



PLAYING WITH THE

KING

E. K. MUZIC

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE

Lavender Sweatshirts

CHAPTER TWO

Ah, Yes, Vomit and Posh Boys

CHAPTER THREE

Amazing Teachers and Innuendos

CHAPTER FOUR

Late Arrivals

CHAPTER FIVE

Jade Dragons and Beer Pong

CHAPTER SIX

Tattoos and Emotional Bruises

CHAPTER SEVEN

Frosting for Breakfast

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bottoms in Skirts

CHAPTER NINE

Alcoholism Goes Delightfully With Fries

CHAPTER TEN

Pretty Packages

CHAPTER ELEVEN

First Dates Come With Pork

CHAPTER TWELVE

Chocolate Raspberry Cheesecake

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I Just Wanted A Coffee

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Elliot the Assistant Manager

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Snowflake With A Low Bank Account

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Promises of Stairwell Fun

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Tom Holland

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Olive Garden Bathroom

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Off-brand Fruit Loops

CHAPTER TWENTY

Beard Couples

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Coming Out

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Horny Teenagers

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Sour Slushie

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I'm Not Gonna Suck Your Dick in a Public Restroom

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Happily Married Homosexuals

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Sad Finn

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Daisy Shirt and a Matching Skirt

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

McDonald's is Really Close to the Funeral Home

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Mateo is a Latino God

CHAPTER THIRTY

Buy Me A Crown

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Internalized Homophobia

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

John Mulaney Reference

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Homie-sexuals

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Make the Cishets Uncomfy

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Bottom Shaming is Toxic

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Elsa is a Lesbian Icon

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Economy-class Boy

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

The Crown is on its Way

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

AA Meetings for Ass Addiction

CHAPTER FORTY

Republican Morals

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Stolen Glasses

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Touch Questions

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Gay Shit and Kitty Cats

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Michael in the Bathroom

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Rocky Horror Picture Show

EPILOGUE

*Dedicated to all the kids who couldn't sleep until the book
ended*

Trigger Warning:

The following story contains profanities, explicit sexual content, and discussions on mental health. Reader discretion is advised.

CHAPTER ONE

Lavender Sweatshirts

All I can focus on is his hot breath hitting my face. That and his clearly muscled body pressed against mine. I can hear my heartbeat in my ears. A rhythmic thump-thump that makes my anxiety flare up even more. We are only centimeters away. If I move even in the slightest, our lips will touch. The bell has already rung, meaning I am more than just a little late for my first day of classes. The only reason I am trapped now is me being incredibly late.

“Let’s play a game.”

My eyes flicker up to his dark ones. God, that voice just oozes sex appeal. This man has just uttered the four words that start every cliché online romance novel you can imagine.

“Why would you want to play a game you know you’ll lose?” I quip back. I don’t know if this game is poker or chutes and ladders, but I’m confident I’d lose. The quiver in my voice gives that away.

“Come to my party, new kid. Let me show you the game,” he whispers directly into my ear, his lips brushing it as he does. He puts a hand on the back of my neck, pulling away to look me in the eyes.

“Why?” My face flushes red at the intense eye contact. I’m not a party person. If I show up to this, I am undoubtedly getting pig’s blood dropped on me.

“Because I want to have some fun with you. Once I get what I want from you, which is purely your total embarrassment and confusion of what you want, I’ll leave you be.” He pauses for a moment, looking me up and down. “Because right now, your body wants me to never leave, and your mind wants me as far away as possible.” His hand grabs my shoulder to press me harder into the wall.

“N-no, it doesn’t.” I stumble over my words. Who the heck does he think he is? If I weren’t so paralyzed with fear, I’d be giving this punk a piece of my mind.

“So you’re telling me if I kissed you right now, you’d feel no attraction whatsoever?” He pulls back, allowing me a view of all of him. The boy’s uniform pants are khakis. There is a dark blue sweater over his white long-sleeved button-up. The white shirt is rolled up to his elbow, showing off a magnificent tattoo sleeve. A beautiful mosaic of tattoos also creeps up from the collar of his shirt.

“None,” I breathe out. I don’t know if it’s my hormones, but being pushed against this locker and kissed sounds heavenly.

He leans in and I close my eyes in blissful anticipation of his lips on mine. Then the bell rings, making him pull away as the hallways begin to flood with people.

“Guess it’s your lucky day then. I’ll get someone to give you my address so you can come to the party tonight.” And, with that, he disappears into the sea of boys.

I feel the beginnings of heart palpitations. The thought of escorting myself to the nurse crosses my mind. Maybe if I faked being sick, they would let me leave. I’m paying to be here after all. What does it matter if I just bail?

But, for now, I am standing here, looking dumbfounded. Who is that guy? And what gives him the right

to act that way? I know I will probably not be able to find these answers standing in the hallway.

I push my way through the hall, making my way to the office. I might or might not be on the verge of a panic attack. As I open the office door, a lovely woman looks my way. Her smile is soft and appears to be genuine. Her hair is in braids, and her lips are painted red. The red that tints her lips is the same shade that appears on her glasses.

“Do you need help?” she asks, looking me over. I am not in the uniform everyone else is wearing, and she has noticed immediately. On her desk is a nameplate that says *Mrs. Katherine Howard* in cursive letters.

“H-hi, Mrs. Howard. I’m Finn Green. I, um ... Its, uh ... Today’s my first day.” I hate talking to people. I trip over the words I try to say every time I speak to someone older than me.

The smile never leaves her face as she replies, “I wondered why you weren’t in uniform. Glad I don’t have to give out a dress code violation.” She laughs to punctuate her sentence.

I chuckle softly as well. I’m sure it isn’t every day a 5-foot-6 kid walks into her office in a lavender-colored sweatshirt, black jeans, and worn-out vans.

“Well, we can get you fitted for a uniform on Monday. We have some extras in the back. You can pay the sizing fee and uniform cost today if you’d like,” Mrs. Howard sweetly explains. She stands up from the chair she has been sitting at behind her desk. She opens the door behind her, disappearing into what I assume is the storage for the uniforms.

I feel my heart clench at the mention of extra expenses. I will eat nothing but ramen once a week for a month to afford them after emptying out my bank account to pay the year’s-worth of tuition. “A-and how-how um ... How much would that be?” I ask, hoping she can’t hear the poorness in my voice.

“Oh, not that much. It’s \$200.00 for the uniform sets and an additional \$50.00 for the sizing,” Mrs. Howard answers as she emerges from the room with a box of old uniforms in her arms. She sets them on the table in the middle of the room. “Seems like the smallest we have is a large.”

I am not a large. I am a small poor kid who is freaking out over the \$250.00 fee that had just been mentioned to me as though it was only \$3.00. “Okay, can I write you the check tomorrow?” I ask.

I honestly need the extra time to scrape together that money. I don’t need the bank charging me an overdraft fee when the school cashes the check and finds only \$150.00 in the account. Thank god it’s pay day today.

“Sure! Or if you’d rather put it on a card, we have the swipecard thing,” she offers.

But I can’t use a credit card.

“Check is f-fine.” Just don’t cash it for a month, I say silently in my head.

Mrs. Howard pulls out a neatly folded stack of clothes. It’s a blue Polo with the school crest on the left side. She hands me a pair of khakis to go along with it. “Here you go. We have some paperwork for you. Simple things: the handbook, medical forms, that stuff.”

I hold the uniform against my chest as she goes to fetch me a stack of papers.

Mrs. Howard comes back and hands them to me. I set the uniform down on the table with the box of uniforms. I open the bag to pull out one of the folders I brought. I carefully place the documents inside, leaving out my class schedule.

“The bathroom is across the hall. You can change and then head to your first period. Luckily, you’ve only missed Homeroom.” Mrs. Howard smiles as she settles back into her desk chair.

“T-thank you,” I say. Being treated kindly after being practically assaulted is a nice change of pace.

I grab my schedule before I make my way to the restroom. I lock myself in one of the stalls to change. The shirt is so big that I have to roll the sleeves up twice to get them to sit at my wrists. The pants, as I expected, are too big and needs to have a belt. I sigh and shove my clothes into my bag.

I check my schedule to find out about the next class. It’s AP Government in room 222. A lovely way to start the day. I search the halls for room number 222.

I knock on the door to be greeted by a teacher in his late twenties. He is wearing a green and grey sweater vest over a dark gray shirt. His overly styled hair is a dark shade of auburn.

“S-sorry. Sorry I’m late,” I tell him.

The teacher responds by saying, “Well, you’re new, so I guess I’ll give you a pass.” He laughs as though he is telling some hilarious joke. “Welcome to AP Government. I’m Mr. Martin.” As Mr. Martin introduces himself, he opens the door wider for me.

I look out at the sea of spoiled brats. Unattentive, uninterested faces look back at me. My eyes fall on one guy in the back row. It’s the same face that not even fifteen minutes ago had my heart racing. The guy just smirks back at my stunned expression.

“How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.” -Winnie The Pooh

CHAPTER TWO

Ah, Yes, Vomit and Posh Boys

My heart is pounding in my ears. Here I am, standing in front of a bunch of people, in a uniform that doesn't fit, getting embarrassed for no reason. But as I look at those dark brown eyes in the back of the class, I can't stop myself from replaying what happened at the lockers.

"Would you care to introduce yourself to the class?" Mr. Martin encourages. He motions for me to step into the classroom. I am standing and gaping by the doorway.

I step in and I feel a light blush paint my cheeks. "Um, uh, y-yeah. My name's Finn, uh, Finn Green." God, someone put an arrow through my throat.

"Well, Mr. Green. Take a seat at the open desk back there." Just when I thought my life couldn't become more like a stupid novel. The seat is next to none other than the asshat who pressed me against the lockers.

Someone groans as I make my way toward the only seat available. It feels as though every student is keeping their eyes trained on me. I slide into the desk and set my bag on the floor.

I can feel his eyes on me. His gaze makes it increasingly difficult to listen to Mr. Martin lecturing about the

foreign policies of France. I squirm in my seat, hoping if I make myself visibly uncomfortable, the man will stop looking at me like I'm meat.

"You're practically swimming in that uniform," he says, his eyes still trained on me.

"Shut up," I say through clenched teeth. My leg is bouncing in an attempt to calm my nerves.

"Oh, your stutter's gone now. I guess I don't make you as nervous as you standing in front of the whole class introducing yourself like a kindergartener. I'm sure a little confidence would do you good. And I am confident that I could give you the confidence you need," he whispers before letting out a light chuckle.

"N-no, thank y-you." There's the stutter again. I can feel my cheeks burn as I scan the room. It feels like they're all watching my every move. It's as if the whole room is watching my reaction to him leaning so close to me.

"Oh, the stutter's back." He laughs lowly.

I can't tell if this is flirting or bullying, but I've had enough of it.

"Leave me alone," I whisper.

"It's a wonder that I have this much effect on you, and you don't even know my name."

It's official. I hate his laugh.

"I d-don't need to know your name to know you annoy the shit outta me," I bite back. I know that it's better to not poke the bear, but I can't help myself.

"I didn't realize 'annoy' was synonymous with you admitting that I turn you on."

Finally, for the first time in this entire conversation, I turn to look at the prick. A smirk is spread across his smug face and a blush across mine.

“No, you really don’t.” It doesn’t matter if I find him incredibly hot. His personality is doing wonders to soil any hint of attractiveness.

“Oh, yeah?” he asks, quirking an eyebrow up.

“Yeah,” I answer, turning back to face the teacher. The whole class is oblivious to the situation. While no one is actually listening to the teacher, no one seems to care about the situation in the back either.

“Here.” He slips a piece of paper with a phone number and address on my desk.

I glare at him and mutter a half-hearted thanks.

Folding the paper, I slip it into my bag. The blush stays on my face while I listen to the cackle of the asshole beside my chair. My heart is beating incredibly fast. I try to do my breathing exercises. Five seconds in, ten seconds out. Needless to say, it’s not working well.

Once I’ve finally calmed myself, I start paying attention to whatever Mr. Martin is blabbering about. While I am lost on the concept of France’s foreign policy, I am at least able to pretend I know what is going on. The only thing I know about the French is that Daveed Diggs as Lafayette is a smoke show.

Before I can understand the concept of France’s foreign policy, the bell rings. I gather my things and start my walk to math class. This will undeniably be the low point of the day, but at least the asshole isn’t in this class. After Math, the rest of my classes breeze by until it’s lunch time. The other courses I have before lunch are Art, English, and Forensics, respectively.

Then I am left with the dilemma of where exactly I should sit. I find an empty table and sit alone.

A tray is set down in front of me on the table.

“Mind if I sit?”

I look up at the owner of the tray. He is short but taller than me. The boy has red hair and freckles dotting his pale face. His uniform is untucked, and he looks sloppy, as though he quite literally just rolled out of bed.

“Um, yeah, sure.” I smile weakly at him, poking around at the food on my plate.

“Disgusting, isn’t it?” he asks, looking down at his plate with distaste evident in his features.

I laugh. “Honestly, I’ve had worse. Public schools will do wonders for your digestive system.”

“Ah, yes, I can only imagine the death trap that is public school lunches,” he says with a joyful tone.

“It’s like eating vomit but ... it’s ... whatever.” This is true but I did qualify for free lunches, so vomit was generally better than not eating. I am still able to get free lunches here, but the lunch lady looked at me with pure disgust in her eyes when I brought it up.

“So, what made you hop off the hell train of public school?” He switches to a British accent as he says, “And hop on the posh path of private education?”

Me, the liar that I am, answers with, “I was just ready for a change of pace.” Which isn’t entirely untrue as I have been yearning for a bully-free education for years.

“Well, I, Gerald Hanson, do humbly welcome you to our establishment,” he speaks again with a British accent, making me laugh. Gerald sticks his hand out, presumably an invitation to shake hands.

I smile more genuinely than the last time, taking his hand. “Well, I, Finn Green, do humbly accept your welcoming.” Gerald sits down as if only now realizing that he has been standing throughout the entirety of our exchange.

“Also, I mean no disrespect, man, but you have got to get a uniform that fits you. You really look like you pulled that

outfit straight outta Goodwill,” he says in an insulting way as he starts to shovel food into his mouth.

I want to say something along the lines of a) what was wrong with Goodwill? I do a fair amount of shopping there, and b) I’m aware I look like Harry Potter swimming in these massive clothes.

“Oh, uh, yeah, they are doing my uniform fitting Monday. This is just an extra, so it doesn’t really fit at all.”

“Really? I hadn’t noticed,” Gerald deadpans.

“Ha, ha, very funny,” I reply, matching his tone.

“So, how’s your first day been treating ya?” he asks.

I could have responded by telling him that “this morning, I was assaulted”. Followed with “it’s not a huge deal because I enjoyed it a little”. Instead, I choose the safer option of saying, “Oh, it’s been fine. I’ve only had one person be mean to me.”

“I can only assume that was Mateo,” Gerald explains with a sigh. “He’s lowkey a dick.”

“While I cannot verify that that is his name, I can say that he is for sure a dick.”

Gerald’s eyes widen at something behind me.

“I’m a little hurt that you don’t know my name but still think I’m a dick,” said a husky voice in my left ear.

“I am very small. And I have no money. So you can imagine the kind of stress I am under.” - John Mulaney

CHAPTER THREE

Amazing Teachers and Innuendos

“I-I-I ...” Those are the only letters coming to mind. No excuses come to mind. No witty oneliners that I could throw at him as a retort.

“Use your words, darling,” he flirtily says as he props his elbows on my shoulders.

“I’m sure Finn was talking about someone else, Mateo.” Gerald has his eyes downcast. He is staring intently at the empty lunch tray in front of him. Clearly, Gerlad’s spunky personality does not mean he isn’t scared of this douchenozzle.

“Shut your fucking mouth, Hanson. No one told you you could speak,” he says in a growl. “Besides, I’m sure Finn here can speak for himself, can’t he?”

Of course I can, or at least I could do so until now. Mateo’s presence looms over me. His muscled body subtly pressing against mine is making my brain a puddle.

“So, were you talking about me or not?”

I sit there in silence, willing my brain to form any words.

“Well, I’m gonna dip. You guys have fun with whatever the hell this is.” And with that insightful statement, Gerald grabs his bag and disappears to a table halfway across the lunchroom. So glad to see that someone has my back.

Mateo removes his arms from me and slides into the spot Gerald had previously occupied. “I do believe I asked you a question, Greenie.” He leans across the table and continues, “And I don’t like repeating myself.”

“Y-yes,” I mumble.

“I’m sorry. I can’t hear you. You’re going to have to speak a tad bit louder.” Mateo leans back from me and cups a hand to his ear.

“Yes.” I raise my voice, silently praying he won’t make me repeat myself again. Something about him is just boiling my blood.

“Yes, what?” he asks. Mateo lets a smirk spread across his face.

“Yes, I called you a dick,” I angrily bite back. I start to take a sip of water to try calming my shaking nerves.

“Now, just because my dick’s bigger than yours doesn’t mean you have to accuse me of being one.” Mateo puts on a hand over where his heart would be if he wasn’t heartless, feigning hurt. He smirks as he slips in his innuendo. I roll my eyes over this little game he’s playing. “If you want me to make your eyes roll back in your head, you could’ve just asked.”

I choke on the water.

“I could give you something better to choke on.”

At this point, my cheeks are red and burning. “That’s it.” I stand up and start walking out of the cafeteria.

“Oh, come on, Greenie. It was only a joke,” Mateo calls out to me.

I respond ever so politely by flipping him off. I hear a chorus of laughter from the lunchroom crowd. I feel better than I had in my entire life, more confident than ever. In fact, maybe he is right that he could give me more confidence.

I storm out of the cafeteria and into the bathroom. I pull out my phone to check the time. Twelve o'clock. Two hours left for the day. Six minutes left for lunch. I let the seat drop down, making the toilet a chair.

I run a hand through my hair, attempting to clear my mind of thoughts concerning Mateo. Overall, there is nothing overwhelmingly incredible about him other than his level of attractiveness, maybe. Although I will never admit that to anyone.

I pull out my phone and begin to scroll through some old photos. I must be in the mood to make my brain sad. The bell rings, pulling me out of the trance I had placed myself in.

I manage to be the first person to make it into Psychology. The teacher is an older but friendly plump woman. Her gray hair is down, and her hair piece might be made of real flowers. Displayed throughout her room are rainbow pieces. The back wall has every flag imaginable. We love representation.

The teacher claps her hands together as she notices me. "You must be the new student!" She rushes over to me. She grabs my hands and squeezes them softly. "I like your energy," she whispers. She lets go and breathes out an airy laugh. "Sorry. I know no boundaries. I'm Claire."

I can't tell if I should be feeling uneasy or in the best state of calm ever.

Her outfit could very well have been made in the '70s. The long flowing skirt is made out of the most gorgeous floral fabric pattern, and I want it. Although I don't know what I would do with it.

"I . . . Is Claire your last name?" I ask, letting my nosiness get the best of me.

“No, I don’t like authoritarian titles. They make me uncomfortable.” Claire waves a hand across the air as though she’s waving away the idea. “What’s your name?”

“Finn,” I reply. The classroom is still empty, only starting to fill a few seconds later.

“That’s the name my wife wants to give our cat. Once we get one, of course.” Claire laughs as if this is the most extraordinary coincidence in her life. “Anyways, take a seat anywhere. We all change desks daily. That’s one of my only rules. That and keeping your vape in your goddamn bookbag!” Claire yells, whipping around and jabbing a finger at the kid in the back. The kid in question is currently making rings out of vape smoke. “Fucking Jeremy,” she mumbles.

I laugh a little before taking a seat in the front row. The lesson is riveting and close to what I was learning in public school. The lecture consists of Claire sitting on the ground and going off-topic a few times.

When the period ends, Claire yells, “Which one of you jackasses is gonna help me up?”

Two guys helped her up, one on each arm.

“Thanks, boys!” she calls as they leave. “I do hope the rest of your day goes fantastic!”

I smile as I walk through the hallway to Biology II. Many of the boys are already in the classroom when I get there. The Forensics class is in the same room as Bio class, so I found it quite quickly.

I take a seat towards the back, thankful that Mateo is not in the class. In most science classes I’ve been in, the desks are more like tables. That didn’t change in this private school. The tables are black and sit two students at once.

I am in the middle of pulling out my notebook when I hear the teacher say in an annoyed tone, “Nice of you to join us, Mr. Quesada.”

I look up and my heart stops. Mateo is standing at the front of the room. I guess I spoke too soon.

“My apologies, Mr. Archer.” He is addressing the teacher, but his eyes are yet to leave mine. I caved and lower my gaze down to my notebook.

Please don't sit next to me. And I repeat the mantra over and over again in my head. By some cruel twist of fate, Mateo sits down right next to me.

“Fancy seeing you here. Miss me much?” he questions, looking over at me once he has settled into his seat.

I ignore him, trying instead to direct my attention to the fascinating complexity of the human nervous system.

Mr. Archer is just showing the class a slide show. Mateo, on the other hand, is playing on his phone. So I begin to copy down notes. Naturally, there is no one paying much attention to Mr. Archer as they start to carry out their own conversations.

“You can't ignore me forever. You're coming to my party tonight,” Mateo says with certainty.

I'm definitely not going to his party. I have work from three to closing time, and I certainly don't want to spend the remainder of my night with anyone that spends time with him.

“And what makes you think that?” I ask, turning to face him.

Mateo grabs me by my collar and gets up in my face. “Because I said so,” he whispers.

“People get built different. We don't need to figure it out. We just need to respect it.” - Bonnibel Bubblegum

CHAPTER FOUR

Late Arrivals

Mateo's fist is balled up in my shirt. I take a dramatic gulp, swallowing the mix of panic and attraction that rises to the surface. My heart is threatening to beat out of my chest. I subconsciously chew my bottom lip before replying an okay. Because who am I to argue with someone who clearly is deranged.

"Text me when you're on your way tonight. Party starts at ten-thirty," he tells me. Mateo lets go of my shirt. I feel my feet hit the ground again. I haven't even realized I am already in the air. Mateo relaxes back into his chair, focusing his attention to the front of the room. He does so as if our entire interaction just didn't happen. I do the same, training my gaze to the front of the room instead of where it wants to be—on him.

The words on the screen seem like gibberish. It takes me a few minutes to get my heart rate to regulate. When my heart already doesn't feel like it needs to be on life support, Mr. Archer has fallen asleep in his chair. The slideshow continues to flip through on a timer.

After about half-an-hour of snoring, Mr. Archer, and mind-numbing slides, the bell rings, dismissing us. Everyone bolts for the door. I gather my things, and Mateo says, "Don't

be late.” With that, he’s gone, and my heart rate is again higher than it needs to be.

It’s depressing that this man I met less than eight hours ago can have my heart palpitating.

I let out a breath I didn’t realize I was holding before putting my bookbag on. The school isn’t far from my apartment. About twenty minutes, maybe thirty minutes. I can probably ride the bus if I want to, but I don’t enjoy the idea of pompous rich kids knowing where I live.

I wait until the buses have cleared the parking lot to start walking. I arrive home a little after 2:30 p.m., leaving me around ten minutes to fill out the school’s paperwork and change for work. It’s a ten-minute walk to the bus stop, and I like to arrive before my shift starts.

The paperwork includes the basics: address, parent e-mail, and parent phone number. The last two are just my email and phone number because ... what parents? Who’s heard of such an absurd thing?

I head to work to start my shift. Hopefully, my manager will be okay with me leaving early tonight if I offer to work late on Monday.

After my exceptionally dull bus ride, I arrive at Chuck E. Cheese. Yes, Chuck E. Cheese, America’s number one breeding ground for germs and a beloved destination for small children. Luckily, I’m working in the back today, so my job isn’t incredibly vital to the way things run tonight.

Delilah, my manager, says it’s okay if I leave early. I just have to finish the tasks, and she certainly took me up on my working-late-on-Monday offer. There’s a birthday party happening then. What kind of crackhead has a birthday party on a Monday. I have to make five pizzas and then prep ten more before I can leave.

Food duty is my favorite. You can do minimal work and still make just above minimum wage, which is not enough

to cover the cost of living, so I also work at a local restaurant on the weekends.

My shift passes like a blur, and I'm pretty positive I zoned out the entire time. I finish the pizzas at 7:30 p.m, so I leave work earlier than expected.

I make it home just before eight. I punch the number into my Google Maps to see if it's within walking distance. Twenty minutes. Shit. I'm still in my nasty work clothes.

I change into a black Fall Out Boy t-shirt and a pair of dark washed jeans. I slip on my black tattered second-hand Vans and put on some light black eye shadow. I try to make my caramel brown hair a little less awful. Spoiler alert: it doesn't work. I sigh and make my way out the door, pausing briefly to survey my dull apartment. I grab the note from my bag and lock the door, needing to protect my high-class apartment, all before sliding the key into my pocket.

I start walking to the bus stop. I pull out the note and enter Mateo's phone number.

"Hey, it's Finn. I'm on my way," I text. It only takes a minute for the bubbles to appear, showing he's responding. Not that I was staring at the screen like a middle schooler.

I let out a groan. There's no way I am doing this. I can't believe this is how I will be spending my Friday night.

The text reads, ***"Hurry or you'll miss all the fun."*** It's accompanied by a winking face emoji.

I roll my eyes before saving his name on my phone as Asshole From School. I stick the phone back into my jeans and then survey my surroundings as dusk falls on the street. House after house that are all worth more than money that I will see in my life line the streets.

There are a bunch of cars parked near my destination. The music can be heard from outside. Lights are flashing from the windows. The house itself is massive. It most likely can fit five of my apartments inside of it and still have room for guests. I take a deep breath. I'm standing in front of the door,

debating whether or not I should knock. I settle for shooting Mateo a text.

“I’m here,” I tell him.

“Come in. I’ll find you.” His response is immediate. I feel a strange stirring in my stomach, butterflies perhaps. Giddiness takes over my body as I think about him waiting for my text.

I open the door, and my senses are assaulted by the sounds and smell of a party. I can feel the music pounding in my body. I can feel the bass in my bones. The stench of alcohol is powerful, maybe enough to get you intoxicated from breathing alone.

I scrunch my nose as I catch a whiff of weed. While I’m not opposed to weed, I wasn’t expecting it. You become used to the stench after working with high school dropouts for several years. So it’s a wonder it still affects me.

I stand stupidly in front of the door. Mateo told me he would come and find me, so it would be counterproductive to start wandering around. So I stay where I am, playing with the hem of my shirt like the awkward person that I am.

I am chewing a hole in my lip until it begins to sting. Lip chewing was a nervous habit from my childhood. And, apparently, it’s coming back.

The door hits me as a couple walks in. The girl is dressed like she just came directly from a rock concert, and it’s the best thing ever. This prompts me to move over a bit to the side, so I’m standing in front of the wall instead.

I look around for Mateo, but I must have been looking in the wrong direction because he suddenly appears.

He doesn’t say hi, as a regular human would. No, he presses me against the wall, his hand next to my head and his face inches from mine.

Mateo wipes the blood off my bottom lip before saying, “You’re late.”

“Fuck everyone who hates you, a smile is the best revenge.”

- Gerard Way

CHAPTER FIVE

Jade Dragons and Beer Pong

Oh sweet Jesus.

Mateo is so close to me that I can smell the liquor on his breath. I feel a slight tightening in my jeans, and I silently wish I am more of a man. I would love to have the willpower to kill this burning feeling in my jeans. I am not enjoying this, so there is no way I can be getting a boner right now.

“W-w-what?” I stutter. I know what Mateo had said. I just don’t have any other reasonable response right now.

What I do not know is if I want this to continue. I am mostly just hoping he would back down and change the subject.

“I said you were late, and I wanna know why,” Mateo repeats himself, tacking on a new command. Mateo starts to toy with the collar of my shirt, not looking at my eyes.

“I, um ... I d-didn’t leave early enough. I had to work.” Oh my god. I don’t even have a speech impediment, at least not that I know of. Mateo is giving me mad anxiety, making me lose all control over my mouth.

Mateo brings his gaze up to mine. He gives me a once-over before grabbing my chin softly. “You look good with

makeup on.” Mateo pauses, letting go of my chin. He leans in close enough so only I can hear him say, “I bet you’d look better in a skirt.” He pulls away and smiles. “Go get a drink. It’ll calm you down. You look scared half to death.”

Gee, I wonder why.

I nod. That nod is the first coherent communication I’ve managed to convey throughout our entire exchange.

Mateo lets me out of his trap before disappearing into the crowd. I watch him mix into the sea of people. There’s a mix of different characters in the crowd. Mateo’s invites most likely have spanned multiple schools because there are more than just guys. Everyone is grinding against each other. I guess high school parties are basically orgies.

A song I don’t know pumps through the house as I make my way towards the kitchen. During my trip there, I spot a cluster of kids passing around a couple of joints and a bong. There’s the source of the weed smell. I have never had a drink before, so when I see the assortment of alcoholic beverages, I stand there looking confused.

I feel a soft tap on my shoulder. I turn around and come face-to-face with a girl with pastel blue hair and green eyes that are almost the same shade as mine. The green looks way better against her brown skin than it does on my pale one.

The pretty girl stands about an inch below me. This effectively reminds me of my vertical challenged-ness.

“Do you want me to make you a drink?” she asks before looking me up and down.

“Y-yes, please,” I answer, giving out an awkward laugh.

“You looked confused. Thought I could help. My name’s Jade,” she tells me as she begins to fill a blue solo cup with unidentifiable liquids.

“Yeah, I don’t really drink. M-my name’s Finn,” I tell her as I watch her mix a drink.

“Polite, hesitant, and not an alcoholic. How exactly do you know my brother?” Jade asks, handing me a cup.

I sniff the drink, and it burns my nostrils slightly.

“From school.” I take a hesitant sip, feeling the alcohol burn as it slides down my throat. The taste makes me start to cough.

“You’ve never had alcohol before, have you?” Jade asks as she starts to laugh.

“Is it that obvious?” I ask, laughing along with her. I have never known that I have such a strong desire to fit in.

“Painfully.” Jade takes a sip of her own drink. There is no reaction from her like there had been with me. “Drink fast, like you’re taking a shot.”

Did I not make it clear that I had never had a drink before?

I throw back the cup. The burning sensation is still prevalent, but it goes down better than before.

“There you go. When you want more, it’s just vodka and cranberry juice.” Jade smiles at me.

“O-oh, thank you,” I tell her as I take another sip of my drink.

“And a word of warning. You seem like a good kid. If I were you, I would not get involved with Mateo. He will break you.” Jade puts her hand on my shoulder. She pats my shoulder before disappearing into the crowd.

I stay leaned against a counter until someone grabs my arm, pulling me toward a table. The table’s surrounded by people. The sea parts and I see someone downing a solo cup of beer. On one end is a person being cheered on by what looks like a group of boys. Upon closer inspection, I notice one girl hanging on to one of the guys. This particular one has a smug look of victory on his face. The other end is empty.

“I found another guy to play beer pong!”

I look over at the voice that is screaming. The yelling girl has enough bracelets on one arm to fill up a small child's entire arm. Her red hair is wavy, and her words are slurred.

"Oh. I, um ... I don't know how to play." I look across the table I was pushed in front of. The guy has black hair and a sharp jawline. It could cut glass. The man is wearing a tank top, presumably to show off his muscles, which are just as defined as his jawline. He's tall, around six feet. His girlfriend is a brunette with a tiny waist, but most people can guess what is not small on her body.

"You chuck and you drink," the man says with a challenging look on his face. The man's voice is deep but not nearly as low as Mateo's when he whispers into my ear.

The redhead hands me a white ping pong ball and says, "Throw this in his cups. When you get one in, Danny drinks. When Danny gets one in, you drink." She then punctuates her instructions with a long drink from the contents of her cup. My own cup was abandoned in the kitchen.

Shit. I have zero hand-eye coordination. This is going to go horrendously.

"You first," the guy says.

I throw and miss terribly. A chorus of laughter begins to sound. The guy takes his shot, looking me in the eyes as he throws and sinks it in one of the cups. The solo cups are formed into a pyramid. He hits the middle one.

"Drink, pretty boy." The smirk on his face spreads. The insult falls out of his lips, and I would bet money he makes comments of this nature often.

I blush in embarrassment. I remember what Jade said, and I down the cup, ignoring the bitter taste of wheat juice. I would rather not relive that shit show of a game. The highlights are me making two shots while Mr. Doucheface sinking every single one.

My head is spinning, and my thoughts are drowning me. I feel like I could climb the Empire State Building, which

is nowhere near here.

“Get outta here. That was the worst game of beer pong I’ve ever played.” Doucheface and his friends join in a sea of laughter as I stumble away.

I run into someone. “Sorry,” I mumble at whoever I hit. My words slosh out of my mouth like water in a small child’s bathtub.

Strong hands clamp on my forearms. “Are you drunk, Finn?”

The voice is incredibly familiar.

“Mateo!” I yell, looking up at him.

Mateo releases my forearms and grabs my hand. His hands are slightly calloused, which is definitely hot. Mateo drags me through the crowd of horny teenagers. He stops his dragging when we arrive at a room. He pulls me into said room.

“What are we doing in here?” I ask, surveying my surroundings.

“Well, I’m certainly not letting you drive home. You’re drunk as fuck.” He drags a hand through his fluffy hair.

Mateo’s standing in the middle of the room he pulled me into. I walk toward him and snake my hands around his waist. “That’s sweet,” I whisper. I prop myself up on my tippy toes and press a soft kiss against his lips.

**“If homosexuality is a disease, lets all call in queer to work:
‘Hello. Can’t work today, still queer’.” - Robin Tyler**

CHAPTER SIX

Tattoos and Emotional Bruises

I wake up to a throbbing pain in my head. “Fuuuck.” I groan before sitting up. I ruffle my hair a bit and open my eyes. My eyes scan the room, and I feel my heart rate quicken. The room I’m in is unfamiliar and is definitely not mine. I look down. My jeans and shirt are gone. “Oh, no, no, no, no,” I say in a panicked tone.

“Will you be quiet, Greenie?” Mateo grumbles.

I whip my head to the left to see Mateo lying on his stomach with his arms under his pillow. His face is smashed into the pillow.

Hazy images of last night’s kiss flood my memory. Embarrassment paints my cheeks red. “I-I ... D-did ... Did we?” I stutter and let out a shaky breath.

“You wish,” he says into the pillow.

“No, I don’t,” I mumble, falling back into the pillow.

“Oh, really?” He turns his face towards me and opens his eyes. “Because I seem to remember someone being very touchy last night.”

“All we did was kiss, right?” I ask as I am unsure of the details of last night. Everything have been really hazy after

meeting Jade.

“Yeah. You were so drunk after getting your ass kicked at beer pong that doing anything with you would’ve basically been rape,” he explains.

Good to know he’s not a rapist, I suppose.

“So, where are my clothes?” I ask, running my hands through my hair.

“You said you were hot. So you stripped down to your boxers and then you flopped on my bed, like a fish, and passed out.”

I look over at Mateo, getting a full view of his tattoos. The ones on his neck are a collection of small butterflies that looks ethereal. On his arm, what I thought was a tattoo sleeve is actually a cuff. Inside the cuff is a multitude of designs. I feel silly for thinking it was a sleeve. It’s beautiful and I’m jealous. I wish I can afford to get such gorgeous tattoos.

“I like your tattoos,” I blurt out in response.

A light blush covers Mateo’s cheeks before letting out a sheepish, “Thanks.” He looks almost embarrassed. I know it’s silly, but I feel like this brief show of humanity might be a sign that he’s not a total asshole.

“Wait. What time is it?” I ask, sitting up.

Mateo glances over at his nightstand, presumably at his phone. “Almost eleven.”

“Shit.” I hop out of bed, which causes Mateo to sit up. He rubs a hand over his face.

“What’s wrong?” Mateo asks as I start searching for my phone.

“I pretty much missed my entire shift.” I was supposed to work from seven to twelve. I feel my eyes start to well up with tears.

My back is turned to Mateo as I open my phone to find a message from Tori. It says, “You missed work today so you

can pick up your paycheck next week. Gonna assume you don't feel well. Get better soon." God, I am so lucky to have such an understanding boss. Anyone else would be losing their shit.

Mateo says, "Well, it's not like you really need the money or anything. Just have your parents spot you."

Well, Mateo, not everyone has parents that hate him. Not everyone needs that money so they can eat this month. Not everyone needs that money to be able to afford a uniform. Tears start to stream down my cheeks. "I have to go," I mumble.

"Let me take you home," Mateo says as he starts to climb out of bed.

I put on my jeans, t-shirt, and shoes. "No, it's fine."

Mateo must have heard the crack in my voice because he goes silent for a minute. "Hey, are you okay?"

I turn to Mateo. He shrugs on a t-shirt and a pair of sweats.

I angrily wipe my eyes. I'm not upset that I'm crying. I'm upset that this heartless douche is watching me cry. Mateo walks over to me. Mateo grabs my face and wipes away my tears with his thumbs. I'm still silently crying. "What's wrong?" he asks, still holding my face in his hands.

"I-I do need the money," I blubber out. God, strike me down now. This is some middle school-level embarrassment.

"What do you mean?" He looks confused. Mateo lets go of my face as I pull away.

"Never mind." I wipe my face again. I've calmed down a bit. "Thank you for letting me stay." I make my way toward the door.

"Finn, wait." Mateo grabs my wrist, turning me toward him. "If you're not gonna tell me what's wrong, at least let me take you home."

No, I don't want him to know I live in a shitty apartment complex. "It's fine. I like walking. It's good for me."

"Well, now I'm definitely taking you home. It's raining," Mateo tells me as he pushes past me and walks through the door. "Come on," he says.

I follow after him. I'm positive my face is puffy, and my makeup is smeared on my cheeks. "Thanks," I mumble.

Mateo leads me to the garage and has me get in a car. I don't know much about cars, but the expensiveness of this one is evident. He pulls out and starts to drive. "Where do you live?" Mateo asks, looking over at me.

I avoid his gaze as I rattle off my address. I can feel Mateo's gaze lingering on me. He knows it's the garbage part of town. I can feel it.

Mateo turns on some music, which I am thankful for so we aren't driving in silence. When we arrive, Mateo stops in front of the complex.

"Thank you for driving me home," I tell him quietly. I grab the handle but it's locked.

"Finn." Mateo doesn't continue talking until I look at him. He leans in close to me. "Is there something you want to tell me?" he asks.

He's all in my space, and it's pissing me off. "No," I answer, my eyes darting to the car floor.

"Finn," Mateo says.

I don't know why, but at that moment, I snap.

"Fine! I'm poor as shit! Is that what you want me to admit? You want me to tell you that because I skipped my shift, I'm gonna be living on school lunches and the food bank shit just so I can pay for my uniform! Or did you want to hear about how they'll probably shut my power off when my check bounces this month!" I'm still not looking him in the eyes. My gaze is cast down toward the ground.

Mateo grabs my chin, forcing me to look at him. He catches me off guard as he presses a kiss to my cheek. Before I am able to mutter a protest at the assault on my cheek, Mateo says, “You didn’t have to tell me that. I should’ve just left it alone and not pryed. I’m sorry.”

“I hate the word homophobia. It’s not a phobia. You’re not scared. You’re just an asshole.” - Morgan Freeman

CHAPTER SEVEN

Frosting for Breakfast

“Yeah, you should be,” I tell him as I feel my cheeks burning intensely. Whether the burning feeling is from the admission that I’m not rich or from his kiss is confusing.

“What if I make you breakfast to apologize?” Mateo is still quite close to my face. His voice is husky. I feel my heartbeat come to a screeching halt when I realize he’s inviting himself to my apartment. I don’t want him to see the dumpster fire that is my life behind closed doors. If Mateo comes in, he’ll see that my parents aren’t there, and then I’ll get a series of questions I have no desire to answer.

“A-are you saying you want to come inside?” I ask. His eyes are a beautiful shade of brown, and I feel like they can see into my soul. I feel like they’re slowly picking apart my composure.

“Well, you saw my house. Don’t I get to see yours?” Mateo asks. He trails a finger down the side of my neck. I can’t tell if he’s toying with me or if he actually wants to see my house.

“I mean, I guess, but you don’t get to judge me just because I live in a shitty apartment complex.” I leave out the alone part of my living arrangement. “Not everyone lives in a

goddamn mansion.” I can feel the blush still prevalent on my cheeks. The blush is now a direct result of shame.

Mateo chuckles and unlocks the car. “It’s not a mansion.” He crosses over to my side of the street. Of course he’d say some modest shit like that. I’m sure every house he’s ever been to could easily absorb my apartment like another room. And that room would most likely be the smallest.

“Well, mine is more of a hovel than a home, so ...” I trail off, unsure where to go with my thoughts. I open the doors to the complex and say good morning to Morrie. His eyes are silently asking who my man friend is. I smile and shake my head.

I look back at Mateo, who’s giving Morrie a wave. I grab Mateo’s hand, which seems to catch him off guard. I pull him toward the elevator. The doors close before I select my floor.

“Are your parents going to be home?” Mateo asks, looking over at me.

There it is. It’s the question I hate hearing. Actually—correction—any question concerning the people who gave me life is one I hate hearing. I shift uncomfortably and let the silence linger in the elevator.

“Finn?” Mateo tries to get my attention.

“Technically, they are probably at their home.” I put emphasis on the word *their*. My words hold a kind of aggressive tone to them.

“So this isn’t their home?” he asks, seemingly embarrassed now for bringing up what anyone can tell is a sensitive subject.

My cheeks flush with shame. “No.” It comes out as a whisper. I hadn’t meant for it to. I’d intended for it to come out with conviction. I wanted the words to show that I was proud to be rid of them. Instead, I only conveyed how alone I truly am.

“Oh,” Mateo says, sounding as uncomfortable as I feel.

The doors to the elevator open. I walk out, not checking over my shoulder to see if Mateo’s following. I fish around my pockets for my keys. I jam my shoulder against the door to get it to open. The building is so old that it’d be a surprise if the door actually opened smoothly.

I look around at my pitiful apartment before glancing over at Mateo. He’s standing next to me, surveying my garbage apartment. I can tell if the eyes hold curiosity or judgment.

“Welcome,” I tell him. I inwardly cringe at the awkward vibes I’m radiating. Maybe my awkwardness will prevent him from inviting himself into other guys’ apartments in the future.

“It’s ...” There’s a brief hesitation before Mateo continues. “Nice.”

“Sure,” I say, even though we’re both thinking about how much of a shithole it is. I can only imagine the nasty thoughts swimming in Mateo’s head. I’m sure he’s gonna have a mountain of pity to dump on me.

“Well, I promised you breakfast,” Mateo says, clapping his hands together in excitement. He starts moving to the kitchen. As Mateo does this, it hits me that I have very little food in my apartment.

He starts to rummage through the fridge. Mateo laughs before looking back at me. “Man, you have three eggs, two pieces of ham, and a container of frosting in here.”

“I didn’t really have, um, time to go get groceries this week.” Hopefully, Mateo doesn’t recognize that time constraint is code for money problems.

Mateo’s face flushes crimson, meaning he knows what I meant. “I could always just have you for breakfast.”

Although his speech is vulgar, at least he doesn't comment on my poorness. I haven't realized I've been looking at the floor until I looked up to find Mateo in front of me. He is caging me against a wall. We seem to end up in this position a lot.

"Would you like that, Finn?" Mateo asks, dragging a thumb across my bottom lip.

"I-I, um ..." My eyes flicker between his piercing gaze and his lips.

Mateo leans in close to my ear. In a husky voice, he says, "I do believe I asked you a question."

"Yes," I breathe out.

I can feel Mateo's smile against the side of my face. He presses light kisses against my jaw, mapping a path to my mouth. Mateo starts to kiss me. They're hungry kisses, like he can't get enough of me. Mateo bites at my bottom lip, causing a groan to slip from my lips. He takes this opportunity to slip his tongue inside my mouth and begin exploring. Mateo tastes like toothpaste and something else that I can't quite place.

After a few minutes of kissing, Mateo moves toward my neck. He lightly kisses the side of it. I turn my head to the side, giving him better access. When Mateo reaches the spot where my shoulder meets my neck, he bites down. I gasp just as he starts to suck on my neck. A moan falls out of my lips, and I tangle my fingers in his hair. I tug on his hair lightly as he continues to suck on my neck. He starts to grind against me.

"Oh god," I murmur.

Mateo looks at me and whispers in my ear, "How's that for breakfast?"

"I have freedom. But freedom means total selfishness. It means nobody cares much what you do." - Lynn Barber

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bottoms in Skirts

Mateo pulls away, leaving me slumped against the wall of my tiny kitchen as he slithers back to the fridge. Mateo pulls out my frosting tub. It's vanilla with sprinkles. He starts opening drawers in search of a spoon. Mateo finds one and begins shoveling sugar into his stupid mouth.

“You can't just ... Ugh!” My aggravation is evident as I tangle my hands in my hair.

Mateo licks the frosting off his spoon before pointing it in my direction. “I can't just what, Finn?” Mateo quirks an eyebrow up at me.

“You can't just be all hot, get me all horny, and then eat my frosting!” I'm borderline yelling and my cheeks are flushed red.

“Oh? I didn't realize you found me hot. Nor did I think you were horny.” He continues to eat the frosting that doesn't belong to him. Like the thief he is.

“Fuck off! You knew very well what you were doing with that dumbass smirk and your kisses!” I jab my index finger out at him.

“I could stop if you like,” Mateo tells me, his smirk growing as he continues to eat my frosting.

“Wait, uh, n-no. That’s ... That’s not what I meant,” I stutter out.

“In other words, you enjoy me being hot and making you horny?” he asks, scraping the sides of the container.

“Whatever,” I grumble before crossing my arms across my chest.

“So what I’m hearing is ...” He pauses for a moment as he sucks the frosting off the spoon. “Mateo, I would love it if you pinned me against this wall and fucked me until my legs were jelly. Sound about right?” Mateo asks, looking me up and down.

“N-no. That’s ... That’s not what I’m saying,” I answer, my face flushing red.

“So you don’t want me to make your legs jelly? Because no part of you could top me,” Mateo says this while setting down the container of frosting, which is now empty.

There goes dinner. I should probably not plan to have frosting as a meal.

“You don’t know that,” I grumbled, crossing my arms across my chest.

“Okay, tell me what sounds more appealing: my hand wrapped around your throat as I destroy your insides or you pinning me against a wall with your petite frame?”

“Fuck you.” I spit at him. My face is red because we both know I’d prefer the first option.

“No, I thought I’d just make it clear I would be the one fucking you, darling.” Mateo once again calls me a bottom, only this time, he’s pointing his finger at me. While I hate to admit it, even if it’s not out loud, I love the way the word *darling* sounds coming from him. “Now that we’ve had breakfast,” Mateo says, clapping his hands together, “I would love to see you in that skirt.”

“Mateo, I don’t own a skirt,” I tell him, running a hand through my hair in frustration. I can’t believe how easily Mateo can just switch topics. It’s almost as if he wasn’t just talking about rearranging my insides.

“Really? I definitely had you pegged as the kind of gay guy who owns a skirt.” Mateo hops up on my counter. He sits there with his foot propped up on his ankle.

“Well, you won’t be pegging anything today. Are you the kind of gay guy that owns a skirt?” I ask as I play with the hem of my shirt. I’m not sure if asking him this question is making me nervous or if it’s the fact that he’s sitting so comfortably on my counter.

“I’m not gay,” Mateo deadpans.

I let out a dry laugh.

He’s got to be kidding. Is this the same guy that just, minutes ago, was sucking on my neck and talking about railing me against the wall? His expression doesn’t change. “Excuse me?” My eyes are wide with disbelief.

“I’m not gay. I’m bi,” Mateo corrects me.

“Oh,” I say. Right, I’m so narrow-minded. Of course. I should’ve known Mateo’s enough of a fuckboy that he’d go after anything that moves.

“Should I do more finger guns? Or maybe you want me to cuff my sweatpants?” Mateo asks, chuckling softly.

“When you said you weren’t gay, I was assuming you were gonna play the I’m-straight-and-was-just messing-with-you card.” I chew on my lips a little. They feel raw. Maybe I need to make a conscious effort to not chew on my lips.

“Why? Do guys do that to you?” Mateo asks as if he can’t believe that could possibly happen.

“Well, you wouldn’t be the first or the second,” I mumble.

“Damn, I’m sorry,” Mateo says, looking down. As he can’t help rocking the boat, he says, “How do your parents feel about guys fucking you over?”

“I doubt they think much about me anymore.” I avoid eye contact with him.

“Why?” I can feel his eyes on me.

“Most of the time, when you disown your kid, you don’t really care who’s fucking them over, especially when you’re the ones who fucked your kid up the most.” My voice is a whisper, and tears are pooling in my eyes. I don’t like talking about them. I don’t like giving them the power to make me cry. And I most certainly don’t enjoy reliving what they put me through.

“When did they disown you?” Mateo’s voice is soft. I don’t know why he’s asking these questions. Or any question at all. It’s none of Mateo’s business. He doesn’t know me. He knows the answers are just as much a shit show as I am. I can’t tell if he’s curious or if this is just a sick game he’s playing with me. I know it’s unfair to assume that, but that’s where my brain goes when anyone begins to show interest in my life.

“When I was twelve.” My voice is still a whisper.

“Is that when you came out?”

I’m still not looking at Mateo, but I know he’s looking at me. I honestly can’t believe he’s still here. If I were him, I would have bolted as soon as feelings were brought up. It’s a miracle I’m still having this conversation with him.

“No, actually.” I give out a dark chuckle. “They found gay porn on my computer. I just wanted to jack off, you know, and straight porn wasn’t doing it for me. So I got curious, and that’s when my mother came in. Rather than just being a normal mom and shutting the door in fear and embarrassment, she barged towards me and snatched my computer. When she saw what was on it, I thought she was going to faint.” I pause, needing a minute to continue. I don’t know who’s the bigger

idiot: him for asking these invasive questions or me for answering them.

“My parents are super religious. So when my dad came home from work that day, they sat me down and gave me two options: I could go to a conversion camp or I could get out. They were asking me to renounce my sexuality and beg for forgiveness. My father told me that no matter what, homosexuality was a disease that needed to be cured. I was so confused. I didn’t understand why it was such a big deal that I didn’t like girls the way I liked guys. I never did. Whenever I saw a couple, my focus was never on the attractiveness of the girl. It was always on how hot the guy was. In fact, I’d never really thought about girls that way.”

“Finn, I’m so sorry.”

I didn’t even realize he had walked over to me until he put a hand on my shoulder.

“Fuck me gently with a chainsaw.” - Heather Chandler

CHAPTER NINE

Alcoholism Goes Delightfully With Fries

Before I could respond, Mateo engulfs me in a hug. I start sobbing into his shirt. After a few minutes of me crying, the tears begins to slow down. Mateo rubs circles on my back. I pull away to look at him.

“Sorry,” I mumble, embarrassed that I am acting like this. I am embarrassed at how any display of affection causes me to breakdown like this.

“It’s okay. How about you go take a shower to relax and I’ll get us some real breakfast? Okay?” Mateo asks. I can’t tell if it’s pity in his eyes or a look filled with genuine concern. I guess I am not used to seeing either, so it is difficult to distinguish between them.

I nod. Mateo uses his thumbs to wipe the tears off my cheeks. I’m not sure what made the action feel so intimate.

“Be back in fifteen minutes, okay?”

“Thank you,” I whisper, my voice hoarse from the intense mental breakdown that just happened.

Mateo places a chaste kiss on my lips before grabbing his keys off the counter and disappearing out the front door.

I'm sure my cheeks are red because they are burning.

I walk to my bathroom, the only one in the apartment. It connects to my bedroom. It definitely sucks because what if I have company over and don't want them in my room?

I put my Spotify playlist on and set my phone on the kitchen counter. The reflection that is staring back at me is looking quite rough. Last night's make-up is running down my cheeks, and my hair is sticking up in angles I hadn't thought possible. I strip and let the water hit my back for a while before washing up. I can't believe Mateo wants anything to do with me while I look like this.

I'm not sure how long I have already been in here, maybe three-and-a-half songs long. I get out and wrap a towel around my waist. I swipe my hand over the fogged-up mirror and inspect my reflection again. It's still not great, but it's no worse than usual.

I exit the bathroom and step into my room. Just as I am about to drop my towel, Mateo bursts in, holding a bag of McDonald's and a bottle of vodka.

"Don't you knock!?" I yell, clutching my towel close to my waist.

"Honestly, I was kind of hoping for the towel to not be there. Nice hickey by the way." Mateo laughs.

"Be quiet," I grumble. I grab some clothes from one of my drawers. "Give me a minute." I hear a plop, which I assume is the sound that results from a six-foot-something giant flopping on my bed.

I grab a black hoodie, embroidered with the words *Make Me* in white letters. The pants are the one article of clothing I own which costs more than fifteen dollars. They're black Nike sweatpants. I pull them on before I towel off my hair. I don't bother to style it.

I open the door, and the first thing to come out of Mateo's mouth is, "That sweatshirt proves that you're definitely a kinky bottom."

“Shut up,” I mumble. My cheeks are beginning to burn. I sit next to Mateo on my bed and reach for the bag. I eye the vodka. I raise my eyebrows at him.

“What? Alcoholism goes delightfully with fries.” Mateo takes the top off the bottle before drinking some.

“Boy, it’s not even noon.” I laugh, reaching into the bag for some fries.

“It’s like eleven-thirty, so I was rounding up.” He shrugs before chomping down on some fries.

“You know normal people wait till at least five to start drinking.”

“It’s called day drinking. You’ll understand when you’re older, sweetheart.” Mateo screws the top back on the bottle.

I shovel some fries into my own mouth before responding. “Mateo, I’m pretty sure we’re the same age.”

“Well, when’s your birthday?” Mateo asks, punctuating his statement with a swig of vodka. I can’t imagine drinking more, especially since my head has been having a dull throb since I woke up.

“July 12th,” I answer, eating some more food from the McDonald’s bag.

“So you’re only seventeen, as a senior? That’s unfortunate.” Mateo tsks as he shakes his head.

“Okay, when’s your birthday?” I shoot back, a little offended by his comment.

“November 5th. I’m an adult, unlike you. You’re just a baby.” Mateo ruffles my hair before saying, “My baby.”

I’m pretty sure I melted after that. My heart also may have skipped a beat. Mateo better quit acting all sweet or I will fall into a rabbit hole that I may never come out of. I might stay because I don’t want to get out. I probably won’t want to

get out of the rabbit hole, especially if the maker of that hole looks like a goddamn Greek God.

“Well, I guess that makes you a pedophile then.” I laugh, grabbing a handful of fries. I am starving.

“I can’t be a pedophile if I haven’t even fucked you yet, Greenie, but that doesn’t mean you’re not my baby yet.”

If someone else had said that, I’m confident I would have thrown up, but, from him, it sounds magnificent.

“What?” I look up from my fries to him. I don’t know if I’m just looking for Mateo to clarify what he said or if I just want him to call me his baby again.

Mateo softly grabs my chin. “My baby,” he whispers.

“One more time. I don’t think the monster in the closet heard you,” I say breathily. I know it’s irrational, but I feel like if I talk too loud, I’ll wake up from this beautiful dream. When I wake up from this dream, I know Mateo will disappear, leaving me alone again.

Mateo leans close to my ear and whispers, “My baby.” He nips my earlobe. I bite my lip to stop the moan that wants to fall from my lips.

Mateo grabs the bag from my hand and places it on the bed. He begins kissing down my neck. I don’t know what kind of good deed I did to deserve this man being all over me twice today, but I would love to know. That way, I can repeat my action.

Mateo pulls me onto his lap and starts kissing my neck. He lets his hands wander across my body. In response, I grind on him a bit. Mateo says my name as a groan. He pulls away, allowing me access to kiss his neck.

Mateo starts to pull my shirt off and chucks it across the room. I grab on to the bottom of his shirt to do the same. Mateo flips us over and presses me to the bed. Mateo slips his hand into my sweat pants. Mateo’s hand is resting on me, then he says, “No underwear? Were you expecting this?”

“N-no.” Mateo pulls my dick out of my pants. I gasp as Mateo wraps his hand around my length. He begins to move up and down, quickening his pace. “Oh god.” If someone had asked me a week ago what I would be doing today, my answer would definitely not have been, *“I’ll be getting a hand job on my bed.”*

Mateo continues the motion for a bit and then he leans and takes me in his mouth. He starts to bob his head up and down. I tangle my hands in his hair and mutter obscenities as Mateo’s hands and mouth work miracles.

“I’m-I’m gonna ...” I moan and finish in his mouth. “Fuck,” I mutter.

Mateo pulls my sweat pants back up and looks me up and down. He swipes a finger across his bottom lip and says, “Now that’s what I call breakfast.” He chuckles lightly.

“Why do they call it rush hour when nothing moves?” - Robin Williams

CHAPTER TEN

Pretty Packages

I'm not sure why, but a wave of embarrassment washes over me. Mateo hovers over me with a smirk spread across his smug face.

"That was," I pause for a second, still a bit breathless from the ordeal, "amazing."

"Yes, it was," Mateo responds. He flops down on top of me.

I wiggle underneath him. "Get off of me." I'm laughing a bit as I squirm.

"That is not what you were saying a second ago. I do believe you were just moaning under me." Mateo laughs, not moving off of me. He fake-moans a little, mocking me.

"That was different. You weren't crushing me," I answer, trying to push Mateo off me. My face is red from Mateo's mockery.

"Nah, I was just jacking you off." Mateo is still snuggled up on my chest, crushing me with his body weight.

My cheeks are still burning red. I've never had someone so casually talk about jacking me off. Then again, most guys don't stick around for conversation.

“Well, now you’re crushing me!” I yell.

“But you’re comfy!” Mateo whines.

“Better stop whining or I’m gonna start calling you a bottom,” I respond.

Mateo props himself up, straddling me. “You wanna say that again.” Mateo’s voice is husky as he says that. He locks eyes with me.

“You’re the bottom—”

Mateo’s hand circles my throat. “Really?”

The word comes out as a growl.

I nod as he increases pressure on his grip.

“Because I can tell from your boner that you are definitely enjoying being my bitch.” Mateo leans down and presses a kiss to my lips before letting go of my neck.

I’m gasping for air. I am ashamed to admit that I am incredibly turned on by Mateo. “I-I,” I try to say, but the words don’t come. I give out a shaky breath, having regained it finally.

Mateo grabs my chin and makes me meet his eyes. “Who’s the bottom now?”

“I could top you if I wanted to,” I grumbled, crossing my arms across my chest.

“No, you couldn’t. Not to mention you didn’t seem to want to a little while ago.” Mateo grins as he rolls off of me and lies down next to me.

“Be quiet,” I mumble, running my hands over my face.

“Nah. Vodka!” Mateo yells before bolting up. He grabs the bottle and takes a swig. Mateo offers the bottle to me after he’s done.

“No. I don’t really want to drink ever again,” I say. My head is still slightly pounding.

“Come on. Maybe, it’ll loosen you a little since you seem so hell-bent on not being a bottom.” Mateo laughs, taking another sip before setting the bottle on my nightstand.

“I’m not hell-bent on not being a bottom,” I mumble.

“Really? So you’re over the whole I-could-top-you-if-I-wanted-to’ fantasy?” Mateo laughs.

I hit his bare chest with the back of my hand. “I could!” I whine.

“Who’s whining and proving my point now?” Mateo taunts.

“Shut up! Don’t you have anything else to do other than be an ass?” I ask as I sit up beside him.

“We could talk about a date. You know, go out.” Mateo proposes, sounding a little tentative as he says it.

Like on a date?” I look up at him.

“Yeah,” Mateo answers, looking at me. “Like on a date.”

“With me?” I know I’m asking questions that are a bit redundant, but I just want to make sure he’s not fucking with me.

“No, with the homeless guy on the corner.” Mateo laughs. “Maybe if you put on a skirt, it’d be with you.”

I lean over and rest my head on Mateo’s shoulder. “I told you. I don’t own a skirt.”

“I could fix that. I could even get you some sexy lingerie to wear under it if you’d like.”

“That sounds more like something you’d like.” I laugh. I absentmindedly run my hands over his abs, which are tight, making me feel inferior.

“Maybe, but it seems like you found something you like,” Mateo says, referring to my hand roaming his mid-section.

My cheeks flush. “I was just making sure they were real.”

“What’s the verdict?” he asks in a teasing tone.

“Quite real,” I answer as I pull my hand away from his abs. “Do you have a day in mind for the date?”

“How about we do dinner tonight? After, you could spend the night at my house again. That way, you could see if the rest of me is real.”

“While that sounds lovely, you have a tendency to make me miss work. And I need that money for groceries.” The word vomit about my poorness falls out of my mouth before I have a chance to filter it.

“How much do you make? I could match that,” Mateo offers.

I know he isn’t trying to make me feel like shit, but that’s all his comment does.

“Mateo, I don’t want your money. I’ve been self-sufficient since fourteen.”

Mateo tenses beside me. “I thought you said you got kicked out when you were twelve.”

“I did,” I answer, praying that he doesn’t ask further questions on the subject.

“So what happened between the ages of twelve and thirteen?” Mateo asks, drawing small circles on my thigh.

“Just homelessness,” I mumble.

“Finn, I—” Mateo starts to offer some unwanted sympathy.

“To be honest, I don’t really want to relieve the horror show that was my pre-teen years,” I say, sounding exasperated.

“Yeah, I get that. So I’ll pick you up next Friday at seven? Dress nice, alright?” Mateo stands up from the bed and

grabs his shirt. Mateo pulls it over his head, covering the beautiful skin of his chest.

“Okay. Where are we going?” I ask, still staying seated as I watch him dress.

“I was thinking somewhere nice, and it’s a surprise.” Mateo punctuates his statement with jazz hands.

“Ooh, fancy,” I say.

“See ya at seven.” Mateo gives me a two-fingered salute before exiting the room. Moments later, I hear the front door shut.

* * *

“Ah, Torpedos. Nice.” I smile excitedly.

“Glad you like it,” Mateo responds. The two of us make our way into the restaurant. “Reservation for two under Quesada,” Mateo says.

“Right this way, sir,” The waiter looks between us with an emotion in his eyes that I don’t quite understand.

We sit down at a table covered with a white tablecloth. The waiter says something about taking our time with our orders as he hands us our menus. The look I don’t understand still graces his face. The waiter is a tall, lanky man with an I’m-better-than-you type of attitude.

The waiter leaves us, and Mateo produces a package wrapped with a ribbon.

“What’s that for?”

“You,” Mateo answers.

My heart skips a beat. I haven’t been given a present in a little over five years. “Really?”

“Yeah. Open it.” Mateo bites his bottom lip, looking excited.

I pull the ribbon off the box and peel back the tissue paper. It's a black pleated skirt. "You're kidding me?" I ask as I laugh a bit hysterically.

**"I don't have a dirty mind. I have a sexy imagination." -
Unknown**

CHAPTER ELEVEN

First Dates Come With Pork

“You said you didn’t have one, so the most plausible solution was to get you one,” Mateo says over my laughing.

“It’s adorable.” I look and run my hands over it. The fabric is so soft.

“You’re adorable,” Mateo tells me.

I swear if I spend more time around him, my heart will melt and render me immobile.

“Nah,” I mumble, becoming shy.

“Yeah, and I bet your ass would look even more adorable in the skirt,” Mateo tells me.

“Stop. It will not,” I answer, hiding my red face behind the menu.

“Oh, so you plan on wearing it? I can get you a maid costume too,” Mateo teases, putting his menu up.

“Unfortunately, I am not a TikTok femboy—”

“Nah, you’re just a femboy,” Mateo teases, reaching over to push my shoulder.

“Well, if I’m a femboy, then what are you?” I question, scanning the menu before flicking back my eyes to look at him.

“Hot.” Mateo’s comment is cocky but somehow doesn’t seem arrogant.

“Ha, ha, ha,” I deadpan, no humor in my voice.

“Are you saying I’m not hot? Because that’s not what you were saying when you were groping my abs.” He sets down the menu. “Wanna split the applewood smoked pork chops? It comes with two. And then we can get two sides.”

“Ooh. We could also get the maple butter-glazed carrots and macaroni carbonara.” I point out the dishes on the menu.

“If that’s what you want.” Mateo smiles, looking at me sweetly.

The waiter comes back to the table. He’s still sporting that look on his face. Only this time, I recognize it as disdain. Mateo grabs my hand before starting to order. Mateo turns to me. “What do you want, babe?”

There is a quiet scoff from the waiter. Mateo whips his gaze away from me and glares at the waiter. “Alright, you’ve been throwing us sour looks since we got here. So I feel entitled to ask, what the hell is your deal?” Mateo’s words are filled with venom.

I softly squeeze his hand. I would love to make some snarky comment about how that’s not the only thing he feels entitled to.

“Well, I don’t think you should come into a family restaurant acting like that.” The waiter makes a circular motion with his hand, gesturing at us.

“Like what?” Mateo asks the man through gritted teeth.

“You know, acting like goddamn fags. This is a family establishment. I’m sure that I’m not the only one that would

appreciate it if you didn't act like that." The waiter crosses his arms across his chest.

"Excuse me, sir. Just because you're not getting any doesn't mean you have to hate on us for being happy. And, frankly, I would appreciate it if you get us a less bigotted server." Mateo spits out his words.

Good God. I could never.

"I'll bring my manager over if you want to act like that." The waiter scoffs.

"Act like what? Like some human decency is in order?" Mateo's voice is scary and quiet.

"Mateo, it's okay," I whisper as I rub small circles on the back of his hand. The waiter disappears, rolling his eyes at us.

"It's really not okay. The guy is an intolerant asshole and—"

"An asshole that you shouldn't let ruin our first date." I smile up at him. I take a sip of the glass of water that was on the table when we arrived.

"You're right," Mateo grumbles.

The waiter returns to our table with a plump woman in her late forties. "So what's the issue? I heard you've requested a new server? Has Matthew done something to offend you?"

"No, not at all. Mathew here just insulted our sexualities and asked us to not act like the F slur," Mateo says, glaring in the direction of Matthew.

"Oh, my dears, I am so sorry. Matthew, go to the kitchen! I'll deal with you later. I am so sorry. Can I offer the two of you half the price of your meal along with free dessert?" The woman looks incredibly sorry, and I can see the hurt in her eyes.

"That's really not necessary," Mateo starts to say.

I don't like handouts, even if they're based on the need to apologize. Mateo clearly doesn't like them either. Guess he's not a total rich kid.

"Nonsense. My son and his husband would never let me hear the end of it if I didn't offer some consolation for the two of you."

"Well, alright. I really appreciate it, Miss." Mateo smiles at me even though he is angry. He definitely looks hot in his baby blue button-up.

"There never should have been an issue, but I am happy to resolve it." The woman smiles sweetly. I glance at the name tag pinned to the apron on her waist. It reads Darla. Darla claps her hands together, and a look of excitement sparkles across her face. "I'll be your server now."

"Thank you, Darla," I tell her.

Mateo places our order, and I ask for a lemonade while Mateo orders a coke for himself. Darla takes the menus, then leaves us, silence settling over us.

"Is that the first time that's happened to you?" I ask Mateo.

"Yeah," he mumbles, looking over at me.

"You get used to it." I shrug, intertwining my fingers with his. Mateo's hands are callused, and I can't help but wish they were roaming across my body.

"I don't want either of us to have to be used to it." Mateo lets out a breath of frustration before continuing. "We shouldn't have to be! It's not the 1950s anymore! If I wanna go on a date with some cutie, then that's my business."

"You clearly have never ridden the subway," I tell him.

"What happens on the subway?" Mateo asks, a look of alarm on his face.

"Very," I pause, "interesting slurs."

"Oh," Mateo whispers.

We go through some first date chit-chat and then the food arrives.

“I got the chef to work extra quick!” Darla places the plates in front of us. I start to eat. Darla starts to leave and says, “Enjoy.”

Mateo begins to eat as well. Then he says, “I bet you’d look better with me in your mouth.”

I choke on the food a bit, not expecting him to say that.

“Thirteen-year-olds are the meanest people in the world. They will make fun of you but in an accurate way. They’ll be like, ‘Hey look at that high-waisted man. He got feminine hips.’” - John Mulaney

CHAPTER TWELVE

Chocolate Raspberry Cheesecake

“Why you gotta be dirty, Mateo? Let me eat my carrots without you providing innuendos, please.”

“It’s not my fault that you look sexy when you eat.” Mateo wiggles his eyebrows at me. He starts to slice one of the pork chops while I eat the carrots.

“It’s not my fault you’re overly concerned with sex! Maybe you should get some so that you could stop thinking about it.” I take a sip of my lemonade.

“Could you help with that?” Mateo asks in a husky tone as he leans in close to me.

“You see, I would, but I have to work tomorrow,” I say as I look at him with a teasing look in my eyes.

“I don’t see why you need to work when I could just give you what you’ll get paid at your job,” Mateo tells me while taking a bite of his pork chop.

“Mateo, unless we’re at a strip show and I’m on stage, I don’t want your money. I would rather earn it,” I say as I eat some of my own pork chop.

“Well, you could put that skirt on, then strip down to nothing while I throw crumpled ones at you. That would be

nice,” Mateo offers with a sly smile.

“That’s something I’ll do for free.” I smile, finishing off my pork chop.

“Oh, really?” Mateo asks as he starts with the macaroni.

“Yeah, when I’m done with work.” I smirk at him.

“So I will be getting a strip tease? And I am also allowed to throw crumpled ones in your direction?” Mateo asks, reaching over to run his thumb across my bottom lip.

God, Mateo’s desire for a strip tease is making me shy. I bite my bottom lip as he pulls away. He’s nearly finished with his meal, and so am I.

Darla returns to our table with a dessert menu. Mateo and I settle on the chocolate cheesecake with a raspberry sauce. I haven’t been looking closely at the menu. I catch a glance of the price and become paralyzed with shock.

Darla leaves our table to place our dessert order in the kitchen.

“Mateo.” I pause for a minute. “This place is really high-end.”

We both know that I meant expensive when I said that this place is high-end. “I know and I’ve got the tab.”

“Oh, I figured we’d split it. You know, be equal and stuff,” I explain with a slight frown.

“Nah, I wanna spoil you.” Mateo laces our fingers together and smiles sweetly.

“You don’t have to do that,” I mumble.

“I want to.” Mateo gives my hand a squeeze. “Plus, I’ll beat you up if you try to pay. But you’d probably like it if I were to rough you up a little, wouldn’t you?” Mateo asks teasingly.

I bite my bottom lip. My face flushes red from Mateo's comment. "Can I leave a tip?"

"I'm pretty positive that tips count as paying." Mateo starts to smile, most likely because if I pay, he'll get to rough me up.

"Fine." I sigh.

Darla returns to the table with one plate of cheesecake and two forks. The cheesecake has raspberries around it and on top is a heart design made out of raspberry sauce.

Darla gives us a sly smile before saying, "Enjoy, boys! I'll bring the check in a moment."

"Ah, cute!" I practically squeal in excitement.

"Just like you," Mateo tells me in agreement.

"Stop," I mumble, a blush beginning to form on my cheeks.

Mateo takes a bite of the cheesecake. We both finish the cheesecake, Mateo giving me sly comments as we eat.

Darla comes back and gives us the tab. She sets it in front of Mateo, giving him a smile as she does. Mateo smiles at her and hands Darla his card to cover the bill. Mateo leaves Darla a hearty tip.

"Thank you for being so kind," I tell Darla. She gives me a smile in return before disappearing.

"Ready to go?" Mateo asks, brushing a bit of my hair behind my ear.

I nod, smiling at him. "Let's go."

We leave the restaurant with our hands intertwined. In my other arm is the box with my skirt in it. We walk for a bit until we reach Mateo's car. Mateo opens the door for me.

"Such a gentleman," I tell him.

We start to drive to my apartment. Mateo rests his hand on my thigh. For what feels like the millionth time this

evening, my cheeks are red. I look out the window, trying to hide my blush from Mateo.

“You look cute when you blush,” Mateo tells me. He slides his hand a little higher up my thigh.

“You always look cute,” I say. I look over at Mateo with a smile.

“Nah, I’m a hot piece of ass.” Mateo laughs and slides his hand still higher up my thigh. I feel a tent forming in my jeans as he brushes my inner thigh.

“Why can’t you just take my freaking compliment?” I groan.

“Because you won’t let me up into your apartment to show you this hot piece of ass,” Mateo explains. His thumb is rubbing circles on my leg, his hand occasionally grazing my growing length.

We stop in front of my apartment.

“Mateo.” I groan as Mateo begins to rub me through my jeans.

“Yes, darling?” Mateo asks in a teasing tone that seems so sexy.

I unbuckle my seatbelt and climb onto his lap. I smash my lips on his. I pull his bottom lip with my teeth. I pull away a bit to say, “You’ve been teasing me since we got in the car.”

I begin to kiss Mateo’s neck. I nip his skin softly. “That’s because I wanted this to happen.” He lets out a low moan as I start to suck on his neck. “You better stop before I fuck you in the back of my car.”

I pull away and rest my forehead against his own. “Well, I guess I’ll go inside because I would like to be able to walk tomorrow.”

Mateo presses a hungry kiss to my lips and begins exploring my mouth with his tongue. “You taste like chocolate,” Mateo murmurs.

I get off of him. “Good night, Mateo.”

“Good night, Finn,” Mateo tells me, sporting a look of lust in his eyes.

“What? So everyone’s supposed to sleep every single night now. You realize that nighttime makes up half of all time, right?” - Rick Sanchez

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I Just Wanted A Coffee

My alarm blares and, for a moment, I think the last two days have just been a cruel dream. Honestly, it would make more sense for this to be a horrid trick that whoever controls the universe is playing on me. It's six a.m. and I groan, knowing it's all too good to be true. I grab my phone and am greeted by a good night text from Mateo, accompanied by a heart emoji.

A huge dumb smile spreads across my face. He said good night to me about ten times before I left. I roll out of bed and go to the closet to get dressed.

I pull out my Chuck E. Cheese uniform. It's a basic purple long-sleeved top with the logo on the back. I have a name tag to pin to it, but I'll wait until I get there. My work pants are simple khaki-style dress pants, but they are still pricey. I wear this outside of work as well. They are perfect for any situation I have to look well dressed for.

I put a playlist on before hopping in the shower. I sing with my horrible voice as I shower. The hot water is short-lived. It's always temperamental in the mornings and rarely lasts more than five minutes. I pull on my uniform. I grab a cream-colored sweater before I slip out of my apartment. I lock the door behind me to be greeted in the hallway by my

crazy cat lady neighbor. Ms. Renoylds is pulling a bag of cat food into her apartment.

“Do you need a hand, Ms. Renoylds?” I ask, placing my keys into the side pocket of my apron. This woman is practically agoraphobic. Ms. Reynolds only leaves the house for cat food. And even then, she only goes out when she can’t get Walmart to deliver it directly to her. I always wonder if she comes from money or if she works from home. She could also be on disability, but I’ve never asked.

“No!” she grunts out. “If anyone else touches the food, the cats won’t eat it.”

I don’t bother to point out that the person whose job it is to stock shelves has definitely touched it.

“Alrighty, then. You look like you need a hand, though.” I offer my assistance once more.

“And you’re gonna lend a hand with those noodle arms?” she asks, heaving the bag past the threshold of her doorway.

I laugh softly. “Have a nice day!” I tell her happily.

“Yeah, yeah. Hope your day doesn’t suck, I guess.” And with that tidbit of kindness, Ms. Renoylds slams the door shut behind her.

“Crazy woman,” I mutter, stepping into the elevator. I press the lobby button and wait in silence. I send Mateo a good morning text, even though he’s probably not awake yet.

The elevator door opens to reveal Morrie at the front desk. He looks like hell. Morrie usually does it on Sundays. While I’m not entirely sure, and it’s unfair to make assumptions, Morrie’s an alcoholic. He always smells a little like alcohol. Except for Sundays because Sundays are when Morrie goes to church and visits his daughter. That means Morrie binge-drinks on Saturdays, so he can stay sober the next day. It makes me sad for Morrie. He’s such a nice guy. On Sunday mornings, however, he’s not generally pleasant.

“Good morning, Morrie,” I say as I step out of the elevator.

“Lower your voice, child, or I will break into your apartment and steal your shit,” Morrie says in a growl.

“Say hello to Charlene for me,” I tell him, lowering the volume of my voice.

“Will do,” Morrie answers as he takes a swig of black coffee.

I begin my walk to work. On my way, I realize I’m hella early. I don’t have to get there until eight-thirty. I walk into a coffee shop. As I walk in, the bell on the door sounds, which alerts everyone in the shop to my presence. No one bothers to look up in acknowledgment. I make my way to the counter to place my order.

“Good morning,” I say chipperly.

The barista shoots me a look that tells me she’s dead inside. Her hair is a deep shade of purple. So deep that upon first glance, it seems to be black. Her ears hold so many earrings that it looks heavy and painful. She’s probably around twenty and drowning in student loan debt.

“What can I get for you today, sir?” she asks, trying to match my energy and failing miserably. I wonder if it feels uncomfortable addressing people younger than you as sir.

“Iced coffee, please.” Yes, I am well aware that ordering an iced coffee makes me a bit basic. Sue me.

“Size?”

“Oh, a medium, please.”

“Can I get a name for the order?” she asks, typing something into the computer screen next to her.

“Finn.” I wonder if it would’ve been more convenient for me to have put on my name tag.

“Alright, your total is \$2.15.”

I pull out my wallet. I have a five in there and that's it. Maybe I should have circled the park like a creep until it was closer to eight. I hand her the five, and she returns my change.

I take a seat at one of the tables. After a few minutes, a woman approaches the counter. The cruel part of my mind wonders how long it'll take for her to ask to see the manager. I'm watching the exchange when I hear my name being called.

I stand and make my way to the counter. I thank the barista, and she returns my smile with a half-hearted one from herself. I can feel the woman's eyes on me. I turn to her, ready to ask if she has an issue.

"Finn?" she asks.

It takes my brain a minute to register who the woman is. When I do, I drop my iced coffee on the floor. I blink for a moment as tears well up in my eyes. I think my heart may have stopped. I feel the beginnings of a panic attack take over.

It's my mother.

"Do anything, but let it produce joy." -Walt Whitman

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Elliot the Assistant Manager

“Oh god. Oh god,” I murmur as I rock back and forth on the closed toilet seat of the Chuck E. Cheese employee bathroom. I’m the only one here, so I let myself start sobbing hysterically. I don’t know why the very sight of that woman annoys me, but I want to gouge out her eyeballs and feed them to the fishes, preferably small fishes that will take their time ripping her eyes apart.

I wipe my eyes and call Mateo. I listen to the line ring four or five times before I get directed to voicemail. I spend a minute listening to the sound of Mateo’s voice on the message before I hang up. I was stupid to think he would ever pick up.

I take some deep breaths, trying to get the last of my panic attack to leave my system. I have that dreadful feeling in the pit of my stomach, the feeling that comes during a panic attack where you know you’re going to throw up. I guess it’s better that I’m too financially challenged to eat breakfast. Otherwise, I’d probably spill my guts all over the bathroom. I’m responsible for cleaning it up, though, so it’s a lose-lose situation.

I pull on my hair tightly. My knees are pressed tightly against my chest. And just when I thought things couldn’t get

any more embarrassing than having a mental breakdown in a Chuck E. Cheese bathroom, there's a knock on the door.

"Sir, we're closed. I'm gonna need you to leave or at least wait until we open," a deep voice says on the other side of the stall.

I sniff and use the back of my sleeve to wipe the tears from my eyes. "I work here. I'm sorry I'm early, I'm just—"

"Sobbing?"

"Yes," I whisper.

"Do you wanna talk about it?" I can hear him shift and lean against the bathroom stall.

"Not particularly," I mumble, standing up from my place on the toilet to lean against the door.

"Alright. Wanna help me make pizzas and restock the tickets in the skeeball machines?" he asks in a mocking tone of excitement.

"Yeah, okay." I turn toward the door and push it open, causing him to stumble.

I look at him. He's tall, maybe an inch taller than Mateo. His skin is quite dark in contrast to the never-been-outside shade of my skin. His hair is about the same length as mine. He's wearing the same uniform as I am. I glance at his name tag. It reads Elliot.

Elliot awkwardly juts out a hand, looking a bit apprehensive.

"I'm Elliot. I'm the new assistant manager."

Instead of having that confident tone, he now sounds incredibly tentative.

I take his hand, knowing full well that I look like I've had an allergic reaction to something.

"I'm Finn. I am not a manager of any kind."

“Nice to meet you, Finn. Let’s go make pizzas,” Elliot says as he begins to walk away.

I follow him into the kitchen. We talk as we work, and for a minute, I mistake it for flirting and get a bit uncomfortable. Then I realize that Elliot radiates straight guy energy, and I return to thinking it’s just friendly banter.

“So, do you have plans after work?” Elliot asks as he kneads some dough.

“No, I don’t think so,” I tell him, sprinkling some mozzarella on my pizza.

“Wanna get drinks with me and some friends?” Elliot proposes as he looks over at me.

“Oh, I’m not twenty-one yet,” I answer, sliding the pizza into the oven.

“Neither am I but I pass. I’m sure we can get you a fake ID,” Elliot says, spreading the dough on the pizza pan to create the crust.

“Are you saying I won’t pass?” I tease as he slides me the pan. I begin to spread the sauce on the dough using a spoon.

“Well, you look like a tall child. Plus, you have a baby face, so ...” Elliot laughs.

“Excuse you, I am twice the man you are,” I say, jabbing a finger at him.

“I can guarantee I am more of a man than you are,” Elliot tells me.

“Oh yeah? What makes you say that?” I ask, raising my eyebrow at him.

“How long can you go in bed?”

A blush creeps on my cheeks. “What?”

“That’s the ultimate test. Whoever can last longer in bed is manlier,” Elliot explains, placing a pizza in the oven.

“Well, it’s not usually about how long I can last,” I say with a little chuckle.

“What does how long the chick can last have to do with it?” Elliot asks, sounding woefully confused.

“When I get laid, there is generally not a chick in the equation,” I explain, a blush still prevalent on my cheeks.

“What do you ... Oh.” A blush surfaces on his own cheeks. “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize it.”

“Wow, I didn’t realize I don’t radiate gay energy,” I tell him in an overdramatic tone.

“No, I totally see it now. I was just oblivious. I guess I should have noticed that straight guys normally aren’t sobbing in a bathroom.”

“Excuse me? What’s that supposed to mean?” I ask, anger evident in my tone. I shoot him a glare filled with daggers.

“Well, you know,” Elliot tells me with a shrug.

“No. No, I don’t. Care to explain?” My anger is radiating off of me in waves.

“Gay guys are a lot softer, ya’ know.” Elliot’s avoiding my gaze now.

“Wow.” I scoff. I wipe the flour off my hands with a towel and throw it aggressively at Elliot.

“Oh, come on,” Elliot says.

I walk out to the front.

“Good morning,” Sky greets me, turning around from their place at the counter. Sky’s hair is blue on one side with a green stripe on the left side. Their short, just like me, and their my favorite coworker.

“Hello. So it turns out our new assistant manager is a homophobic asshat, who thinks he’s all that and a bag of fucking chips,” I grumbled, crossing my arms across my chest.

“I’m sorry about that. On the bright side, it looks like you got some action last night.” Sky puts her finger on the hickey on my neck.

“Yeah, he’s hella fine,” I answer.

“Wanna explain why you look like it’s allergy season?”

“Two words. Janet Green.”

“Oh, shit,” Sky says. “Can I get the two words that answer the question, who you’re fucking?”

“Mateo Quesada,” I say, a goofy smile spreading on my face.

“Trying is the first step toward failure.” - Homer Simpson

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Snowflake With A Low Bank Account

At the end of my shift, Sky invites me to go out to eat with them and their partner. I decline, not wanting to be the third wheel, something I find myself doing more often than I'd like to admit. As I'm reaching for the door handle, Elliot calls me. Because I'm not a piece of trash like him, I turn around.

I cross my arms over my chest. "What?" I ask through gritted teeth.

"I just wanted to apologize. I didn't mean to sound—"

"Homophobic?" I ask.

"Oh, come on." Elliot scoffs. "How the hell was I being homophobic?"

"For starters, you used a stereotype that's not even true. If I looked you dead in the eyes and said, I should have known you were poor because you're working at a Chuck E. Cheese, that would be offensive, right? So how is that any different from you saying, I should have known you were gay because straight men don't act so soft. Also, I'm sure you're a midly intelligent person, but I'm sorry that your parents raised such an idiotic and insensitive pile of garbage." The entire time I'm talking, I make wild gestures with my hands. That's just something that happens when I'm angry.

“Wow. Sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you.” I’m about to cut him some slack when I hear Elliot mutter under his breath, “Fucking snowflake.”

“Fuck you, Elliot. I hope making your point was enough because I’m going to be filing a complaint. This is a tolerant work place, but we don’t tolerate assistant managers who can’t respect others because of their sexuality. Have fun losing your job.” I take in Elliot’s stunned expression before storming out the door.

I walk toward my apartment and take out my phone. The home screen shows a good morning text at eleven from Mateo, which I missed because of the lunch rush. Above that text notification is a missed call, also around eleven. I slide the notification, and it dials Mateo’s number.

Only one ring later, he picks up. “Hey, how was work?” Mateo asks.

“Oh, nothing. Just going to get the assistant manager fired for being an asshat. It was his first day too,” I answer as I cross the street.

“Do you want me to chop off his dick?” Mateo asks without missing a beat.

“That homophobe probably wouldn’t let you anywhere near his dick without spitting slurs. You know what that douchebag called me today? First, he called me soft. And then he called me a snowflake. That motherfucker has no clue what I’ve done to survive. I am not a soft person at all. I’ll shove my soft foot up his ass.” I’m so mad that I’m pretty positive I have smoke blowing out of my ears. I honestly don’t remember the last time I’ve said so many curse words.

“Damn. Want me to come over and make you feel better?” Mateo practically purrs out the question.

“We have school tomorrow,” I answer.

“Let’s skip,” Mateo says.

“I’m not skipping. I lived in the dark for a month to afford tuition. I will not miss school on my second day,” I explain as I approach my apartment complex.

“Fine. Want me to pick you up tomorrow?” Mateo asks.

I walk into my building. Samuel, the night-shift front-desk man, gives me a half-hearted wave. I give him a smile before going into the elevator and saying, “You wanna be seen with me?” The question falls out of my mouth before I could realize how sad that question is.

“Of course I wanna be seen with you, why wouldn’t I?” Mateo asks, sounding a bit concerned.

“Sorry,” I answer bashfully. “I’m not used to guys treating me with any shred of respect.” The elevator stops and I step out.

Mateo starts talking as I use my shoulder to push my door after I unlocked it. “Well, you need to hang out with better guys. When was the last time someone treated you with respect?”

“Today, actually.” I shrug off my sweatshirt and throw it on the coffee table. I grab the ham out of the fridge and make a mental note to get more and some other foods.

“Who?” Mateo asks, sounding skeptical.

“Sky. They work with me,” I answer with a sense of triumph.

“Fine, I guess Sky counts. Did anything else noteworthy happen today?” Mateo asks.

I freeze, swallowing the ham with an audible gulp. “Nope,” I lie. Mateo is not ready for the baggage that is Janet Green.

“Same. I just watched TV all day.” On Mateo’s line, there is a shuffling sound.

“I wish I could do that.” I groan as I throw the empty package of ham into the trash can.

“I told you I would’ve given you the money, and we could’ve hung out all day,” Mateo answers, sounding a little smug about his great financial status.

“Boy, you just want to fuck.” I chuckle.

“Well, that was part of the plan too!” Mateo says, returning my laughter with some of his own.

“So, what time are you picking me up next weekend?” I walk over to the coffee table, grabbing my ancient laptop off the couch. I open it and check my bank account. I used my phone to check my balance. Fuck, guess the power’s going out if I don’t get paid at my other job soon.

“Seven-ish. That good?” Mateo answers. The only thing between a magical day with me and Mateo is a week full of school.

“Yeah, that’s fine.” I chew on my bottom lip and suck in a sharp breath. Once I write the two-hundred-and-fifty check, I’ll barely be keeping my head above water. I don’t remember this bank account being this low since I was fifteen. I have become pretty good at money management. Learned ways on how to stretch a dollar. I have figured out a thousand unique ways to make a meal out of ramen. One package could be two meals if you only split it in half.

“Alright, see you then,” Mateo says. “Imma go to bed. Night.”

“Okay.” The line goes dead, and I glance at the clock in my living room. It’s ten-thirty. I should go to bed too. I make my way to my room and strip down to my boxers, pull on a sweatshirt, and flop onto my bed.

“Haagen-Dazs made a limited edition pomegranate chip ice cream. The tragedy of it is that it was limited edition. I

**think about that ice cream everyday.” - Lin Manuel
Miranda**

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Promises of Stairwell Fun

I wake up precisely six minutes before my alarm is supposed to go off. I hate when this happens. For instance, what if in those last six minutes of sleep, I was supposed to have an especially saucy dream.

I roll out of bed. I move into the bathroom to wipe the tiredness from my face with a washcloth. When I look halfway presentable, I grab my borrowed uniform from Friday.

I check my appearance in the mirror and am underwhelmed. I sigh. Then I get an idea. I grab my makeup and use black eyeshadow on the undersides of my eyes. I also add winged eyeliner. That's the best I can do to improve my appearance. The uniform is still huge on me, but there's nothing I can do about that. Maybe my use of makeup is why I had gotten bullied so relentlessly at public school.

I walk into the kitchen and grab a box of cereal. I reach into the box and shove a fistful into my mouth. It's some generic brand of fruit loops. I scroll through Instagram, stalking hot people and liking different drawings. I get a text from Mateo, asking if I want to grab breakfast with him. I send back a yes. Mateo responds, saying that he'll be early.

I smile happily and set the box of cereal on the counter. I look around the apartment for my shoes. I can't find them. I wander the apartment for a bit until there's a knock at my door. I stand up and practically run to the door. I'm definitely not desperate. Nope, not at all.

I pull hard on the door, trying to get it to open. "Hi," I greet, smiling at Mateo. I don't know how someone can look that good in a school uniform. His sleeves are rolled up to his elbows, like the first day I met him. The rolled-up sleeves expose a good deal of his tattoos.

"Hey," Mateo says in return. I step out into the hallway. Mateo cages me against the wall, which seems to be my new favorite position to be trapped in by this hot man. "I like your makeup. You didn't want to wear the skirt I got you?" Mateo leans in close to my ear. His lips brush my neck softly. I've only known Mateo for a couple of weeks, but I've begun looking forward to our spicy interactions in various hallways.

"No." I laugh nervously.

"Is it because you want that the first time you wear the skirt, I fuck you in it?" Mateo growls as he tugs on the collar of my shirt, pulling me closer to him. I didn't think it was possible to get any closer to him.

"I, um, I ..." In all honesty, that sounds utterly delightful, but Mateo doesn't need to know that.

"Would you like that, Finn? I bet we could get some rope, and I could tie you up and make you moan till you forget your own name." Mateo purrs, wrapping his hand around my neck and squeezing softly.

I chew on my bottom lip. "Mateo," I breathe out.

He leans in and presses a kiss to my lips. "Let's go to school now, alright? Don't think we have time for a quickie in the stairwell, unless ..." Mateo lets go of my neck and pulls away.

“Nope! We’re taking the stairs because I’m not trying to suck dick before school. It’ll mess up my makeup.” I blush as my brain registers what I just said.

“Oh, well, now we definitely need to take the stairs, Greenie,” Mateo teases as we move to the elevator.

“Nah, maybe after school,” I tell Mateo.

“Is that a promise?” Mateo asks as we get into the elevator and press the lobby button.

“Maybe,” I say slyly.

“Pinky promise?” Mateo holds out his pinky.

“Are you a child?” I look at his finger with a raised eyebrow. “Fine.” I lock my pinky with his. “I pinky-promise I will suck your dick after school.”

Mateo smiles. “In the stairwell?”

“Yes, in the stairwell,” I assure him. “God, I can’t believe this is my life now,” I mumble.

Mateo slumps on me, his arms over my shoulders. “Maybe I could rail you in a Denny’s bathroom because that’s where we’re going out to eat.”

“Maybe we could just have breakfast, and I’ll fulfill my promise after school,” I suggest, trying to shrug him off my shoulders as the elevator door opens.

“Yeah, that sounds good too,” Mateo replies, laughing a bit as he removes his arms from my shoulders.

I step out of the elevator and into the lobby. “Good morning, Morrie!” I say happily.

“Morning, Finn,” Morrie answers. “Who’s your man?”

I blush, looking back at Mateo. “This is my ... um, Mateo. Yep, this is my Mateo.”

Mateo laughs. “Yep, I’m his Mateo.”

“Well, I’m his Morrie. I work in the lobby, obviously. And, one more thing, if you break his heart, I will break your

leg in three different places.”

Fun fact about Morrie: he did some time in jail. Why? I’m not sure.

“Morrie, stop. You can’t just go around breaking people’s legs.” I laugh a bit nervously.

“I promise if I break his heart, you can break my leg in one place but not three. That’s a lot of breaks.” Mateo laughs, also sounding nervous.

“Well, have fun, you crazy kids. But not too much fun.” Morrie points his finger at the two of us, looking at us with a sappy smile on his face.

“Alright, Morrie. Have a good day,” I tell Morrie. Mateo and I make our way out of the lobby and walk toward Mateo’s car.

“So Morrie seems fun?” Mateo tells me, but instead of saying it as a statement, it comes out as a question.

“Yeah, he’s a lot but he’s been very nice to me since I moved in. He’s been more like a dad to me than my actual father.” I shrug, opening the door to Mateo’s undoubtedly expensive car.

We get in, drive to Denny’s, and enjoy a small breakfast. Thankfully, there is no homophobia at Denny’s, which surprises me a bit.

About thirty minutes later, the two of us are sitting in the school parking lot. Mateo is sipping a hot to-go coffee from breakfast.

“Ready?” I ask.

“Yeah.” Mateo grabs his bag from the back, and I bring my bag up from the floor.

We get out of the car, and Mateo grabs my hand. We walk together into the school. We don’t get very far until someone says, “Looks like the king has a new fuck toy.”

I catch a glance of Mateo gritting his teeth.

“Fucking fag.” This comment is directed at me.

I look over at Mateo, trying to get him to just walk forward, but Mateo’s eyes look livid, and it happens so quickly that I almost think I am imagining it. I watch as Mateo’s fist comes into contact with the homophobe’s face. This leaves the kid with a bloody crooked nose.

“If you need me, I’ll be down here on the floor, dying.”

- Tina Belcher

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Tom Holland

“Mateo!” I yell. I grab on to his shoulder, but it’s too late. The kid’s nose is undoubtedly broken. The blood from his nose is dripping down his chin.

“Sorry,” Mateo tells me, glancing at back me. “My hand slipped.”

“Into his face?” I question as I stare at Mateo. I’m surprised that it’s the best excuse he could come up with.

“Yes,” Mateo deadpans. “Let’s go to class.” Mateo snatches my hand and drags me to first period.

I glance back at the kid, who has his head tilted backward, trying to stop the blood. “Mateo, you can’t punch every homophobe we meet.” I look at his hand. “Your hand is gonna start to hurt.”

“Yes, I can,” Mateo shoots back, sounding smug.

“No, you can’t!” I practically yell, the loud sound causing some heads to turn our direction. Mateo doesn’t even glance at them, or me for that matter. Mateo continues pulling me through the crowd of people. The crowd parts down the middle for him, giving Moses-in-the-Red-Sea vibes.

Mateo doesn't say anything as he pulls me into our classroom and goes to his desk.

"Good morning, boys," Mr. Martin says.

"Good morning," I mumble.

Mateo gives the teacher a nod as he settles into his seat. I'm still standing in the doorway. I'm still startled by what happened earlier, but Mateo seems completely unfazed.

Mr. Martin's phone rings, shaking me out of my daze. I move toward my desk. Mr. Martin says, "Mrs. Howard is looking for you in the office, something about a uniform that actually fits. Her words, not mine."

I'm not sure why it has taken weeks, especially since I was told it would be available two Mondays ago.

"Okay," I respond, turning on my heel to leave the room. I all but pray that Mateo will still be in the seat behind me when I get back. I really don't want him to get suspended.

I make my way to the office. On my way there, I spot the small puddle of blood that has dried near a wall of lockers. I push down the shudder that threatens to run through my body and enter the office.

"Good morning!" Mrs. Howard greets me happily. "If you'll just give me your check, Mr. Ambrose from Home Ec is in the back room to measure you."

"Okay," I say, hoping that the despair I feel in my chest is not audible. I pull my checkbook out of my bag and put it on the counter to write my check. The action only takes a minute, maybe two, but it feels like hours. No, correction, it feels like I am signing away my right to eat anything that isn't ramen.

With a slight sigh, I hand the check to Mrs. Howard. She smiles and thanks me, slipping the check into a binder before leading me to the back room. I walk into the room, and a man I presume is Mr. Ambrose has his back turned to me.

“I’ll leave you to it,” Mrs. Howard says, exiting the room and leaving the two of us.

Mrs. Howard shuts the door. Mr. Ambrose whips around as if I’ve caught him off guard. He has a startled look in his eyes. I can’t tell if it’s because of me or if that’s just how Mr. Ambrose looks all the time. He has huge round glasses framing his piercing blue eyes.

“Hi, there. You must be Finn Green! I’m Mr. Ambrose but I’m sure Mrs. Howard told you that already.” Mr. Ambrose sticks his hand out for me to shake. He has a southern drawl going on that I did not expect to hear from him. He’s plump and wearing an outfit that would be acceptable to wear in a nice restaurant and on top of the couch.

“Y-yeah. Um, hi,” I say, tripping over my words for some reason. I have no idea why I’m nervous around Mr. Ambrose. He is basically a grandfather in both age and spirit.

“I am incredibly sorry that it took so long to get you a uniform. I was in Paris and no one thought to ask when I would be back. Whelp, let’s get you fitted!” Mr. Ambrose says with an excited clap. He grabs a roll of measuring tape.

“Al-alright,” I murmur as Mr. Ambrose moves over to measure me. He starts with my arms. He says a measurement that I miss because I’m distracted by how shiny the top of his head is. Mr. Ambrose is positioned in the perfect spot for the light from the room to reflect off his head, blinding me a bit. Mr. Ambrose rattles off another measurement for my leg. Then, he moves to my waist.

“Well, you’re a size small. That’s for sure,” Mr. Ambrose says, rolling up his measuring tape.

“I could have told you that,” I blurt out before I have a chance to filter myself. “I-I am so sorry. I didn’t mean to say that.”

“It’s okay. So people are in between two sizes and just need some adjustments,” Mr. Ambrose answers with a laugh.

“I’ll get you one from the front office, and you’ll be able to change in here if you’d like.”

“Alright. I’ll be here,” I tell Mr. Ambrose before sitting on one of the comfy chairs that adorn the room. The middle gives away and basically swallows me. I blush, happy that Mr. Ambrose has left the room before he could see me fall pitifully into a chair.

I pull out of my phone to see a text from Mateo.

“Whatcha doing?” Mateo asks, sending a smiling emoji.

“I’m bout to get a uniform that fits me,” I reply with a tongue-sticking out emoji.

“So what I think you said is ‘Mateo, I’m about to get naked’. Is that right? Because I know someone who would love to be naked with you,” Mateo writes with a purple devil emoji accompanying it. I still haven’t figured out if he uses that emoji ironically or not.

“Oh, is it Tom Holland? Because I wouldn’t mind if he was naked with me,” I tease.

“I’m offended.”

“Oh, well, if you’re so offended, maybe we should just skip the stairwell and use the elevator when we get home,” I write, continuing to tease him.

“Woah. Woah,” Mateo responds.

Mr. Ambrose gives me the uniform, and I thank him. I wait for him to leave before I change. I feel like I look significantly better in this one. I walk back to class, and I see that the pile of blood is gone from the floor.

“I have a girlfriend now myself. Which is weird because I am probably gay based on the way I’ve walked and talked for twenty-eight years.” - John Mulaney

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Olive Garden Bathroom

“I-I-I ...” That is the only thing I can utter.

There are a lot of mysteries in the world. For instance, how the stone hedge got there or why straight men think pictures of them holding up dead fish is attractive. But one of our generation’s biggest mysteries, at least in my opinion, is why the heck is Mateo still in school.

If this was a public school, Mateo would most likely have been reprimanded by three different teachers. In addition, the color of his skin would be a determining factor in his punishment.

But he’s still beside me, looking awfully smug too. I don’t know how I hadn’t noticed that Mateo is in my Art class. Maybe I’d been distracted. Or he might have opted not to come last week. I begrudgingly sit through all of Algebra, clutching my phone tightly, thinking Mateo will text me my fate. So imagine my surprise when Mateo practically scares a sophomore out of the seat beside me.

The teacher, Ms. Rain, which can’t be her real last name, tells us to work on the sketchbook assignment. I’m absentmindedly drawing one of Mateo’s tattoos. I look up from the drawing, and Mateo’s staring at it. I move my arm to

shield it from his view, but Mateo grabs my arm and pulls it out of the way.

“You should draw my next tattoo,” Mateo tells me, his eyes never looking away from the drawing.

“Who drew the ones you have already?” I ask, looking up at him.

Mateo meets my eyes and gives me a small smile. “Me.”

“Really?” I ask. I didn’t mean to sound so skeptical, but that’s how it came out.

“Why did you say it like that?” Mateo asks before chuckling.

“Well, you just don’t strike me as the artsy type.” I shrug, continuing to draw the design that sits on his shoulder.

“Thanks,” Mateo tells me in a sarcastic tone. “What kinda person do I strike you as then?”

“You strike me more like an I’m-gonna-wrap-my-hands-around-your-throat-and-beat-you-up kind of person,” I tell him as I start to add small designs to the big one. It’s a spiral-looking thing that gives me tribal vibes.

Mateo leans in close to me. “I bet you’d like to be roughed up a little, wouldn’t you?” Mateo’s voice is husky and low.

I glance around the room, but everyone’s absorbed in their work. If they’re not, they’re on their phones.

“Can you tone down the top energy, please?” I mumble, my cheeks turning red from embarrassment.

“Oh, so you’re finally ready to admit that you’re a bottom?” Mateo teases, raising his voice to the volume just above a whisper.

“Shut up.” I groan quietly, putting my head on top of my arms on the desk.

“I could make you quiver beneath me, Greenie,” Mateo whispers.

“We’re in class!” I whisper-yell.

“Make you scream my name,” Mateo continues.

My head is still buried in my arms so I don’t have to look him in the eyes.

“Stop,” I say but it comes out muffled as my face is still buried in my arms.

“Nah, I’m having too much fun,” Mateo teases. “We could smash in a Wendy’s bathroom if you’d like.”

I look up at him, my face redder than a tomato. “Gross. Fast food bathrooms are gross.”

“How about an Olive Garden?” Mateo proposes as he bites his bottom lip.

“An Olive Garden bathroom?” I ask, quirking an eyebrow up at him.

“Are you telling me that getting fucked in an Olive Garden bathroom isn’t the epitome of class?” Mateo asks.

“Yes. Yes, I am. I don’t know who taught you the definition of class, but our definitions vary greatly,” I tell Mateo before rolling my eyes in his direction.

“I don’t know. I think that Olive Garden bathrooms are very sexy.” Mateo wiggles his eyebrows to punctuate his claim.

“That’s debatable.”

“Well, where do you want to smash?” Mateo asks.

“Not in a bathroom!”

The bell rings.

“Is that up for debate?” Mateo calls after me as I walk away from him, shaking my head at his comments.

I go through the following two classes with no interaction with Mateo. Lunch passes by without anything crazy happening. However, Mateo keeps whispering graphic things to me at lunch, which makes Gerald squirm in discomfort. At some point, Gerald decides that sitting with us, despite the discomfort, is worth more socially than being far away from us.

The kid that Mateo socked in the nose earlier is staring daggers at the two of us. When Mateo notices, he grabs my hand before leaning in to kiss me. Lunch ends and Mateo does a reasonably good job of masking his anger. I give him a kiss on the cheek before I go into Claire's classroom.

"Hello, darling!" Claire practically shouts. I quickly learned from her class that she has no volume control. "You look lovely in that new uniform. Much better than the other one that made you look like Harry in Dudley's clothes." Claire laughs, more to herself than anyone else.

I smile as students begin to pile into the classroom. We chat for a bit until Claire whips around and jabs a finger toward the back of the room. "I swear to all that I hold holy, if you don't put the fucking vape away, Jeremy, I will cut your balls off and put them in a jar filled with white wine!" Claire yells across the room, anger evident in her voice.

I laugh and take a seat. The class goes by quickly, as does the rest of the day. Mateo's quiet during Bio and keeps stealing seemingly nervous glances at me. The bell rings and Mateo grabs my hand, pulling me out of the classroom.

"Oh, are you excited about something?" I ask as Mateo pulls me through the crowd of students desperate to escape the building.

"Shut up," Mateo mumbles and I would bet money that there is a light blush spreading across his cheeks.

Mateo wastes no time pulling me to the car. I laugh a bit before buckling up. Click it or ticket, baby.

He looks over at me. "What's so funny?"

“You.” Mateo pulls out of the parking lot, and I decide to tease him. “Maybe we should grab a bite to eat before we go back to my place.”

Mateo shoots me a look before he realizes I’m messing with him. “Haha,” Mateo deadpans. He stops in front of my building, and I hop out of the car. Mateo also gets out, and I grab his hand, pulling him into the lobby.

“Hi, Morrie,” I say, smiling at him.

“You boys look like you’re in a hurry. Got any plans?” Morrie flips a page in his magazine. He’s done with his sentence before he even looks up.

“Yep, big ones.” Mateo grins, proud of the innuendo he snuck in.

I blush and pull him to the stairs. We go up to the landing, and Mateo traps me against the wall.

“I’ve wanted to do that all day,” Mateo tells me before kissing down my neck.

I start to unbutton his shirt and kiss my way down his chest. I smile against his skin as I toy with the waistband of his pants. I pull them down and grab him through his boxers. He’s hard as a rock. I rub it through his boxers for a bit.

Mateo groans. “Finn, stop teasing.”

I chuckle before I pull out his dick. Mateo definitely wasn’t lying when he said *big plans*. I lean down and press a small kiss to the tip. I wrap my lips around it before I bob my head up and down, using my hand to work his shaft. Mateo lets out a low moan and tangles his hands in my hair, pulling slightly.

“Mmm, fuck,” Mateo whispers.

As he says this, I take as much of him in my mouth as I can. This causes me to choke. Mateo snaps and starts thrusting in and out of my mouth. Unintentional noises come from both of us before Mateo starts to pull away, presumably because he’s near his end. I grab his hips and trap him as I

continue to take him in my mouth. When Mateo finishes, I stand up and lick my lips.

“Well, that was fun,” I whisper as Mateo attempts to regain his composure.

“You are a piece of shit, and I can prove it mathematically.” - Rick Sanchez

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Off-brand Fruit Loops

After the incident in the stairwell, Mateo walks with me to my apartment. I slam my shoulder into the door after unlocking it. I turn my back to Mateo before saying, “You’re lucky you didn’t get suspended after that stunt you pulled this morning.”

Mateo’s really stupid, isn’t he?

“Please, I could pants the dean and not get suspended,” Mateo tells me before hopping onto my counter and grabbing the off-brand fruit loops box.

“Why’s that?” I ask with raised eyebrows as I lean against the wall adjacent to the counter.

“Because my dad’s having an affair with the dean.” Mateo takes a pause to shovel cereal into his mouth before continuing, “Although it’s hardly an affair. My mom knows and so do Jade and I. So I guess the only person who doesn’t know is the dean’s husband.”

“Oh, so are your parents still together?”

“Together in public, yes. My dad’s on the path to Congress, and him being married to my mom gets him the

Hispanic vote. So my dad continues to fund my mom's spending, and she lets him fuck whoever he pleases."

"Damn. Parents, right?"

"Amen to that, Greenie," Mateo answers, raising the cereal box to the sky.

"Boy, you have got to stop eating my food. I just dropped three hundred dollars for this stinking uniform," I tell Mateo, walking over to him and snatching the box from him. I reach up to put the box in the cupboard, then I feel Mateo pressing against me. His hands are on my hips, resting on the bare skin that became exposed when I reached up.

"You could let me take you out to buy the things you need or you could just take my money and get them yourself," Mateo murmurs as he trails kisses down my neck.

"Mateo, I don't want your money," I say softly, leaning into him.

"Why not?" Mateo asks, his face buried in my neck.

"Because ..." I don't have a reason other than it makes me feel gross to be taking money from anyone. I don't even know Mateo that well. I can't take his money.

"Just let me spoil you." Mateo runs his hands up my sides before encircling me in a hug.

"You're really touchy today." I choose to ignore his comment about spoiling me. I don't need his handouts. I'm doing moderately okay.

"It's been four days since we met, and I've touched you every one of those days. It just feels different because now we've sucked each other's dicks," Mateo explains, resting his head on top of mine.

A blush rises to my cheeks. The blushing seems to be becoming a massive problem. Mateo's sly comments always make my heart melt just a little.

After years of my life being spent in a touch-starved environment with only the affection of one-night stands, I want him to make me blush, probably way more than I am willing to admit.

“Those are only minuscule details.”

“Wanna come over to my house? We could rent a movie, and you can eat my food,” Mateo offers, spinning me around to face him.

“Yeah, okay. Let me change first.” I detangle myself from Mateo’s clutches and make my way to my room.

“Only if I get to watch,” Mateo calls, following behind me.

“Nope,” I answer, popping the *p* intentionally.

“Oh, come on. I’ve seen your dick. Just let me check out those muscles,” Mateo complains.

I grab him by the wrist and pull him into my room. I pull off the uniform’s sweater vest and move closer to Mateo. I stay this close as I slowly unbutton my shirt. Mateo bites his bottom lip. I stop unbuttoning just before he can get a decent view of anything.

I lean close to his ear, just like Mateo enjoys doing to me. I whisper, “Stop being thirsty.” Then I turn around and move toward my dresser.

“You ass.” Mateo groans. I can feel his eyes burning holes into my back as I change out of my school shirt and into a black tee shirt. I shimmy out of my khakis. “Nice ass,” Mateo comments and I’m glad my back is towards him so he can’t see the blush that seems to have taken permanent residence on my cheeks.

“Shut up,” I mumble as I pull on a pair of sweatpants. I turn around to face Mateo, and he just can’t help himself.

“Nice dick print, Greenie.” Mateo smirks, moving his gaze downward.

“I swear to god you are a pig.” I throw my hands up in defeat.

“Alright, I’m done,” he says with a laugh. “You ready to go now?”

We make our way down to the lobby, and Morrie says goodbye to the two of us. We reach Mateo’s car, and as I’m buckling my seatbelt, Mateo says, “I wanna adopt Morrie as a grandfather.”

“No argument from me, but may I ask why?” I ask with a laugh.

“Because he’s amazing,” Mateo concludes. “Plus, I feel liked he’d give us weed if we asked, and I respect that in a man.”

Mateo begins the drive to his house. The neighborhood change is evident when the buildings get more expensive-looking and the lawns start to get greener as we drive.

We pull into their driveway and Mateo mutters, “Who the fuck?”

“What’s wrong?” I ask, looking over at Mateo and putting a hand on his thigh.

“I don’t know who’s car that is,” Mateo explains, shooting me a look of confusion.

I take my hand off his thigh and open the car door. “Let’s find out.”

I follow Mateo to the front door. He opens the front door to reveal Jade with her tongue down some girl’s throat.

Mateo laughs, causing the two to break apart. “What happened to Danny? I liked him.”

“He was a dick,” Jade mumbles, seemingly embarrassed to have been caught. The girl with her is blushing as well. Her hair is in a bunch of braids gathered into a bun.

She's wearing a tube top that accentuates her curves and a gold choker.

"This is Amara," Jade says.

Amara waves at us shyly, a light blush still on her cheeks.

"Well, if you'll excuse us, we're gonna go smash," Mateo says with no shame. Mateo begins to move to the stairs.

"We are not," I say, a blush covering my cheeks. I run after Mateo, shouting his name.

"I'm a very vengeful person, with access to weaponized small pox."

- Bernadette Rostenkowski

CHAPTER TWENTY

Beard Couples

We're on Mateo's bed, cuddling. We rented some generic Amazon movie neither of us cared for, and now we're watching Russian Doll on Netflix. I am sitting on Mateo's lap, and he is playing with my hair.

I bite my lip before saying, "So, what are we?"

Gotta love this awkward talk.

"Hmm." He ponders for a second. "What do you mean?"

"Are we dating or are we just friends?" I ask. I'm sure the second option is not the correct answer, but I thought I'd put it as a choice. That way, Mateo can back off if he wants.

"Well, I'm pretty positive friends don't want to fuck each other. Since I want to get in your pants and you want to get in mine, I think we're more than friends." Mateo laughs softly. "Plus, we've spent the last hour-and-a-half cuddling."

"What if it was platonic cuddling?" I ask, blushing a bit at my insecurities.

"It isn't. I promise," Mateo answers, burying his head in my neck. "And if it was, the blowjobs haven't been platonic." He laughs.

“Alright, I believe you,” I say with a laugh.

I hear a scrambling noise before the door to Mateo’s room swings open. Jade is standing there, looking frantic. She pushes Amara into the room. After catching her breath for a second, Jade says, “Dad’s home. Switch?”

“Ugh. Fine.” Mateo throws me off his lap, and I land with an unceremonious flop. “My dad’s quite homophobic, so we gonna do some beard couple shit.”

I get off the bed. Before I have a chance to argue, Jade grabs my hand and pulls me to the living room. The man standing in front of me is fit, in a scary way. His beard scruff is peppered with gray hair, and the hair on his head is slicked back in a douchebag way. The man who I assume is Jade and Mateo’s father is wearing a charcoal gray suit with a red tie that has been untied and now hangs around his neck.

“Hello.” The man before me is sizing me up. For a moment, I’m worried the gay is seeping off me like a rainbow aura. “Who is this, Jade?” He’s addressing his daughter but looking directly at me.

“This is Finn,” Jade says, holding her dad’s gaze that seems to be locked on me.

“Hmm,” Jade’s dad says. “Are you fucking my daughter?” His question is blunt, and I feel all the air leave my body.

“I-I ... um, no s-sir,” I stutter out, my cheeks bright red.

“Dad, don’t be an asshat. We’re going to go hang out in my room,” Jade says, pulling me away from him and his threatening stare.

“Don’t want you getting pregnant,” the man grumbles. He looks like one of the men who says women can’t get an abortion.

When we reach the top of the stairs, I turn to Jade. She looks mad.

“You’re dad ... seems fun.” I scratch the back of my neck.

“Yeah. My mom’s much better,” Jade says with a grumble. We just need to hang out in my room for a bit. We move into the room, and she flops down onto her bed. “Now, we need to have a serious talk about my brother.”

Jade pats the seat beside her. I sit down next to Jade, unsure where this conversation is heading.

“He’s going to fuck you and then leave you.” Jade doesn’t waste any time dropping this bomb. The bluntness of Jade’s statement makes her sound like her father.

“Well, okay, that’s a lot to unpack,” I explain as I take a deep breath. “Can I get an explanation as to why you think this?”

“That’s what Mateo does. He picks up broken souls. No offense,” she adds, not that it makes the statement any less offensive or accurate. “Once he’s fucked them up even more than before, he dips before he gets attached. Sure, Mateo’s cute and lovey-dovey now, but once you give him what he wants, he’ll block your number. That’s his thing.” She shakes her head before continuing, “If I were you, I’d run, but I can tell by the way you look at him that’s not gonna happen.”

I blush a bit at the insinuation that I look at Mateo like a lovestruck fool. “So if you think I’m already whipped, why bother telling me this at all?”

“Because when Mateo fucks you up, I wanna make sure he gets what he deserves. Plus, you’re better than most people Mateo keeps as his company. Maybe he’ll keep you around for a while, but I wouldn’t get your hopes up.” Jade shrugs at me.

“Whatever,” I mumble. I should probably listen to Jade, who seems genuine in telling me that Mateo and I won’t work out. Maybe I know, deep down, that I’m destined for loneliness. Something inside of me makes me want to spite

God, so I decide to ignore her advice completely. “Let’s just watch a movie or something,” I say, needing a topic change.

“What do you want to watch?” Jade asks, grabbing a laptop. She props it open and pulls up Netflix.

“West Side Story is good,” I suggest as I pull a blanket around me.

“That’s very gay of you,” Jade tells me with a laugh.

“Says the girl who had her tongue down another girl’s throat earlier,” I retort as the movie begins.

Jade hits me with a pillow. “Oh, you wish you were getting as much action as I am.”

“Gross. I don’t want to hear about anything regarding your sex life. What are you, like sixteen?” I ask.

“Yeah,” she says with a shrug. “And the details of my sex life are wonderful, not that they would be appealing to you.”

“Do you date girls and guys?” I ask, my nosiness getting the best of me.

“I date anyone I like,” Jade answers, giving me another shrug.

“So you’re pansexual?” I ask, smiling a bit at her. I don’t know why it makes me happy to discuss sexualities. Maybe it’s because I never really get to do it.

“I don’t really like labels, but, yeah, something like that.”

“Fun. Now I know two pansexuals,” I tell her happily.

“I hope Mateo doesn’t break your heart, Finn. I really do,” Jade says, giving me a small smile.

“She’s singing ‘Baby Come Home’ in a melody tears while the rhythm of the rain keeps time.” - Fall Out Boy

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Coming Out

I spend a couple of hours in Jade's room with her, watching movies and talking. We watched about half of *The Lorax*, and now we're watching *The Lion King*. Mateo comes in once or twice to update me on his dad's whereabouts. Every time Mateo comes in, he says his mom should be home soon and then his dad will disappear to the basement.

I tell him to enjoy spending time with Amara, secretly disappointed that we're not hanging out together. It's fine. I'm not clingy at all. And each time Mateo leaves the room, Jade looks over at me and whispers, "Whipped." My only comeback is to hit her in the head with a pillow from her bed.

Jade laughs at me every time I do. I hear yelling downstairs. It's a woman's voice accompanied by Mateo's father. I hop off the bed. I hate yelling. It reminds me of when I was in my parents' house. They used every excuse in the book to scream at me. They never liked me. Finding out I'm gay was just the cherry on top.

"So, when did you come out?" Jade asks, turning to me while *The Lion King* plays in the background.

"I never really came out," I answer with a shrug. "It was more of a traumatic push." I sit back down next to her on

the bed. “And after that, it was never a coming out. I radiate gay,” I explain, rolling the *r* in radiate.

“Oh.” Jade seems disappointed with my response.

“Why? Are you thinking of coming out?” I ask, glancing over at her. “Because I always wanted to do something involving balloons, maybe a giant archway of rainbow balloons and a musical number.” I pause for a beat before saying, “God, that sounded gay.”

“Yeah, it did. No, I’m out to my mom. And that’s as close as I’m gonna come to coming out to my family. I’m pretty sure that my abuela would cut out my tongue if she knew I kiss girls,” Jade says with a bitter laugh.

I grab her hand, squeezing softly. “Want me to cut her tits off before she can cut your tongue off? I’m pretty sure prison would be nicer than my apartment. Plus, maybe I’ll get jacked,” I offer.

“No. It’s okay. Abuela would probably fillet you before you got within a foot of her boobs,” Jade tells me with a laugh.

Jade’s bedroom door opens, and a beautiful short Hispanic woman stands in the doorway. She looks between Jade and me. “What happened to Amara? She was lovely.”

I wave my hands before me. “Oh no. We’re not—”

“Ah. You’re Mateo’s boyfriend, I see. You’re much cuter than his last one.” I blush at her statement. “Well, your dad’s downstairs, being an asshole. So if you wanna ...” She suggestively wiggles her eyebrows. “Just be quiet. I can’t go through another night of having to listen to the sounds of horny teenagers getting it on.” She gives a shudder. “I’m Carolina. Nice to meet you.”

“I’m Finn,” I tell her with a smile. I stand up and follow Carolina toward Mateo’s room.

She looks at Amara, then says, “Amara, you can go to Jade’s room. Just please be quiet this time. If I have to hear

you two fucking again, I will barge in and make things incredibly awkward.”

It’s official: I love this woman. I’m gonna snatch her and make her my mom.

Carolina turns her body to face Mateo and then jabs her finger at him. “And, I swear to god, I don’t wanna hear screaming. Dios mío.”

“De acuerdo, mamá. I’ll be quiet but I make no promises for Finn. He strikes me as a screamer.” Mateo has a lustful look swimming in his eyes while making eye contact me.

“Shut your mouth,” I tell him as I flop down next to Mateo on his bed. A blush covers my cheeks.

Amara smiles at the two of us. “You two are adorable,” Amara tells us before disappearing to Jade’s room.

“Have fun, you two.” Carolina smiles at us before exiting the room and closing the door behind her.

Mateo practically jumps on me, pinning me to the bed. “So, are you a screamer, Greenie?”

“What?” The blush from earlier stains my cheeks again.

Mateo uses his left hand to grip my throat. It’s tight enough to hurt but not enough to restrict my breathing. “Will you be screaming my name when I’m buried deep inside you?”

I gasp lightly. “I-I ...”

Mateo leans in close to me, his hand still wrapped around my throat. He squeezes a little tighter. “Or maybe you would rather have my hand be over your mouth, muffling your screams as I destroy your insides.” Mateo places soft kisses across my jawline.

“Ah, Mateo.” I gasp.

Mateo grinds on me. He lets go of my throat, trailing his hand down the side of my face and then moving to my body. He grips my hip as he continues to grind on me. Mateo starts to suck on my neck. He adds another hickey to the mural he has already painted on my neck.

My breath hitches. “Oh god.”

Mateo rips my shirt off my body. Physically rips it. He starts sucking on my right nipple, swirling his tongue against my sensitive skin. Mateo bites down gently and I groan.

“Mateo, I want you to fuck me,” I breathe out, practically in a pant.

Mateo moves back up to my neck, then places a kiss on my mouth.

“No,” he whispers against my lips.

“What?” I ask, gazing at him in confusion.

“I’m not gonna fuck you yet. I always rush into these things. I wanna take it slow with you.”

“You can’t just get me horny and then be like, ‘Nah, I don’t wanna fuck.’ That’s just cruel,” I whine.

“If you don’t stop whining, I’m gonna tie you up and make you quiver.”

“Well, maybe I won’t stop whining,” I tell him, pulling my bottom lip with my teeth.

He growls lowly. “You kinky little slut,” Mateo whispers, grabbing my throat again.

“Oh god. Why won’t you fuck me?” I know I sound desperate, but I’m okay with that.

“Because I wanna watch movies and cuddle.” Mateo lets go of my throat and rolls off me. He grabs me and snuggles up to my chest.

“You’re an asshole,” I mumble.

“Let’s do something really scary.” – Ribgy

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Horny Teenagers

I end up falling asleep while cuddling with Mateo. I spend the night there, and when I wake up, my face is buried in Mateo's chest. It's smooth, muscular, and is a beautiful shade of light brown.

"Are you awake, baby?"

God, I think my heart just melted into a puddle. No one should have the right to have their morning voice sound that sexy.

"Yeah," I murmur, my voice muffled by the skin of Mateo's chest.

"I'm gonna go shower." Mateo runs his hand through my undoubtedly messy hair. "Wanna come and get soapy and steamy with me?"

I pull away from Mateo's chest and look at him. He's biting his bottom lip, a mischievous glint dancing in his eyes.

"Yeah. Let's go," I tell Mateo and sit up.

Mateo looks quite surprised. His fingers dance on my waist, rubbing small circles beneath my shirt.

"What?" I ask, a confused smile pulling my lips.

“Nothing. You must be horny because I didn’t expect you to say yes,” Mateo explains with a chuckle. He lets go of my hip, still smiling at me with a playful look spreading across his face.

“Darling, I’m always horny,” I say, placing a hand on my hip for emphasis.

Mateo grabs my face and places a kiss on my lips. “Let’s go get sexy.” Mateo waggles his eyebrows to punctuate his statement.

We both stand and Mateo picks me up. I wrap my legs around him and let out a giggle.

“Mateo!” I say, holding on tight for fear he’ll drop me on my ass. Definitely not because I love the way his body feels against mine.

“What?” he asks, sounding innocent. He kisses me. This time, however, instead of the kiss being soft and sweet, it’s hot and hungry. Mateo makes his way into the bathroom, then sets me down without breaking the heated kiss.

I come up for air, panting. I grab the waistline of Mateo’s boxers and tug them down. I sneak a peek at his dick. I don’t know how I didn’t realize how huge he is. They fall to the floor. Mateo steps out of them before he starts to kiss my neck, nipping every once in a while. He pulls away from my neck and takes his shirt off my body. Since Mateo ripped my shirt apart yesterday, I fell asleep in one of Mateo’s. He pulls my boxers down before kissing me again.

Mateo leads us into the shower and turns it on. Mateo’s muscular body presses against mine as he pins me to the shower wall. The hot water is blocked by Mateo’s body. He starts to kiss my neck again. Mateo bites me and I cry out in a mix of pleasure and pain.

I grab Mateo’s dick and start to pump. Mateo groans against my neck. The sound is low, husky, and turns me on more than I thought possible. Mateo flips us, so I’m pressed up against the shower wall. He wraps his hand around my throat

and engulfs my dick with the other. He starts to pump while tightening his grip on my neck.

“You like that?” Mateo purrs in my ear.

The only thing I can do is nod as I let out sounds of pleasure. I brace my hand against the shower wall. I start to grind my ass against Mateo’s rock-hard dick. This causes Mateo to grip my neck harder to the point where I’m having trouble breathing. I’m a little embarrassed to say I’m loving the pain.

Sensing that I need air, Mateo releases my throat. He slaps my ass, his hand still doing miracles on my throbbing dick. “Who’s ass is this?”

“Yours,” I breathe, biting my lip to conceal the moan that threatens to slip from my lips.

Mateo grabs a fistful of my ass and squeezes. “I can’t hear you,” he whispers in my ear.

“Yours!” I practically yell as I find my release into Mateo’s hand. Mateo turns me around and leans his forehead against my own. I grab his length, ready to return the favor.

There’s a bang on the door.

“Mijo! It’s time for school. Vamos!” Carolina yells from the other side of the door.

“Alright, máma!” Mateo yells as I continue to jerk him off.

“Did Finn ever go home last night?” Carolina asks.

“No,” he answers in a strained voice before letting out a quiet groan. “Finn,” Mateo mutters.

“Is he in there? God! Teenagers are nasty!” Carolina yells and I hear her walk out of the room.

It only takes a minute for Mateo to finish in my hand. We stand there, letting the hot water wash away the evidence of the pleasure the two of us just shared.

“That was amazing,” I whisper as Mateo soaps up a loofah and begins to soap up my chest.

“Yes, it was.” Mateo purrs, his voice still laced with pleasure. “Let’s head out. We can spend the day at the mall making fun of straight couples, then maybe we could fuck in the food court bathroom,” Mateo suggests, a lustful look filling his eyes.

“What is with you and fucking in bathrooms? Was jerking each other off in the shower not enough for you?” I laugh a bit. “And, besides, I offered to let you fuck me, and you said no.”

“Does that offer still stand? Because I’ve decided I now want to take full advantage of it,” Mateo says as he soaps up his own body. He squirts some shampoo in his hands and rubs it into my hair.

“Ah! It’s getting in my eyes,” I whine, trying to push Mateo away from me as soap continues to burn my eyes.

“Don’t be such a bottom.” Mateo wipes his hand across my eyes, clearing the soap from them.

“Excuse me? We do not support bottom shaming in this house,” I tell him, crossing my arms across my soapy chest.

“I’d rather have an enemy who admits that they hate me than a friend who secretly puts me down.” – Karen Salmansohn

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Sour Slushie

“That guy’s gay!” Mateo says exasperatedly.

“His tongue is literally down that chick’s throat!” I argue, subtly pointing in the direction of the couple.

“Yeah but he’s looking at the poster of the underwear model on that storefront. The previously mentioned model is male,” Mateo says, slurping down his slushie that has tinted his lips blue.

“Oh my god! How did you know?” I practically squeal, gripping onto his arms in excitement. For some reason, Mateo is incredible at this game.

“My gaydar is just impeccable.” Mateo ends his sentence with a chef’s kiss.

I steal his cup and take a sip of his slushie. I make a face. “Oh, Jesus, why is it so sour?” I ask, puckering my lips.

“Ah, that would be because I put some sour powder in there from one of those baby bottle things,” Mateo tells me, snatching the cup back from me.

“And what prompted you to do this?”

“Oh, purely because I wanted to watch your face contort when you stole a sip. Normally, I would’ve spiked it

with alcohol, but you're a lightweight." Mateo throws the empty cup into a trash can next to the bench we're perched on.

"I am not," I tell Mateo, shoving him softly. We've been sitting here for nearly an hour. We skipped school and hung out in the shower for a bit longer. The mall is close to Mateo's house, maybe a half-hour ride. So the drive was comfortable, and Mateo spent the entire ride gripping my thigh, not that I'm complaining.

"You can't be in denial. Just accept it. You're a lightweight and a bottom."

"You always make that point. I am not ashamed to be a bottom."

Mateo leans in close to my ear. "Oh, is that so?" Mateo whispers in my ear. "So, you're not even a little ashamed when you bite back moans when I choke you?"

"Nope," I breathe out. Mateo's breath is hot on my ear. My hand rests on Mateo's inner thigh, moving us dangerously close to being graphic in public.

"What about when you're in my mouth and let out some of the sexist noises I've ever heard?" Mateo nips my ear lobe.

I place my hand on his chest. I'm not sure if it's to push him away or if I'm using him to steady myself. He makes it hard to breathe. My breath is physically being taken away. I know how that sounds, but, honestly, that's what it's like. "Not at all," I whisper.

"Well, I'm not doing my job then, am I?" He grabs my neck. I glance around to check if anyone's watching Mateo's reckless display of dominance. No one is even sparing a look in our direction. Thank god for the technology they're all absorbed with.

"Mateo." His name falls off my tongue as a groan. "We're in public." I bite my lip as Mateo tightens his grip.

“And you’re enjoying this.” He glances down at my hardening length. “Such a kinky motherfucker.” I feel his free hand grazing the bulge in my jeans.

Before I can say anything, Mateo lets go of my neck. He braces a hand on my side and leans in to kiss me.

“Who the fuck is this?” A high-pitched voice pulls us away from our kiss. The taste of his blue slushie lingers in my mouth. I turn my attention to the source of the question. In front of me stands a scantily clad woman with silver heels on her feet that I bet would look better on me. The woman is wearing a crop top that she has a shit ton of confidence in. The minuscule shirt always has the word *princess* written in gems on it. I pray that this chick doesn’t raise her arms above her head. Her dark hair is pulled back in a slick ponytail. Her long legs are covered in leggings that are ripped at the knees.

I look over at Mateo. Mateo’s face holds a confused look as he scratches the back of his neck. “Do we know you?”

“Excuse you?” Her voice is a mix between a whine and a shriek. I quietly wonder if the tone of her voice is an act or if that’s how she actually sounds. “I’m Tasha. We went out for like a year.”

“Oh, I didn’t recognize you with your new tits.” Mateo scoffs.

I cover up my laugh with my hand.

Tasha pivots, directing her attention to me. “Oh, shut your mouth, gay boy.”

Mateo glares at her. “You do not get to speak to him like that.”

“Oh, really? I don’t? You’re not even gay. Whatever this is is simply a phase. I’d bet money that this I’m-gay shit will be over by June.”

“Fuck off, Tasha. I’ve been out as a bisexual since the sixth grade. It’s not my fault you’re one of those girls who say, ‘I’m not homophobic! I have a gay friend’ and actually

believes that's how it works. Now, go back to giving shitty blowjobs in fitting rooms." Mateo is grinning by the end of his rant. He appears to be bored with her. He sips his slushie. He pulls out his phone, refusing to give Tasha another glance.

She rolls her eyes. "Whatever. Let me know when you're straight again. My number's still the same." She flips her ponytail at us before strutting away.

"Oh, honey," Mateo drawls, his voice dripping with condescension. "I deleted your number the day we broke up."

Wow. Mateo can destroy a person's ego in a matter of seconds.

Tasha doesn't glance back, but I turn to Mateo and say, "That was amazing!"

"Good enough for bathroom head?" Mateo questions.

I shove his chest. "You need to stop it with the bathroom shit or you will be single."

"Oh, come on. Sex in public is hot," Mateo says, fanning himself with his hand for emphasis.

"Well, I prefer sex in the privacy of my apartment." I cross my arms over my chest.

"Says the guy who gave me head in the stairwell."

"Shut up!" I whine, looking up to the ceiling. Despite the tone of my voice, I never want Mateo to shut up.

"You don't need a mirror to look good. You're beautiful on the inside." - Finn Mertens

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I'm Not Gonna Suck Your Dick in a Public Restroom

Mateo and I just finished some Auntie Anne's pretzels. Mine was cinnamon sugar, and Mateo's was just a regular pretzel. After the Tasha fiasco, Mateo apologized. He said he dated some pretty crazy people. I told him it was okay. It's not the first time a girl has yelled at me because I'm with her man. Generally, it's not a mistake. The girl yelling at me is the girlfriend. I have gotten quite used to being the homewrecker.

I have been antsy all day, and I couldn't figure out why. Little things are putting me on edge. I keep overanalyzing everything Mateo is saying with psychological intensity. It has been a while since I felt like this.

Then while Mateo was telling some story, it hit me. I'd forgotten to take my meds. The last time I slept over at Mateo's house, I took them when I got home. Now, my anxiety levels are high, for no reason other than my existence.

I feel a hand on my thigh. I look at Mateo, blinking myself back into reality. I had disassociated myself into some obscure plane of existence. Mateo's touch reminds me of where I am.

“Finn?” Mateo asks, a look of concern flashing over his face.

“Hmm, yeah,” I say. I am still half-there, in between my usual self and who I used to be.

“So, yes or no?”

Fuck. I don’t know the answer. I had zoned out before I could comprehend what he was talking about.

“Yes?” I answer but it comes out as a question.

“Are you sure?” Mateo quirks up an eyebrow.

“No?” I tell Mateo, changing my answer. He gives me a look, and I cave. “Okay, fine. You caught me. I’m not sure what we were talking about,” I say, sighing in defeat.

Mateo takes his hand off my thigh and places it on his chest, feigning hurt. “I can’t believe you weren’t listening to me.”

I’m not sure how Mateo looks so good under the fluorescent lighting of the mall but he does.

“I just got lost in thought, that’s all. Normally, I hang on to every word,” I tell him.

Mateo chuckles a bit. I think he thinks I’m joking. Unfortunately, I am not. I do hang on to his every word like the desperate fool I am.

“What were you thinking about?” Mateo asks, tilting his head to the side inquisitively.

Now, the age-old dilemma: to lie or scare him away. “Just about something I forgot to do today.” I finish my answer with a shrug. I went with the third option: the omission of truth. I’m not lying to him completely.

“Oh, what is it? Do you wanna go do it?” Mateo asks sweetly.

Little does he know, I would love to be able to not do it. A blush of embarrassment flushes over my cheeks, or

maybe it's just shame.

“Oh, no, it's ...” I try to find the words to explain myself without giving away too much detail. “It's nothing,” I mumble.

“Are you sure? If doing it will make you feel better, then we can go do it,” Mateo offers.

“Yeah, I just didn't take my meds this morning,” I mumble.

“What?” Mateo asks.

I hear a fan kick on somewhere. I'm not sure why this sound sticks out to me, but I focus intently on it. I look around, searching for the source before repeating myself. “I didn't take my meds.”

I look anywhere but at Mateo. This will be the part where he says this isn't gonna work. He'll make up some excuse about us not being a good fit. But the reality is he won't be able to handle being with someone who's just a bit more fucked up than he expected.

“Oh.”

I can't tell what's going through his head. In my mind, Mateo can only be thinking one of two things: “This crazy bitch” or “Wow, Finn's doing a tremendous job taking care of his general wellbeing, and I'm so proud of him.” However, the latter seems less likely to be his thought process.

“Are you sure you don't wanna go get them?”

“No, I can wait until we're done hanging out. I don't want to ruin our day with my issues.” I can't tell what Mateo's real reaction is to this information, but he's not bolting, so that's good. I look back at him, ready to re-engage in this awkward conversation.

Mateo shifts uncomfortably. I can now tell that this conversation is making him a bit unsettled as well. I don't think he was expecting that I'm doped up on anti-depressants.

“So, are you like, okay?” he asks tentatively.

I scan him over. Mateo is under the impression that it’s the kind of medicine you take to keep you alive, not the kind that keeps you from killing yourself. I run a hand over my face, averting my gaze from Mateo again. “Oh, there’s nothing physically wrong with me. The pills just stop me from throwing myself off a building.” I finish my blunt truth with a dry laugh.

Mateo grabs my hand, intertwining my fingers with his. “Sorry, I shouldn’t have pressed. It’s none of my business.”

I look back at Mateo. I don’t think I’ve ever seen someone’s expression hold so much care. God, this man is gonna be the death of me. He’s too sweet for me. Jade’s worried Mateo’s gonna break me. I’m more concerned I’m gonna infect him with my shitshow of a life.

“No, it’s okay. I don’t really care,” I say with a smile. “Hey, what did you ask earlier?”

“Well, I noticed you were spacing out, so I said, ‘Wanna go suck me off in the food court bathroom?’ That’s why I was so surprised when you said yes. I thought that would have snapped you out of it.” Mateo bursts out laughing.

“For the last time, I’m not going to suck your dick in a public restroom! God, I never thought I’d be saying that.” I shake my head at the guy in front of me. I feel my heart swell with an emotion I can’t quite place.

“When there are no cops around, anything is legal.” - Grunkle Stan

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Happily Married Homosexuals

“No, I’m not going in there! I can see the vapor from vapes flowing out of it!” I practically shout.

“Oh, come on. Going to Spencer’s is part of the mall experience!” Mateo huffs.

“No. It’s gross in there. I’ll probably catch an airborne illness in there!” Spencer’s gives me bad vibes. I don’t know why.

“We can go into whatever store you want afterward,” Mateo offers, walking me toward the store.

“Fine, I wanna go to Khol’s and buy a pair of Converse,” I tell him, crossing my arms. We’re just going to ignore the fact that I have no money to do so.

The attendant at the front counter has green and black hair that stretches down their back. Their face is covered in piercings. Personally, having many piercings is not my style, mostly because I don’t like needles. However, I do respect the hell out of anyone with piercings.

I was right. The entire shop smells like how I imagine Michael from Be More Chill’s basement smells. That and BO. I glance around the room. The front is a large amount of weed-

themed merchandise. No surprise there. However, toward the back is a collection of colorful dildos.

“I change my mind,” I say, starting to turn around to leave.

Mateo grabs my wrist. “Oh, no, you don’t.” He yanks me back into this hellhole of bad-gag gifts. I groan, crossing my arms over my chest. “You know I like that sound much better when you’re breathless and beneath me,” Mateo says, poking my cheek with his index finger.

I blush and mumble a half-hearted, “Shut up.” I push him gently. Maybe that will become my new response to Mateo saying perverted things. “So why did you want to come in here anyway?” I ask as I walk further into the store.

“Oh, I just wanted to get a dildo, so I can destroy you with something other than my dick.” Mateo looks at me with a look of complete seriousness on his face.

I stand there, gaping at him. I have no idea how he can get away with saying shit like that. If he were anybody else, I’d slap him and walk away.

“I’m kidding. My stoner cousin’s birthday is coming up. I wanted to get him a t-shirt to celebrate his addiction. Whatever. A weed addiction is significantly better than a cocaine one.”

“Speaking of cocaine, John Mulaney’s in rehab, and I am not okay with it!”

Mateo laughs after I tell him about this important matter. John Mulaney, a living god, is in rehab, and Mateo has the audacity to laugh!

“What is so funny!” I ask, partly shouting.

“You!” Mateo says through his laughter.

“You’re a dick,” I grumble. “John Mulaney is a goddamn icon!”

“That is probably the gayest thing I have heard you say.” Mateo is still laughing like the asshole that he is.

“Am I wrong? John Mulaney is basically a gay icon, and no one can tell me otherwise.” I cross my arms over my chest, thinking this will solidify my argument.

“Yeah, I’m gonna shut up because I feel like you have a compulsive need to justify how correct you are about this topic. I’ll win the next fight, though.” Mateo smiles, interlacing his fingers with mine.

I look at a black hoodie that has Rick Sanchez’s face on it. Instead of his hair being a pastel shade of blue, they’re in the form of cannabis leaves. The cartoon character is also holding a joint.

I tug Mateo away from a creepy looking Chuckie doll to show him the hoodie. “What about this one?” I ask, feeling the soft material of the sweatshirt.

“Yeah, that’s fine. It’s kinda cute, I guess.” He shrugs, letting go of my hand and grabbing the hoodie off the rack.

We walk to the counter, and the salesperson smiles before saying, “You two look very cute together.”

I blush but Mateo’s response is to grab my face and kiss me before saying, “Yeah, we are.”

“He means thank you,” I mumble as the sales attendant rings up the hoodie. The sweatshirt is ridiculously overpriced.

We walk out of the store with the weed hoodie in our possession. “Into Khol’s we go!” I yell. I grab Mateo by his wrist, pulling him into the money trap that is Khol’s.

We spend a few minutes trying to find the shoe section. We pass by two beds with decorative “His” and “Hers” pillows. I grab the pillows and switch them. I move the throw pillows to make each bed no longer for straight couples. Instead, there are two beds for happily married homosexuals.

We are shopping at Khol's, and I end up with a pair of rainbow Converse shoes. I wasn't going to let Mateo buy them for me, but after some middle-aged white woman scoffed when Mateo kissed me, I decided to buy the gayest thing in the store out of spite. And since I can't purchase myself, I bought the closest thing. Does that make me totally cheesy?

We wander around the mall for a few more hours before Mateo takes me home. We reach my door, and I give Mateo a kiss goodbye. He pulls me close and leans in. I think Mateo is trying to kiss me, so I lean in, but this bastard swerves and says, "Make sure you take your meds." Then he gives me a kiss on the forehead and walks away.

"Bye, Mateo," I tell him, blushing slightly. I've never had anyone hold any concern for my mental health, other than that one doctor that was positive I was gonna off myself. That dick just wanted to be clear that he wouldn't be held responsible if I took a belly flop off a bridge.

"Goodbye, Finn," Mateo responds, letting the elevator door close as he speaks.

I spend the next hour-and-a half on the couch watching *The Prom*. At some point, I had found a probably expired tub of ice cream to eat for dinner.

A knock at my door makes me sit up from a slumped position on the couch. I'm confused by the sound as no one ever comes to my house. Well, other than Mateo, but he would've texted before coming over.

The person behind my door knocks again.

"Hang on. I'm coming!" I yell. I grab the shirt I discarded when I had settled into the couch and put it on.

I walk to the door and open it. I think I feel my jaw hit the floor as I take in the person in front of me. "What the fuck are you doing here, mother?"

**“You can’t touch music, but music can touch you.” -
Mordecai**

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Sad Finn

“You need to leave. I don’t know how you found me, but I don’t want or need you in my life.” I try to slam the door on her face, but she braces a hand on the door, stopping it.

“Please, just hear me out,” she pleads.

I look her over. I can never forget the woman who stood by and did nothing as my father cast me out.

But she looks different. Her clothes are disheveled, her eyes puffy and bloodshot.

I scoff. “Like you and dad heard me out me when you found out I was gay.”

Janet purses her lips at the mention of the past but doesn’t acknowledge it.

“Well, I just thought you deserved to know what is going to be happening this weekend after I saw you at the coffee shop,” she says sharply.

She does not get to be snippy with me. You don’t get to treat your child like shit, disown them, and then come to their door and be rude to them.

“Oh, did I also deserve to be disowned?” My voice is laced with bitterness. But if there’s anything I deserve, it’s to

be bitter with this woman.

“Well—” Janet starts like she’s going to argue.

“Or did I deserve for him to throw slurs at me and spit on me before slamming the door on my face?”

“Finn—”

I can see the pain in her eyes, but she doesn’t get my sympathy.

“Or maybe I deserved to be homeless for years purely because I find men more attractive than women!” I am fuming. If this was a cartoon, smoke would be billowing out of my ears.

“Finn, I have no idea.” She reaches out to offer me a comforting touch.

I pull away as though she’s diseased. “Just say what you came here to say and leave me alone,” I grumble, placing a hand on my hip.

“I just wanted to tell you that your dad died in a car accident. His funeral is this weekend. I know he’d appreciate it if you came. Even though he couldn’t accept you, he would’ve wanted you to—”

“Bullshit! That man was a die-hard homophobe. Have a nice day, mother.” I spit out the word mother with enough venom to kill a small elephant. I slam the door on her face.

I turn around, letting my back hit the door. I slide down my front door and sit on the cold hardwood. I pull my knees against my chest before burying my face in my hands. I don’t know why it hit me so hard. Tears are spilling down my cheeks. Crying isn’t the reaction I had expected. The two of them have been dead to me for years. My heart should have been gleeful, not crushed. Maybe it’s the knowledge that now there is no way for my relationship with my father to ever be repaired.

A hear a woosh. I look to my side. Through my tears, I can see a slip of paper. I read an address and time written in

my mother's handwriting.

I spend a good ten minutes on the floor, sobbing hysterically. This event makes me thankful that I actually took my meds. If I hadn't, I would have had a mental breakdown, complete with screaming.

I search my apartment for my phone. Once I find it, I dial Mateo's number. My hands shake as I listen to it ring. When he doesn't pick up, I pack a bag of essentials. I don't work till Thursday. It's still Tuesday, so I don't have to worry about it. I take in my puffy-faced appearance in my bathroom mirror. I look like hell, but I can't really change that. Hopefully, the crisp, almost winter air will make me look a little more presentable.

I start the walk to Mateo's house, hoping he doesn't mind that I'm showing up unannounced. On second thought, I text him and let him know I'm on my way. I also send an apology for deciding to come over without talking to him first. But, in all fairness, I don't want my mother to come back again today. So I'll spend the night at Mateo's.

My walk is mostly uneventful. However, I see a mine sporting an eyepatch yelling in another language or maybe it's gibberish, which I guess is a type of language.

I knock twice on Mateo's front door. I look out at the upperclass neighborhood cast in the light of dusk, and my only thought is I don't belong here. Maybe they didn't hear the knock, and I can just turn around.

Carolina's smiling face greets me. "Aleluya!" She throws her hands to the sky. "I was hoping you'd come back!" Carolina pinches my right cheek in a grandmotherly way. She holds my face in her hands and says, "Are you okay, coneijto?" I guess the cold did nothing to fix my puffy cheeks. "Was it Mateo? I will beat his ass. Mateo!" she yells, letting go of my face to turn toward the interior of her house.

I chuckle lightly. "No, it wasn't Mateo. I came here so Mateo can make me feel better," I explain.

“Well, come in,” Carolina says, stepping aside so I can enter the threshold. She closes the door behind me and locks it. “Have you eaten?”

I shake my head, and she responds by clicking her tongue.

“No wonder you’re so skinny!” She pokes my side, causing me to squirm a bit before laughing. “Come, come. Let’s get you some food.” Carolina pushes me toward the kitchen and makes me sit before the counter.

“Qué pasa?” Mateo asks as he enters the kitchen.

“Finn’s here,” Carolina explains, pointing a wooden spoon in my direction before she starts pulling ingredients from a cupboard. “And he’s sad,” Carolina says, putting a pot on the stove.

“What’s the matter, Greenie?” Mateo asks, sitting down on the barstool beside me.

I open my mouth to speak, but Carolina beats me to it. “I told him if it was you, I’d smack the shit outta you.”

Mateo laughs before saying, “I have no doubt you would, máma. So what’s up, Finn?”

“My mother showed up to tell me my father died.”

“If you keep undressing me with your eyes, I’m gonna catch a cold.”

- Klaus Hargreeves

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Daisy Shirt and a Matching Skirt

“Are you okay?” Mateo grabs my hand. His eyes search for the emotion I’m feeling. I’ve masked the sea of emotions I’m feeling with an expression of neutrality.

“I hadn’t seen either of them in years, so it’s not going to have much effect on my life. My mother did invite me to the funeral, though. She made up some garbage about how he would want me to be there.” I scoff.

Carolina takes a moment to survey my face. It feels like her gaze is staring into my soul. “Why haven’t you seen your family in years?” Carolina asks, her voice sounding gentle, as though she’s trying not to spook a wild animal. Carolina glances at Mateo before returning her attention to me.

“Well, you see, my parents are gigantic bigots and were not too keen on having a gay son. So, they decided to disown me at the age of twelve.” Tears prick my eyes. I hadn’t been looking at anyone. But, now, I turn my attention to Carolina. She has placed her hand on my arm and is rubbing small soothing circles on my arm.

“Oh, honey.” Carolina pulls me into a hug. “Lo siento.”

I'm not sure what that means, but I can feel the care in her words.

I cry softly on her shoulder. She hugs me tightly this time, rubbing small circles on my back. God, why couldn't she have been my mom? Honestly, the only adult to show me any kindness before her has been Morrie.

Carolina pulls away, grabs my face, and places a kiss on my forehead. I do not doubt that my face is puffy again. Mateo holds my hand and smiles at me.

"I wanna crash the funeral," I say, directing my attention to Mateo as Carolina returns to cooking.

"Is it crashing if you were invited?" Mateo asks, raising an eyebrow at me.

"It's crashing because I want you to come, and I won't be wearing black." Anger is laced into my words, boiling anger that has been festering for so many years.

"I'm down." Mateo doesn't miss a beat and is immediately on board with the plan.

"Food's done!" Carolina announces. She sets two bowls down on the counter. The bowls are filled with the most delicious-looking soup I have ever seen.

* * *

I spend the majority of the rest of the week at Mateo's. I have dinner there almost every night. I think I'm starting to gain weight, and I mean that healthily.

Now, it's Saturday morning, the morning of my father's funeral. Mateo and I are standing in my bedroom, attempting to decide what I should wear.

"Mateo, I'm not wearing the skirt," I say for the fifth time, throwing the garment back to him.

“Oh, come on.” Mateo throws the skirt at me, and I catch it on my chest. “Wouldn’t that be the ultimate fuck-you to your father?”

I take a moment to consider it. “Fine.”

“Really?” Mateo practically squeals, exhibiting the energy of a three-year-old who just got a puppy on Christmas morning. He proves day in and day out that he is a child.

“Yes, I have to shower first so I can shave my legs,” I explain, pulling a yellow t-shirt with a small daisy in the middle out of my drawer. I also grab a pair of underwear because I’m not about to have my dick exposed at a goddamn funeral.

“Can I come?” Mateo asks suggestively.

“No, you horny bastard,” I answer as I enter into the bathroom and shut the door.

“Yeah, but I’m your horny bastard.”

I roll my eyes at Mateo’s comment, despite my eyes not being visible to him. I set my clothes on the counter of the bathroom. I undress and hop in the shower.

I’m embarrassed to admit that I nick my legs in several places as I shave. I did not think it was going to be that hard. It’s been determined that I am a fool.

I turn the shower off and realize my towel is in my bedroom. “Fuck,” I whisper to myself. “Mateo!” I call.

“Yeah!” he responds from the other side of the door.

“I need you to get me my towel! It should be on the chair!” I yell.

“I think you should come out and get it, Finn!” Mateo yells and I can hear him cackling after he says it.

“Don’t be an asshole!” I yell with a groan.

“Fine!” Mateo opens the door and tosses the towel over the shower. I catch it and wrap it around my waist. I pull

back the curtain to find Mateo standing in the bathroom. Mateo rakes his gaze over me. “Remember what happened last time we were in the bathroom together?”

“Shut up,” I mumble as a blush surfaces on my cheeks. The blush is both from Mateo’s words and his gaze.

Mateo grabs me by my waist and pulls me in for a kiss. I pull away, the color red still painting my cheeks. Mateo presses my nose lightly with his index finger. “You’re adorable.”

I laugh, pushing him away from me. “Now, get out so I can change,” I tell him.

“Aww. I can’t watch?” Mateo asks, earning a shove from me.

I shut the door behind him and get dressed.

Now, I don’t mean to sound conceited, but I look hot. I add some winged eyeliner and blush to my pale cheeks.

Mateo is wearing a pair of dark jeans with a band t-shirt. The two of us don’t look like we are attending a funeral. I step out of the bathroom.

Mateo wolf-whistles at me. I raise an eyebrow and say, “Really?”

Mateo stands up from his place on my bed and snakes his arms around my waist, pulling me toward him. “Let’s go crash this funeral.”

I laugh at his statement, and Mateo pulls away. I grab my rainbow Converse and lace them up. “Let’s go!” I say excitedly. No one would ever be able to guess I’m about to attend my father’s funeral.

The ride to the funeral home is short, and when we step into the building, all eyes turn to us in shock. Mateo offers me his arm, and I hold on to it as we enter.

My mother approaches us. “You can’t be here, with him, looking like that!” she whisper-yells.

“Oh, I didn’t realize there was a dress code,” I say in a sickeningly sweet tone. I give Janet Green a smile and a small wave and then I make my way to my father’s casket.

“That was badass,” Mateo whispers in my ear. I smirk at him before I look down at my father. The smirk falls off my face.

The man in the casket was never really my father. Fathers love their children unconditionally. His love always had conditions. I resist the urge to spit on his corpse, mostly because I feel like that crosses a line. “You were a sad, pitiful man. I hope you’re burning in hell,” I whisper lowly. I turn to Mateo. “Let’s go get McDonald’s.”

“The idea of beetles came into my head. I decided to spell it BEATles to make it look like beat music, just a joke.” - John Lennon

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

McDonald's is Really Close to the Funeral Home

I wish I could say that Mateo and I drove away from the funeral blasting Heather's and singing Candy Store at the top of our lungs. I really do. Instead, Mateo is sitting on the driver's seat of his car with a hand rubbing small circles on my back as I have a breakdown.

"It's okay," Mateo whispers. My face is buried in my hands. Shame heats my cheeks, which are dripping with hot tears.

I sit up and aggressively rub the tears off my face using the back of my hand. "C-can we go-go get McDonald's now?"

"Of course." Mateo starts the car before biting his bottom lip and glancing at me. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. Do I look like I just had a mental breakdown?" I'm almost positive that my makeup has run down my face, giving me the appearance of a goth teenager.

I can see the thought process in Mateo's eyes. "No?" he says but it comes out as a question.

I laugh. “You sound so confident,” I tell Mateo sarcastically.

“Okay, fine. You look a little like you were crying, but it’s not that bad.” Mateo takes his attention off the road and looks at me. He reaches up and wipes a tear off my cheek with his thumb.

“Great, now the McDonald’s people are going to judge me.” I huff, crossing my arms across my chest.

Mateo turns into McDonald’s, which is surprisingly close to the funeral home, making me wonder if there is a relationship between the two establishments.

Mateo?”

“Hmm?” he says as he pulls into the obnoxiously long drive-through line.

“Do you think sad people get McDonald’s a lot?”

Mateo starts to laugh at my comment. “I mean, most people don’t get McDonald’s when they feel like a bad bitch. Why?”

“Because McDonald’s is really close to the funeral home.”

Mateo starts to laugh harder.

“Only you would make that connection, Finn.” Mateo’s hand rests on the inner part of my thigh as he pulls forward in line.

“Did you know that Burger King waits for McDonald’s to pick their locations and then just set up shop right across from them? They do this because McDonald’s has a whole team of people who scope out the area that would be best to sell food at. Then Burger King is like, ‘we also like that area’,” I tell him.

“Okay, that is quite a weird tangent you just went off on, so I’m gonna ignore that. What do you want to eat?”

Mateo asks as the intercom goes off, asking what we want to eat from the grease trap known as McDonald's.

"Can I get a vanilla milkshake, large fries, and an apple-pie thingy?"

Mateo smiles at my request.

"Sure," he says before reciting my order to the intercom. Mateo orders a Coke and then drives through to the second window.

"That's all you're getting?" I ask in disbelief.

"Yeah, unlike you." He pokes the fat part of my stomach. "I need to keep this stomach tight." Mateo pulls up his shirt, revealing his golden six-pack.

"A, did you just call me fat? And B, did you just say show off your abs to prove why you can't eat McDonald's like a straight man?"

"Possibly. And you're not fat." He laughs, handing the cashier his credit card. Mateo gives me my food and places his card back in his wallet before speeding away. "Finn," Mateo says, sounding quite serious.

"Yes, Mateo?" I ask, matching his tone.

"Are you dipping your fries in that milkshake?" Mateo asks with a laugh.

"Yes, very much so," I answer, returning to the extra serious tone he was using.

"You're weird."

"And you love me," I retort before realizing what I said. My face flushes bright red. "I-I, um, not like that!" I stutter out.

"You're adorable." Mateo sticks his tongue out at me before ruffling my hair.

"Shut up," I mutter.

“You got plans for the rest of the day?” Mateo asks, then takes a sip of his Coke.

“No, why? Do you want to, I don’t know, hang out?” I ask, only sounding a little bit desperate.

“No. Actually, I was thinking of ditching you in that McDonald’s parking lot.”

I look at him for a second, not picking up on the fact that it’s a joke. “Why do you have to be such a jerk? Can’t you just humor me?”

“Fine. Finn? Do you want to hang out?” Mateo asks, placing his hand on my upper thigh.

“Yes, preferably in a setting that is not my father’s funeral.”

“Oh, for sure. We can’t get hot and bothered at a funeral,” Mateo says matter-of-factly.

“You can’t seriously be horny all the time, can you?”

“Only when I’m around you, darling,” Mateo answers as he steals one of my fries.

I don’t even care that he’s stealing my food. His use of the word darling has effectively distracted me.

“We could go back to my place if you want.” I shrug, scarfing down my apple pie like an animal who hasn’t been fed well in weeks.

“Is that an invitation for us to get hot and bothered?” Mateo asks with a chuckle.

“I mean ...”

Mateo chokes on his Coke. “Really?”

He starts to speed up, definitely breaking the speed limit.

“You could act a little less excited.” I roll my eyes at Mateo.

“No. My boyfriend just gave me an invitation to devour him, and you want me to be calm?” Mateo asks with a laugh.

We reach my apartment in record time, and Mateo all but hops out of the car. I laugh and step out with the McDonald’s bag in hand. Mateo picks me up bridal style, causing me to drop it on the floor.

“Mateo!” I squeal. “What are you doing?” I laugh a bit as Mateo makes his way to the building.

“Nothing yet,” Mateo answers mischievously.

“I meant, why did you pick me up?”

“Oh, that’s easy. You were taking too long.” Mateo pushes open the lobby door.

“Ya’ll are looking extra gay today,” Morrie comments with a laugh.

“Thank you, Morrie. Enjoy your day!” I call as Mateo practically runs to the stairwell. He jogs up the stairs with me still in his arms.

“You’re a crackhead,” I mutter as he sets me down in front of my door. I open it and step inside. As soon as the door closes, Mateo presses me up against it.

“I think this may be my new favorite activity to do with you,” I mumble, my face flushing red.

Mateo slides his hand up my skirt. He leans in close to my ear. “You know what I’ve wanted to do to you ever since you put on that skirt, Greenie?” Mateo’s voice is low and husky.

“What?” I breathe out, grabbing on to the hem of his t-shirt to steady myself.

“Rip it off of you and fuck you senseless,” Mateo whispers, grabbing my throat and squeezing just enough to make breathing difficult.

“Oh god,” I murmur as his hand brushes against my growing bulge.

Mateo lets go of my neck before he grabs my length. He starts an assault on my neck with his lips as he rubs me through my boxers.

“Please.” I groan.

“Please what, Finn?” Mateo taunts, giving my dick a soft squeeze.

“Please fuck me, Mateo,” I whisper, turning red out of embarrassment.

“You don’t have to tell me twice.”

“Look, it’s time we stopped trying to be so ‘perfect’ and be who we really are. We’re crazed, angry, sweaty animals. We’re not unicorns. We’re women! And we take what we want.” - Wendy Corduroy

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Mateo is a Latino God

Mateo's body presses up against mine. We're in my bed, and he's on top of me. Big surprise. He's grinding against me gently. I let out a soft moan in his ear.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Mateo whispers, pulling his lips away from where they had been kissing my jawline. He hovers above me, looking like a Latino god.

I grab his shirt like I'm holding on for dear life. "Yes." The word comes out as more a breath than a statement of affirmation.

"Are you sure?"

"For the love of God, Mateo, just fuck me." I groan, trying to pull off his shirt.

Mateo lets out a husky laugh before using one hand to pull off his shirt. I run my hands over his hard abs. He leans in and bites my bottom lip, pulling it softly.

I let out a quiet moan as Mateo grabs my throat tightly. "I love it when you moan for me, baby. I can't wait to hear what sound you make when I'm inside of you," Mateo whispers in my ear.

I grab his hand on my throat, my cheeks flushing red at his comment. Mateo lets go of my throat and then starts to kiss me. He grabs my shirt, removing it from my body.

I break the kiss and pull off my shirt. I wiggle out of my skirt, chucking it across the room. I fiddle with Mateo's waistband as he begins to kiss and suck on my neck. I manage to get Mateo's pants off. It's more of a struggle than I would like to admit. When I do, I can see the large tent that has formed inside his boxers. I grab him through his underwear, and he groans softly at my touch.

"Don't tease me," he murmurs, causing me to laugh. I pull down his boxers and grab his length. I move up and down as Mateo pulls down my boxers and does the same thing.

We do this for a bit, letting out moans, groans, and whispered curse words as we do. We continue like this until we both find our highs.

I reach over to my nightstand, pulling out a bottle of lube and a condom. I give the condom to Mateo, and he sets it aside, grabbing the lube from me instead. He squirts a generous amount onto his fingers before spreading my legs apart.

Mateo starts with one finger, moving in and out of me at a painfully slow pace. I let out a low moan. I see Mateo smirk as he enters another finger. I clamp my hand over my mouth, muffling what would have been a loud moan as he hits my prostate.

Mateo pulls my hand off my mouth as he continues to hit my prostate with his fingers. He pins my hands above my head, pulling his fingers out. "Ready?" he whispers into my ear.

I nod at him, a bit too eagerly. I flush red. I hear the ripping of a condom, and then I feel Mateo pressing at my entrance. He slowly pushes in, letting out a quiet 'fuck' as he does so.

Mateo starts at a slow pace. I can see he's restraining himself, so I mutter, "Faster." And he is more than happy to oblige. He quickens his pace and starts to kiss my neck. Mateo reaches my ear and tells me in the sexiest voice that I have ever heard how good I feel around him.

I let out a soft groan as I drag my nails down Mateo's back. I guide one of his hands to my neck, signaling that I want it around my throat.

Mateo lets out a low, sultry laugh and grabs my throat, softly squeezing it as he continues to destroy my insides. I let out breathless moans as Mateo grabs on to the headboard above me.

"I-I'm gonna cum," I say in between pants.

Mateo tightens his grip on my throat and leans in close. "Cum for me, baby."

I remember a time in my life when a guy calling me baby would have repulsed me. It would have been an absolute turn off. But instead of being disgusted, I find myself writhing in pleasure beneath Mateo. I realize that I just wanted the right person to say it.

I find my release, but Mateo doesn't slow down. He lets go of my throat and the headboard. I flip us over so I'm on top, and then I begin riding him. I bounce a bit, controlling the pace as Mateo grips my hips.

"Finn," Mateo groans, thrusting up a bit, meeting my stride.

I continue to bounce, running my hands up his chest. Once I reach the base of his neck. I move my hands up to tangle my fingers in his hair. I tug lightly, earning a groan of approval from Mateo.

"Fuck," Mateo whispers, his nails digging into my sides. "I'm so close."

I use the one move he seems to love doing to me. I grab his chin and make him look me in the eyes as I continue

to roll my hips.

“God,” Mateo mutters as he finds his release.

I lean down and press my forehead against Mateo’s as I feel him go soft inside me. I move so I’m off his dick and just straddling him. We’re both panting and sweaty. Despite the sweat and the shambles we’re in, I think Mateo never looked as amazing as he does now.

Mateo grabs the back of my neck with both hands, trying to pull me closer to him. “You’re so beautiful, Finn.”

I blush. “You’re just saying that,” I mumble. I could probably stay like this forever. Mateo’s naked body pressed against mine is all I need. No food, water, or sleep. Just this forever until I die.

“No.” Mateo touches his nose with mine. “I think you are the most beautiful person I have ever met. You’re beautiful inside and out.”

I blush. I don’t know why that flusters me more than Mateo whispering dirty things in my ear while he’s inside me.

“I think I love you,” I say before I have a chance to think about the words I’m saying. I roll off of Mateo and cover my face with my hands, thinking this will hide my embarrassment.

“I know I love you.”

I don’t care if we’re moving too fast. I love him and he loves me.

“It’s hard to fight when the fight ain’t fair.” - Taylor Swift

CHAPTER THIRTY

Buy Me A Crown

I think that statement may have murdered me. I don't think anyone's ever said 'I love you' to me. It wasn't something that was talked about much in my household. In fact, I don't think my parents ever professed their love for each other. Gotta love the emotional trauma.

"Finn, are you crying?" Mateo props himself up on his elbow. "Damn, am I that bad? I've never had any complaints before."

For a second, I consider whether or not I forgot to take my pills this morning. That would explain my semi-irrational thoughts at the funeral earlier. Then I remember I definitely took my meds. That was the first thing I did when I woke up. Well, that's a lie. The first thing I did this morning was check my phone to see if I had any messages from Mateo.

I wipe my tears away, angry at myself for letting this set me over the edge. I have never cried after sex before. But, in all fairness, no one has ever told me they were in love with me after sex. Most of the time, the other party just leaves me with a limp for days. Other times, they leave me unsatisfied and in an emotional slump.

“N-no one’s ever told me they loved me before.” Tears continue to roll down my cheeks, and I cover my face with my hands, although this action does little to hide the shame I feel. God, I feel like such a cliché. My parents never loved me. Blah blah blah. But it’s true though. I don’t remember the last time I had heard those words directed towards me.

“Finn,” Mateo coos, drawing me in for a tight hug. For the second time today, I cry as Mateo comforts me. “Least the sex wasn’t bad,” Mateo comments.

I laugh a bit, which effectively stops the stream of tears. “No, it wasn’t bad,” I tell Mateo with a snuffle.

Once Mateo’s satisfied that I feel better, he lets me out of his tight grasp. He claps his hands together and says, “You got any alcohol? You’ve been extra sad today, and I want to unwind. I think you should too.”

“Are you saying I’m sad all the time but today I’ve been extra sad?” I laugh, rubbing the tears out of my eyes, which is probably not helping my case.

Mateo gives me a sheepish grin before answering, “Yes.”

I smack his bare chest lightly. “Asshole.”

“It’s not my fault!” He laughs as I smack him over the head with a pillow. “Do you want me to lie to you?”

“About how sad I am? Yes. I want you to tell me that my life is the epitome of happiness,” I explain dramatically.

“Drama queen.” Mateo rolls his eyes.

“Buy me a crown,” I tell him, leaning in close.

Mateo grips my throat tightly. “Do I get to fuck you in it?” He bites down on my earlobe, hard enough to sting but not hard enough to break the skin. “I’d love to watch you ride me with a crown perched a top of your head.”

“You’re such a horny bastard,” I say in an annoyed tone even though I’m loving this.

He laughs, letting go of my throat. "I'm your horny bastard." He licks the side of my face, causing me to squeal.

"Don't be gross." I groan before rolling my eyes.

"Boy, I was just inside you. I can't lick your face?" Mateo laughs. "Let's go get drinks," he says before hopping off of my bed.

"Are you forgetting that neither of us is twenty-one?" I ask, arching an eyebrow in confusion.

"You're telling me you don't have a fake ID?" Mateo asks, pulling his boxers back on.

"Honey, do I look like I go out to you?" I ask as I gesture to myself.

"No, but you do look like you just got fucked down," Mateo answers with a smirk.

I throw Mateo's shirt at him before mumbling, "Shut up."

"You know you love me," he tells me with a wink before pulling his shirt on, covering up that god-like body of his.

"You said you love me too!" I say exasperatedly. I pull on my daisy shirt and a pair of jeans from my drawers. Mateo slaps my ass once I've gotten dressed. I opt not to grab my skirt because it gives Mateo an opening to slide his hands under it.

"Don't you forget it," Mateo says, sticking his tongue out at me before drawing me in for a kiss. I smile against his lips. "So, do you want to go get drinks or not?"

"Yeah, that sounds fun. Just don't let me drink too much, alright?" I tell him as I grab my wallet that has approximately seven dollars in it.

"Put that down. You're not paying," Mateo tells me.

"Well, that's good because I'm broke."

“Yeah, broke back,” Mateo says, earning a shove from me. “Hey, I’m not complaining.”

I laugh. “Let’s go.”

I grab a dark jacket from my couch and turn to face Mateo. The sky has darkened considerably, so I check my phone for the time. It’s six-thirty.

We make our way to the elevator. I don’t know when he did it, but Mateo’s hand is intertwined with mine. I’m smiling like an idiot.

“Do you want to just walk?” Mateo asks as we step out into the lobby. There’s a bounce in my step as we walk past the front desk. This earns a laugh from Morrie.

“Sure,” I answer, too happy to even acknowledge Morrie’s laughter.

“Okay. I know a good bar that’s not too far.” Mateo smiles, his hand still holding mine as he leads me down the sidewalk. It’s empty, making me glad that we opted not to take his car.

The walk to the bar is short, peppered with graphic comments from Mateo as we go. He makes me blush, laugh, and feel every emotion in my arsenal. Except sadness. That’s one emotion I hope Mateo never makes me feel.

We approach the bar. The sign in front is in the shape of a diamond. The neon name displayed on the diamond is The Avenue Pub.

I glance over at Mateo, who has a mischievous smile on his face. I survey the crowd. It seems to be populated by males exclusively.

“Really?” I ask Mateo.

“Yes,” Mateo says with pride as he drags me to my first gay bar.

“I’m not righteous. I’m wrongteous.” - Finn Mertens

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Internalized Homophobia

I'm not sure how much alcohol is coursing through my bloodstream. All I know is that it feels amazing to be grinding against Mateo. I giggle as Mateo trails his hands up my shirt. I reach a hand towards Mateo's face. "What if we went and smashed in the bathroom?" I murmured.

"Is that an invitation?"

I laugh. "Of course not." I laugh again as I feel Mateo's hand come down my ass. This bitch did not! I gasp and blush deeply.

"D-did you just ..."

We both had too much to drink. I'm taunting him with invitations to smash in the bar bathroom.

"Yes. Yes, I did." Mateo purrs into my ear.

"That was hot," I mumble, my face burning in a deep shade of red.

"What was that?" Mateo felt his way up my chest before grabbing my neck tightly.

"That was hot," I repeat, a little louder this time.

“I’m glad you found it as enjoyable as I did, love.” Mateo smells faintly of vodka and sweat, but I’m not going to lie, that’s hot too. He lets go of my neck, placing his hands on my hips.

I turn around to face Mateo, pulling him close to me. I plant a soft kiss on his full lips. He smiles against my lips.

“What was that for?” he mumbles, snaking his hands around my waist and pulling my body toward his.

“Because I love you. And you taste like vodka.” Alcohol must make me bold because after I make that remark, I lean in and lick the side of his face. “And sweat.”

Mateo lets out a laugh. “You’re perfect but you’re also quite drunk. We should start to make our way back to your house.”

“But I wanna keep dancing with my man,” I whine.

“You better stop whining or I will not hesitate to tie you to the bed and ravish you.”

Mateo’s threat only makes me smirk.

I run my thumb across his bottom lip. “Doesn’t seem like such a bad deal to me.”

Mateo leans in toward my ear. “Maybe I won’t let you cum either. Maybe I’ll bring you to the edge and then let your high die down, over and over again.”

“Oh god,” I breathe out. I can feel myself hardening at the thought.

“You’d probably like that, wouldn’t you, my little slut?” Mateo murmurs in my ear. His voice is husky and oozes sex appeal.

“We should probably go before I let you fuck me in a bathroom stall.” I pull away from Mateo, visibly flustered.

“Let’s go, Finn.” Mateo takes my hand in his and pulls me toward the bar.

“I thought we were leaving?” I ask, scrunching my eyebrows together in confusion.

“Yeah, I just thought we could both use some water to sober us up.” I hadn’t noticed until now, but we are slurring most of our words. Maybe I had been too distracted by his threats to properly register how the promises were being said, most likely because I was more enticed by what exactly was being said.

The bartender looks at us, fully knowing that we are both underage and should have never been served alcohol in the first place. He sets the glass he was cleaning down on the table.

“Boys, I don’t know how you got in here, but the two of you are clearly sloshed and need to go home.” The bartender points to the door as if we wouldn’t understand his words but would understand his signal.

“Chill out, man. We’re trying to sober up so we can get home,” Mateo explains as I spin around on a barstool.

“Fine. You two can have some water but don’t be trying to order alcohol. Just because ya’ll are cute doesn’t mean I’ll give you anything.” The bartender leaves to get our water.

“That’s fine, man! We’re already trashed!” Mateo calls after him before he starts cackling.

“What’s so funny?” I ask, feeling a bit disorientated from the spinning.

“Nothing. He just gives me the I’ll-say-I’m-a-top-but-I’m-really-a-needy-bottom vibes.” Mateo’s still laughing like a mad man, and I roll my eyes at him.

Mateo spins around on his barstool, looking out at the sea of beautiful men. His eyes lock on something. I feel a sting of jealousy hit me in the darkest part of my soul. This part of me screams that I’m not good enough for Mateo. The dark part of me yells to end the whole relationship because I’m just a

burden to everyone around me. It's a toxic part of me that have been controlling me for a very long time.

"Who are you looking at?" I ask, trying hard to push down the voice saying that says, "He's looking at your replacement. He got you in bed. Why would he keep you around?" I suddenly yearn for the sweet sting of alcohol to burn my throat and kill my thoughts. Anything to make the voice quiet. If anything, the drinks have made the voice louder, giving it more conviction. Made me way more insecure than I usually am. I don't like it. Maybe I shouldn't drink more than one glass from now on.

"Mateo?" I ask. The desperation I have for validation creeps into my voice.

"Huh, yeah? I'm sorry. I thought I saw someone."

It's official: Mateo doesn't want to be seen with me. He thinks I'm embarrassing. That's the only reason he would be staring at the crowd like that.

"Oh? Who?" I ask. I'm on the verge of panicking, like a full-on-mental-breakdown-type panic.

"My dad?" Mateo says it like a question, like he's not quite sure whether or not he's hallucinating.

I start laughing before he looks over at me. "Oh, you're serious?" I pause for a beat. "I thought your dad was like really homophobic." I feel stupid for being jealous over nothing. Well, not nothing. It's his dad. A small wave of shame hits me that I'm choosing to blame how much alcohol I ingested tonight.

"He is. He is also really grinding up against that guy." Mateo points to a pair of guys on the dance floor who are getting it on.

"Damn," I whisper, feeling awkward as I watch an old white formerly-straight male grind up against a college boy.

**“If I know what love is, it is because of you.” – Hermann
Hesse**

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

John Mulaney Reference

A homophobic dad in a gay bar. That's how Mateo ended up in my bedroom at two in the morning, flipping out.

"Are you sure it was your dad?" I ask, watching as Mateo paces back and forth in front of my bed. He's chewing on the skin of his nail, a quirk I've noticed he does while he's deep in thought. "We were pretty wasted. We're still pretty wasted," I reason. While the shock of supposedly seeing Mateo's father grinding on a college student sobered us considerably, we are still drunk.

Mateo pulls his phone from his pocket and scrolls through it for a moment. He turns the phone to me and shows me a family photo. Sure enough, the man in the picture is identical to the one in the bar. Although the one in the photo has his shirt on. I'd seen his dad once while with Jane before, but I hadn't quite memorized his face.

"Look at that man and tell me he is not a future white corrupt senator." Mateo has a panicked look in his eyes. I don't think I've ever seen him looking this disheveled. I can only imagine what rumors the assholes at school would spin if they saw him looking like this. He gives off the vibe of a sort of king there.

“He looks a bit racist too,” I joke, trying to lighten the serious mood.

“I mean, yeah.” Mateo stares at the photo of his father for what feels like forever. Then with no warning, Mateo snaps his head away and looks at me. “Shit, did you get a picture of him dancing?”

I shake my head, much to Mateo’s dismay.

“Fuck. Fuck,” he mumbles angrily. “We need to go!” he shouts with the clarity of a man who has seen God and is not afraid to die.

Wow! That sounds a little like that one John Mulaney bit. The “fuck da police” bit. I should not drink. When I do, everything just becomes one huge comedy show. That and my stomach feels like it’s doing acrobatics.

“Mateo. It’s ...” I glance at my phone. “It’s two thirty-one in the morning. We’re not going back. Not to mention the fact that your dad is either balls deep in that college kid or is underneath that college kid.”

Mateo makes a face at my ‘balls deep’ comment. “You know, drunk Finn is a lot less shy.”

“Drunk Finn is also tired and kind of does not want to go back to the gay bar,” I tell him as I flop down on the bed. “Come snuggle with me.”

“What? You don’t wanna get sexy before we go to sleep?” Mateo asks, crawling into bed with me.

“No. In fact, your use of the phrase ‘get sexy’ is turning me off.” I snuggle close to Mateo.

“Oh, so there was a chance for us to get sexy?” Mateo asks with a laugh. He puts an arm around me and pulls me close to his chest.

I’m partially asleep as I mumble something close to “You can’t get any sexier.”

* * *

Mateo shakes me awake, and I let out a groan in response. “What the hell, Mateo?”

“I’m sorry but I just had the craziest dream. We were at the gay bar from last night, and I saw my motherfucking dad dancing with some guy. How crazy is that?” Mateo looks so happy to be recounting this wild dream experience to me that I almost don’t want to tell him it wasn’t a dream.

The idea of letting him believe that seeing his father gyrating on the dance floor with a twenty-something college student is only a dream is funny. Of course, I also realize that it’s ridiculous.

“Mateo,” I say as I grab one of his hands and give it a squeeze. He looks so happy to just be sitting here with me. I take an overexaggerated breath. “That wasn’t a dream. We were just incredibly wasted, so now that you’re revisiting the event, it seems a little hazy and completely insane. But it did happen, and you were just as upset last night as you look right now.” Mateo has a look of disbelief on his face.

“You’re kidding, right? This is some kind of cruel prank that the two of us are going to laugh about when we’re old and senile.”

I try to ignore the fact that my heart is melting at the mention of us being together when we’re old and senile. I shouldn’t be getting sentimental when he and I are discussing a monumental and potentially life-changing event.

“No, unfortunately, I am not. Do you want pancakes?” And ten points for Finn for letting his stomach do the thinking and interrupting a meaningful moment for the young couple.

“Yes, but I don’t think this conversation should end like this,” Mateo tells me as he hops out of bed and pull his jeans on. I grab Mateo’s shirt off the floor, although I’m not entirely sure when he took it off last night. I pull it on. It’s not overly large, like it would be if this were a cheesy straight-

person movie. Yes, I know how that statement could be perceived as problematic, but I'm just a little too hungover to care, so ...

"True," I agree as I walk toward the kitchen.

"So, am I just not allowed to have my shirt now?" Mateo asks with a light chuckle as he comes up behind me, pulling me into a hug.

"Of course! Why would anyone cover up those sexy muscles?" I ask, leaning against the said wall of muscles.

"Truly one of the great mysteries of the world," Mateo says in agreement.

I laugh and pull away so I can start to make the pancakes. I grab a box of Bisquick from a cabinet and begin to make the batter.

"So, it's crazy, right?" Mateo asks as I cook some pancakes.

I nod. "Maybe your dad's just a really repressed gay man. I mean, he was raised in a generation that wasn't exactly accepting."

"I want to expose him."

"Love is more than a noun; it is a verb. It is more than a feeling; it is caring, sharing, helping, sacrificing." – William Arthur Ward

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Homie-sexuals

“Let’s think about this for a second, Mateo. This man has built a life on the fundamental value of homosexuality being a sin. This man has openly attended a protest against gay rights. For some reason, your dad is on the right track to becoming a member of Congress.” Mateo nods, expressing his agreement. “He’s built his campaign on the fact that gay people should have very few rights.” Another nod. “Yet, he spends his weekends in gay bars hooking up with men?”

Mateo sighs and nods. Mateo wants his dad’s campaign to go down in flames, burn to the crisp like many of his supporters believe gays will. He doesn’t hate his dad for being gay. No, that would be incredibly hypocritical. Mateo hates his dad for creating such a toxic world for lgbtq+ people.

“My entire childhood, I had heteronormative ideals shoved down my throat constantly, especially when I would play dress-up with Jade. And even more when my eyes lingered on the wrong people on tv.” Mateo’s eyes hold a fiery glint in them, although it is unclear if this is because of anger or a deep passion for ruining his father’s life. “I want to expose him and make him feel like a piece of absolute garbage just like he did to me for the entirety of my childhood.”

A statement like that will likely be discussed in a therapy session in the future and a bright light on Mateo's childhood trauma.

"And we're a hundred percent certain the man in the club was your dad?" I know it's a long shot, but we were incredibly drunk. "We were so wasted."

"You've already made this point, Finn," Mateo reminds me.

"I'm well aware of that. I just feel like it needs to be reiterated," I explain, shoveling some of the now cold pancakes into my mouth.

"Finn, it's still seven thirty-two. You can't be using big words until at least ten thirty." Mateo sips the coffee he had made to get through this necessary discussion.

"Mateo, 'reiterated' isn't even a big word. It's like the size that our names would be if you combined them together," I tell him, taking a sip of his coffee because I had opted not to make some for myself, claiming I didn't need any.

"Speaking of which, what is our ship name?" Mateo asks, snatching his cup back from me before downing the contents.

"I don't know, but it's either Minn or Fateo, but neither of those sound great," I answer, looking down at the currently empty cup.

"Well, we could try last names. Mine's Quesada and yours is, um, Greenie?"

I dramatically place a hand over my heart to feign hurt. "Mateo middle name Quesada, you don't know my actual last name?" I put a pout at the end to accentuate the statement, but it only causes a laugh to fall from Mateo's mouth.

"In all fairness, you don't know my middle name, so I think that makes us even," Mateo reasons, tearing off a piece of pancake with his hands like a heathen.

“No, no, no. You don’t know my middle or my actual last name, so you are in the wrong here.” I cross my arms over my chest, preparing myself to play out this drama-filled conversation as much as Mateo will let me. Mateo gives me a look that says he’s unamused, but I’m in the mood to mess with him. “How could you not remember that I am the third and clearly superior Green brother?” I ask him in a tone that oozes superiority complex.

“You are most certainly not the superior Green brother. Hank is,” Mateo says with a chuckle.

“That’s fair. Hank Green did teach me that ice is a rock and water is lava.” I pause for a second as if I’m giving the subject some deliberation. “In fact, both Green brothers have taught me more than the American public school system ever has or ever will.” Honestly, a hobo in a ditch could’ve probably taught me more than the American education system. It’s all good here, though. No issues in America. Women have all their rights intact. Insert overly dramatic eye roll here, please.

“Oh, for sure, Hank Green is basically a religion at this point.

“Well, of course it is. Who is more deserving of worship? A deity who discourages my existence? Or the man behind the “well, first of all, eh,” sound?” I ask, putting strong negative emphasis on the first option.

“Obviously, the latter. He’s actually real. Don’t tell my mother I said that. She would cauterize me,” Mateo says with a laugh, but the look in his eyes tells me he’s serious.

“And that would be unfortunate because ...” I trail off, encouraging Mateo to continue my sentence, but the only thing he does is smack me with a paper plate. “That’s homophobic!” I yell.

“That’s a little gay, homie!”

“What can I say? I’m a homie-sexual,” I tell Mateo.

“That was gross. Please never say that again.”

“You don’t wanna be a homie-sexual with me?” I ask, giving him puppy dog eyes to persuade him.

“No, Finn Green, I do not want to be a homie-sexual with you, but I would love to be a homosexual with you.” Mateo punctuates his statement by wiggling his eyebrows at me suggestively.

“Well, Mateo Quesada, how could I be a homosexual with you when you won’t even be a homie-sexual with me?” I tell him as I finish off the last of the pancakes.

“You’re impossible, and if you say homie-sexual one more time, I will fuck you on this table.”

While I’m not sure how this serious conversation turned into a sexually tense moment, I am not complaining.

I bite my bottom lip, leaning in towards Mateo. “Homie-sexual.” Mateo grabs the collar of my shirt and pulls me into a passionate kiss. The particulars of how we ended up on the table are a bit blurry, but as I feel Mateo grinding against me, the details don’t matter.

I moan into his kiss. He leans down to mutter in my ear, “Hope your legs don’t hurt too bad from yesterday because I’m going to make them quiver all over again.”

And they did.

**“In high school, people were always like ‘This is the best time of your life!’ and I was always like ‘It better not be!’”
- Hank Green**

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Make the Cishets Uncomfy

Sky lets out a squeal that seriously makes me question their mental health. “You guys fucked on the table!” They yell, earning pointed looks from parents. The parents here act as if their kids have never heard a swear word, but I bet they have heard it countless times.

“Yes, but can you please not yell that in the Chuck E. Cheese where we work?” They asked me why I was late, which led to me giving Sky a detailed recount of this morning and last night’s events. However, I conveniently left out the part about my father’s funeral.

Sky chooses to ignore my request to not talk about my sex life in a place where children are a plenty and decides to ask, “Why didn’t you call me after?” They put on a dramatic pout. “You have my number. I know you do. We laughed after I told you it had a sixty-nine in it.”

“Because Mateo was in bed next to me, and I fell asleep in his arms!” I yell in my defense as I wipe down the counter.

“Ooh, even that name is fucking sexy.” Sky purrs, practically swooning.

“I don’t think you’re significant other would appreciate that.” Though I doubt Elaine would care.

“Mommy, what does sexy mean?” A small child looks up at their mother with a curious look.

“Nothing, sweetie,” the mom replies, sending a sharp look at Sky, who just laughs. Honestly, they should have been fired ten times over for the amount of vulgar language they use at work, but there’s not exactly a line when working at Chuck E. Cheese.

“You’re gonna get fired.” I sigh, putting a hand on my hip.

“Nah, I’ll just tell them they’re being homophobic.” Sky laughs, filling up some of the prize containers under the counter.

“That can’t be your answer for everything, Sky,” I tell them with an exasperated look.

“Sure it can. It makes cishets so uncomfy.” They let out a laugh that holds a kind of maniacal tone to it.

“That’s always a plus.” I laugh.

The workday goes by pretty smoothly, except for numerous occasions where Sky asks me how big Mateo’s dick is. I return home to find Mateo on my fire escape petting a stray cat.

“How did you get in!” I half-yell, half-laugh.

Mateo holds up his key chain. “I found an extra key in one of your drawers, so I snatched it.”

What a thief.

I laugh again and set my bag down on the kitchen table. “Have you been here all day?” I ask as I hop up on the kitchen table and cross my legs.

“Yeah, I didn’t want to go home,” Mateo mumbles. He must have overcome whatever sea of emotions that hit him a second ago because he perks up and says, “Is this your cat?”

“No, she just hangs out on the fire escape.”

“Then why do you have cat food and a cat crate?”
Mateo laughs as the cat makes itself comfortable on his lap.

“Whenever I have extra money, I take her to the vet, and I usually leave cat food on the balcony for her.” I shrug.

“Does this cat that doesn’t belong to you but kinda does have a name?” Mateo asks.

“I call her Cookie,” I answer, getting a bit embarrassed. It’s not a great name, but I think it suits her.

“Because she’s so sweet?” Mateo coos, talking to me and the cat.

“Something like that.” I shrug.

The cat jumps off his lap and onto the fire escape. Mateo watches the cat, staring at her like she holds the answers to all of life’s problems.

“So, what have you been doing all day?” I ask before hopping off the table. I walk over to the couch and sit down next to him.

“Oh, you know, just jerking off in every room in the apartment.”

I hit Mateo on the face with a pillow, which seems to have become common. “Don’t be gross. Plus, there are only like three anyway.”

“I did two rounds,” he jokes, poking me on the side.

“You’re disgusting and your sex drive will never fail to amaze me.” I chuckle and lean my head on his shoulder.

“You’re just as disgusting,” Mateo says.

“How so?”

“The only thing you have of substance in your fridge is peanut butter, and that doesn’t even go in the fridge!”

“She doesn’t even go here,” I respond.

“I love you, Greenie,” Mateo whispers as he leans in to kiss me.

I slip my hands under his shirt, which causes him to pull me onto his lap.

“I love you too,” I murmur as Mateo gives my ass a light squeeze.

“You smell like pizza grease.” Mateo thrusts up a bit, his hard length pressing against me.

“You think it’s hot,” I say with a groan. Mateo pulls off my uniform shirt, leaving me to fumble with my pants. Mateo is still fully clothed.

“You have too many clothes on,” I mumble. I attempt to pull Mateo’s shirt off even though he’s sucking on my neck, undoubtedly leaving massive hickeys on it.

Mateo swirls his tongue on my nipple, causing me to throw my head back with a moan. Mateo kisses me across my chest, then bites down softly on my shoulder. I whimper in pain and pleasure. My hand finds its way into Mateo’s boxers, and I slowly begin to move it up and down. Mateo lets out soft, sexy groans.

Suddenly, my boxers are down, and Mateo’s fingers are in my mouth. I suck on them softly, which earns me a sound of approval from Mateo. Then I feel one of his fingers press inside of me, prepping me. Though no matter how much prepping we do, it’s never enough.

“You’re so tight.” Mateo groans.

I blush at his comment as he enters a second finger. Mateo finds his release in my hand, and I smile, loving the lust-filled look in his eyes.

I move up a bit and slide down onto his once again hard length. I let out an incoherent sound of pleasure before I begin to bounce up and down.

“Fuck,” Mateo breathes out as I quicken my pace. Mateo meets each of my bounces with a thrust of his own,

creating immense pleasure. Sex has never felt as good as it feels with him.

“Nobody sets out to make a bad record.” - Alex Van Halen

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Bottom Shaming is Toxic

“Mateo, I swear to God himself that if you touch my ass one more time, I will be suing you for sexual harassment.” I groan as we walk down the hallways. Every time he does it, my face flushes the color of a strawberry.

“It’s not sexual harassment if you like it.” Mateo laughs as he puts his arm around my shoulders. Since he broke that kid’s nose, no one has had anything negative to say about our relationship. Gerald even offered us an awkward congratulation at lunch today.

“I feel like that’s a little offensive, sir.” I cross my arms across my chest with a huff.

“I wouldn’t mind if you called me sir while you’re bent over my lap as I color your ass the same shade of red as your cheeks.” Mateo slaps my ass to punctuate his comment.

“Y-you’re impossible.” His remark about spanking catches me off guard.

“Oh, is someone flustered? I bet you like it if I smacked that ass of yours, wouldn’t you?” Mateo teases, leaning in close.

“Boys, either get a room or get to class,” one of the teachers who probably hasn’t had sex in a decade says to us.

Mateo plants a kiss on my cheek, then he slaps my ass before disappearing into a classroom down the hall. I shake my head, letting out a light laugh. My cheeks have now taken on this deep shade of red permanently.

I take a seat in Claire’s class, which has become my favorite part of the day, other than leaving. Claire slams her hands down on my desk. I think she’s mad, but when I glance up, I see a smile on her face.

“Oh, Finn! I’m so happy to hear that you’re dating!” She pinches my right cheek. “I figured you’d be a heartbreaker.” Claire winks before returning to the front of the class.

An hour later, the bell rings. Claire tells us to get out and make bad decisions. I laugh and stand up. I suddenly run into a wall of muscle. I look up, expecting to see Mateo because he’s the only muscle I ever come into contact with.

The scary man looks down at me and says, “Watch where you’re going, fruitcake.” He shoulder-checks me and walks away.

I would like to say that I stood my ground, looked at the terrifying man, and told him to fuck off. However, I only avoid eye contact and scurry off to Bio II with my tail tucked between my legs. My heart is hammering, and I don’t know why.

I slump down in my seat, a little shaken by the interaction. Mateo comes in and leans against my desk. He plants a kiss on my lips. “What’s wrong, babe?” Mateo slides into the seat next to me.

“Oh, nothing. Just got spooked by some asshole,” I mumble.

“Want me to beat him up for you?” Mateo asks.

I think to myself that the scary man would crush Mateo's bones into 50,000 tiny shards.

"Hey!"

Apparently, it wasn't in my head as I had thought. Mr. Archer scribbles some bullshit on the board about a study hall, despite this class being a free-for-all.

"This man was jacked, Mateo. I was surprised he doesn't have moons orbiting around him." I make wild gestures as I try to illustrate my point. Mateo looks at me like I'd just asked him if I could screw Mr. Archer.

"That makes no sense, Finn." Mateo shakes his head at me, confused by my reasoning.

"Because he was huge! He had his own gravitational pull. His bicep is as big as a fucking grapefruit."

"I have muscles too," Mateo grumbles, sounding like a jealous toddler.

"Yes, you do, and they look incredibly sexy. No need to pout." I pat Mateo on the head to console him.

"I'm pouting. Unlike you, I'm not a bottom." Mateo sticks his tongue out at me to emphasize how he isn't pouting.

"You need to quit it with the bottom shaming. It's getting toxic," I mumble, crossing my arms across my chest. Now, it's my turn to pout.

"Aww. Did the bottom get his feelings hurt by his super sexy top?" Mateo asks like he's talking to a child.

"No, but his self-absorbed top is about to get punched in the balls." And with that declaration, I do just that.

"You're a dick." Mateo groans, gritting his teeth in pain.

For the record, I didn't even hit him that hard. He's just being a baby.

“I’ll give you this dick. We’ll see who’s the bottom then.” I cross my arms across my chest again, turning away from him.

Mateo grabs my chin and forces me to look at him. “Finn,” Mateo says.

I squeeze my eyes shut as tightly as I can manage.

“Finn, if you don’t open your eyes, I promise that there will be hell to pay.”

I open one eye slowly before shutting it again. I do the same with the other. “There, I opened my eyes.” I stick my tongue out at him, and he dares to lick it.

“That’s gay,” I tell Mateo, opening my eyes to give him a glare.

“You don’t say that when you’re beneath me.” Mateo flashes me a smirk. “Besides, it got you to open your eyes, didn’t it.”

I roll my eyes at Mateo’s cheesy smirk.

Before long, the last bell of the day rings. I stand up and carry my bookbag on my shoulder. “Are you coming to my place?”

“Nah. My mom’s been on my ass to come home. I just don’t want to until I figure out how to ruin my dad’s life, you know?” He lets out a forced laugh as we exit the school.

“No, I don’t know. My father is burning in hell currently. He ruined my life. I’ll never get the chance to ruin his.” God, that sounded dark.

“Ah, shit,” Mateo mutters. “I kinda forgot.” Mateo shrugs, opening his car door for me.

“How did you forget?” I ask Mateo as he starts the car.

“I don’t know, man. Maybe I was just distracted by that ass.”

**“A loss, of which we are ignorant, is no loss.” - Publilius
Syrus**

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Elsa is a Lesbian Icon

I shoot up from my bed, confused by the sound of glass breaking in the kitchen. Of course, the one night that Mateo chooses to spend at home is the night that a burglar decides to rob me. Unfortunately, they aren't going to find anything of value in this apartment. Honestly, the most expensive thing in my entire apartment would probably be the cat carrier. Even then, cat carriers are only like forty dollars, hardly something to break into my house for.

Unless they're here to murder me. I don't think I've pissed anyone off enough to warrant taking a hit out on me. But maybe that terrifying giant from earlier is secretly a homicidal maniac who's come to stab me to death.

I slowly creep out of my bed and move to the closet to grab the baseball bat I keep in there. I hold it in the position that I think baseball players hold it in, the one where it's over your shoulder. I sneak into the hallway, ready to swing at the first sign of danger.

Instead, I see the dark outline of someone trying to sweep up the glass scattered across the floor. The front door is slightly ajar, allowing a slight sliver of light to illuminate part of the person's face.

“Mateo?” I ask, lowering the bat. “What the hell are you doing?” I flip the light switch on. There’s a smear of blood under Mateo’s nose, while the rest of his beautiful face has an assortment of bruises.

“I dropped my bottle.” His voice is incredibly slurred, and you’d have to be stupid to not know that he has consumed a monumental amount of alcohol.

“W-what happened to your face?” I stutter out, kneeling down next to him. I reach out to brush my fingers against Mateo’s bruises.

“What happened to yours?” Mateo asks, reaching out to squeeze my cheeks with his hands, causing me to notice his scraped and bleeding knuckles.

“Mateo, why are your knuckles bleeding?” I ask, grabbing his hands in mine to inspect his wounds.

“Because I punched a wall, Greenie!” Mateo starts laughing as though he’s struck comedy gold.

I sigh. “Let’s get you cleaned up, okay?” Mateo nods as I pull him off the ground. “Then you can tell me what happened, alright?”

“Fine,” Mateo grumbles as I pull him toward the sink. I’m not sure what you’re supposed to do with battered knuckles, but with no protests from Mateo, I decide to fix them. I wash his hands with warm water to clean off the blood. I make the assumption that all his bones are still intact.

I squat down and pull hydrogen peroxide out from under the sink. I pull out my box of Frozen Band-Aids because Elsa is a lesbian icon. Then I grab some Neosporin. I pour some hydrogen peroxide on his bloody knuckles. He lets out a hiss of pain.

“Do you want to tell me what happened?” I ask, using the voice I have reserved for talking with kids.

Mateo shakes his head, not meeting my eyes. He opts to focus on the white bubbles forming on his hands.

“Why not?” I ask, patting his hands dry with paper towels.

“Because.” That’s what I assume he is trying to say, but it sounds like he is saying “bubbles” with a southern accent.

I place the bands on his knuckles. “Please?” I ask. I’m allowed to know why as he stumbled into my kitchen at one in the morning, drunk and bloody and bruised.

“Fine, but only ...” He hiccups. “Only because you’re cute.”

I stand there and look up at him with an eyebrow raised, waiting for him to continue.

“W-well, I got home today and went to take a shower.” Mateo stops speaking to run a hand over his damaged face. “I must have forgotten to take my phone upstairs be-cause when I was done, my dad barges in my room yelling, ‘How could you do this to me! Do you know what this will do to my name!’ Blah, blah, blah.

And me, I’m confused because I-I just got dressed, and he’s in my room yelling at me like I’m ... I’m a horse in a hospital! So I say to him, ‘What the hell?’ And this asshole goes, ‘Who the fuck’s Finn?’ like you aren’t the most memorable person in the world. How could he ever forget meeting you?”

I smile sadly at his compliment, knowing exactly where this is going.

“Then I yelled back, ‘He’s my boyfriend. But you must know a lot about that.’ Then he smack-smacked me across the face before saying something like, ‘What are you going on about, boy?’ So I told him that we’d seen him at the club Saturday and fucking punched me in the face! Then I stormed out of the house. I grabbed a bottle of vodka and walked here.”

Mateo’s on the verge of tears, so I pull him into a hug. He breaks down and starts to cry softly in my chest. “H-how

could he do that to me? I-I'm his son!" He blubbers, stumbling over his words.

"Men are stupid," I say to him, stroking his hair lightly.

"And I don't respect them," Mateo says with a laugh. He stands up and wipes his tears off his face with the back of his hand.

"It's okay. You could stay here forever if you'd like," I tell Mateo, squeezing his unbruised hand softly.

"Forever's a-a long time," Mateo says, running a hand down my side and letting it rest on my hip.

"I know." I lean in for a kiss. I can taste the vodka on his lips. For the first time, I'm the one in control of the kiss. I pull away and a small smile spreads across my face.

"I want to stay with you forever."

"Until the sun explodes, Mateo."

"That's morbid!" Mateo slurs out.

"But I will!" I laugh. "Let's go to bed and cuddle."

"Yay!" he yells, hopping up and down before making a face. Mateo lets go of my hand and turns toward the sink, emptying the contents of his stomach.

"Two bros chilling in a hot tub five feet apart 'cause they're not gay'."

- Anthony Padilla

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Economy-class Boy

“Finn! That hurts!” Mateo whines. Last night, he had fallen asleep in my arms. Right now, he’s sitting on the kitchen counter, and I’m ripping off his Elsa Band-Aids. It’s already afternoon, bordering on the evening, as I had to negotiate when we would be ripping them off.

“Don’t punch walls next time!” I tell him before I rip off another one.

“Do you have to do it so aggressively?! Why can’t you pull them off slowly?” Mateo complains.

By the sound of his whining, you would never know that this man practically runs Oakwood Academy.

“Because it’s easier if you do it fast. Now, stop being a baby. We’re on the last one,” I say. I pull it off fast and Mateo hisses. “All done.”

“Finally!” Mateo hops off the counter.

“You’re so dramatic,” I mumble as I wash my hands off.

“You’re the dramatic one, not me,” Mateo grumbles.

I don’t blame him. He had a rough night. Not to mention he is incredibly hungover.

“Nah,” I say as I dry off my hands with a towel. “It’s you because I don’t whine like a child when I get my Band-Aids taken off.” I stick my tongue out at him.

“Whatever.” Mateo leans in and engulfs me in a hug. “Thank you for taking care of me, Finny,” he says into my hair.

“You’re welcome,” I respond, squeezing him.

“Did you mean what you said?”

“What?” I ask, pulling away so I can look him in the eyes.

“When you said you’d stay with me until the sun explodes?” Mateo has the sappiest look on his face. I feel my cheeks burn as they turn red. Usually, this wouldn’t be something that would cause me to blush, but the intensity of Mateo’s gaze is making me.

“Of course,” I tell him, looking down in embarrassment. I don’t know why. It may have to do with the fact that I’ve never really felt this strongly toward anyone. I had flings before, but they were never like this. None of my one-night stands ever made my heart skip a beat. Never created such a feeling of security. I never had a day better than the instant I saw him.

I know I’ve already admitted that I love this boy. And I know the relationship is moving fast enough that two women would already have adopted a shelter cat and bought a U-haul. However, I’ve lived so much of my life alone that I think I deserve to be blissfully in love.

Mateo grabs my chin softly, forcing me to look up at him. “I love you, Finn whatever-your-middle-name-is Green.”

I laugh as he leans in and kisses me. I will probably never get used to the feeling that his kiss evokes. In all honesty, I hope it never gets old.

“It’s Willow,” I tell him as I rest my forehead against his.

“That’s pretty,” Mateo mumbles, playing with a tendril of my hair as he does so.

“I picked it out. My parents gave me a middle name, but I despised it.” I smile.

“Mine’s Andres.”

“Mateo Andres Quesada. That’s hot,” I say with a giggle.

Great, Mateo has turned me into the brand of gay that giggles for no reason.

Mateo lets out a laugh too. “How can a middle name be hot?”

“Well, anything belonging to you is hot,” I tell him.

I have also become that type of person who says shit like that.

“That’s a little gay, Finn.” Mateo gives me a look, to which I just roll my eyes at him.

“That’s the best you could come up with?” I ask, raising my eyebrows at him.

“Well, my first thought was to say, ‘You know what else is hot? This dick.’ But I didn’t think you’d appreciate that.” Mateo laughs. His arms are still encircling me, pulling my body close to his.

“You’re right. I wouldn’t have appreciated that.” I chuckle a bit as I think about how the conversation would have gone had he said that initially. “Want to go out to eat?” I ask before adding, “My treat for being so brave when I took off your Band-Aids.” I smirk at him, scrunching my nose a bit as I do so.

“Alright, but no way in hell am I letting you pay,” Mateo tells me, pulling away from our hug.

“I will be paying,” I respond in the tone I use to win arguments.

“Only if I get to fuck you in the skirt I got you when we get home,” Mateo answers, walking toward my room.

“Didn’t we already smash in my skirt?” I ask, following behind him, a little bit confused.

“No, you definitely took it off, and I was too blinded by your beauty to tell you to put it back on,” Mateo tells me as he flops down on my bed.

I blush at the shameless compliment from Mateo. “Alrighty. Sounds like a plan.”

“I’m gonna pay anyways,” Mateo mutters under his breath.

“What was that?” I ask, spinning around from the dresser to face him.

“I said I’m gonna get wasted at dinner and drive up the tab.”

“Sure.” I roll my eyes at this man, the one I am so head-over-heels for. I pull the skirt on. “So, the other day, I got fishnets,” I tell him with a smirk spread across my face.

“I’m pretty sure you put those on before you put the skirt on, stupid.” Mateo sticks his tongue out at me.

“Don’t call me stupid or you will not be tapping this ass.” I slap my ass for reference. I sit down and begin the struggle to put my tights on.

“That was the most graceful thing I have seen in all eighteen years of my life.”

“Shut up,” I mumble as the redness of embarrassment coats my cheeks and ears a vibrant shade of red.

“It’s okay. I found it cute, Greenie.”

“Least I’m getting dressed up. Your average ass is wearing jeans, along with one of my button-ups that is a little too small.” I wave him off and stand up to pull on a t-shirt.

“That’s intentional to show off my muscles.” Mateo flexes to show off said muscles. They are indeed emphasized by the tightness of the button-up.

“Let’s go to the restaurant, muscle man.” I laugh, grabbing his hand and my wallet before pulling him out the door.

I pick a close place, mostly because I don’t want to walk that far and the windchill.

We are seated almost immediately as the restaurant is relatively empty. We place our orders with the waiter. Mateo stays true to his word and orders two glasses of red wine, though I don’t have a clue how he manages it. He looks old enough to be twenty-one, but I do not in the slightest.

Everything is going great until our waiter starts to get flirtatious. “You are looking lovely this evening. I don’t suppose you have any plans after this?” The waiter is by no means unattractive, but I’m obviously on a date, so I’m not sure why he’s trying to ask me out.

“Actually, we’re on a date,” Mateo tells him before grabbing my hand.

“Oh, well, if you ever want to drop this economy-class boy and get with a first-class man, you know where to find me.” He gives me a wink before disappearing to place our orders in the kitchen.

Mateo is fuming. He looks like a child getting his favorite toy ripped from his hands. I’ve compared him to a child a lot today and other days, but that’s been the only relevant comparison I could make.

“I’m going to fuck you so hard, you will forget that man’s face,” Mateo says huskily.

“You son of a bleep-bleep.” - The Squirrel

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

The Crown is on its Way

“Fuck,” Mateo says against my neck as I pump his rock-hard length in my hand.

After what had happened with the waiter, Mateo and I ate our appetizers and left as quickly as possible. The waiter continued making me uncomfortable, and Mateo was pissed off during every interaction. The possessiveness of his lips attacking my neck is evidence of that.

Mateo nips at the spot where my neck and shoulder meet, causing me to let out a throaty moan and to squeeze his dick lightly. After this, I lean down and lick a stripe up the side of Mateo’s length. Then I slowly take him in my mouth. My pace must be too slow for him. Before long, he is thrusting in my mouth and setting the pace. I look up at Mateo, his face showing a look of pure pleasure as his eyes rolls back in his head. Mateo’s hands are tugging my hair, causing me to moan, which, in turn, causes soft vibrations against his dick.

“Finn,” Mateo murmurs as he finds his release in my mouth. Moments later, Mateo flips me on my back on the bed.

Staying true to his word, Mateo lifts the skirt up rather than taking it off. He takes my length that have been begging for attention since we got home and puts it in his mouth. I hear

the bottle of lube being opened and the sound of the bottle being squirted onto Mateo's fingers. Mateo starts with one finger, slowly working and curling until he feels like I can handle a second. When he adds the second, I let out a low moan, which causes a blush to spread across my face.

He continues to prep, making me a moaning mess. "Oh god," I murmur as Mateo curls his fingers and hits my prostate. My hands grab a fistful of the sheets. I need me something to anchor myself to.

"This is what happens when you flirt with ugly waiters," Mateo mumbles, leaning down to kiss my neck as he aligns himself with my entrance.

"I wasn't ..." Mateo interrupts me by sliding in slowly. "Fuck," I mutter. "I wasn't flirting." Mateo begins to glide in and out at a quick pace. "And he wasn't, ah, ugly."

This statement triggers something animalistic in Mateo. He begins to absolutely obliterate my insides. I doubt I would be sitting comfortably for a week.

My eyes roll to the back of my head. The only sounds that can be heard in the room are the sounds of Mateo and I fucking. Skin slapping against skin.

Mateo's big hand wraps around my throat, effectively restricting my air supply. I would be a dirty liar if I said that the roughness of his thrusts and his hand on my throat do not intensify the sex considerably.

"Harder," I whisper and let out a moan.

"What did you say, Greenie?" Mateo mumbles in my ear before nipping my ear lobe, his hand still wrapped around my throat.

Good God.

I never realized how much of a masochist I am until Mateo. Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if Mateo starts to call me a slut and I begin to like it.

“Harder,” I mumble as Mateo continues at his rough pace.

“I can’t hear you.” Mateo muses.

I can’t tell if he’s fucking with me, but I feel like you can’t fuck with someone while he’s fucking you.

“Harder,” I practically scream.

“Such a needy little slut,” Mateo tells me as he lets go of my neck. Now, one of Mateo’s hands pins both of my wrists above my head as his other hand’s nails dig into my waist.

“Oh god,” I breathe out as he does as I requested. He speeds up and I can feel his length in my stomach. While I know this isn’t biologically possible, I am willing to bet money that’s what’s happening right now. “I’m close,” I say but it comes out more like a gasp.

“Not yet,” Mateo says, looking down at me. He grabs my dick, which had been previously covered by my skirt, and begins to pump. The double pleasure makes my toes curl as I try to delay my orgasm.

“Mateo.” I try to tell him that I can’t hold it much longer. I drag my nails down his back, creating dark red marks on his skin. I feel like it’s fair that I get to make marks on him when he’s covered my whole neck with dark hickeys.

“Beg,” Mateo says in the huskiest, most dominant voice I have ever heard from anyone.

“Please, oh fuck. Please, Mateo,” I beg. I would do anything to find my release. At that moment, I am the most desperate I’d ever been for anything.

“Now,” Mateo commands and my body listens as I find one of the most satisfying orgasms of my life. It takes a few more thrusts into my quivering body until Mateo finds a release of his own.

Mateo is still on top of me and inside me, hovering above me as he captures my lips with his. He pulls my bottom

lip with his teeth, which he knows I just love. I tangle my fingers in his dark hair, tugging him closer to me.

“I love you,” I whisper as I rest my forehead against his.

“I love you so much,” Mateo whispers back. Although he’s clearly trying to one-up me, this confession feels much better than someone saying, “I love you too.” It feels more personal than just saying it back. Because there will always be that voice in the back of my mind, saying that “He is only saying it because I did.” And I don’t think that will ever go away, even with time.

He pulls out of me and tugs on his boxers before laying down on top of me.

“You’re crushing me!” I squeal.

“I’m kinda still not over how you let me rail you with your skirt on.” Mateo’s face is buried in my neck, and I can feel his expression as he smiles. He shifts his weight so that he’s no longer crushing me.

“I’m still waiting on that crown, so you can rail me with that on my head,” I tell him as I play with his hair.

“Oh, don’t worry, darling. It’s on it’s way.”

“Now, go sit in the corner, and go think about your life.”

- Jake the Dog

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

AA Meetings for Ass Addiction

“I got it!” I shout, causing Mateo to look up from his notebook. We’ve been brainstorming the best ways to expose Mateo’s father, for not only his hypocrisy but also his abuse.

“I also have an idea,” Mateo says, a smirk spreading across his beautiful face.

“Say it at the same time?” I ask.

He nods his agreement.

I say, “Let’s expose him to The Times!”

At the same time, he says, “Let’s fuck on the table.”

Mateo still has a shit-eating grin spread across his face.

I crumble up my paper and chuck it at his head. “Why are you so goddamn horny?” I groan, burying my face in my hands to hide my deep blush.

“Maybe if you didn’t constantly look so fuckable, I wouldn’t be in a constant state of horniness.”

I look up to see Mateo looking innocent as he shrugs.

“Go to horny jail,” I tell him, a red blush still coating my cheeks.

“Did you just tell me to ‘go to horny jail?’” Mateo asks with a chuckle.

“Yes, you are too thirsty and have now been sentenced to a life sentence in horny jail,” I explain, crossing my arms across my chest as if this will prove my point.

“The only thing I want to do with jail is handcuffs but not for me.” Mateo wiggles his eyebrows at me suggestively.

“Wait. What are they for?” I pause as the purpose of the handcuffs hits me like a truck. “You really do need to go to horny jail!” I huff as the blush spreads across my cheeks all over again.

“Then you’d be all alone.” Mateo pouts, sticking his lip out.

“Maybe I wouldn’t mind.” I turn my head as though I’m too good to look at him.

“Oh, you would mind. Who would be there to remind you that you’re not a top?” Mateo teases. “Anyways.” Mateo pauses, gathering his thoughts as he taps his pen on his notebook. “They would never believe us. We’d have to get proof!” Mateo slumps back in his chair dramatically. This man is all drama, so I don’t know why he calls me the dramatic one.

“And after your ...” I hesitate, trying to find the best words to describe what happened in my kitchen that night. “Your last encounter with your father, he’ll most likely move to a new club to avoid you.”

“Shit. You’re right,” Mateo says, flopping his body on the table with the drama of a Broadway actor.

“Do you think he’s on Grindr?” I ask, pulling out my phone to go to the app store to download it.

“Finn, I would prefer not to think about what hookup apps my dad is or is not on.” Mateo sighs.

I can’t imagine this topic is pleasant to be discussing, but he is the one that wants to expose his dad. The second he

says he wants to be done, I'm more than happy to be finished.

"Yeah, but if he's on there, it'll be easy to expose him. We invite him out for a date to a gay club and snap a picture of him when he starts dancing. Easy peasy." Now that I'm thinking about it, we have been making the whole ordeal of putting him out that much worse. Then it hits me. We're going to out him. "Mateo." I soften my voice, knowing he will not be happy with what I'm about to say.

"Hmm?" He hums, looking up at me.

"We can't expose your dad for being gay."

"Finn, what the hell are you talking about? He is a horrible person, hypocrite, beta male sexist, low-key racist, and he fucking hit me. If there is anyone who deserves to be outted, it is that man." Mateo is fuming. My suggestion is not sitting too well with him.

"Mateo, we can't expose him for liking men no matter how much he deserves it. It's unethical. How would you feel?" I try to reason with him, but his anger may be preventing him from seeing the bigger picture.

"That man barely has feelings!" Mateo yells as he throws his hands toward the ceiling.

"What if we just expose him for hitting you?" This suggestion doesn't compromise my morals like the other one.

"That won't make a difference! Plenty of his supporters believe that is the only way to discipline a kid. The only option is to reveal his sexuality to his homophobic followers."

"Oh, come on!" I complain.

"Finn, this man deserves everything coming to him. He can't preach about how all gays are going to hell and then turn around and fuck random guys at clubs." Mateo looks exasperated with the whole conversation.

"Fine! But you have to catfish him," I bargain. My reasoning behind this is that if I don't directly do it, it's not

that bad.

“Sounds like a deal. We should both download Grindr so that we can find him faster,” Mateo says, pulling out his phone.

I nod in agreement, feeling more and more like an accomplice as we go on. But it’s okay. The only way to strengthen a relationship is to do things together. Activities with questionable morals are the best.

“Found him!” I exclaim after only about ten minutes of scrolling. I turn the volume down of the music, quieting Katie Ladner from singing Kindergarten Boyfriend.

“Already? Damn. That was fast.” Mateo stands up to move to my side of the table to look over my shoulder.

“I’m well-versed in the art of Grindr,” I tell Mateo as I start to chat with his dad.

Mateo gives me a questioning look.

“What? I’m allowed to get horny too,” I explain, turning red.

“I know that. I just don’t want to think about you with anyone but me. I love you.” He leans in for a kiss.

“You taste weird.”

“That’s because there is vodka in my orange juice,” Mateo smirks, pulling the chair out beside me to sit down.

“You better watch it or I will be taking you to AA meetings,” I say sternly.

“Hi. My name is Mateo, and I am addicted to Finn’s voluptuous ass. Side note: I plan to never recover from this addiction.”

I laugh at his comment before resting my head on his shoulder.

“What should we say?” I ask, my fingers hovering over the keys.

“Here.” He takes my phone from me and gets to work.

“You know what they say: a spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down.”

“Not if you’re diabetic.”

- Daria by Daria

CHAPTER FORTY

Republican Morals

“I can’t believe you’re flirting with your dad. That is like some top-tier Alabama shit,” I tell Mateo. I’m standing behind him with my arms around his neck as I lean on him. We’ve been texting Mateo’s dad for an hour or so, trying to develop a connection that would warrant a date.

“A, I’m doing this because it made your stupid morals uncomfortable. B, Alabama’s not parents. They’re cousins.” Mateo’s fingers hover over the keys of his phone as he debates what to say.

“Fine. That’s some top-tier West Virginia shit.” I laugh before planting a kiss on Mateo’s cheek.

“Whatever. Also, I’m pretty sure you’re gonna offend some people.” Mateo starts to type, apparently having figured out how to flirt with his father.

“We are the only people here. Who am I gonna offend?” I ask, still hanging on him like a love-sick puppy.

“Well, when the nice people of hollywood turn our life into a book or movie, the West Virginia and Alabama people are going to be offended,” Mateo answers, sounding overly confident about the whole idea.

“Mateo. They’re not gonna turn our life into a movie,” I tell him before burying my face in his neck.

“What makes you say that?” He tries to look at me, but my position in his neck makes it difficult. I only know this because I can feel his movement.

I pull my head out of the crevice of Mateo’s neck. I rest it on his shoulder. “Because we’re too gay, and the story isn’t about either of us coming out. That’s generally the only way gay people make it into the media.”

“You must not watch many new tv shows.”

I watch over his shoulder as the dots that signify someone is typing move back and forth, Mateo’s father writing his response. My legs start to ache from standing so long. I have been standing since we started this conversation, so I finally sit.

“I don’t. I meant movies.” I pause as I start to play with Mateo’s hair. “Name one movie where the main character is gay and their story isn’t about them coming out.”

“The Prom, The Thing About Harry, and The Half Of It. At least I don’t think the Half Of It is about coming out. In fact, I think that one just had gayness, no coming out.” Mateo looks at me as he lists them.

“Fine. You win. But why would anyone make a movie about us? There’s no drama. We are just a happy couple.”

“Because our sex scenes would be so hot,” Mateo says without missing a beat.

I smack him on the back of the head with my hand. “The world does not get to know the details of our sex life, you perv.”

Mateo shouts an “ow” before rubbing the back of his head. “Oh, come on. You don’t wanna make a porno with me?” Mateo bumps me playfully with his shoulder.

“No! I don’t want to make a porno with you, actually! Jesus Christ. Just flirt with your dad.” I huff.

“Will you please stop saying it like that?” Mateo asks.

“Why does it make you uncomfy?” I tease with a smirk.

“Why?” Mateo asks, running a hand over his face.

“Why what?”

“Why did you say ‘uncomfy’ instead of saying uncomfortable?” Mateo laughs at the end of his question, letting his phone screen go dark.

I shrug in response. I like saying it like that. I think it sounds more fun than using the word uncomfortable.

“Is it because you’re a bottom?” Mateo teases, sticking out his tongue at me as if this will solidify his statement.

“Toxic!” I yell at a volume that is nowhere near an inside voice.

“Excuse me?”

“We’ve been over this. Bottom shaming is toxic. And I thought we established that if I wanted to, I could definitely top you.”

Mateo’s hand comes up to hold my face. He grabs my chin and rests his hand there before dragging his tongue over my bottom lip. Then once he’d traced over my lip, he sticks his thumb in my mouth.

On instinct, I open my mouth a bit so he can get his thumb inside. I pull back my lips. That way, I don’t accidentally bite Mateo. Mateo pulls his thumb out of my mouth, and I hollow my cheeks before sticking out my tongue a little, licking his finger as it leaves my mouth.

Mateo draws me close to him, using his hand on my neck to do so. “I’m pretty sure tops aren’t so willing to have their partner’s fingers in their mouth.”

“I don’t know. I’ve felt what that mouth can do. Maybe you’re the ultimate bottom,” I counter as I lean towards Mateo, our lips almost touching.

“Well, maybe I just like to make you quiver beneath me,” Mateo whispers before closing the last bit of distance between us to capture my mouth in a kiss.

The phone buzzes, snapping us back into the reality of what we’re doing. Mateo opens his phone and reads the text. “He wrote, ‘Are you free tonight?’ accompanied by two hot face emojis.”

“Tell him yes! And that Travis will meet him at the club where we were the other night,” I tell him as my face burns. I’m not sure why this interaction is making me so flustered. Maybe it’s because now I’m hot and bothered, and we’re going to be scheming, not banging.

Mateo gives out a time and the address along with a winking face emoji.

“So, how are we gonna get this to The Times?” I ask, looking up at Mateo inquisitively.

“I may or may not.” Mateo pauses as if he’s choosing his words carefully.

“How do you know them?” Mateo’s hiding something and I intend to figure out what.

“We were,” Mateo mumbles the last part of his statement, making his words unintelligible.

“Mateo, you’re going to have to speak up.” I sigh before cupping my hand up to my ear for emphasis.

“We were fuck buddies.” Mateo’s turning red. I can’t tell if he’s embarrassed or ashamed.

“Oh.” I hope Mateo can’t see the insecurity in my eyes.

“Uh, yeah. Do you want me to call Liam?”

“You still talk to him?” My voice goes up an octave, and I can only imagine that I am a painful sight to behold.

“No, not since we started dating,” Mateo reassures me.

Although, it's actually not very reassuring.

"Oh." God damn. I don't know that anyone has ever resembled a deflated balloon more than me at this moment. "Yeah, call Liam." I plaster a smile on my face to show that it's okay.

"Alright," Mateo says. He looks a little hesitant as he dials the phone.

"Liam?" Mateo asks. "No, no." He glances in my direction, letting me know that Liam thought he was calling to fuck. "I need a favor. You know my asshole father. I want to ruin him." He listens to Liam's response. "He's gay or bi. The moral of the story is that my homophobic father likes men." Another pause as Liam speaks. "Yeah, that's it. Is that not enough?"

Silence as we both listen intently for Liam's answer.

I realize that no matter how hard I listen, I will not be able to hear him. However, that's not important.

"Well, he did hit me when he found out I have a boyfriend. So if we get evidence, will you run the story? ... Great! Can we come in tomorrow? ... Thank you, Liam. I really appreciate it." Mateo hangs up.

"So?" I ask.

"Liam says he'll run it."

"Let's go ruin a white man's career." I smirk.

"Rich people run funny. Must be all the money in their pockets or their big rich golden wieners. Eh, it's probably their wieners."

- Linda Belcher

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Stolen Glasses

The music in the club is loud and obnoxious, but, somehow, people are still dancing. They're dancing like it's the best music they have ever heard. Mateo and I are standing in a corner, scanning the crowd.

Mateo's holding a glass of vodka and cranberry juice while I have a glass of cran-raspberry juice.

"What time did you say again?" I yell over the music.

"Nine twenty-five!" Mateo yells back as he takes a swig of his drink.

"Why such a specific time?" I yell, watching his adam apple bob as he drinks.

"What?" Mateo yells.

"Why such a specific time?" I repeat as he leans in close. I can smell the vodka on his breath. I feel like I'm getting drunk on his scent alone, but the vodka intensifies the feeling.

"Because." He licks my cheek.

"You're gross." I make a face at him.

“Your tongue has been on the same surfaces as mine.” Mateo smirks.

A blush creeps on my cheeks from his comment. I shove him away from me lightly before mumbling a half-hearted, “Shut up.” I catch the eye of someone who looks vaguely familiar. I tug on the sleeve of Mateo’s shirt to get his attention. “That’s him.”

“Damn. What do we do now?” Mateo asks as he glances over at me.

“Cry.”

“Finn, this is serious,” Mateo says before rolling his eyes.

“I am serious.” Mateo gives me a look that says he’s not in the mood for my bullshit. “Alright, text him and say that ‘Travis can’t make it.’ But make sure you say something like, ‘But you stay and have fun. Find someone cute to dance with.’”

“Are you sure you’ve never done this before?” Mateo teases, pulling out his phone to type the message.

“You know, now that you mention it, I catfish people’s dads all the time. I’m actually in a club that meets every Tuesday,” I say this in the most innocent voice I can muster up.

Mateo punches me softly on the shoulder, but it still hurts a little. “Don’t be an asshole.”

“Oh. I forgot. That’s your job,” I tease.

The phone buzzes with a notification from Grindr.

“Too bad. I was looking to spending the night with you. I guess I’ll have to find someone else.” That’s the message Mateo’s dad has sent. It creeps me out. He’s such a douche that anyone sleeping with him would be a miracle.

“Your father’s gross.” I stick my tongue out in disgust.

“Tell me about it.” Mateo groans.

We watch his father leave the bar and go to the dance floor to mingle.

It doesn't take long before Mateo's dad starts grinding on some moderately attractive guy, and it takes even less time for us to snap a picture of the two of them locked in a sloppy kiss. Then it's even a smaller window of time before Mateo orders another drink and steals the glass from the club.

"Don't you have a lot of money?" I ask as we walk down the street back to my place.

"Well, technically, no. It's my parent's money. But I guess. Why?" Mateo asks before sipping his drink.

"I was just wondering ... If you have money, why are you stealing that cup?" I ask, pointing at the cup with my index finger.

"Oh, I just didn't want to stay at the club, but I still want my drink, so I just snatched the cup. I didn't think it'd be a big deal." Mateo shrugs.

I trace my hand over one of the tattoos on Mateo's forearm. "We should get tattoos."

"What? Did you get drunk off your juice?" Mateo is laughing at my suggestion.

"No. I've always wanted to get a tattoo. But not matching ones because that automatically dooms a relationship," I explain.

"Oh, so we're in a relationship," Mateo teases, bumping me with his shoulder, causing me to stumble. I honestly don't think Mateo realizes how strong he is.

"Nah. You're just a hot piece of ass I keep around for when I'm horny," I deadpan, not looking over at him.

"You're so mean to me." Mateo pouts.

"You bottom-shame me all the time. Yet, somehow, I'm still the mean one," I complain.

“I’ll stop bottom-shaming you if you actually get a tattoo,” Mateo tells me. His tone implies that he doesn’t think I am serious about the tattoos.

“I’ll only get one if you do too. Deal?” I jut out my hand for a legally binding shake.

“Fine. But if you chicken out, I get to tie you to the bed and do as I please with you.” Mateo grabs my hand and pulls me close to him.

“What if I want you to do that anyways?” My face is red as I say this, but I don’t regret a single word.

“Then I’d be more than happy to oblige.” Mateo purrs. This man just oozes sexy. If the dictionary was filled with pictures rather than words, the only thing under sexy and perfection would be Mateo’s face.

“Let’s go get tattoos!” I practically squeal at the idea as I grab Mateo by his hand and drag him into the nearest tattoo parlor. The place smells faintly of smoke and cleaning supplies.

“Hey,” the man at the counter says before giving us a nod. He stands up from his chair and drags a hand over his face before stroking his beard. The action is kind of weird, but who am I to judge. “How can I help you folks?”

“Oh, we haven’t decided what we are yet. Can we have the booklet to look at our options?” Mateo asks. His hand is still intertwined with mine as the man slides a binder full of laminated pages toward us.

We flip through it. After a while of not finding anything, I make my way over to look at the artwork on the wall. It seems to be mostly pencil sketches. However, I see a few full tattoos and full-colored paintings. They’re so pretty.

“Finn,” Mateo calls, waving me over. “I know you didn’t want to get matching tattoos, but what if we got a sun and moon tattoo.”

“Ooh. Can I get the moon?!”

“She hates time. Make it stop.” - Bowling For Soup

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Touch Questions

“Ow. Fuck!”

“Mateo, this isn’t even your first tattoo. You have a shit ton of them.”

I wince as the needle pokes into my skin. Mateo, however, has chosen to express his discomfort by crying out in pain.

“It still hurts!” Mateo shoots a pointed look at the tattoo artist that’s doing his. It’s the same man from the front. My artist is a pretty woman with beautiful and intricate tattoos.

“I’m sorry, sir. I’m sure you’re doing fine, and my boyfriend is just being a baby.” I shoot him my own look.

“I am not! Why are you so calm?”

“Do you want the honest answer or do you want to remain happy tonight?” I ask, which causes a blanket of silence to fall over the room.

The tattoo artist working on my arm gives out an awkward cough.

“Finn,” Mateo says, looking over at me with big eyes.

“I don’t really want to tell you with other people in the room.” I shift uncomfortably. The tattoo artist politely asks me not to move. That way, she doesn’t mess up.

“Tell me when we’re done?” Mateo asks.

“Only if you stay quiet and let the nice man do his job.” I flash a toothy smile at the artist, who gives me a grateful look back.

“Fine,” Mateo grumbles.

We had decided for our tattoos to be on our inner arms. Mateo’s is on the side opposite his tattoo cuff, and if he were to hold them next to each other, one would see that the sun design is farther up than the one on the wrist.

“All done,” the artists exclaim at the same time, which causes the four of us to share a laugh.

“See? It wasn’t too bad,” I tease. I watch the tattoo artist as she wipes down the area that now sports a simple moon.

“It hurt,” Mateo says.

The man bandaging Mateo’s tattoo rolls his eyes at the comment.

“Didn’t your neck ones hurt too?” I ask.

My tattoo is already bandaged, so I reach up and touch the small butterflies that can be seen on his neck.

“Nah. I was wasted when I got that one.”

I laugh. “The artist really shouldn’t have given you the tattoos if you were sloshed.”

Mateo shrugs.

“I did call ahead when I was sober. I just showed up drunk.” Mateo smiles at me.

All of a sudden, a thought nags at me.

I think Mateo might have a problem with alcohol. Once the tattoo artists have left to find out what the total is, I

turn to Mateo.

“Mateo?”

“Hmm?” he says as he smooths down the bandage on his arm.

“Do you drink every day?” I feel as though asking this question crosses a line in our relationship that had never really been established.

Mateo’s face goes neutral, except for his eyes that hold an emotion I can’t decipher. “What?”

Oh fuck. I thought Mateo would just answer, not avoid the question by pretending not to hear me. Or maybe he is offering me a chance to act like I didn’t just ask him that. I cough awkwardly. “D-do you drink every- everyday?” I don’t remember the last time I was this nervous around Mateo. I’m not even meeting his eyes.

“Why do you ask?” He’s still avoiding the question.

“I’ll tell you my thing if you answer my question.” For the record, I had fully intended to avoid giving an explanation for my thing. It’s not really something I like to think about. It’s something I haven’t talked about since I met Morrie.

I look up at Mateo. During the entire conversation, I can feel Mateo’s eyes burning the side of my face as I avert from his gaze.

“I don’t drink every day but probably five days a week.” Mateo rubs a hand over his face. “I shouldn’t drink so much, I know. But when you’ve been hiding since fourteen ...” Mateo pauses and scratches the back of his head. “It’s much easier to just down a bottle of vodka instead of coming out to your father.” Mateo lets out a sigh. He finally looks over at me. “Wanna tell me your thing?”

“No, not really,” I tell him.

“That’s not fair! I told you mine.” Mateo pouts. Honestly, even being the older one in the relationship, he’s the one constantly throwing fits.

“Fine. Well, it all started when I was still living on the streets. Basically, before I was on my medicine. I would find other ways to dull pain. Sex with random dudes, razor blades on my skin ...” I stopped looking at him about halfway through my explanation. “And, one day, I overdid it. I was feeling extra self-destructive, and I went into the bathroom of a restaurant. I was crying in one of the stalls. I couldn’t get it to stop bleeding.

Morrie opened the door to find me. I was a mess in the stall. I was young, fourteen or so, maybe younger. He took me to the hospital. He paid for them to patch me up. Then he let me crash in one of the spare apartments. Morrie made me swear I wouldn’t do it again. He helped me put a down payment on my apartment so I could get off the streets. Morrie saved my life.” I hadn’t noticed I was crying until I felt Mateo’s thumb brush a tear off my cheek. He pulls me into a hug, and I cry into his shoulder.

I am monumentally fucked up. I am glad I have someone now that I can be with when I feel like this. Someone who isn’t here to judge me or offer answers. Mateo’s just here to make me feel better at this moment.

The tattoo lady coughs. “Boys, we’re all set if you’re ready to pay.”

I pull away from Mateo, wiping my eyes with the back of my hand before examining the wet mark on Mateo’s shirt.

“Yeah. Sorry,” I mumble.

Mateo grabs my hand and stands up. He walks with me to the front of the shop. I sniffle, trying to stop my nose from running.

Mateo hands the woman his card. “Oh shit. I didn’t bring any money.”

“Like I was gonna let you pay anyway.” Mateo laughs.

“That’s fair.”

Mateo and I thank the artists, and I drag Mateo to look at the artwork before leaving.

“Now what?” I ask, giving Mateo’s hand a squeeze.

“Now, we go home and get some sleep. We’re going to The Times tomorrow.”

“And if you leave here, you leave me broken shattered I lie.”

- Franz Ferdinand

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Gay Shit and Kitty Cats

It's still pitch-black outside when I begin to stir. I sit up and feel around my bed. All I'm met with is a slightly warm spot where someone was at some point during the night.

Mateo is gone.

I throw the blankets off of me and pull on a shirt from the ground. It hangs off my shoulders, not fitting me well, which leads me to believe it is one of Mateo's.

The floor creaks as I walk out into the hallway and eventually to the living room. I can see the back of Mateo's head from behind the couch. His hair is adorably messy. I make my way over to him. He must have heard my footsteps because Mateo turns to look at me in surprise. He is holding an unopened bottle of vodka in his hands.

"What are you doing up?" Mateo asks as if I'm the one sitting in the living room without a single light on.

I move to the front of the couch and sit next to him. "I should be asking you that." I eye the bottle in his hands. "Are you having a drink?"

Mateo scoffs. "Well, I was going to. Then all I could think about was how your voice sounded when you asked me

how often I drink. And then ...” He lets out a sigh. “Then I couldn’t even bring myself to open up the bottle.” Mateo sets the bottle down on the table, looking down at it angrily.

“There’s nothing wrong with drinking, Mateo. You just have to do it in moderation. For instance, using cups rather than just drinking right out of the bottle.” I hop up to go get two glasses.

“Finn, what are you doing?” Mateo turns himself, bracing an arm on the back of the couch to glance at me.

“Getting glasses, of course,” I tell him as I grab two coffee cups out of the cabinet. One of them is pink with a cat face and ears on it. The other has white cursive letters that says “Gay Shit”.

“Would you prefer gay shit or a kitty cat?” I ask him, flopping down on the couch next to him.

“Gay shit, obviously.” Mateo laughs, taking the white cup from me.

“Pour me a drink?” I ask, grabbing the vodka bottle off the coffee table and offering it to him.

Mateo looks up at me, wearing a look of utter confusion. “I thought you didn’t want me drinking.”

A blush covers my cheeks. “I never said that.” He raises an eyebrow. “I just asked how much you did it. I don’t care if you drink. Everyone has things they do to relax.”

Mateo leans close to me, causing my grip on the vodka to go lax as I let the bottle fall on the couch. “What do you do to relax?”

He grabs my chin and tilts my head away from the bottle I was looking at intently.

“Oh, I-I read m-manga,” I stutter out. I can’t tell if I’m stuttering because I just admitted to reading manga or if he’s making me nervous by holding my face like this.

Mateo releases my chin, leans back, and lets out a controlled breath before breaking out in laughter. “Oh my god.” He runs a hand over his face. “I’m dating a weeb!” Mateo starts to laugh again.

“Whatever,” I grumble, crossing my arms against my chest.

He grabs me by my wrist as I stand up. Mateo pulls me into his lap and nuzzles his face into my neck.

“Mateo,” I squeal as he bites down on my neck. “We have to meet the New York Times people early tomorrow!” I groan and he begins to leave dark hickeys at the base of my neck.

“Well, I could leave.” Mateo pulls off my shirt and starts to kiss down my chest.

“Mateo, I don’t wanna be sore,” I whine, tangling my hands in his hair.

“Fine,” Mateo says as he pulls away. He pushes me off of him and gets up to go to bed. “You coming?”

“Why’d you stop?”

“You said you didn’t want to be sore.” Mateo shrugs, knowing full well what I want.

“I change my mind.”

* * *

“Fuck,” I grumble as I shuffle to the kitchen to swallow two Advils and my meds.

Mateo comes up from behind me and snakes his hands around my waist, pulling me close to him.

“Ooh. Is my baby sore from getting dicked down last night?” Mateo teases.

“Yes. You went too rough,” I complain, crossing my arms across my chest.

“Oh, but you like it rough.” Mateo pulls my hair back to turn my head toward him so that he can place a kiss on my lips.

“Shut up,” I mumble as my face flushes a deep shade of red.

“If I do recall, last night went something like ‘Fuck Mateo. Harder, harder!’” Mateo laughs, letting me go so he can make a pot of coffee.

“God, why are you like this!” I bury my face in my hands.

“Ah, you love me.” Mateo laughs as the coffee brews.

“Yes, I do love you.” I smile as I watch my favorite person in the world pour two cups of coffee.

“I love you too.” He smirks, sipping from the Gay Shit cup. “Hey, what time are we supposed to be at the coffee shop to meet Liam?”

“Eight thirty. Why?” I ask, sipping my coffee.

“It’s eight fifteen,” Mateo tells me.

“Oh shit.” I set the coffee cup down on the counter a little too roughly. I rush to our room and throw on a shirt that looks pretty professional but not like I’m trying too hard. I wiggle into some jeans and hear a giggle from Mateo. “What?” I ask, feeling a little flushed as I button up my jeans.

“It’s nothing. You’re just funny trying to wiggle into those skinny jeans. They’re probably not as tight as your ass, though,” Mateo smirks as my face flushes for the tenth time this morning.

“Why are you so vulgar all the time?” I groan. I pick one of his shirts from the dresser and chuck it at him. “Get dressed. We’re gonna be late if you don’t move your ass, and stop concerning yourself with mine.”

“Yeah, but you have a sweet ass.”

“The only way to get what you want in this world is through hard work.”

- Tiana

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Michael in the Bathroom

If looks could kill, I'm sure I would've dropped dead by now. The woman about two tables away from me is staring daggers at me. I keep bouncing my knee up and down, trying to calm my nerves. The noise this action is creating is disturbing the woman who is attempting to enjoy her fucking pumpkin spice latte.

I break my silent staring contest with the woman so that I can direct my attention to someone who deserves it: Mateo. He sets down my hot chocolate in front of me. It is in a white mug that is not nearly as cute as the ones I have at home.

Usually, I would have ordered coffee or at least tea, but I had had one this morning before we left, and I do not need to hype up my anxiety anymore.

I have this gut feeling that Liam will be significantly more attractive than I am. Once Mateo sees how much of a downgrade I am, he will go crawling back to Liam.

"What time is it?" I ask Mateo while gripping my coffee like it's gonna run away from the table.

"Quarter to nine. Don't worry. Liam's always late. I thought he might be a little more punctual given that this is a

business meeting.” Mateo shrugs, settling into his seat and raising his mug to his lips.

“Well, then why did we have to rush when we were running late? We even arrived five minutes early.” I huff. I don’t like this Liam guy. He can’t even show up on time. Yet, for some reason, I feel like no matter how late he shows up, he could still probably steal Mateo from me.

“Relax. We’re close to the coffee shop. Liam might not be.” Mateo is less nervous than I am, and it isn’t even my father we are exposing. Mine’s a dead asshole, while his father is a living asshole.

The bell on the door chimes as someone enters. I turn to see who it is. The person who enters is taller than me but not quite as tall as Mateo. His hair is a golden shade of blond that looks natural. The man’s eyes are hidden behind expensive-looking sunglasses.

He looks exactly like someone who would be dating Mateo. I do not. This must be it. This is the place where our story ends.

I have never been the main character.

I have been the detour.

I am the character that the main character, Mateo, references in later parts of the novel.

I am the one he will reminisce about, but never would he wonder what might have been.

I will be the crazy ex-boyfriend who got too possessive. I guess I will forever be immortalized in Mateo’s memory as the boyfriend that was too poor, too clingy, and too desperate.

And as these toxic thoughts swim through my brain, poking at my insecurities, the man turns to reveal a shorter man clinging to his arm.

The shorter one has his hair in tiny braids with golden beads tied up in a bun atop his head. His eyelids are dusted

with a beautiful shade of metallic gold. His dark lips shine with clear gloss.

He waves at us excitedly. “Mateo!” The man who I presume is Liam yells.

“Hey, Liam!” Mateo calls with a laugh. He stands up and greets the short man with a hug.

The pair sits down with us. The man I had first thought was Liam looks less than ecstatic to be here. Maybe he feels the same way toward Mateo as I feel toward Liam.

“Who’s this cutie?” Liam leans in to pinch my cheek, a gesture that both confuses and annoys me. Especially since he appears to be shorter than me.

“This is Finn, my boyfriend.” Mateo rests his hand on mine, sending a smile my way before directing his attention back to Liam.

“Well, this is Michael, my boyfriend.”

I can’t tell if this statement from Liam is meant to be a power play or not, but it seems to be.

Mateo juts out a hand and offers it to Michael. Michael looks down at it and hesitates before taking it. Once he does, he shakes it in a manner that I assume is also a power move.

I cough awkwardly and offer my hand to Liam, who shakes it much more enthusiastically than his boyfriend. I smile kindly at him.

I overreacted. This guy is so kind that I feel silly for having such ill thoughts about him in the first place.

“Mateo, let’s see those pictures from the gay bar. We don’t really need evidence of the ...” Liam pauses for a second, deciding how to phrase his words. “Other incident you mentioned.”

Mateo pulls out his phone and shows Liam the pictures.

“So, how did you two meet?” The question comes from Michael, and it’s directed at me.

“Oh, um, w-we go to the same school.” I stumble over my words. I have a hard time talking to people who intimidate me. Everything about this man screams ‘better than me’.

“Nice. Liam went there, just graduated last year, but he had The Times trying to get him to work there since junior year,” Michael brags.

What a cocky asshole, bragging about achievements that aren’t even his.

Liam hits him lightly on the shoulder. “He’s exaggerating. I graduated my junior year and was applying for a job there for the entirety of my junior year. The only reason that I have a job there is because I sucked off one of the ‘straight’ hiring agents.” Liam laughs, putting air quotes around the word straight.

“I’m gonna go to the bathroom. I’ll be right back, babe.” Michael leans down and kisses Liam on the cheek before disappearing.

Liam must have sent the pictures to himself from Mateo’s phone because he seems to be looking intently at his phone screen.

“Do you mind if I get a recorded statement for my article? Just something along the lines of ‘My father’s a piece of homophobic garbage but is secretly very gay’. Please.” Liam places his phone on the center of the table.

“Sure.” Mateo glances over at me, looking nervous.

“Okay. If you don’t mind, just say the date and your name before you start,” Liam says.

I grab Mateo’s hand, giving it a light squeeze. We watch as Liam clicks the button on the voice memos app to start recording.

“My name is Mateo Quesada, the son of Arthur Holmes, the man who’s running for senator. He built his

campaign on the belief that homosexuality is a sin, but he failed to mention that he frequents gay bars and is on Grindr.”

“The only way to have a life is to commit to it like crazy.”

- Angelina Jolie

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Rocky Horror Picture Show

The account Mateo gives on the specifics of his personal life is short and to the point. At some point, Michael comes back from the bathroom, looking bored still as he pulls his phone out of his pocket. The entire time, Mateo's grip on my hand never falters.

Liam goes over what exactly he'll be writing in the article. After that, he says, "It shouldn't be long before it's released. Normally, it would take a little over a week for me to do a piece like this, but, for you, I'll expedite it." Liam punctuates his statement with a wink.

"Thanks, Liam. I really appreciate it." Mateo gives him a sweet smile, as I squeeze his hand.

"It was so nice to meet you, Liam." I smile at Liam. The whole interaction goes a lot better than I had expected. I'd thought I would leave this coffee shop a single, sobbing mess.

"Oh, it was my pleasure, Finn. We have to hang out sometime. Give me your number?" Liam leans in close as if his proximity would enhance the quality of the conversation.

"Sure." I rattle off my phone number.

“So, when do you think the article will be out?” Mateo asks, leaning back and letting go of my hand to stretch an arm over the back of my chair.

“Tonight at the earliest. Two days at the most. It all depends on how I’m feeling. The vibes are pretty good today, but that could change.” Liam shrugs.

“Babe, we gotta go.” Michael rests his hand on Liam’s shoulder.

“Right! We’re going to see a movie. Do you two want to come with?” Liam asks, perking up in his seat excitedly.

I look over at Mateo with a smile spread across my lips. I don’t know if I am looking for approval or if I am looking for confirmation.

“Sure,” Mateo says.

“What movie?” I ask, tilting my head to the side.

“Oh, they’re playing an older movie. What’s it called again?” Liam asks Michael. He rests a hand on Liam’s shoulder to draw his attention away from his phone.

I am not a fan of Michael. Maybe it’s the name. It’s more likely his demeanor. His I’m-better-than-you attitude.

“Something like Rocky Horror. I think it’s a horror movie.” Michael shrugs.

Liam and I both burst at the seams with laughter. “Oh, Michael, such a sorry excuse for a gay.”

My eyes start welling up with tears as I struggle to catch my breath.

“What’s Rocky Horror?” Mateo asks.

Liam and I both stand up and grab our boyfriends’ hands.

I say, “You’re going to love it.”

At the same, Liam says, “You’ll see.”

* * *

“I can’t believe you made me watch that,” Mateo grumbles as we drive back home.

“I can’t believe they played the Fox version after the original. That movie is the greatest tragedy of the twenty-first century.” I huff, crossing my arms across my chest.

“Oh, come on. It wasn’t that bad,” Mateo says, looking over at me with a smirk.

I have no idea how Mateo can smirk about the Fox production of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. It was not that bad, but it was far from adequate. The woman from *Victorious* and the man from *Liv and Maddie* are the last people I would choose to play Brad and Janet, not to mention that they did the elevator entrance using a goddamn crane.

I digress.

“You’re incorrect,” I tell Mateo as he parks.

“Whatever,” Mateo mumbles. He rolls his eyes at me before stepping out of the car. He moves over to open my door for me.

“That definitely didn’t sound like, ‘Sorry, Finn. You’re always right. How dare I doubt you like that.’” Mateo laughs at me as he holds the lobby door open for me.

I scan the lobby to see Morrie sitting behind his desk with a small cardboard box in front of him.

“Hey, boys, a package came for you.” Morrie taps the side of the box with his pen for emphasis.

“Thanks?” I turn to Mateo. “What did you order?”

Mateo just smirks at me. “You’ll see.”

Mateo all but runs up the stairs, leaving me trailing slowly behind him. “Will you slow down?” I complain.

“Nope. Don’t you want to find out what’s in the box?” Mateo asks as he waits at the door that opens into the hallway.

“Fine.” I groan, holding the box in one hand and the stair railing in the other as I quicken my pace.

It actually took the same amount of time if the two of us had walked at a decent pace to reach the door.

I set the box on the kitchen table. Mateo comes up behind me, snaking his arms around my waist and pulling me close to him.

“Any ideas what’s in the box?” Mateo whispers against my neck as he begins to pepper me with kisses.

“I swear to god if it’s something gross, I’ll murder you and make it look like an accident,” I warn as I open the box and move the tissue paper aside.

I gasp as I look down upon the most beautiful object I have ever seen. It’s a crown.

Mateo takes it from my hands and places it on my head before turning me around to face him. He captures my mouth in a passionate kiss. I hear the sound of a cardboard box hitting the ground, then I’m pressed against the kitchen table with my hands pinned above my head.

“You’re so beautiful,” Mateo mutters before beginning to leave dark hickeys on my neck.

“Mateo.” I groan, fisting my hands in his hair.

He lets out a throaty growl as he rips off my shirt. The buttons on it scatters across the floor in the most satisfying way possible.

Within seconds, we’re both shirtless, and I have lost my bottoms. I let out a soft gasp as Mateo presses one finger against my entrance. I grab Mateo’s shoulder with one hand and the crown with another.

It’s not long before Mateo’s pants are off as well.

“Wait,” I breathe out. “I want to be on top.”

“You wanna top?” Mateo asks in disbelief. “I am not doing that.”

“No, dipshit.” I laugh.

I flip us over. Mateo has his back flat on the table, and I’m straddling him. With one hand holding the crown in place and the other on Mateo’s chest, I slide down on him.

“Fuck,” Mateo murmurs, gripping my hips as if his life depends on it.

This must be perfection. Any life other than this is not one worth living.

“People often say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and I say that the most liberating thing about beauty is realizing you are the beholder.” - Salma Hayek

EPILOGUE

Chapter One

My heart is about to fall out of my chest. My heart is about to fall to the ground, still beating. The trash can sitting next to me contains this morning's breakfast.

"Why are you so nervous, Finn?" Sky asks, pulling up a chair beside me. This kid looks prettier than I do today.

"Yeah, that man is literally head over heels for you," Jade says as she pours Liam his third or fourth mimosa.

Liam takes a sip of his drink before telling me, "And if he does get cold feet, I'll cut his motherfucking balls off." The gold highlighter on his dark skin is doing wonders for him.

"Yeah, you're right." I sigh, running a hand through my hair. Over the years, my hair had grown to be fluffy and long. It's way down to my shoulders now. Liam put tiny little braids throughout my hair and is the one who convinced me not to cut my hair off.

The tux I have had been picked out with Liam. It's charcoal gray with a black tie. The entire time we shopped, I tried to get Liam to tell me what color Mateo had bought so we could match. However, the chatterbox known as Liam decided that then would be the best time to practice silence.

“Are you guys sure I look okay?” I ask, standing up and fidgeting with my tie.

“I’d bang you,” Jade says.

“Jade, you’re in a very committed monogamous relationship!” Sky yells.

“So?” Jade questions, putting a hand on her hip.

“With me!” Sky huffs, crossing their arms across their chest.

“I know.” Jade laughs, pulling Sky into a hug.

I made Jade my maid of honor, Liam my best man, and Sky my person of interest. Although they had initially requested to be referred to as the “bad bitch” of the wedding, Sky claimed the only other acceptable thing would be mentioning them like a suspect in a homicide case.

“You guys are so cute,” Liam coos.

Liam hadn’t really had anything going in the love department since he broke up with Michael. None of us had enjoyed the company of Michael. But, for a while, he made Liam happy, and that was all that mattered. Then when he didn’t anymore, Liam decided he was over romance. He had elected to become the single gay aunt, although Mateo and I weren’t even sure if we wanted kids.

Carolina had not been happy when we told her that. Now, she is standing at the altar, ready to marry us off. Neither of us wants the bishop to perform the ceremony, so Carolina decided she would get certified and do it herself. A big reason why I don’t want a bishop to marry us is that I don’t believe in God, and I think religion is a scam for money. I respect the people who devote their lives to the church, and I think they do a lot of good, but there is no way in hell that we are paying \$250.00 for a man in a stupid hat to marry us.

Morrie waits next to her, squeezing a handkerchief in his right hand. Morrie is on temporary leave from jail to be here. This time, he told me why he was in jail. He’s there for

beating the shit out of his daughter's abusive ex-husband. This is why the judge gave him temporary leave to be here.

The doors to the room flung open to show Mateo and Jade's abuela wearing a gorgeous sundress.

"It's time," she squeals. Her Hispanic accent is thick. Although she had moved from Mexico to America in her twenties, her accent never disappeared. "Mijo, you look so handsome," she says as she comes over and pinches my cheeks.

I had thought that Jade was the biggest shipper of my relationship with Mateo, but I was wrong. The moment I met abuela, she wanted a wedding date. So Mateo and I had thrown out a date, June 14th of the upcoming year. We ended up sticking to that date.

The summer sun shines through the windows, making a perfect atmosphere. We are renting out a winery in rural New York. It's close to the apartment we are renting together in New York City. It didn't take long for us to get out of the tiny apartment I had in Rochester. We had lived in New York for our entire lives and hadn't really seen a reason to leave.

There is one ironic thing about our wedding destination. Mateo had stopped drinking shortly after my confrontation about the frequency of his drinking. I told him repeatedly that he didn't have to quit, but he said he wanted to, for me. I had also said that we shouldn't get married at a winery since he didn't drink anymore, but the scenery is so pretty that I eventually agreed.

Sky made their way over to me. They had decided they would be the person walking me down the aisle. Even if my father had been alive, he wouldn't have been invited. They look beautiful in their light blue pants suit. Liam and Jade are also wearing some variations of light blue. Jade had opted for a cute dress, and Liam went with a tux.

Jade and Sky had picked out matching white daisies and scattered them throughout their hair. I had a white daisy

sticking out of the pocket of my tux instead of a pocket square. Even Morrie has a daisy in his hair for the occasion.

“Let’s go,” I say.

Abuela, Jade, and Liam all walk down the aisle first. I grip Sky’s arm like I am holding on for dear life.

“Relax, Finn,” Sky whispers as they push open the doors that lead outside.

The wedding is small, mostly attended by Mateo’s maternal side of the family. The only persons I had brought to the wedding is Sky and Morrie, but the venue is still packed full. Everyone rises from their seats and directs their attention to me.

However, I am only focused on Mateo.

He stands in a black tux and gray tie that matches my suit next to Carolina. Carolina is wearing a deep purple dress that ends at her knees and is in the same style as Jade’s.

On his left is Liam. On the other side, where I’m supposed to stand, is Jade smiling brightly. The aisle is scattered with daisies.

One time, I had said that perfection was just being with Mateo. I was wrong.

Being with Mateo forever is the true definition of perfection.

Sky leads me to the altar, where I now stand on shaking legs.

“Hi,” I whisper to Mateo.

“Hi. You look beautiful, Greenie,” Mateo whispers back.

* * *

“We are gathered here today to witness the joining of two souls, Mateo and Finn. Two boys who deserve absolute happiness more than they think they do.” Carolina pauses for dramatic effect. “Mateo Andres Quesada, do you take Finn Willow Green to be your husband through sickness and health? Do you promise to love him with all of your heart for as long as you both shall live?” Carolina has tears of happiness welling in her eyes.

“I do,” Mateo says with no hesitation.

“And do you, Finn Willow Green, take Mateo Andres Quesada to be your husband through sickness and in health? Do you promise to love him with all of your heart for as long as you both shall live?”

“I do.”

“Who would like to say their vows first?”

“I will.” Mateo pulls a piece of paper out of his suit pocket. “Finn, you are the best thing that has ever happened to me. You changed my life in ways I could never have imagined. You gave me love. You gave me support. Most importantly, you gave me the strength to grow better happier everyday. I will be eternally grateful for you, Greenie. I would love to be your king for all of eternity. I love you, Finn.”

Silent tears stream down my cheeks. I had memorized my vows because I knew that I would tear up and not be able to read. “Mateo. I told you once that I would love you until the sun explodes. I know now that this is not true. I will love you long after the sun explodes. You are my king. I want to spend every day with you for as long as we live and then I want to spend the afterlife with you too. I never have and never will love anyone as much as I love you.”

Mateo has tears falling down his cheeks as well.

“That was beautiful, boys,” Carolina whispers.

The microphone doesn’t pick it up, so the only people who can hear it are Mateo and me.

“By the power vested in me by the state of New York,
I now pronounce you married! Now, kiss!”

I will forever love the way she phrased that.

**“I love you even more than I am annoyed by you. Which is
a lot.”**

- Unknown

Do you like lgbt romance stories?
Here are samples of other stories
you might enjoy!

DANTE CULLEN



THE

FORBIDDEN

CHAPTER ONE

ZAC

“I’m sorry Zac, it’s just...it’s no longer working out between us.”

He’d said those words—finally. I should have been happy, but I wasn’t. I should have been angry, but I couldn’t even muster that. They say anger is easier than happiness, and that people are more inclined to show anger than happiness.

But not me.

At that moment, I surprisingly didn’t feel anything. I didn’t do anything either. I just stood there, looking at the guy whom I’d given my heart to.

“Zac, say something,” he said, almost pleading.

What did he want me to say? “*Well, we can start working out. I can register us for a gym membership. That should be enough, yeah?*”

I couldn’t say that out loud. There was no point anyway. I couldn’t pretend I didn’t understand him. It would only make the situation more awkward and tense than it already was.

“Bruce?” I whispered.

Just saying that name suddenly filled my eyes with tears. It was as if it was only then that his words sank in. The ice was melting, and my cheeks were getting wetter by the second. I hated it. I hated this feeling. I wanted nothing but to be numb again, but there was no going back. He was breaking up with me.

I wish I could say I hadn't expected it, but I had. I just wished that knowledge could have helped soothe the pain.

I watched the shocked look on his face at what I said. He was going to say I was delusional. He was going to say I was lying. The least he could do after breaking my heart was not lie to me.

“What?” He had the audacity to ask.

“Are you—are you leaving me for Bruce?” I asked, my voice breaking as the tears trailed down my cheeks.

He shifted uncomfortably, and his eyes darted to and fro. He couldn't decide whether to flee or to stay and answer my questions.

I wasn't waiting for the answer, because I already knew. I knew the things that went on behind my back. He'd been cheating on me with Bruce Carlisle for the past two months. My heart broke when I found out, but I stayed, hoping we'd fix whatever was wrong with us—with *me*. I tried to become the best boyfriend I could ever be. I made time for him, and he had his way with everything.

He would cancel dinner plans at the last minute just because he didn't “feel” like it; he'd stand me up countless times because he “ran late at gym”, and, when it came to making plans, his input was barely there.

I didn't argue with him about the missed calls that he never returned, or the incoherent explanations he offered to excuse his behavior. I did my best to understand him. Clearly, my passive approach hadn't worked the way I thought it would.

“What? No, Zac. I don’t know where you got that,” he said.

I felt a thud in my heart. Even after breaking it to me, he wasn’t willing to be honest. I’d been faithful to him, and this was how he was repaying me?

He thrust his hands in his sweater pockets.

“I’m sorry, Zac,” he said, turning to leave.

“I know, Chase. I know about you and him. I’ve known for a long time,” I said, a strangled sob escaped my lips as tears started to fall on my face.

Chase turned, and his face fell. “How’d you find out?” he asked, finally admitting.

“I saw the messages. I saw you together in his room,” I said.

“Zac, I never meant to hurt you. Things happened, and it...it got out of control and—”

“What is wrong with me?” I asked firmly.

“That’s unfair,” he said.

“Is it? You cheated on me for two months and still pretended we were okay. You lied to my face whenever I ask where you’ve been. You lied to my face about me being the *only* one. How is it unfair to ask you what’s wrong with me? I want to know what is it with me that made you not only cheat on me but *lie to me over and over again!*” I demanded, my voice rising a few decibels.

“Zac, I’m not doing this!” he spat back, his voice rising to match mine.

I knew I shouldn’t have pushed to find out, but I just needed to find out something—anything. Because truth be told, I’d been nothing but a good boyfriend. I didn’t deserve to be dumped. I didn’t deserve to be cheated on. I tried everything I could to make him happy.

But it wasn't just that. I *loved* him. Dating Chase was a dream come true.

I had a crush on him for a long time before I gathered the courage to ask him out. We met during our first year in college, and I spent the whole school year crushing on him. We saw each other a lot because we stayed in the same building on the same floor and started hanging out towards the end. I asked him out at the beginning of our second year, and we became a couple. We'd been dating for about a year, but all along, he'd been spending the last two months cheating on me, if not more.

"I just want to know, Chase," I said softly.

"Zac, I...", he said, a bit hesitant, before heaving a sigh. "I never loved you."

My heart stopped. Everything came crashing down yet again. I shook my head, refusing to believe what he was saying to me.

He let out a breath loudly. "I knew you liked me, and I felt sorry for you. Bruce and I, we started out way before us. I mean, I liked him, but he was unwilling to come out. I said yes to you just to spite him, but I couldn't stay away from him."

I had opened up a can of worms. Each word he said was like a knife to my heart, stabbing me over and over and over again. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. *Could someone really be that cruel?*

"I didn't mean to hurt you," he said.

"You used me!"

"This is why I didn't want to tell you," he said, starting to walk away.

"And you think that makes it all better?!"

He shook his head and walked away from me. I watched him leave as memories of our time together filled my brain. Watching him leave was all I could do. There was no hope of saving our relationship anymore.

Chase didn't love me.

He had only been pretending. He lied about everything.

Our whole relationship was a lie.

The door closed. Fresh tears made their way onto my face. I closed my eyes, as if that could stop the tears. It couldn't. Neither could it stop the pain that seared through my heart, eliminating everything in its path.

I fell to the floor as Chase's words swam around.

"I never loved you."

So, what did those *I love yous* he had uttered mean? What did our lovemaking mean to him? Had he wished it was Bruce instead of me? Was Bruce the only person he saw when he was with me?

They say real men don't cry. I guess I'm not a real man then, because I was crying to my heart's content.

I heard some vibration and a beeping sound in the room. Judging from the sound, it came from the bed. It wasn't my phone because mine was in my pocket.

Chase had left his phone in the room, which wasn't unusual as we shared the room. It was my suggestion when we returned for the second year, and it had been convenient. Now, it was just going to be awkward and unpleasant.

I ignored his phone for a few seconds, wondering how it was going to be like staying together in one place but not together. It was going to be torture for me. He would bring Bruce over, for sure. He would try to be considerate and ask to have the room for himself to study or something, but my mind was only going to wonder if he was with Bruce.

His phone vibrated again.

I got up from the floor and followed the vibration to the bed—my bed. My mind temporarily went back to the

moment he'd put the phone there. We were kissing then before he decided he was ready to break my heart.

His phone lit up. The line "Two New Messages" splashed on the screen.

An insane thought came into my head, and before I knew it, Chase's phone was in my hand. I chastised myself. I couldn't open his messages; they were private.

Even though my mind protested, I found myself clicking "Open."

Both of the messages were from Bruce. My heart sank as I read each one.

Have you told him yet? You've been in there forever.

Come to my room afterwards. I have something for you. Jackson is out. Hurry up.

I felt fresh tears graze my cheeks. Every time I calmed down, my wound would open again. It felt worse than finding out Chase was cheating on me. Back then I had hoped one day he would stop, that one day he would see that I was enough for him. I realized now, with a burning ache in my heart, that was something he was never going to see; the pain gripped me with its rawness, scorching me.

I put Chase's phone on the bed and realized something, which comforted me. If Bruce sent Chase a message that meant Chase wasn't with him at that moment. It was silly of me to think that, but I just wanted anything to lessen the pain.

I sat on my bed, wondering what on earth I was going to do. I felt lost.

My phone rang. I took it out of my pocket and looked at the Caller ID. It was my mom. I didn't feel like answering,

but I didn't want to make her worry either.

I cleared my throat, erasing any trace of me crying, and answered.

"Hello?"

"Hello, honey. How are you?" she asked, her voice filled with excitement.

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"You don't sound fine," she said, her excited voice now immediately replaced with concern.

"I just have a cold," I lied.

"My poor baby, do you have medication?"

"Uh, Mom, it's just a cold. I'll be fine."

She sighed. "All right. Are you excited about spring break?"

I shrugged. "Uh...I guess."

"I know this is short notice, but I really hope you don't have any plans. I want you to meet someone," she said.

Chase and I had planned to spend spring break at his family vacation house with some of his relatives. I guess that's no longer going to happen. I hadn't yet decided on what I was going to do—we just literally broke up minutes ago!—but maybe going home wasn't a bad idea.

"Uh, I guess it's serious between you and Mark?" I asked.

She giggled. "I think so. He wants to meet you, Jessica, and Noah."

"I'll be home, Mom," I said.

"Thank you, Zachary. You don't know how much this means to me," she said.

"How does Jess feel?"

“You know your sister. She’s throwing a tantrum. I don’t think I’ll survive it this time,” she replied.

“Don’t worry, I’ll talk to her. She’ll be fine.”

The way I replied confidently when, really, I felt like breaking apart, was amazing, even to me.

“Thanks, honey. I love you, Zac,” she said. She seemed a lot more at ease now.

“I love you too, Mom,” I said, and she hung up.

My life was a mess, and I was assuring someone else I’d fix theirs. It was laughable how I thought I could do that, when I couldn’t do it to myself. But I needed a distraction, and meeting Mark couldn’t have come at a better time.

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[The Forbidden](#)

on Amazon.

Enemies WITH Benefits



LAVENDER FIELDS

CHAPTER ONE

Mistakes Are Made

Being drunk is fun.

Making out with someone whilst drunk is fun.

Being too drunk to remember who you were making out with whilst drunk is fun.

Basically, Colby Williams had a lot of fun at a party the night before. Granted he didn't remember anything that had happened at the party, but he was pretty sure that he had a great time. He must've impressed a very lucky lady last night, if the hickeys on his neck were anything to go by.

That feeling was instantly ruined the morning after, due to both his hangover and the anonymous text message he was sent.

Colby had never seen the number before, so he assumed it was spam. It was only out of his curiosity that an image had been sent instead of a message that caused him to open it.

"Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit," Colby whispered to himself in a locked stall in the boy's locker room. He was supposed to be at the morning football practice by now, but the picture stole all of his attention. That couldn't be Colby in the

picture, could it? No, no, no, it had to be photoshopped. There was no way in hell that Colby would ever kiss *him*. Actually, he would never kiss a boy. At all. Never!

Not because he was homophobic or anything. Everyone was welcome to their own proclivities, that kind of stuff just wasn't for Colby. However, if one was to hypothetically put him in a situation where he would have to have sex with another guy, then he would not sleep with *him* of all people. Most likely, he'd go for a nice twink or something, perhaps a twunk. Were twunks a thing? Could he get a twank? He'd have to brush up on his gay terminology later.

None of that was the point.

He stared down in horror at his phone. A random number had sent him a picture of two guys making out. Colby thought it must've been some type of gay porn spam that his friends had signed him up for as a joke, but something was rather familiar about it. Colby had looked at the photo and thought, *I have that exact same shirt*. In fact, he was certain he'd worn it to the party yesterday. The world is full of funny coincidences like that. Only, there were one too many funny coincidences in that picture. How funny that the guy in the picture was wearing the same stressed jeans that Colby had worn yesterday. What a coincidence that the guy in the picture also had the same shoes. How incredible that he had been sent a photo of a guy that looked exactly like him in every way possible. Hilarious!

However, under closer inspection, he realised it was him in the photo with none other than Ezra Dickinson.

It was difficult to discern exactly what was going on in the photo. The lighting was low and the surroundings around the two were dark apart from a window that had colourful strobe lights shining through it. They were outside of the party and an empty vodka bottle lay on the ground by Colby's feet. Ezra had one arm wrapped around Colby's waist and the other pinning Colby to the wall. Colby had his arms tightly wrapped

around Ezra's neck and a hand buried in Ezra's platinum blonde hair.

Now, this looked bad. Why, if a random person were to look at this photo, they might think that Ezra and Colby were kissing. That person would be wrong and they should feel very embarrassed for thinking such silly things.

Colby knew exactly what was going on here. It was very obvious from the closeness of their bodies and the intimacy of their touches. Such sensual interactions could only have one explanation. Clearly, they were huddling together for warmth. Everything made complete sense when he thought about it with that context. They were outside and Colby had been intoxicated that night, he must've stumbled outside and when he realised how cold it was, he grabbed the closest source of warmth—which was unfortunately Ezra—and snuggled up to it. Penguins did that all the time, so why couldn't Colby?

He'd often been called a birdbrain, so it made sense that he would think like a bird.

That answer made so much sense. Problem solved! Kind of ... a little ... not very much ... Okay, it made no sense at all.

If not the penguin answer, then what was going on in this picture?

Three major things bothered Colby about the photo:

One, who the hell took it?

Two, why the actual hell would Colby kiss Ezra of all people? Colby had hated Ezra with a passion for over a year now. He was just so full of himself because he was captain of the football team which meant he was the ultimate pussy-magnet and was the greatest guy EVER. Seriously, fuck that guy.

Three, why the actual fucking hell did Colby look like the submissive one in this picture! He had never been with a guy before but—theoretically—he was 99.9% sure he'd be the

top. Right? He was assertive, dominant, a true alpha male, and now Ezra was trying to take that away from him too? That fuelled Colby's anger more than anything else on his list possibly could.

"Colby? You alright in there, man? You've been on the toilet for like ten minutes now. Coach is getting pissed, get out here already," called Finley, Colby's best friend, the perfect person to ask the important question to.

Colby threw open the stall door, slamming it against the wall and screamed at Finley, "If I was in a gay relationship, I'd be the top! Right?"

Finley just stared back at Colby, unfazed by his outburst but surprised by the question. "Listen, man." Finley rested a gentle hand on Colby's shoulder. "You know I'll love you whether you're straight, gay, or a furry but no. You would not be the top, you're a bottom boy," he delivered the news as if he was a doctor giving Colby some really bad news.

"What are you on about! I am so a top! I'm going to prove it to you! Never ever call me bottom boy again! You're the bottom boy!" Colby cried back.

"Nope," said Finley. "You're the bottom. I bet you'd cry during sex."

"I would not!"

"I bet you'd ask for a hug or to hold their hand when they're about to put it in."

"I would not! I bet you ... you ... you would ... I bet ..." Come on, Colby, think of a comeback—a really good one that will shut him up.

Finley was about to retort when they were loudly interrupted.

"I bet you're both going to be real sorry if you don't get your scrawny asses out on the field. Now!"

The boys recoiled in shock as Coach Sally Clain screamed at them from the locker room door. At a glance she

was not a very scary woman. She was about five-foot-two, in her forties with a dirty blonde bob and she wore the school's blue tracksuit that was a little bit too big for her. But you would be a fool to underestimate this woman. After all, the shorter they are the closer they are to hell.

She had the lungs of a banshee and was cruel in her punishments. She wasn't the original coach. Her husband had been it before her, but he mysteriously quit a few months ago. Rumour had it that Coach Sally had broken his leg on purpose by dropping the one trophy the team had won under his management, because he was a terrible coach—which was true — and so she could also become coach instead. She knew the game of football inside and out.

Although, the rumours of her purposefully breaking her husband's leg were found to be untrue. Turns out the guy just really didn't like football as much as he thought he did, so he quit and handed the job over to his wife who actually liked the game and knew the rules.

“Now, boys, stop having a domestic and GET OUT THERE!” screamed Coach Clain.

Colby and Finley sprinted out of the toilets and onto the football field. That's when Colby saw him, Mr Kiss-you-at-a-party-and-ruin-your-day himself.

Ezra was leading some pretty intense warm-up drills in the centre of the field. His fair hair stuck to his forehead because of the sweat. His sun-kissed skin glowing in the morning light and his muscles clearly rippling underneath his skintight white pants and red shirt. What a dick.

Colby scowled at him before Ezra even noticed him.

“This is late. Even for you, Colby,” Ezra said. His voice was deep and gruff. The rest of the team snickered.

“I'm going to punch his perfect little face,” Colby said to Finley.

“Please don't. I don't need your parents accusing me of corrupting their precious baby boy again,” said Finley.

“Do they still hate you because we set off those fireworks when we were twelve? We’re seventeen now. Why are they still mad?” asked Colby.

“You tell me, man. They’re your parents.” Finley shuddered at the thought of Colby’s mother angry.

“Come on, guys! We’ve finished warm-ups so just get your gear on.” Ezra turned his head towards Colby. “Are you capable of doing that, Colby, or do you need some more time before you actually start doing anything?” said Ezra in his annoyingly nice voice and charming smile. It was a scam, the blond boy was a demon under all the niceties.

Colby shoved past Ezra, sending him a glare that was equally returned.

“You think you’re better than me, dickhead?” scoffed Colby.

“You haven’t done anything to challenge that idea, Colby,” said Ezra.

I’m going to kill him, Colby thought. I’m going to kill him for that stupid kiss and hide his body where no one will find it. That thought kept Colby smiling throughout the entirety of training.

* * *

Coach had kept Colby after practice was done and made him clear up all the kit and equipment the team had used. Finley got to go on time, because technically he had shown up on time and Coach said she felt bad for him always having to put up with Colby’s crap which was totally unfair. Finley loved dealing with Colby’s crap, and he was sure of it.

Ezra had talked to the coach after practice as well but not because he was in trouble, but for some other reason instead. *Always the little golden boy,* Colby thought.

When Colby had finally finished clearing up, he headed for the showers only to find Ezra already using one of them, the one that Colby always used. Colby's shower!

"Hey, dickhead!" Colby stormed. "Get out of *my* shower!"

Ezra just sighed and faced away from him. "Colby, there are plenty of other showers that you can use."

"Yeah, but that's the one I always use. Ask anyone."

"Well, no one else is here, so what are you going to do about it?" Ezra turned back around to Colby and held him down with a glare.

Colby tried to ignore the fact that Ezra was naked in the shower and barged into the cubicle that he was in. Ezra looked shocked that Colby had actually come in. *Got him!* Colby thought.

"You think you're all that? Bet you even think that you'd be the top and I'd be the bottom boy. Well, you're wrong!" Colby mocked, his voice laced with triumph.

"What are you talking abo—"

Ezra's sentence was cut off by Colby slamming his lips onto his. The kiss had taken Ezra by surprise as Colby managed to shove him against one of the walls of the shower. Both of them got drenched by the warm pouring water.

Ezra opened his mouth to object, but Colby shoved his tongue in before he even got the opportunity to speak. Colby didn't know why he did it or why he was enjoying it but he knew one thing, whatever this was, he was winning and he was the fucking top!

Colby figured Ezra must have picked up on that thought too as he turned the tables on Colby. He grabbed Colby's hands, flipped them round so now Colby was against the wall, and pinned his hands above his head.

Colby tried to stifle the moan that was rising in his throat. Ezra had gotten Colby in a firm grip, so all Colby could

do was battle Ezra's tongue for dominance. Ezra had the slight height advantage over Colby. He was six-foot-two whilst Colby was nearly six-foot-one. A fact that really annoyed Colby. Ezra was also stronger than Colby, but only by a little bit. If Colby showed up to practice regularly like goody two shoes over here, then he would be that strong too.

Colby's pants began to feel tighter and tighter as the kiss went on. He wasn't the only one either. Colby could feel Ezra inadvertently pressing his hard on against Colby's thigh.

Colby took a sneaky peak down. *Oh my god, that is big.* The intimidation passed quickly as Colby thought of the perfect idea to establish his top energy again. He slipped one of his hands from Ezra's grip and began to pump Ezra's cock.

It worked. Ezra stopped kissing Colby and let out a deep groan, the sound of Ezra's voice only tightening Colby's pants even more. It's not that Colby was finding Ezra attractive. No, no, no, no, no, that would be ridiculous. It was just nature taking over. Any man would get turned on by somebody moaning and writhing under their touch. Yeah, that was it.

Ezra began to bite and suck on Colby's neck and teased one of Colby's nipples with his hand. Colby was sure it would have no effect on him, because he was a guy after all. That stuff only worked on girls. He was wrong. Ezra gently pinched and rolled Colby's nipple in between his fingers causing shocks of ecstasy to go straight to his dick. Colby became a panting mess under Ezra's skillful touches. He wanted to start touching his own cock, but that would be admitting to Ezra that he was enjoying this and that was a sign of defeat.

Colby began to pump even faster, trying to prove a point. What that point was, even he wasn't sure anymore. Ezra's hand eventually left Colby's nipples and went to his pants instead. Colby would never admit it, but he had been hoping Ezra would start touching his dick too. It was aching

under the tight fabric of his pants, begging for some much needed attention.

Ezra pulled down his pants and removed Colby's hand from his cock, and he began pumping them together instead. Colby could've sworn he saw stars in that moment, the warmth radiating off.

Ezra's cock sent shivers up his spine as both their dicks leaked all over each other. His head rolled back in pleasure.

He couldn't hold it back anymore. He began to moan. It was embarrassing, but he couldn't hold the moans down any longer. He thought he was going to explode if he did.

"... ster ... aster ... ," whispered Colby.

"What?" asked Ezra.

Heat rose to Colby's cheeks, but since he figured that he was already in this situation, he may as well enjoy it as much as possible. "Faster. Do it faster."

Ezra smirked at the request but did as he was asked. He began to pump faster. Ezra leaned back in for a kiss and claimed Colby's mouth with his own. Colby tried to convince himself that he was doing all of this to assert his dominance but then his orgasm struck.

He grasped Ezra's shoulders and pulled him close, his body tensing and his legs trembling as he came all over Ezra's bare chest. Ezra came soon after and then they were left there in silence, leaning against the shower wall with the water no longer running. Colby's head rested under Ezra's chin as they both stood there, panting.

"Why? Why did you do that?" Ezra began to ask in between breaths but then Coach screamed in from the outside.

"You good-for-nothings better not still be in there! You're supposed to take a shower not start a fucking flood!"

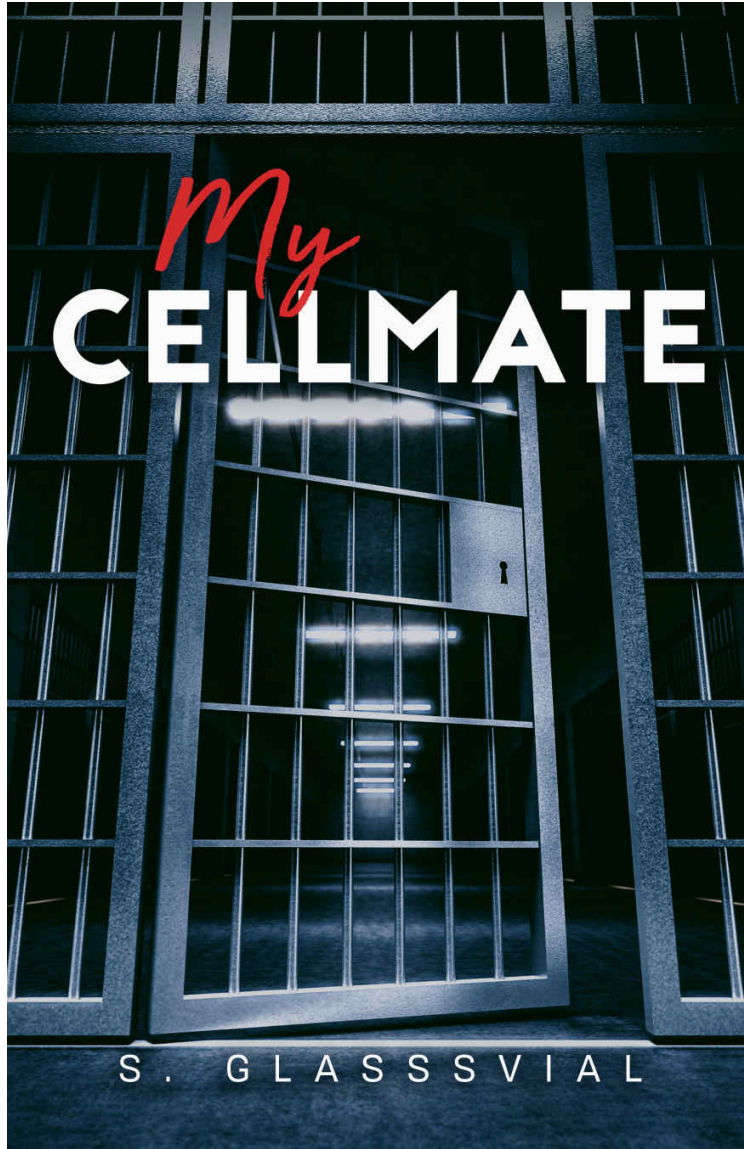
Colby suddenly realised the predicament he was in. He was wrapped up in Ezra's arms, soaking wet with his dick out.

“Hurry up, jackass,” spat Colby. He shoved Ezra away and stormed out, a firm blush still rested on his cheeks. He dried himself off, changed his clothes, and left, repeatedly asking himself in his head, *What have I done?*

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My
CELLMATE

S . G L A S S V I A L

CHAPTER ONE

The day after my eighteenth birthday, I was no longer able to stay in the juvenile detention center, and I was whisked off to another prison facility. But this time, it was a facility for adult criminals.

“Look at that tight little ass!” some guy yelled as I followed a female guard down the long austere hallway that led to my cell. The shackles clanked with every step I took.

“Come here, boy. I got a nice meal for you. We call it a cockmeat sandwich in here, and I have one with your name written all over it!”

The inmates banged against the bars and made all kinds of sexual comments, taunting me with jeers and catcalls. When I looked at them, they squeezed and rubbed their dicks while smiling at me. Some even mimicked blowjob movements. I had barely stepped foot in this place, and it was already shaping into a horrible experience.

“Now, that is some fine-looking piece of new hot meat for me right there! Wait till I come for you. Gonna make you my little cockslut!” a large, broad man yelled in my direction.

“Shut up, Leroy!” the guard shouted. She slammed her baton against his hands, making him cry out in pain.

“You fucking cunt!”

“Keep going on like that and you’ll find yourself in isolation again.” She banged the baton against the metal bars a few times, making a lot of noise. “Stupid prick.” She shook her head and walked on.

The inmates scared me, but honestly, she did too. I guess she had to be tough to work in a place like this.

Where the fuck am I? In hell?

“That hot ass is mine.”

“You will suck my fat dick till you gag, pretty boy!”

After a few more similar comments, it was the next one that made me even more scared.

“Oh, is that little fairy Skull Crusher’s new cellmate?”

The guy who said it started laughing. “Oh, boy. You’re gonna be in trouble!”

“Skull Crusher?” I asked out loud.

The lady guard stopped in front of the next cell.

“Hmm, yes. He’s in isolation now, but he will be your cellmate.” She then sighed. “Just a word of advice. Be on his friendly side as much as you can.” She unlocked the door and nodded her head in the direction she wanted me to go—inside my cell. “This is it. Try to behave, will you? You look like a sweet boy. The better you behave, the sooner you might come out of this place.” She looked at me with sympathetic eyes. “And really, try to become friends instead of enemies with your cellmate. He has gained a lot of respect from the other inmates. He pretty much stands on top of the pile.”

Inside the cell, she uncuffed my wrists and ankles. “He will be back this afternoon.”

She then slammed the door shut, leaving me alone inside.

This was the place where I would have to survive for the next two years. I’d just turned eighteen, and I was convicted of murder two years ago.

I took a deep breath before I walked further inside. It definitely looked different compared to juvenile prison.

There wasn't much to see: A metal bunk bed with thin mattresses stood bleakly against one wall. In the corner of the cell stood a small table with two chairs, and one little cabinet filled with ... books?

At the back of the cell was a stainless steel toilet with a sink. I could just die thinking I had to shit in front of someone else, but I guess it was either that, or just not shit at all. I shook my head, trying to not think about that right now.

So, which bed should I take? In the movies, they always wanted the top bed, right? Something to do with not wanting to have the other person's farts in their face or ... I didn't really know if that was true, so I just went with my gut and laid down on the bottom bed.

I thought about Skull Crusher. What did that guy do to earn that kind of name? My stomach twisted at the thought he would come back to this very cell this afternoon, and I would unavoidably meet him. What if he hurt me?

I then thought back to the words of the prison guard. She said I should befriend him. It made me feel that I needed to do that in order to survive.

The way I saw it, I had two options to protect myself from these wolves. Option one: I would beat up the most feared man in here to gain respect. But if I needed to fight a man named Skull Crusher, I knew I would have a ridiculously small chance of succeeding in that. This option wasn't very attractive, and frankly, I preferred my skull to remain just the way it was. Option two: I would cut a deal with my new cellmate. I could convince him to become my personal protector. It wasn't hard to guess what this feared man would want in return, though ... but at least with this option, I would only have to endure the horrendous, revolting torture of sleeping with only one man instead of getting violated by all the other monsters in here.

* * *

“Get the fuck off my bed!”

“What?” I gasped as I woke up with a startle at the loud noise that made my eardrums tremble.

I got goosebumps all over when I was forcefully yanked off the bed.

Skull Crusher was here.

He pulled me off the floor and shoved me against the wall, pressing his body against mine. I almost pissed myself when he brought his hands against my head and pressed at my forehead. Was he going to crush my skull now? Do his name honor?

“Oh, Uh ... I ... my name is—”

“I don’t care what your fucking name is,” he said, and he sniffed at my neck. I didn’t dare speak again.

“In here, you don’t use your old name. You become a Unicorn, a Four Eyes, a Spiderleg, or”—he pointed at his chest while staring at my soul—“a Skull Crusher.”

I swallowed. “Oh ... okay.”

“Now, you ... hmm, what shall I name you ...” He looked at me from head to toes and back again. “Your name will be ...” He then leaned in and whispered in my ear.

“Twink.”

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Thanks to all the friends who pushed me to do this

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



E. K. Muzic has been an aspiring author her entire life. This book being published is a dream come true. She grew up in a small town in Ohio and her goal is to obtain her teaching license and teach. She spent years learning how to write essays without having intense anxiety about it. However, writing fiction has never been an issue for her.