending the call. I look down at the note in my hand and know that no matter how hard I try or wish it, I'm not going to be able to win Finn back.



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## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

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### FINN

I'd waited at the park across the street from the police station, Evan's clothes in my arms, tears streaming down my face, until I saw James get out of his car and walk cautiously towards the station.

I stumble in the direction of home, avoiding main roads where I might see someone. I don't want to go to Bar None. I don't want to see Lane and Eli's pity or concern. I want to sit in this anger and pain for a little while longer by myself.

I now understand what Landon went through when I split up with him. There's an ache surrounding my body, overwhelming me with uncertainty. How could I have trusted him so strongly? How had I let him break me so *easily*?

A car turns onto the street I'm on, headlights bright in my face. It pulls over to the side of the road and a figure steps out. "Finn?"

Toby. I close my eyes and open my mouth to say, *Yes, fine, everything's never been better*, but it doesn't come out.

Instead, the tears break the surface again.

Toby makes it to me in an instant. “What happened?” he whispers, holding my face in his hands and looking over my body. I’m sure he sees the police uniform in my arms, but he doesn’t say anything.

“I was dating Evan in secret,” I sob. “But it turns out he doesn’t love me.”

“Oh, babe,” Toby whispers, pulling me into a hug. I bury my face into his neck and cry. “Just to check, you didn’t just murder him and steal his clothes, did you?”

“No.”

“Okay. Good.” He squeezes me tighter and lets me cry, offering vague soothing noises.

We stand there for ages, until Toby slowly herds me into his car. He drives to the nearest McDonald’s, orders half the menu, and then starts driving. When we’re well out of Wingstead, he pulls off to the side of the road and wraps his arm around me, tugging me into his hug.

It feels so similar to our college days that if I close my eyes, I can almost imagine I’m there again, trying my best to live how I was supposed to.

“I’m sorry I haven’t been a very good friend,” I whisper, my voice shaky at best.

“How so?”

I'd never think to do this for someone that I cared about. I'd never consider getting out of there and giving them space to breathe, a shoulder to cry on, an ear to listen. I sit up and mindlessly pick at the apple pie handed to me. "I should've been here for you when Damon died," I whisper. "I should have been at his funeral." I gulp. "I was... mad at him. Mad at everyone."

"I know." Toby clears his throat and eats a nugget. "I had a crush on Landon, so I'm glad you didn't show up. That would have been awkward. And I'm almost certain Mac would have looked at you first before me. So, uh, thanks for helping me get laid."

I manage a smile. "I would have been fine for a quick fling, but Mac would have found you before long anyway. I've seen the way he looks at you."

Toby reaches over and squeezes my arm again. "You want to talk about it?" he whispers.

"I don't know if I can."

He nods seriously. "Okay. Well, whatever you say stays in this car. Mac will go mental if he knows I have a secret, but I won't say it."

I chuckle and lean back in the seat, looking out over the dark Wyoming landscape. The stars above us sparkle brightly and I try my hardest to wrap my head around my thoughts.

"Evan only wanted to be with me if I was a secret. I thought... I was changing his mind. I thought he was falling in

love with me.” I look over at Toby and brush away an errant tear. “Ridiculous, right?”

“You’re extremely loveable, Finn.”

“History says you’re incorrect.”

“*History* is a bitch and you’re picking out all the bits that support your claim. Landon was utterly obsessed with you until *you* split up with *him*. People have looked up to you for years. Elias would have done anything short of murder if he thought you’d want to fuck him.”

I look over and snort. “That’s *so* not true.”

“Ask Eli. Eli knows it better than anyone. Elias was with Elijah in secret, ready to drop as soon as you showed some interest.”

I roll my eyes and sigh, looking away from him. “Life could have been so different. Elias, Damon alive... Lan and I together. Eli’s *wife* alive. No Mac, no Lane... no Evan.”

Toby twists in his seat and hands me a thick shake that’s slowly melting. “I don’t want to think about that alternate reality. Mainly because I have a hot husband and I don’t want to think about a life without his perfect ass in my life.”

I laugh. “You could have still been with Daniel.”

He nods slowly. “He, uh... he messaged me the other week. Asked how I was. What I was up to.”

“What did you say?”

“I didn’t,” he whispers. “Thought that was better off locked in the vault.” He smiles and eats another nugget. “Mac encouraged me to message back, but...”

I sigh at the reminder that Toby has found his forever man *somehow* in this weird messed up world we live in. A couple of hours ago and I would have thought the same.

I gulp and stare out the window. “I’ve written a novel. Half of one anyway. Evan read it without my permission but then kept helping me with research. Giving me information about certain things. I didn’t realize it was about the novel until tonight, when he told me was helping me with it so that I’d be out of his life quicker.” The words catch in my throat and I squeeze my eyes shut.

“I’m sure he didn’t mean—”

“He *literally* said those exact words. He said he wanted to *speed up the process* so that the both of us didn’t get too attached.” I bring my knees up to my chest and hold them tight to stop myself from falling apart, limb from limb. “I *trusted* him,” I whisper. “I thought... after everything ...that I found someone who really cared for me.”

“Finn, you’re surrounded by people who care—”

“Really?” I snap. “You knew where the key to the handcuffs were, Toby, just like everyone else in that fucking apartment.”

Guilt crosses Toby’s face and he nods slowly. “I know. I should have done the right thing. I didn’t think you were in as much distress as you were.”

I look away from him. “Evan was supposed to be the one who cared. Turns out he lied.”

Toby doesn’t say anything and he starts the engine, heading back towards Wingstead.

He drops me back at Bar None and gives me a sad smile. “I am truly sorry about the handcuff thing, Finn. And... maybe you’ll be able to work this out with Evan? You’ve seemed so much more... *alive*, recently. Centered.”

“Yeah?” I whisper. “You think?”

He nods, but I shrug weakly.

“It doesn’t matter. I’m going to go back to Chicago. Try and make amends with people there. Maybe I’ll find someone who *wants* to be with me and not running for the hills as soon as I question it.”

Toby sighs so heavily it’s almost a whimper. “God, please don’t leave. It’s been so nice having you here. I’m... *fuck*, I’ve been a terrible friend. If you want to go to Chicago, I can’t stop you, but I’m going to do my best to make you want to stay here.”

I smile weakly at him. “How do you propose to do that?”

“I’m not entirely sure yet, but just you wait. I’ll get Lane and Mac and Eli onto it.” He hesitates and I chuckle.

“Maybe not Malcolm and Landon.”

“No. They want nothing more than to see you gone.” He points at me. “*That* should be a reason to stay, no?”

“To have people hate me? Sounds fun.”

He smiles. “You’ve been warned.”

As soon as I get inside, I pack up the police radar, the copies of *Anatomy Of A Murder*, and his police uniform I stole before I sit down at the table and write out a note, immortalizing our break-up forever.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

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### EVAN

I wake up from a restless sleep to the sound of the coffee machine downstairs. I think it's Finn for a brief moment, but the longer I lie here awake, the more I remember last night. It's my sister downstairs. She tried to claim it was too far for her to drive back to her place last night, but my bedroom door has mysteriously been opened and a lot of my bathroom cabinets have been emptied. I know better.

I sigh and wonder if I can lie here for the rest of the day, a painful reminder that *yesterday* I had woken up in this same bed with the exciting, gorgeous, and very nude Finn Merritt lying next to me. He'd asked me back for more, making me late for work, but I wish now I'd taken my time and really appreciated Finn's presence. I should have appreciated *him*.

I sit up and sigh, throwing on some clothes and trudging downstairs.

Gemma turns to face me and smiles. "Good morning!" she says brightly. "I made coffee." She eyes me over her own mug. "Sleep well?"



I throw her a glare and pour myself a cup.

“What are your plans for today?” she asks as I sit at the table and check for messages from Finn. There are none and my spirits sink again.

Instead, there’s a text message from the chief of police.

**Chief:** *Need to have a meeting with you. I know it’s your day off, but can you come in? Uniformed, please.*

I stare at the message in surprise before turning to look at my sister. “Maybe getting the job I wanted?” I show her the message and she smiles.

“That’s great. You’ve been wanting that chief job since you started.”

I smile, surprisingly genuinely. “My personal life might be going to shit, but at least my career is going in the right trajectory!”

Gemma sits across from me and gets my attention. “I think you need to end things properly with Finn.”

“He did. You read it. He never wants to see my face again. As long as he doesn’t speed, I think that can be arranged.”

“It was heat of the moment, Ev. How about you give him—the both of you—a chance to cool down and think about what happened and see if you can approach him with a calm view?”

I shake my head and drain my coffee. “I’ll have to be reminded of that *look* he gave me last night.” I take in a shaky breath. I watched as his heart shattered right in front of me. I’d

been the one to cause it. I can't think about it. I stand up and walk quickly upstairs to get dressed for work.

I know Gemma doesn't think my decision to avoid Finn is a good one but I don't care. She doesn't know Finn. He was deadly serious in that letter he wrote and I'm too scared of the consequences of it if I dare look at him.

When I get to the police station, I'm reminded of Finn's heartbreak all over again and I shy away from the cells.

Malcolm meets my gaze, and I get a sense of wariness that I've never seen from him. Becoming his boss would be a change for him, for sure.

"Ah, Lowry." Chief stands at the entrance to his office and gestures me in. "Wasn't expecting you so soon."

"I didn't have anything else to do today, sir. Sad, I know."

He shuts the door behind me and points me to the seat across from him as he settles into his chair. I look around the office and try not to imagine me on the other side.

The way the chief is awkwardly shuffling papers on his desk, shifting in his seat, and barely making eye contact with me makes me realize this isn't me getting the promotion.

"Sir?" I whisper.

"I'm retiring in a few months, Lowry."

I nod slowly. "I know. Congratulations."

He waves his hand. "*You* were going to be my replacement." He points to a file on his desk. "I had my recommendation

here, all ready to go.”

My spirits fall and I try to stop my face from showing my disappointment.

“You’ve always been a hard worker! You’ve gone above and beyond. You’ve given all of yourself to this job and this town, assumedly to get to this office.”

“Yes, sir.”

Chief folds his hands on the desk in front of him and leans forward. “So, what the hell happened over the last few months? It’s bad enough that you’ve been late to work, left your shifts early, called in sick in the middle of the day, taken breaks that you shouldn’t have had... but you *harassed* Malcolm King out there.”

*Oh.* That’s why I’m not getting the job. I relax a little. It wasn’t my finest hour but I can claim that all on mental health.

The chief rubs his forehead and glances at the door. “We’re going to have to let you go, Lowry. It’s going to be a devastating blow to Wingstead’s police force, of course.”

“What? Because of Malc—”

He holds up a piece of paper and my spirits drop into my stomach so quickly that I feel sick. It’s a receipt from James’ locksmith company.

“About two months ago, we got the cameras working again here in the precinct.”

I grip the arms of my chair in pure horror, and I know he can see it on my face.

“I *suggest* you offer in your resignation before I start to reel off everything that you’ve done on police property.”

I can’t breathe. He’s seen everything. Every dirty little thing I’ve made Finn do here. I’d told Finn he was safe but he *wasn’t*.

The room starts swirling around me and I close my eyes to try and stop whatever is happening to me to stop. “I’ll... I’ll put my... letter of resignation in... tonight,” I stammer. “Th-Thank you.”

“This will stay between us,” Chief says firmly. “I’d rather it not get out that you were paid for sex on government property and then got yourself locked in the cells.”

My mouth drops open. “*Paid* for...*what*? No, I’ve never...”

“We have camera footage, Lowry.”

It suddenly dawns on me. “Oh. *No*, he was paying his speeding fines. He had four hundred dollars worth of fines to pay. I’d been—” *Keeping them from the official record so that he wouldn’t get in trouble.*

Oh, shit.

I clamp my mouth shut and stand up before handing over everything on me that I couldn’t keep.

The following hour continues in a blur. I clear out my desk in front of everyone, walk out into the blinding sun, and stare

blankly at the cop car that I've been driving for six years now.

I take a deep breath and walk towards Bar None.

Lane practically growls at me when I enter. "You're not allowed—"

"I just got fired. I need to warn Finn of repercussions," I say blankly.

Lane stares at me in indecision for a few moments before sighing. "Fine. Go to the back room. I'll go get Finn for you."

"I'll meet him—"

"No, you won't. Back room or nothing, buddy."

I scowl and make my way to the room, sitting on a broken chair and rubbing my forehead. I have nothing left to do. I've lost Finn, been fired from my job, and I have no friends.

The door shuts softly and I open my eyes to see Finn standing there with a wary gaze. He leans against the door and doesn't look like he has the intention to move from that spot.

"I fucked up *big* time, Finn," I whisper. "And it's... *fuck*, could really mess you up."

"What did you do?" he breathes.

"For as long as I've worked at the police station, the cameras have been busted. They were there but not active." I can't look him in the eye. "I found out today that they've been working for a few months now." I drop my voice to a whisper. "Everything that we've done in the precinct was on camera.

*Including* the time you gave me four hundred dollars in cash and then I fucked you on my desk.”

I brave a look at Finn and he’s gone deathly pale. I’m not surprised. He’s probably remembering the same that I did... it does *not* look good without context.

“To make it *worse*, I wasn’t putting your speeding fines through the system because it... meant you wouldn’t get into trouble. So, there’s no reason why you would have come to the precinct, given me four hundred dollars, and then got on your knees while I *fucking counted it*.”

He continues to stay silent but I notice the puffy cheeks and the tired look in his eyes. He had just as bad a night as I did.

“I thought I had it under control, Finn, but I didn’t. I thought you could trust me, but—”

He holds his hand up and looks past me, his eyes squinted in thought. “Save it. I don’t want to hear it.” He clicks his tongue, staring off into the distance. “Lane said you lost your job?”

I nod slowly. “But I’m more worried about...”

“Let me take it from here. I’ll be able to get you out of this. It’s what I do, remember? Get shitty people out of their shitty decisions. Never thought I’d have to do it about myself, but there you go. I’ll let you know via someone else when it’s all sorted.”

I can’t bring myself to smile. The whole thing feels awful. I *know* doing this type of work brings Finn down and yet there

was still that part of me that came here to tell him, knowing that he would be able to solve it. I nod slowly and stand up.

“I didn’t mean to,” I whisper to him. “And the thought of losing you is awful. If your feelings for me are at all important still... if they mean anything to you...” I gulp and place my hand on the door near him. He stills but doesn’t move away. “Don’t go to Chicago. Stay with me and we’ll figure this out.”

Finn doesn’t respond.

When I follow him out of the room, watching as he walks quickly up to his apartment, I see several moving boxes sitting at the top of the stairs.

My heart shatters all over again.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

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### FINN

There's nothing I really need to do for the mess Evan and I have made. The police chief has already said he wants it quiet, and the only time I would need to go in to handle anything is if the news was ever made public. That would have its own repercussions with my parents, but it doesn't look as if anyone is looking too deeply into where the Merritts' son has disappeared to or what he's doing.

No one cares—that's the theme of this fucking saga. No one wants me and no one cares.

I haven't worked out a way to get Evan his job back, but working to get his job back involves really looking into the man who broke my heart and I'm just not ready to do that yet.

I stare at my laptop screen and try to get the stubborn block out of my heart in order to keep working on my novel. Learning that Evan has read it has made it almost impossible to get out of my head. *That's* why I haven't shown anyone yet. I'm just not *ready*.



Eli stands in front of me after he serves yet another miner, and he smiles kindly. “I know you’ve said your mind is made up and you’re moving to Chicago, but—”

“It is. You’re not changing it.”

Eli chuckles. “Okay. *But* can you keep in touch this time? I want weekly updates from you on what you’re doing now.”

I study him for a moment, before shutting my laptop and leaning my arms on the bar. “Is this the Elijah Moore we would have gotten if you’d never felt forced to be straight?”

“What?”

I look over to where Lane is standing and chatting to a customer on the other side of the room. “Lane changed you.” I cast my eyes back to my laptop. “It’s amazing what being in love can do to someone.”

Eli looks over at Lane before leaning forward on the bar closer to me. “*I* changed myself. Lane didn’t do it. I changed in order to give myself *and* Lane the lives we both deserve. Is this the version of myself who would have appeared sooner, if I hadn’t felt like I had to try so hard? Maybe.” He looks over at Lane again and grins. “But this is the version of myself who loves Lane. Just like *you* are the version of yourself who loves Evan.”

“Past tense,” I whisper.

Eli laughs and shakes his head. “No, it’s not. I’ll tell you something... I’ve lived in Wingstead for... well, too long. But I’ve known of Evan the entire time, and not once have I ever

seen him interested in anyone else. He would do his job, sit over there for a drink, and then go home again. I don't think I'd ever said more than a few words to him in my life. Then you show up and he tries to pretend he's not frothing at the mouth for you."

I raise an eyebrow. "That's the gayest thing I've ever heard you say."

Lane walks up and squeezes past Eli to get something from this corner of the bar. "Trust me, last night I heard some *very* gay things coming out of this man's mouth."

"Some very gay things coming *in* this man's mouth," Eli murmurs. Lane winks at him, smacks him gently on the ass, and then walks away with whatever he'd come this way to get.

Before he can get very far, there's suddenly a rumbling sound and everything in the bar starts shaking, the bottles clinking against each other and several glasses sliding off their shelves, shattering on the floor.

"What the fuck?" Eli whispers, lunging for a bottle of our most expensive whisky that was heading for the floor.

The customers in the bar are all standing around in shock, and when the shake eventually comes to a stop, everyone looks around in surprise, not entirely sure what to do next.

"Is... Is everyone okay?" Lane asks. He turns to face me and Eli. "Was that an *earthquake*? I didn't realize you *had* earthquakes here."

Eli frowns. “We *do*. Not as strong as that one though. I haven’t felt one in ages.”

As quickly as the first one started, another one happens, stronger this time, the floor unsteady under my feet. Eli stands in front of the bottles of alcohol to try and stop them from falling while Lane looks warily up at the ceiling. “This is *not* a strong enough structure,” Lane whimpers before looking out over the bar. “Everyone, get under the tables.”

As the ground steadies again, we hear an awful splintering sound and a loud crash shakes through the building.

“Under cover! Now!”

Lane, Eli and I all duck under the only clear spot under the bar itself, but nothing seems to happen other than the lights flickering out.

Eli gulps and looks at me. “Any chance you’d removed all your belongings from the apartment?”

“No,” I whispered.

“Because I have an awful feeling that might be what we just heard.”

I pull myself up and grab the police scanner that I never returned to Evan. I switch it on and hear the hurried calls from everyone. We get words like ‘earthquake,’ ‘damage,’ and the one that makes the most sense: ‘resulting from a coal mine explosion.’

“Oh, fuck,” Lane whispers. He looks around and calls out. “Does anyone know of anyone in the bathrooms?”

“Did that say ‘the coal mine?’” a voice from the other side of the room says loudly. “My husband is there.”

“So is mine!” another voice says.

“My daughter was heading out that way today. Do we have news on the—” I stand up and hold my hands up.

“We don’t know any details, I’m sorry. We’ll...”

Eli finds an old radio behind the bar and switches it to the public radio station in the hopes of news. He shrugs when he sees me and Lane watching him. “What? It was supposed to be part of the emergency kit for Bar None, but we don’t actually normally have emergencies.”

“That was Elias’s,” I whisper. “It used to be in our dorm room.”

“I know,” Eli says simply. “Let’s have a moment of reminiscence later, okay? Let’s try and figure out what the hell is going on and what we can do about it.”

I nod and go to investigate the noise we’d heard upstairs.

“Don’t go upstairs, Finn! We don’t know if there will be another quake,” Lane warns but it’s no use. There’s no apartment to go to. It’s a miracle the bar itself is still standing, although it looks like the apartment was never above the main room at all. Other than the apartment, the back room, the storage room, and the staircase are all damaged, including the bathrooms and a few of the booths from that side of the room.

“Fuck,” Lane whispers, arriving at my side. “Holy...”

“Yeah.” I gulp. “Well, I guess that’s one way of getting me back to Chicago. Literally destroying where I live.”

He exhales a laugh but we both know there’s no humor in it. This will cost way more money than Bar None has.

“No chance you have natural disaster insurance cover?”

Lane slowly shakes his head before straightening his shoulders and standing upright. “Right. Let’s get to work. Eli, you’re the tallest, so start taking down all the things up high that might fall down should there be another earthquake. Finn, go see if everyone’s okay and try to find out some information. Confirm that no one was in the bathrooms if you can. I will try to find if there’s somewhere we can go. This building isn’t stable and we don’t know the damage that has been caused by the collapse.”

We all nod and get on with our assigned roles.

As the police scanner has a continuous stream of voices, I’m relieved that Evan is no longer on the police force. The coal mine is no longer stable, several people trapped inside, more people injured... I take a deep breath and call Evan.

He doesn’t answer. I call again and again, but he still doesn’t respond.

Would his renovated barn be able to handle such an intense earthquake?

I suddenly hear his name on the scanner and with a sinking heart, I know that he’s gone to help *without* the safety of a police uniform to do it in.

I squeeze my eyes shut and pray for the first time in my life.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

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### EVAN

It's only when I'm driving back towards Wingstead with a car full of people who don't require urgent medical attention that I notice the partial collapse of Bar None. My stomach leaps into my throat and I pull over suddenly, running towards it.

That was Finn's apartment.

I've never experienced relief the way I do when I slam open the door to Bar None and find Finn standing in one piece, trying to get patrons out of the bar as quickly as possible.

"Oh, Officer Lowry," Mrs. Everly says. "Thank God you're here. How awful is all of this?"

I'm trying to breathe out the urge to weep as Finn looks over at me, but I force myself to look at Mrs. Everly and smile weakly. "I know, ma'am. Here, let me help you. We need everyone to get out of this structure. It's not safe."

The passengers in my car get out and help too, letting me walk towards Finn, sweeping my gaze over his body.

He turns to me and gulps. “I-I tried to call you. I didn’t know if your house was still standing. Are you okay?”

I breathe out and nod quickly. “I’m okay. I... *fuck*, Finn. Your apartment... no one called the damage.”

He shakes his head. “I still have the old police scanner and we heard all the other calls.” He looks towards the damage. “That looks to be the extent of it. I wasn’t in it. I was down here under cover when it disintegrated. As soon as everyone is out, we’ll take count.” He looks over my shoulder at everyone slowly getting out. “Do you know what happened?”

“The coal mine has been under strain for a few months now. They tried to dig deeper yesterday. The police knew about it—I’d been preparing for it before I got fired. I’m not entirely sure how it works but it sparked the earthquakes today. The mine has collapsed and several hundred people are affected. We’re trying to do the best we can, but they need people.”

“I’ll do it. I have a car.”

I shake my head firmly. “Absolutely not. The mine is at risk of collapsing again. You’re needed here.”

“*Evan...*”

“Stay here, Finn. *Please* listen to my instructions for *once* in your life.”

Finn folds his arms. “I’ve done that before and it didn’t work out so well in my favor.”

I chuckle wearily. “Bar None is the closest establishment to the mines. Can you set up a way for people to get home from



here? We can get people away easier. Don't go *in* here," I say looking around at the frail structure, "but maybe there's a way we can provide a service for them?"

He nods seriously. "Lane found several large pallets of water bottles in the store room, so people can get a bottle of water as they wait."

I take a deep breath and turn to get back to work, before turning back to Finn. "I know it's all your things, but I'm so relieved it was only the apartment and you're safe." I smile a watery smile and lean closer to him. "You're too pretty to die in a car accident *and* from an earthquake."

He folds his arms. "You're really limiting my options here," he says dryly.

"That's the point, Mr. Bartender. You're too pretty to die. Period."

A hungry look crosses his face before he drops his gaze. "You should go back to work," he mumbles. "This is just the type of thing you need if you want your job back. I've been wracking my brain to get around it and apparently, a natural disaster is perfect."

"Finn," I whisper, stepping closer. "I don't want my job back. Not yet anyway. I think I need to spend some time away from it and try and figure out myself."

"Good on you," he says tightly.

"And while I'm on the break, I want to try and get *you* back."

“I’m still going to Chicago. Made easier now that everything I owned here is currently lying in the store room.” He exhales quickly and doesn’t meet my eyes. “I’m glad you’re taking time for yourself, but nothing has changed.”

“*Everything* has changed.” He gives me a weak smile and starts to walk away, but I reach out and grab his hand. “Everything went so *wrong* with us. Lane told me ages ago that I needed to break you enough that you left Wingstead and lived your life without being shackled to everything that a small town offered. To what *I* could offer. And that’s what I set out to do when I entered those cells. And, boy, did it work. It *hurts* to think about the look on your face that night, Finn.”

He takes his hands out of mine and I can see the tears in his eyes. “Lane told you—”

“I love you, Finn. I’ve been in love with you for ages. Isn’t it funny—I was going to tell you that I was in love with you when I accidentally told you that I read your novel. I opened my mouth to say it and you distracted me with a question about policing in the fifties.”

Finn takes in a ragged breath and looks at the floor. “We need to work on getting the survivors out from the mines, Evan.”

“I’m not a police officer anymore, I can—”

“And I’m not yours.”

It feels like a punch in the gut. Finn turns away and walks towards the group of people now hovering by the door.

He's right. He's *not* mine. I take a deep breath and follow him out, before getting in my car and driving back towards the mine.

The chief of police is standing there as I walk up to the mine entrance, and he clears his throat before calling out to me.

“Yes, sir?”

“No civilians beyond this point. It's not safe.”

“No, sir. It's not.” I click my tongue before lazily pointing over his shoulder. “I feel like you should look over that way and not at me for a moment.”

He stares at me before nodding slowly and angling his body away from me.

I chuckle quietly and walk towards the mine.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

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### FINN

I've got way too much to think about and now is not the time to spend thinking about it. I get busy handing out bottles of water, helping people get in touch with other people to come pick them up, and also trying to keep an ear on the radio to make sure I can still keep track of Evan's movements.

We get news that the bus of people arriving are the last from the mine who are uninjured, and everyone relaxes.

As soon as the last few cars come rolling through, I search for Evan's car but can't spot it.

My police scanner comes to life, the speaker on the other end dropping all protocol and speaking plainly. "There's been another collapse," comes the panicked voice. "A number of people are trapped. At least three are injured but no one can get to them."

*Evan.* I know, deep in my heart, that Evan is one of the ones trapped. He wouldn't have left until the last of the people were freed.

Lane can see the realization on my face. “Finn,” he warns. “Leave it up to the people who know what they’re doing.”

I stare at the police scanner, my heart racing. I’d sent Evan away telling him I wasn’t his, not confirming that I love him too. And now he’s trapped in a mine shaft.

As soon as Lane gets distracted, I turn towards my car and drive hurriedly towards the coal mine.

Police from other precincts around the area have arrived to help but no one pays attention to me as I survey the situation. There’s a small gap that people are being let out of with police, paramedics, and the bosses of the coal mine standing around counting people and marking them off lists.

I go to rush forward but a hand grips tight to mine and spins me around. *Malcolm*.

“You are not permitted to be here, Finn. It’s dangerous.”

“My fucking bedroom collapsed earlier. Should I have not been there?” I yank my arm out of his hand and take a few steps backwards. “I know it was you who told the chief everything Evan and I had done, so I don’t know why you’re acting like you care now.”

Malcolm frowns. “Told the chief about what? What did you and Evan do?”

“I’m not an idiot.”

Malcolm chuckles. “You are, but this time I have no idea what you’re talking about. I told him about the time Evan physically assaulted me in the car, but I told him it was a result

of a mental breakdown from working too hard. I told him nothing else.”

I step back in surprise. “But... you hate me.”

“Yes, but I don’t hate Evan. Besides, you being with Evan is *better* for me. You leave Lan alone.”

“So, who...” I turn and scan a wave of people coming out of the mine shaft. The police are walking away, the paramedics loading up the ambulances. “No, wait,” I whisper. “Evan’s not here.”

“He’s probably already left,” Malcolm says, walking forward to meet with his chief.

He’s not. I know he’s not. I know he’s stuck inside the mine. I race up to the last person that had been rescued. “Hey, did you see Evan Lowry in there?”

The man shrugs. “I saw him at one point but I don’t remember seeing him leave.”

“*Finn*,” Malcolm roars as I sprint over to the gap in the rubble and slip through. I use the flashlight on my phone as I walk hurriedly down into the dark, cold tunnel.

“Evan! *Evan*?”

I keep calling out, the police scanner attached to my belt crackling with Malcolm’s angry voice.

“*Evan*? Can you hear me?”

I hear a groan deep at the end of the tunnel.

”*Evan!*”

“Finn?” comes Evan’s voice, weak but alive.

I shine the flashlight towards the sound, before it picks up on his foot, his leg trapped by a large boulder. “Oh my God,” I sob.

It’s just his leg. He winces as I shine the light in his eyes and holds up his hands to shield it. His expression goes from incredulous to angry. “What the *hell* are you doing here, Finn? This is too dangerous!”

“Yeah, save it, Mr. Cop. You were about to be left behind. You weren’t on any lists for being in here. I’m the only one who knew you were.”

He’s covered in coal, dirt, and blood, but I can’t help the overwhelming relief that he’s here and in my sights, alive. I hold his face in my hands and can’t stop the tears that run down my cheeks.

“I thought I lost you,” I whisper. “I thought I lost you and the last thing I told you was that I wasn’t yours. I *am* yours, Evan. I’ll always be yours.”

He breathes out a ragged breath before cupping my face and pulling me closer until our lips meet. He kisses me furiously, filled with adrenaline, and when I lean back, he’s crying, tears running rivers on his dirty face. “I love you,” he whispers.

“I love you, too,” I whisper. “I’ve loved you since you first gave me a Hershey’s kiss and then followed it up with mind-blowing sex.”

He smiles and strokes my cheek. “Well, as soon as I get out of here, we can recreate it.” He winces as he tries to push the boulder off his leg. “*Although*, we are also going to have to recreate any number of punishments for you because you *did not listen to my instructions*.”

“I know. I sped here, too.” I give a cheeky smile. “My car goes *real* fast when the man I love is potentially dying. I don’t even have you to help get me out of trouble with the law either. I *did* just run into a collapsed mine even though they explicitly told me not to.”

Evan growls. “What am I supposed to do with you? I have a law-breaker as a boyfriend.”

I grin and lean forward to kiss him before hovering above his lips. “You’re going to have to fuck all of the law-breaking out of him, I guess.” I plant a gentle kiss on his lips before walking my fingers over his arm. “*Or* turn his attentions somewhere else.”

“What were you thinking?”

I bite my lip and look into his eyes. “I have a few ideas. *Especially* as you’re about to not have any use of your leg for a while. Plenty of opportunity to play.”

He smirks but before he can say anything, a series of flashlight beams turn onto us and the focus becomes about trying to get him out of here alive.



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## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

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### EVAN

I blink my eyes open in a hospital bed, post-surgery and groaning through the drowsiness of the leftover anesthetic. When my eyes can focus, I see Finn draped across a hospital chair fast asleep and my sister playing a game on her phone.

She looks over at me as I make noise and smiles kindly. “Good morning, sleepy head.”

“How long was I out for?”

She hums and looks at her watch. “Surgery took about five hours. Then you slept off the anesthesia for another six, so the whole day. It’s ten thirty.” She smiles and leans forward. “I’m only here until you woke up. *He*—” She jerks her head towards Finn, “—has managed to charm all of the nurses and doctors into letting him stay the whole night, but we’ll see if it works when the nurses switch.” She gathers her things and smiles. “I’ll wake him before I leave, but... I know you don’t care about my opinion on your private life, you’ve told me *many* a time, but... I like him. I think he’s wonderful.”

I contemplate telling her off for saying that, but instead, I smile. “He is,” I say simply. “I mean, he ran into a mine that could collapse any second to save me, so he’s a fucking idiot, but... I love him.”

Gemma grins and leans over the bed to kiss me on the cheek. “I’m glad,” she whispers. “Now, call me when you get released. I think Finn and I will take it in turns to take care of you for a while. I’ll try and fit it around work and the kids...”

“I won’t be moving much, so I don’t think you’ll need to add more onto your plate. I’ll let you know what Finn and I decide to do.” I smile. “But thanks, Gem. I appreciate it.”

She winks at me, before gently shaking Finn’s arm.

He blinks awake with a start. “Hey, huh, what?” He stares at us for a moment, before relaxing. “Oh my God, I was having the *weirdest* dream.” He grins wide when he sees me awake. “You’re finally awake! How are you feeling?”

I chuckle and he moves to sit in Gemma’s newly vacated seat, closer to my head.

“I feel like I’m coming off of anesthesia.”

He clicks through the side of his teeth. “Coming down is tough, man.”

I roll my eyes and wave to Gemma who has made it to the door.

“Bye, Gem!” Finn says brightly. “We’ll call you when he gets released!”

I turn to Finn as Gemma leaves. “Are you best friends with my sister?”

He grins, his eyes glittering, and he leans forward so his chin is by my arm. “She’s *so* cool. God, I wish I had a sister like her.”

“Well, you can have mine by proxy. She likes you, too.”

Finn scoots his chair forward and holds my hand with both of his, holding it up to his lips and kissing it softly. “*So*, were you... serious in the mine? Or were you hallucinating from blood loss?”

“Honestly, probably,” I say seriously. “But hallucination or not, I love you. I do vaguely recall you telling me that you sped *again* and that you wanted me to fuck all your bad behavior out of you.”

He manages a brilliantly innocent look. “Wow, you must have *really* been out of it. I would never say such a thing.”

I roll my eyes. “No?” I cast a look at the door before slowly running my fingers through his hair, tugging his gaze to meet mine when I reach the back of his head. His eyes glimmer with that defiance I love so much. “I don’t believe that,” I whisper.

I urge his mouth closer to mine and he stands up to lean over the bed, surprising me with the force of his kiss. He lifts my chin up and slides his tongue between my lips, taking control of what he wants me to do.

He leans back, flushed and grinning. “Do you believe me now?”

“Oh, definitely not,” I moan. “You don’t know how badly I want you, Finn.”

He scrapes the chair as close as it can get to the bed and smiles calmly, sitting down. “How badly do you want me?”

I study him before rubbing my hand over my jaw and chuckling. “Well, considering I just came out of surgery where they had to re-build my leg from scratch, I am *awfully* hard.” His gaze drops to where the hospital blanket is draped over my lower half, and I spread it tight around the very obvious bulge.

Finn’s eyes sparkle and he leans forward, before slowly walking his fingers across the bed. “I’m sure we can do something about that,” he whispers seductively, throwing a glance at the door.

I capture his hand. “You’re not a nurse.”

“Just call me ‘Mr. Nurse.’” He smirks and slides his hand up under the blanket, his touch electrifying on the bare skin of my thigh. “We do *anything* to make sure our patients are comfortable here at Hospital Merritt.”

“Anything?”

His fingers wrap around my arousal and the breath leaves my lungs instantly. “Oh, believe me—anything.”

“Prove it,” I gasp, his grip eagerly sliding up and down as I sink into the pillows.

The pain in my leg is temporarily forgotten as Finn’s hand becomes the best pain relief. I really want his mouth or his ass or whatever else Finn wants to do with me, but this will do for

now. His other hand joins in, running over my balls, reaching down and brushing over the place I've never let anyone in.

I moan and let my good leg widen to give him more access. "Anything?"

He chuckles softly. "*That* will be done in a more private setting. But I like the way you're thinking."

"If it's going to be with anyone, it's you." I gulp and look over at him. "You're going to have to teach me what to do, though."

He props himself up and kisses me slowly, keeping his hand moving languidly. "Always. I'd never do anything you don't want me to do, Evan."

I cup his face and keep his lips near mine. "Neither will I."

He chuckles softly. "Evan?" His hand stills. "I don't want to be a secret. I *can't* be a secret."

"You're not. Not anymore. You're mine and I want everyone to know it."

He breathes out quickly with a grin before sitting back and moving his hand faster and tighter. I drop my head back with a groan and, despite telling him he's no longer a secret, I wish I could be at home enjoying Finn's company without the risk of witnesses.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

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### FINN

Evan slowly folds the last page of the document over and folds his hands over his stomach, regarding me as I pretend to be busy on my laptop. I'm not. I'm staring at the screen, knowing with every ounce of my being that Evan was on the last chapter of my book.

"Finn," he says cautiously.

I look over and feign disinterest. "Mm?"

He chuckles and pats the sofa next to him, his leg still propped up on the coffee table in front of him. He has to start physical therapy soon in the hope he will be able to start walking independently again, but I've enjoyed being able to solely focus on him for the last few weeks—and finish my novel, of course.

I get up slowly and perch myself next to him, placing my hands on the thigh of his good leg. "So?" I whisper. "What did you think?"

He relaxes his face and gives me a lazy smile. "I loved it, Finn. You knew I did." He thinks about it for a second before cocking his head. "One thing, though: is David Merger supposed to be me?"

I laugh and relax my shoulders. "No. You are *not* cool enough to be the base of that character."

Evan grins and kisses me softly. "You're very talented, Mr. Writer. I love you."

I beam and kiss him back, it growing deeper the longer it goes on.

He pulls away suddenly. "*You* have to go meet your friends at the bar. *I* need to sit here in front of the TV and drink beer, like the hick that I am."

I give him a tight smile and nod. "Okay. You know you can come with me, right?"

"That's okay. Maybe another time."

It's been two weeks since the mine collapse, and while Evan has said I can tell people we're together, he's yet to be seen in public with me. Sure, his leg was almost entirely destroyed in the incident and moving anywhere is hard, but I had expected a little more confirmation that he actually doesn't mind being known as mine by now.

"I love you," I say, standing up and kissing his forehead gently.

"Love you too. Have fun with your friends."

*Your* friends. Never *our* friends. He hasn't even tried to get to know them yet.

I shake the feeling out of my head when I pull up at Bar None and pout as I walk inside. Everyone is there in a somber silence.

"I can't believe this is the last time this bar will be standing," I whisper. It feels like the time to whisper.

Eli exhales sadly and doesn't say anything. Lane puts a hand on his arm, rubbing it with his thumb.

The bar was proven unstable by the council, fire department, *and* the insurance company, so there is no choice but to knock it down. It's a piece of our history and it's about to go.

"To be fair," Toby whispers. "I don't think even Elias thought it would be standing for this long. He literally tried to burn it down for insurance money."

I roll my eyes and glare at Malcolm, reminding him that he tried to accuse me of insurance fraud instead of Damon McCarthy, whom the blame should have fallen on.

Malcolm gives me an impassive look and turns away.

"There are so many memories here," Eli whispers, and I know I'm not the only one to hear the waviness in his voice as he says it. "I met you here, Lane."

Lane smiles sadly. "We had our first kiss here, too. And in the long-lost apartment, we slept together."



“I met most of you guys here, too,” I say. “And Evan.”

“I came here for Toby’s address,” Mac says, wrapping his arm around his husband’s shoulders. “Malcolm gave it to me.”

Landon sighs. “We got engaged here.”

“Mac told me he loved me for the first time,” Toby adds.

Eli looks around the room. “I found out Elias was dead standing in this bar. I found out about Lily’s death, also in this bar. Maybe I’m glad it’s going.”

Lane turns to look at everyone. “I hope you all know this isn’t the end of it. Bar None, the building, is being torn down, but...” He wraps his arm around Eli’s waist and smiles. “We’ve discussed renovating the bar from scratch anyway. We’d been planning on stripping it down to the bare minimum and adding a restaurant to it. We were trying to save funds, bit by bit. Eli had gone to see if we could get another loan.”

“But they wouldn’t give us anything more, not when the building was in such a sad shape,” Eli added. “Honestly, apart from Finn’s belongings being caught in it, half of the building collapsing actually *helped* us. We’ve officially got the loan and an insurance payout to pay for the rebuild.”

Everyone stares at him in bewilderment.

“*And*,” Lane adds, “it will be so well structured that it can be on the same site, even with the possibilities of future earthquakes and coal mine collapses.”

“Wow, you guys,” I whisper. “Bar None two-point-oh. Is it going to be called Restaurant None?”

Eli laughs. “No. We were thinking something along the lines of One True Love, for all the reasons everyone just mentioned.”

As everyone grins and cuddles up to their partners, I’ve never been more obvious that I’m missing mine.

The door opens behind us and Eli looks over, expecting the man in charge of demolition. His face softens into a smile and I turn to see Evan standing there, leaning very heavily on crutches.

“Ev?” I whisper. “What are you doing here? You didn’t drive, I hope. *How* did you get here?”

He chuckles and holds up the copy of my book. “I thought you might want everyone to read this.”

“Ooh! Is that *the* book?” Toby asks. “Me first! I want to read it.”

I narrow my eyes at Evan and walk towards him, letting him lean on me to get down the step into the bar.

He looks around him. “Are you allowed to be in here?”

“No,” Eli says truthfully. “It’s technically about to fall down at any second.”

Evan raises his eyebrows and nods seriously. “It’s been standing for so long already, one afternoon won’t hurt.”

As he says it, something slips in the cleared out back room and we all turn to look at it, nervously.

“Maybe we should get out of here,” Mac murmurs.

“Yeah, let’s do that,” Lane says, urging everyone out.

I help Evan back up the stairs and out into the sunlight.  
“Why are you really here?” I whisper.

Evan makes me stop just outside the entrance of Bar None and he turns to face me. “Because I love you and I haven’t shown it. I’ve told you you’re not a secret, but it’s time to let everyone know it.”

I smile wide and he cups my cheek with his hand to balance himself as he leans down to kiss me slowly.

“You know, I still didn’t believe it,” Landon says, and I smirk.

Evan reaches into his jacket pocket and pulls out the invitation to their wedding. “Landon, Malcolm... I’m sorry. I’m not going to make it to your wedding. I’ve got some *very* big plans with my plus-one.”

“Oh, hey, is that an option?” Mac says. “Can we decline the wedding for sex?”

Malcolm smacks him in the arm. “You’re my best man, you jackass.”

Mac sighs and shrugs at Toby. “That night, then.”

I see Toby start to flick through the pages of the book and I lean forward and snatch it out of his hands. “Don’t read it here! I’ll take it away!”

“Hey! No!” Toby gets it back and hugs it to his chest.  
“*Mine*. Is it good, Evan?”

“Best book I’ve ever read,” he says dryly. “Or whatever else Finn wants me to say in order to still sleep with me.”

Everyone bursts into laughter and I turn to roll my eyes at him. “That was *not* it. If you’re not careful, I’ll stay upstairs and you won’t be able to reach me, even if you wanted to.”

Mac clears his throat behind me. “Actually, that’s something Toby and I wanted to talk to you about, Finn.”

“Me staying upstairs so that Evan can’t reach me?”

“No. Your living situation. We didn’t know if you’d discussed what was going to happen, but Toby and I are actually looking to buy a house. With a *yard*. And no *neighbors* that try to *listen* to us *having sex*.” He plants a fake smile on his face. “I mean, that doesn’t happen. It’s a great place to live. If you wanted to, you can move into that apartment.”

“The apartment is owned by my dad,” Toby says, frowning at Mac. “So we’d be able to figure something out for rent.”

“I’ll think about it,” I whisper. “Thanks, guys. Means a lot.”

A large truck pulls into the parking lot and Eli sighs. “This is it, everyone. Time to say goodbye to Bar None.”

“But saying *hello* to One True Love,” I whisper.

We all stand on the far end of the parking lot, our cars moved out of the way, hard hats on, and watch as the building gets torn down with incredible ease. I grip Evan’s hand tight and he squeezes it back, bringing it up to his lips and kissing the back of it.

“So, what’s the next book going to be about?” he whispers to me.

I grin up at him and grin. “I don’t know yet. There are so many possibilities.”

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## CHAPTER THIRTY

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### EVAN

I stand in front of Finn as he sits on the edge of the bed, his brow furrowed as he reads the history book in his hands. He is well and truly in the research stage of his next novel, and his nose is always in a book of some kind these days. It's still set in the fifties he tells me, and still gay, but I think it now has something to do with pop music. He won't tell me much else, and I don't push it.

"Hey," I whisper, bringing his gaze to me. "Look." I lift my knee up to a right angle and then put it down again. "*I bend.*"

A smile crosses his face and he closes the book instantly. "That's a nice improvement! Although it means the force will want you on more than just desk duty, and I don't know if I want you out there tracking my speeds again." I do it again and he winces. "Okay, don't overdo it. You've practically got a fake knee in there."

I chuckle and sit on the bed next to him. "You know what today is?"

“Ten days until Christmas?”

“Yes, *but*... what was ten days until Christmas?”

He looks innocent and turns back to his book. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Ten days before Christmas is Landon and Malcolm’s wedding, which *means* that you and I have some seriously big plans.”

“Ah. Yes. I remember now.” He smirks and faces me. “Are you going to tell me these plans or are we making them up as we go along?”

I slowly lift my knee up to my chest and put it down again. “I *bend*, Mr. Writer. And I am *ready* for you to bend me over whatever furniture you desire and have your way with me.” He acts surprised, but he’s known this was on the agenda for this date for almost five months now.

He shrugs. “Alright, then. On your stomach. I really want to get back to this chapter.”

I grab the book out of his hands and chuck it over my shoulder. “Ever since I met you, I’ve wanted to have your cock in my ass. Today’s the day. I’m ready, I’m prepared, and I’m *impatient*.”

He laughs and pushes me back on the bed before straddling my thighs and leaning down to kiss me. “Why so impatient? We’ve got all day.”

I prop myself up on my elbows and kiss him slowly. “All day is not nearly long enough for what I’ve got planned.”

Finn hums at the back of his throat. “In that case, my book can wait.”

“Mmm... that’s what I thought.” He leans down and kisses me, his lips and tongue pulling out an immediate response. I suddenly grab at his arms and sit him upright. “Wait. It’s the fifteenth. You had your meeting with the publishing agent your mom set up.” I push him up and press up onto my elbows. Finn smiles calmly.

“Is that *really* what you want to do right now? Talk about a boring meeting?”

“Yes.”

Finn chuckles and climbs off my lap, going over to his nightstand and opening it. He gets lube out and throws it onto the bed. I scowl and open my mouth, but Finn slowly pulls out a thick manila folder from the drawer and holds it up. “I’ve had it for a while,” he whispers, covering his mouth with it. “The meeting was just finalizing details.”

I stand up, my mouth ajar. “You...you’re getting—”

“I’m going to be Mr. Author. Officially.”

I wrap my arms around his waist and lift him up. “Oh my *God*, Finn! That’s fantastic! Why didn’t you tell me?”

He laughs at the giddiness from being lifted suddenly and I put him down. “*Because* I was going to give you *this* for Christmas.” He pulls out a wrapped present and hands it to me. I unwrap it slowly and hold the official copy of his novel. The cover is a photo of my grandfather’s badges from his uniform,



but I'd known he had wanted that to be the cover already. "It nearly split us up," he whispers. "But I wanted you to have the first ever copy of the novel that brought us together, too."

I look up at him and flick open the pages, words here and there sticking out and reminding me of when I'd read it the first time.

The pages fall through my fingers until it lands on the dedication.

*Mr. Cop, tell me to.*

I read it several times before looking over at Finn, standing there with a nervous look on his face. "Tell you to," I whisper.

He nods slowly.

"Tell you to do what?"

"Whatever the fuck you want to do."

I look down at the book in my hand, before looking up at him smirking. "Marry me."

His mouth drops open in surprise.

"Ooh, I like that look. Yes. *Later*. First tell me you'll marry me." I hold my finger up. "Actually, don't say anything. Show me yes or no."

He thinks about it for a second before reaching into the nightstand again and pulling out a little box that looks remarkably similar to the one I have hidden in my box of bath fizzers in the bathroom.

I stare at it as he opens it and slides the ring onto my finger. I'm speechless as I stare at the silver ring that fits perfectly against my knuckle, as if made for me. He smirks and sinks to his knees, opening his mouth wide again and slowly running his tongue around his lips.

Instead, I pull him up to standing, crushing my mouth against his. He grips me tight, toppling the both of us onto the bed, our kisses furious and our hearts full.

He suddenly pulls away, just as I run my fingers into the waistband of his sweats. "What the fuck am I supposed to get you for Christmas now?"

I smirk and run my nose down his. "I have everything I need right here."

And a few moments later, he proves it.

The End.

**Did you like this book? Then check out *My Bossy Valentine* next.**

**Cupid will have to work overtime to get one jealous billionaire and his flirtatious assistant together. Will his arrow hit its mark or blow up in both of their faces?**

**Justin**

Stress is an understatement. With my dad stepping down and to take my rightful place, I just have to get this VIP client

to sign. Which means I must pull off the most spectacular Valentine Masquerade Gala yet.

Gabe is the best event coordinator in our agency, but I can't help it. The more I spend time with him, the more I need to show him he's special.

I'm not good at playing second to anyone when he turns on the charm to everyone for the gala. Not when he's mine... and only mine.

### **Gabe**

With another failed relationship in my rear-view mirror, I'm back on the market.

Strangely, after starting my next work assignment planning the agency's gala event, I've started getting notes from a secret admirer. And it's killing me not knowing who it is?

I find working closely with my boss' boss, the agency's billionaire VP Justin Merrick, that I desire his warm body and mouth on mine.

Even though I've started seeing Justin, I'm still getting these notes. But every time I try finding who the author is, Justin gets upset.

I'm not sure I can take much more of his jealousy and lack of trust.

Things can't go on the way they are. I have a choice to make... my job or my relationship with Justin?

**My Bossy Valentine** is a billionaire office, alpha, mistaken identity M/M romance novel involving one jealous executive and one flirtatious assistant. The story has steamy, passionate scenes and bursts of emotion with a very HEA ending.

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## SNEAK PEEK

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## Chapter One

### Justin

With a hungry gaze, I eye the man sitting on the edge of my bed buttoning up his shirt. I'm going to be late for work if he takes his time, but there's a part of me that is considering suggesting a morning repeat. No one's more surprised than I am that he stayed the night, but if he's here, I'll do something about it. He catches my eye and grins. I open my mouth to say something, probably along the lines of "if you're ever in the neighborhood" or something equally as lame, when the door to my bedroom flings open and the blonde woman I should have been expecting stares at the pair of us, eyes wide in convincing horror.

"*Justin,*" she yells. "Wh-What is this? What the *fuck?*"

The man's fingers considerably speed up in getting redressed.

"With another *man?* In our bed?" She points her finger at me dramatically and steps away from the door, allowing the man to leave. "Those are *my* sheets. You fucked *him* on *my* sheets?" She waits for the man to leave the room – without saying a word and involving himself in this – and her gaze follows him out towards the front door as she continues to berate me. I fold my hands behind my head and yawn as I wait for it to be over. "You dirty, sneaky, stupid, little—"

The door clicks shut, and she turns a full grin onto me.

“Hello, Marissa,” I say dryly. “You know, I had full ability to get that man out of my apartment myself. At my own timeframe too. It was *not* then, just FYI.”

“Oh, I know, but where could I put my acting skills to good use?” She flops onto my bed and gives me her regular bright smile. “He looked...hot, I guess. Showed absolutely *no* regret for sleeping with a married man, but other than that, good for you.”

“I wouldn’t marry you if you paid me.” I roll my eyes at her and get out of bed, still naked, heading towards the shower. I can feel Marissa’s eyes on me. “Why are you here anyway? And how do you always seem to get into my apartment? I swear I took away your key.”

She kicks her heeled feet against the side of my bed and grins as she ignores my question. “You have a nice ass.”

“Thank you. I worked hard to get it this way.”

“You did *not* look that good in high school.” She purses her lips. “You don’t want to revisit—”

“Absolutely not.”

“—our high school—”

“Absolutely *not*.”

“—days?”

She follows me into the bathroom and studies herself in the mirror. “You’re no fun. I’d be way more fun than *that* guy.”

She points in the direction of the front door. “Where’d you meet him?”

“Bar. He saw that shiny little black card I was tapping against the bar top and kindly invited me to buy him a drink.”

“Ah. There’s your mistake.”

“Oh, honey. That was my *plan*.”

Marissa grins and turns to face me. “Your father wants to speak to you.”

I roll my eyes and let the water wash over me. “Let me guess. He’s too lazy to get off his fucking ass and wants me to come save it.”

Marissa sniffs at some of my cologne before spraying some on her collarbone. “No, actually. He’s thinking of stepping down and wants you to take over.”

*That* gets my attention. I turn to look at her in surprise. “He’s what?”

She bats her eyelashes at me and grins sweetly. “That’s right. *You’re* getting a promotion.” She presses her body against the shower screen and licks it. “Your little black card is about to get *thick*, Daddy.”

I splash water at the screen to get her off it and tune her out completely. Is she serious about Dad? It would be an excellent step up for me if she’s right. It’s everything I’ve been working towards. I certainly hadn’t expected it so soon though.



She chatters easily about office gossip that I don't care about as she waits for me to get ready for the day before continuing the same conversation in the car. After dropping the car in the building's parking garage, we stop by the local coffee shop first, and I start to see her slipping into work mode. She stands a bit taller, holds her chin a bit higher. It's a marvel to watch. Head of PR, she's very good at her job, and it's lucky for us she is. It's amazing to think that my high school girlfriend, with a wicked side to her that rivals every mother's worst nightmare, is the same one who has saved our asses too many times to count. She's unflappable, unapologetic, and frankly unstoppable.

"How'd you know about Dad?" I interrupt once we've both got our coffees and we're on the short walk to the office.

"I have my sources."

I glance at her, and she winks at me.

"I thought I told you it was weird that you were fucking my dad."

"Did you? When?"

"*Marissa.*"

"Ooh, that's *Mommy* to you, darling." I can see both of our assistants waiting for us, but she turns quickly to me before they're in hearing distance, pouting her lips and stretching her neck. "Cum in me, Daddy," she moans.

Great. Now I'm put off breakfast. Forever.

She smacks me on the ass before striding forward to meet her assistant. Work mode is activated. She takes the folder handed to her. “Morning, gorgeous. Today’s schedule. Go.”

Marissa heads one way as I head the other, barely managing to offer my assistant a smile.

“Morning, Mr. Merrick,” she says with a breathy gasp.

“Stacy. I have a meeting with my father in—”

“Ten minutes, yes, sir. And it’s Sarah, actually.”

I frown at her. “What happened to Stacy?”

She blinks. “I...think Stacy was two assistants ago, sir. And...from what I’ve heard, you fired her?”

I make it to my office to put my bag down. “Was she the one with the gambling problem or the one who kept calling in sick to work?”

“I wasn’t here, sir, but I...think her mother died? And she, er, suddenly had to look after her siblings. I’m going to assume she’s the one who kept calling in sick.”

I look up before scowling. “I don’t think I knew that.”

Sarah purses her lips before deciding to get on with the day. “Your father requested to see you as soon as you got in. I’ve left ten minutes to run you through your day. You’ve got a meeting with—”

“I also have a calendar I can read. Thanks, Stacy. I’ll do it myself.”

She clears her throat. “Very well. I’ll be outside if you need anything. And, er...it’s Sarah?”

“It’s a miracle I even remember Stacy.”

She blinks at me, but I turn to my computer and ignore her.

When she’s safely out of sight, I relax, letting my gaze drift through the glass window of my office to the chaos of the early morning. I have the luxury of getting in whenever I choose to, although I’m usually the first one here. The quiet gym followed by a quiet office is too tempting. It’s almost annoying that I had someone over last night. I’m not as disconnected from the people out of my window that I’d like to be. I don’t get to watch it all unfold.

I take in a deep breath and steel my jaw, readying myself to walk the fifteen steps from my office to the elevator and up to my father’s office.

Sarah looks up from her computer and gives me a small smile as I leave but makes no motion of getting up. Perfect. They normally try to follow me as if there would be any use for them in this meeting.

I poke my head into Marissa’s office once I reach her floor, but she’s not there, so I continue on the walk down the hall to Dad’s. If what Marissa said was true and Dad *is* stepping down, this will soon become *my* office. I throw a quick glance around me, but it’s much quieter and less engaging than what I am currently used to. That won’t be a hard thing to get accustomed to. I’d like to start as soon as I can.

His receptionist waves me in, and I take in the view of the office before my gaze lands on the thinning gray head that makes up my father.

“You wanted to see me? Or did my assistant get it wrong again?”

He looks up from his desk briefly. “Justin. You’re in late this morning.”

I bite my tongue. “Went to the gym later than normal.” I clear my throat and sit across from his desk, letting my gaze drift to the wall of windows, looking out onto a slowly brightening Chicago, still dusting off the sleep from last night. “Thomas Grey from Accult West has claimed he’s looking elsewhere for marketing. Wants someone with more social media expertise. I’ve put Marissa on it, but I’m having dinner with him and some of his associates tonight, just to sweeten him up again. I’ll tell him we’ve hired that new social media manager.”

Dad barely acknowledges me. “Let Mar work her magic and come back when he agrees.”

I frown. “Is that what you wanted to speak to me about?”

He clears his throat and stands up, looking at the view I had just been admiring. “No. As you know, we’ve had several large losses in the last few months. We’ve taken a hit.”

“I’m trying to—”

“I’d like to step back from the business, Justin.”

I try to make my face surprised and shocked at the news, but even he's not falling for it.

"Marissa told you already, did she?"

I chuckle. "Told me it was a possibility, yes. Nothing else."

He smiles vaguely and clasps his hands behind his back as he stares out the window, sighing heavily. He doesn't say anything for a moment, studying the view. "I want you for the job. But we need to be steady again before I can step down."

I wet my lips, my nerves in overdrive. It's a miracle Dad's even considering me, and I want this moment to end so we can move on. Or in my case, *up*. "What do you suggest we do, then?"

He returns to his side of the desk. "What do *you* suggest we do?"

I blink at him and feel the back of my neck starting to sweat. His gaze feels heavy on me. I breathe out slowly and purse my lips. "Well, if we've got any hope of succeeding, we're going to need to step up our game in the internet market. If the Accult West account is anything to go by, we need more."

"Agreed." He leans back in his chair. "Sean Bailey. You heard of him?"

"Uh, yeah... Tech, right?"

Dad hands me a folder. "He's put some feelers out. Wants somewhere that makes him feel like a priority."

From what I can remember of Sean Bailey, he started a software company super young from nothing. I flick through Sean's details and tune Dad out. Sure enough, Sean graduated college when most kids were finishing high school, started a tech company, sold it to become a billionaire, and started again with a software company. Clever, rich, knows what he wants... Sounds like my kind of man.

"Why aren't you getting Rebecca on this?" I muse as I read his description. "Say what you want about her, she'll get quick results."

He offers up a small smirk. "Not with this guy. He shares your...tastes. You'll get it easier than she will."

I look up at him from under my eyelashes before humming and looking back at the page. "Fine. I'll get my assistant to set up a meeting."

"Already done." He gives me a bland smile. "Please be charming. We need this account."

"I will be on my very best behavior. Don't worry." I stand up and grin. "Or do you want me to be on my worst behavior?"

He throws a frown at me. "One more thing before you go, Justin."

I raise my eyebrows in anticipation.

"If you can, try to get him to come to the Valentine's Day Masquerade Gala. I'm trying to get as many potential clients there as I can."

“Sure.”

He stands up again, and with his hands in his pockets that way, he looks like the man in charge I so desperately want to be. “I’m *saying*, Justin, that the gala better go off without a hitch this year. It is *your* personal job to make it so, are we clear?”

“And the events team will —”

“If there is any hope for me to step down and you to take over, *make* sure this gala goes well. Do not fuck this up for us, okay?”

I leave his office confused more than anything. Why is it suddenly my job to see to the Valentine’s Day shit? We employ people to do that.

Marissa is back in her office as I walk past, and I flop into a seat across from her, already exhausted and it’s not even nine a.m. “Please tell me why I’m suddenly planning the masquerade gala bullshit? The extent of my usual chore for the gala is to *show up*.”

Marissa winces. “Oh, he actually did it, did he? I don’t know, maybe it’s a test?”

“I’m honestly surprised the two of you *talk*. When do you have the time?”

She looks over from her computer. She’s still in work mode, but there’s an evil glint to her gaze. “I’ll have you know that he told me in a meeting at work with about six other people

present. Believe it or not, *you* are not a topic of conversation outside work hours.”

“Why? He doesn’t want to remember how well we know each other? He took you from me.”

“You are *gay*, Justin. You were gay when we lost our virginities to each other and the entire time you and I were dating. Remember that.”

“There are plenty of other men who *aren’t* my father and *aren’t* gay. You could have had your pick. As I recall, you *did*.”

Marissa frowns. “I’m not having this argument with you again. Go be a little Valentine’s cupid and sprinkle some love around.” She waves her hand. “Or whatever the fuck happens at the gala.”

I frown at her. “You love the gala.”

“Not this year. *This* year, I don’t get my tropical beach *vacation* because *somebody* wants to fucking *retire*.” She glares at me before sliding a piece of paper across her desk. “Here. Ashley Branson. She’s the head of Operations, and I think she’s in charge. You’ll get hints about the gala. If you fuck this up, *I* get significantly less tropical beach vacations. So, go.”

I smirk at her. “That’s what happens when you date older men, Mar. *Retirement*.”

“I tried dating younger men, and they all end up gay.”

“*One*, Marissa. You dated *one*.”



“More than enough.” She gestures me away as her phone rings, and I leave her office.

Now all I need to do is find where Ashley Branson’s office is.

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