

CHRISTMAS
Falls



CLAUSING
a Scene

CASEY COX

CLAUSING A SCENE

CHRISTMAS FALLS BOOK 6

CASEY COX

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ABOUT THE BOOK

I'm definitely on Santa's naughty list this year...

My agent calls me a PR nightmare, but I'm just trying to have some fun for the first time in my life. To clean up my supposed 'bad boy' image, I'm starring in a cheesy, live-action holiday rom-com set in Christmas Falls.

Ha, some punishment.

The head of the company producing the film is Hig Langdon, my best friend's dad, a.k.a. my lifelong crush. The most kindhearted and devastatingly handsome guy I've ever laid my eyes on. A sexy businessman and mountain lumberjack rolled into one. He can jingle my bells any time.

But this year, I want Hig to stop seeing me as a kid... Or his son's best friend. I'm an adult, and it's time for Hig to start treating me like one. And I'm willing to do *whatever* it takes to make that happen.

Clausing a Scene is low-angst holiday fun guaranteed to get you into the festive spirit. It's packed with holiday goodness as well as: my best friend's dad, age gap, snowed in, and first-time fun.

Christmas Falls is a multi-author M/M romance series set in a small town that thrives on enough holiday charm to rival any Hallmark movie.

PROLOGUE

Brant

“Make it bigger,” I say, peering over my shoulder. “Have it cover my *whole* ass.”

Col looks up from where he’s been tracing the outline of a love heart on my right butt cheek with a fine point Sharpie, the tip of his tongue sticking out the side of his mouth in concentration.

“Not accepting comments from the peanut gallery, but thank you.” He winks at me and resumes his work. “Fear not, young Brant. I have a plan.”

“You’re one month older than me,” I remind him. “Big whoop.”

“And I’ll lord that over you until we’re old and gray, my friend. Now stop looking at me. You’re affecting my artistic flow.”

I roll my eyes. “Artistic flow my ass.”

Col pokes his tongue out like the grown-up, mature twenty-five-year-old he is. “That’s what I just said.”

I laugh and turn back around. I’m lying on my front, stretched out on a lounge chair by the pool, with half of my pasty ass hanging out of my red, white, and blue board shorts.

The sun feels divine as it beats down on my back, the smell of meat on the grill wafts in the air, country music is playing in the background, and I’m with two of my favorite people in the world.

Is there any better way to spend the Fourth of July?

“Still don’t understand why you need to do this,” Col mutters as he drags the Sharpie across my butt.

“I already told you,” I say. “This is the new me. Brant Lombardi 2.0. I’m living it up, man.”

He chuckles. “Yeah. Getting your straight best friend to draw a fake tattoo on your ass so you can post it on social

media as some sort of lame publicity stunt is absolutely the epitome of living it up.”

I reposition my head and lean into my bicep, getting a strong whiff of the coconut oil I slathered myself in. “Well, not when you say it like that.”

But Col’s absolutely right. This *is* pathetic. I know that.

This whole *new me* thing didn’t start out that way, though. Last New Year’s Eve, I made a resolution. This year, for the first time in my life, I wanted to have some fun.

When people think of child actors, two things come to mind. They’re either washed up, or, if they’ve managed to survive the transition to adult stardom, they’re fucked up.

Somehow, I’ve avoided both fates. Not only am I still a working actor, I’m riding a career high after winning an Emmy for Best Actor for my role as Tate Whitlock in the third season of the hottest streaming show in the country right now, *The Vet Shop Boys*, an adaptation of the MM romance series of the same name.

I’m also not fucked up, largely due to my overbearing mother who tries to exert control over every facet of my career. Lana Lombardi never got her shot at the big time, so she sure as hell is making sure I get mine and milk it for everything it’s worth. Thanks to her, I’ve been working consistently since my first TV diaper commercial when I was two.

Overbearing mother much... Okay, so maybe I am a little fucked up.

“There. All done,” Col says, giving my ass a smack.

I glance over my shoulder. “What’s that?” I jerk my chin at two upside-down letters scrawled on the upper left side of the heart.

“They’re your initials, BL,” Col replies with a mischievous smile. “I figured if you’re trying to get attention, why not start a rumor along the way? Now we just need to figure out whose initials we should add to the other side of the heart.”

I grin widely. “I knew I kept you around for a reason.”

“What? My charming personality and devastating good looks aren’t enough for ya?”

I shake my head as we both laugh. Col and I have been best friends forever. Specifically, since the first day of shooting a TV pilot, which ultimately wasn’t picked up, when I was seven.

I was so happy to see another kid on set, I flew over to him. Back then, Col was nothing like he is now. He looked petrified, and I remember his big blue-green eyes being so, so sad. It was only later I discovered his mom had died a few weeks earlier.

From the second I saw him, though, I knew we’d be best friends. And I was right. Almost twenty years later, our friendship is as strong as ever. We’ve gone through so many things together. Nothing can destroy our friendship. We’re ride or die, baby.

“Food is up. I hope you boys are hungry because I’ve—”

The deep baritone of Col’s dad’s voice stops as his blue-green eyes widen at the sight of me sprawled out on the lounge chair with my freshly tatted ass on full display with his son hovering over me.

Now, I’m going to have to take a minute here to explain something, because Hig Langdon is no ordinary father.

For starters, he’s young. He was seventeen when Col was born, which makes him only forty-two now.

And he’s a *young*-looking forty-two, with a thick head of brown wavy hair, hardly any wrinkles, and when he smiles, it shaves years off him.

Col is a handsome guy, but his dad is the original. The blueprint. And damn, the person upstairs took their sweet-ass time perfecting every last detail of Hig Langdon.

Tall with the same dual-colored eyes as his son, but Hig’s veer more on the blue side. He’s got that sharp, symmetrical

face structure that suggests he should be in front of the camera, rather than working behind the scenes as he does.

And his body. Jesus, his body. Massive shoulders, thick chest, tree-trunk thighs. Hig is what you dream up when you picture a sexy businessman and a mountain lumberjack rolled into one.

Even now, as he's staring at us in his cheesy *GO USA!* tank top, striped blue-and-white board shorts, and flip-flops, he manages to exude masculinity, power, and raw sex appeal.

"Am I interrupting something?" he asks slowly, his eyes shifting between me and his son.

I take him in as my heart breaks out into a gallop, and my body *reacts*. Let's just say, it's a good thing I'm lying face down. I smile at him. "Col's just helping me cause some trouble."

"Right." Hig's eyes linger on me for a moment, igniting a fire in my core in the way only he manages to. "You can fill me in over lunch. Come on. Food's gettin' cold."

Col and I follow Hig onto the back patio where he's put out an impressive spread of two trays of hot dogs, a separate platter of grilled steak, chicken, and pork, corn on the cob, and two bowls, one filled with potato salad, the other with a garden salad.

"Whoa, Dad. Way to go." Col pats his old man on the back enthusiastically. Nothing makes Col happier than food...apart from having lots of it.

"Yeah. Thanks, Hig," I say, sitting down opposite Col and him at the table. We switched to me calling him by his first name when I turned eighteen. It was a tad weird at first but feels completely normal now. "This is really impressive."

"Can't take all the credit," he says with a smile. "I just grilled the meat. Picked the salads up from the grocery store yesterday. Dig in, boys. There's plenty here, just make sure you leave room for apple pie."

"There's always room for apple pie," Col says, and we all chuckle as we begin munching away on our meal.

I peer over the mountain of food at Col and Hig. I never had a dad. Mine walked out on Mom and me before my first TV commercial. Mom jokes the only two good things she got from him were me and his made-for-Hollywood surname. I've seen the man twice in my life. Last I heard, he had shacked up with some chick and they were living in a commune in Utah.

Whatever.

But Col and his dad. This is what a real father-son relationship should be like. The gold standard.

Hig worked for one of the big production companies in Hollywood. It must've been tough for him being a single dad and all, but he always dropped Col off and picked him up after school. He taught Col how to cook and clean and look after himself. He encouraged him to get a job after school to learn the value of money.

He was strict and had expectations, but Col loved him and knew his dad had his back. He could talk to him about anything. I never got that with my father... Or my mom. As much as I know she only wants me to succeed and go far in my career, her motives aren't always about what's best for me. I'm able to see that now, but that doesn't mean I'm able to do anything about it.

She's living vicariously through me, and in a way, I'm okay with that. It must suck to watch your own dreams slip away. If I can bring her happiness, or a sense of purpose, or whatever it is she gets out of feeling like she's playing an important role in my career, then why would I stop that? I've benefited from her drive and discipline. It's gotten me to where I am. Yes, it also makes me a pushover, but I'd feel guilty turning around and telling her to butt out of my life now. Why does family have to be so much?

"So," Hig says in that deep, rumbling voice of his. "What was that little display by the pool?"

Col starts to fill him in. "Remember how I told you Brant's plans to live it up this year?"

Hig's eyes land on me, and I start breathing heavier, my skin prickling with heat. He only has to look at me and my body responds.

"Yeah," he says, keeping his eyes aimed straight at me.

"Well, this is his latest thing."

"I still don't get it," Hig says, finally turning away to face his son.

"It's stupid," I jump in because my whole 'year of fun' charade has gone completely off-track. "I made a new year's resolution to have some fun, only..."

"What is it?" Hig asks with a frown.

I drag in a deep breath. "Only to realize that I must have a screwy definition of fun."

Hig's eyes are back on me again. They change color depending on the light. The blue in them is really prominent right now. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I thought it'd be fun to do all the things I've never had the chance to do."

"Like what?"

"Like going clubbing with friends. Having a few drinks. Smoking a joint. You know, normal stuff that normal twenty-five-year-olds have already done. I was playing catch-up. But it just wasn't fun to me. Clubs are loud and crowded. Alcohol tastes like shit and is actually a poison. And the weed only gave me a little buzz and a big headache after."

"But Brant started getting snapped by the paparazzi and stories began circulating," Col chimes in.

"That's right. The things I thought would bring me fun, didn't, *but* I did get a kick out of messing with the press. I've even got a new nickname."

Hig leans forward. "What is it?"

"Brant the Brat."

Hig frowns some more, and his massive shoulders bunch up. “Not sure I like that. You’re not a brat or spoiled or entitled at all. Given your childhood, it’s remarkable how unaffected and down-to-earth you are.”

I suppress a smile.

“Dad, chill,” Col says, popping another hot dog into his mouth. “It’s all an act.”

“Exactly,” I agree. “Just some harmless fun. That’s why Col was tattooing a love heart on my butt. I’m going to post it on social media, then sit back and watch people freak out.”

“Ooh, I have an idea,” Col says, and that mischievous grin is back. He points at me. “I know whose initials we should put on there.”

“Whose?” Hig and I say at the same time.

Hig’s eyes flick over to me, and he smiles. Heat starts rising up my neck, so I turn my attention back to Col.

“HL,” he says, goofily circling his head around to his father.

“No way,” I say, flat-out shutting down the ludicrous suggestion of tattooing his dad’s initials on my ass. “No offense, Hig.”

He looks at me, and his eyes narrow a fraction. “None taken.”

God, his voice is so deep.

“You guys are no fun.” Col stacks a few more hot dogs onto his plate. “No one outside of the industry knows who Dad is anyway. He’s a nobody.” He turns to Hig. “No offense, Dad.”

“None taken.”

“It’s harmless. A private joke. And if somehow it were to get out, what’s more scandalous than a Hollywood A-lister dating his best friend’s dad?”

My breath catches in my throat, and I sharply avert my gaze. Without meaning to, Col’s stumbled onto my biggest

secret. The only thing in our almost two decades of friendship that I haven't shared with him.

I *do* have a crush on his dad. A ginormous, so-big-you-can-see-it-from-space crush. Audiences and critics ate up my *Vet Shop Boys* performance because my character, Tate, falls for a much older guy, Gus. Truth is, it wasn't that much of an acting stretch for me. I just envisioned Hig, and I put in such a good performance, it earned me a freaking Emmy.

There's no way Col knows about my secret crush. It's never once come up—because why would it?—and I've been super careful to never do anything to raise suspicions. In front of these two, that is.

Privately? Let's just say my purple dildo, which I may or may not have nicknamed The Big Hig, is the best three hundred bucks I've ever spent.

Col looks over at me, and I hope he reads my silence as a sign that I'm not comfortable with his idea, rather than that I'm secretly wishing for more than just his father's initials on my ass.

I don't have any experience with men. I've never dated or even been in a relationship. And at twenty-five, I'm still a virgin.

Another normal thing I've missed out on.

But in the back of my mind, when it's just me and The Big Hig alone in my bed, I have this fantasy that Hig will be my first.

Because aside from being a great father, a successful businessman, and an all-round sexy guy, Hig is also kind. And thoughtful. And he has this calming way about him that makes me feel safe. In my mind, those qualities make him the ideal man to lose my virginity to.

The only wrinkle in my fantasy is that he happens to be my best friend's dad.

Thankfully, the conversation moves on. Once we finish the meal, the three of us jump into the pool and spend the

afternoon splashing around, sunbathing, listening to music, reading, and just hanging out.

I like this.

How easy and natural things are. How I can just be myself around Col and Hig. Because for me, *this* is fun. Forget A-list parties and red carpets, nothing beats this. And I don't want that to ever change.

Which is why the crazy fantasies I have about Hig will always remain just that. I'll never act on my desires because I don't want to ruin the best thing in my life. My friendship with Col means too much to me, and I don't want to do anything to jeopardize it.

Besides, if I lose Col, I lose Hig, and I couldn't handle that, either.

We don't end up adding any initials to the other side of the love heart, and I decide not to post the ass selfie on social media.



It's late, but I'm restless and can't sleep.

It's been an awesome day. After whiling away the afternoon by the pool, we walked a few blocks into town from Hig's house to watch the fireworks. It wasn't a huge display, but it was nice, anyway.

Kinda like Christmas Falls itself. It's a super cute small town. So picturesque that many holiday movies get made here. Everything in town is holiday themed, from the names of the streets—Christmas Boulevard (a.k.a. Main Street), Candy Cane Lane, St. Nick Avenue—to the massive annual holiday festival that draws tons of tourists to the area.

I was born and raised in LA. There's no way I'd ever leave my house to go for a walk. Even though it's gated and safe, it's just not something people do there.

But they do here.

They go for strolls around their pretty town. They smile and say hello when they pass each other. Hig knows a lot of townfolk by first name. It must be nice knowing the people who live near you.

Hig left LA to start HoliGay Presents, a start-up production company that produces gay holiday movies, when Col went to college.

And, oh yeah, he also came out as bi at the same time.

That's when my low-key crush blossomed into an all-out *I want him* obsession.

In a way, Hig's coming out didn't change anything. He was still my best friend's dad. Still completely, one hundred percent off-limits and unavailable.

Except, maybe, not so unavailable anymore? Because it became conceivable that he and I could have sex. At least in theory...

And fantasy.

Which probably explains why it's past two in the morning, and I'm wide awake, sweaty, and staring at the ceiling. It's hot. Both windows are open, and so is the door to my room, but the air is still.

Why does my mind insist on replaying how sexy Hig looked today?

When he slipped off his tank top to jump into the pool, I thought I'd lose my mind. His chest is so broad, and he has a smattering of dark hair on his pecs that spreads out across his stomach before trailing down to his—

Nope. Cannot go there.

But I want to. *Fuck*, I want to.

I kick off my sheet and walk over to my suitcase stashed in the corner of the room. The house is quiet, so I unzip it slowly and not the whole way. I fumble around inside until I find what I'm looking for.

I get back into bed, staying on top of the sheet, lube up the purple dildo, and press it to my entrance. I don't normally sleep in the nude, but it's so warm and sticky, I thought why not. I'm also an early riser, so I'll be up and dressed before those two stumble out of their rooms.

I slow my breathing as I inch the dildo inside myself, making sure I've got a firm grip on the base. I'm tight, and I need to take it slow. I bring my knees closer to my chest, hooking one arm around them to keep them in place. I can't see anything but my knees now, but that's okay. I've done this enough times to be able to go by feeling alone.

My breathing evens out as the dildo pushes all the way in, and I can feel my hand at the base against my ass.

"Oh, that feels so good," I whisper as softly as I can.

My eyes flutter shut, and I begin working the dildo in and out of me. It feels good, so good, but I know the real thing would feel even better. Especially if there were a two-hundred-and-eighty-pound slab of man attached to it.

"Hig," I murmur, sinking my teeth into my bicep as I increase the pace. "Fuck me, Hig. Please. Give me that big cock of yours."

I'm keeping my voice as low as I can, but I *need* this. Porn doesn't do it for me. Picturing other hot guys doesn't do it for me.

Only one man does. Only one man ever has.

I drop my legs and the soles of my feet land softly on the top sheet. I grab my cock and begin jerking myself off. My need rises within me, overtaking my senses until there's nothing else but me and Hig.

Him on top of me, my hands brushing over his meaty pecs, running over his muscular arms, hanging on to his huge shoulders. And the whole time he's working his cock in and out of my body, his beautiful eyes never leaving me...

And that does it. I fly past the point of no return, managing to grab a pillow and shove it into my face, biting down on it, as I let out a guttural moan and a muffled, "Oh, Hig, yes."

My cock spasms in my hand. Jets of hot cum splash all over my stomach. I breathe into the pillow for a few seconds before tossing it aside. Then I drag my fingers along my abs, scoop up some of my release, and feed myself.

I close my eyes, imagining it's Hig I'm tasting. God, I'd love to know what he tastes like.

Suddenly, I hear a noise coming from the hall. I jackknife immediately, staring down the darkened hallway.

Is someone awake?

The pair of them are normally such heavy sleepers, and surely I would've heard footsteps... On second thought, I did get a little carried away.

"Hello," I say into the dark. "Is anyone there?"

Nothing.

Then a few seconds later, Misty, the cat Hig is pet sitting for his neighbor, leaps onto my bed, giving me a heart attack in the process. "Oh, it was you," I say, relieved even though my heart's racing at the fright she gave me. "You wanna snuggle with me?"

Misty takes her rightful position by my pillow. I wipe off the rest of my cum with my shirt and throw it onto the floor before slipping under the sheet and tucking Misty in nice and close to me.

Phew. Disaster averted.

Hig

It's a cold, overcast, and dreary December morning as I drive into the arrivals bay at O'Hare airport. I'm scanning for an empty spot when I notice a person pulling a suitcase behind them.

A purple suitcase.

I somehow manage to swerve into a free opening without crashing the car. Once parked, I close my eyes and try to shove the unwanted video reel prompted by seeing the purple luggage out of my head.

Do not have inappropriate sexual thoughts about your son's best friend. Go straight to jail. Do not pass go. Do not collect two hundred dildos... I mean dollars.

Annnd I'm right back there again. To that warm, sticky Fourth of July night.

The fact that it's been more than five months hasn't lessened the impact of catching Brant in my guest room pleasuring himself with a purple dildo.

How could I see that it was purple without any lights on? I blame the moon for that. It conspired against me because for all the blackness in that bedroom, the two things it chose to shine down on and light up were Brant's ass...and that freaking purple dildo.

I squeeze my eyes shut, but it only brings up another memory.

“Oh, Hig, yes.”

The words were muffled by the pillow he'd placed over his face, but in the dead calm of night, I heard them. My feet were frozen in place in the hallway, my eyes transfixed on the sight of Brant sliding that dildo in and out of his ass while moaning my name into a pillow.

I didn't know what to do.

One part of me wanted to slink away down the hall and back into my room, ignoring my need to get a glass of water.

But the other part of me, probably a remnant from the caveman era, wanted to stomp into the room, crash my body over his, and replace that purple dildo with my own cock.

As more time has passed since that night, I've come to regret not doing that. Or at the very least, knocking on the door, making my presence known, and giving Brant the choice of what to do next. If he'd covered up and ordered me out, I would've complied.

But if he hadn't...

If, after the initial shock of getting caught, he'd invited me in, who knows what might have happened?

That's why I'm annoyed at myself for not letting him see me. In my forty-two years, I've learned that it's better to regret something you've done than something you haven't, because being plagued by *what-ifs* is no fun.

I glance at the time. Brant's private jet landed ten minutes ago so he should be coming out any moment now. I hop out of my Jeep and the crisp, cold air is a welcome relief as it hits my heated face.

I make my way toward the terminal, giving myself an internal pep talk as I go. *Be cool. He doesn't know you saw him so just act normal and not like you wished you could have jumped in there and finished him off properly.*

What. Is. Wrong. With me?

I can't pinpoint when it started exactly. When Brant went from being my son's best friend, the kid who'd come over for sleepovers on the odd occasion his mother would let him out of her clutches, to the confident, full of life young man I'm completely and utterly smitten with today.

He may be an adult now, but he's still Col's best friend and also almost two decades younger than me, which places Brant Lombardi strictly in the *look but don't touch* category. But boy, did I get a show on the Fourth or what. I thought copping an eyeful of Col tattooing Brant's gorgeous ass by the pool would be the highlight of the day. Turns out I was wrong.

Very wrong.

Now, every time I see purple, I get triggered. Not to mention whenever I catch a whiff of coconut oil. Brant basically basted himself in the stuff all day, so every time I smell it now, I'm immediately taken back to the sight of him stretched out by my pool with one butt cheek exposed. I had to switch to olive oil just so I'd stop getting hard making dinner.

Nope. Nope. *Nooope*. I have to stop these thoughts. They're wrong, and I will not greet him with an erection pressing into my zipper fueled by something I should not have even seen.

I'm a forty-two-year-old man. A father. A business owner. I can handle myself, keep my sexual desires in check. God knows I'm well-versed at that. I can't remember the last time I had sex—with a woman or a man—but I'm pretty sure it was a few presidents ago.

And then there he is, emerging from the terminal. I slow my stride as my eyes roam over him. He's wearing a leather jacket and dressed all in black, his face hidden under big dark glasses, probably in an attempt not to draw attention to himself, but I know it's him. A tuft of his reddish-blond hair has escaped from under his black beanie, and he flashes me that brilliant Hollywood smile as I approach.

I suck in a breath. *You can do this, Hig. Be cool.*

"Brant, it's great to see you."

We embrace because that's what we'd normally do.

"Good to see you, too, Hig."

I hold him in my arms, inhaling his clean, crisp scent with a hint of that damn coconut, and resist the urge to tuck his stray lock back under his beanie because that's *not* what I'd normally do. Daydream about it, sure, but never act on it.

He's still smiling as we pull apart. He's got these incredible light-green eyes. When he smiles, pure joy radiates from them.

"Good flight?" I ask, reaching for his suitcase.

He maneuvers it out of my way and begins walking, pulling it behind him. "Yeah. Fine. Sucks about Col, though."

"Tell me about it." I fall into step next to him.

Col took a job with an agricultural finance firm in New York after college. There's currently a blizzard ravaging the entire Northeast of the country. A once-in-a-century blizzard. It's predicted to last for the next few days before moving toward us.

"There's still ten days until Christmas, the weather will clear by then, and he'll be on the next available flight out," I say, trying to sound positive and upbeat.

The weather better improve because if it doesn't, it means Brant and I will be spending the holidays together without Col. I've only just come to accept that we're going to be spending the next few days alone.

In my house.

With him sleeping in the same bed he—

"Yeah. I'm sure it will," Brant says, and I pick up on a slight strain in his voice. It's almost like he's *trying* to sound convincing.

We get to my car, and I pop the trunk. I make a move for his suitcase, but again, he gets in the way. "Thanks, but I got it under control," he says, hefting it into the car.

"Sorry, sorry. Dad reflex." I raise my hands. "I'll stop."

Col may be twenty-five, but whenever he comes to visit, I can't help reverting back to my old ways with him. He'll always be my boy, and I'll always do whatever I can for him.

But Brant is not your child, my subconscious helpfully reminds me, on the off chance I'd forgotten. *But still your kid's best friend*.

I am *not* liking my brain this morning.

We hop into my SUV and set off for Christmas Falls. It's about a four-hour drive. The plan had been for Col to arrive at the same time, saving me from doing two pickups. But yeah, Mother Nature had other ideas.

"So, are you excited about shooting the movie?"

Brant's been staring out the window. He turns and faces me. "Yeah. I'm glad it's with your company."

I grin at his diplomatic response. "Heard from Col you weren't too happy about it initially."

"I never had an issue with the movie itself. I've never done anything live, so a live-action shoot broadcast on network TV is exciting. And I'd never turn down the chance to shoot a film in Christmas Falls, especially one run by your production company. What I was upset about was being reprimanded by my agent. He made me feel like shit when I'd done nothing wrong."

Brant never did post that photo of his tattooed butt on the Fourth, but there's been a constant stream of stories about *Brant the Brat*. I despise that nickname, and I hate that it's only been gaining traction, with the media running with it more and more these past few months. His initially harmless pranks on the press have taken on a life of their own. It's affected his reputation, and he's been forced into damage control mode.

He sighs. "I was legitimately sick during a movie shoot in the fall. Had the doctor tell me to stay in bed for two days. Production, the director, everyone knew. They shot scenes that didn't have me in them. No problem. No drama. The next day, I'm reading in *Variety* that I'm flaking by not showing up on

set and costing the film hundreds of thousands of dollars in delays. They called me a diva.”

That’s the last thing he is. “Yeah. I read that, too.”

I might’ve hated everything about living in LA, but I still work in the industry, so I skim through the trade papers every day just to stay on top of things.

“I’ve gone from being a party boy, which was all just a stupid act anyway, to a troublemaker. My agent called me a PR nightmare, and now I’m getting Lindsay Lohaned.”

When he sees me frowning, he explains, “You know, star in a cheesy holiday rom-com to make everyone fall in love with me and see how nice and wholesome I am.” He rolls his eyes and makes an exaggerated *yick* sound.

“You *are* nice and wholesome,” I point out.

“Not always, Hig.”

It’s a good thing I’m driving and can’t turn to look at him, because if his eyes match the heat in his tone, we’d be swerving off the road into a ditch any second now.

I clear my throat and try to keep my stupid brain free of any provocative images.

“And how are you doing today?” he asks after some time has passed. “*Really* doing?”

I steal a quick glance at him. There’s a soft understanding in his eyes. He remembers. Of course he remembers.

“I’m doing all right. Thank you. I just wish Col had made it back.”

“I’m sorry he can’t be here, too. I’m bummed for you guys.”

Today is eighteen years to the day that Marianne, Col’s mother, passed. We were never *together* together, just two teenage friends who were horny one night and had the misfortune of falling pregnant on their first go. We used a condom, but as we discovered, they don’t work one hundred percent of the time.

We remained friends as we co-parented Col. Marianne studied law in UCLA, while I worked in lighting and production for Warner Brothers. We rented a tiny apartment in Studio City. It was tough, but we made it work.

Until the night of December 15, when the small plane Marianne was in crashed, killing all eight people on board.

My grief is as much about losing Marianne as it is about what it stole from Col. He was only seven when it happened.

Given the date, it made the holidays a tricky time to navigate, which is why when he was younger, I always pulled out all the stops to make sure he had a great, happy, and as normal as possible Christmas.

It's also part of the reason why I started HoliGay Presents. I didn't have to limit the company to just making holiday movies. Heck, I'd be a lot richer if I hadn't. But I did it as a small tribute to Marianne. People love these movies. They bring so much joy to the world. Joy that she missed out on experiencing and giving. She loved Christmas so much, it was her favorite time of year, and so this is my small way of honoring her memory.

"You and Col are always together on the fifteenth," Brant says, his voice tender.

"Try to be," I reply, gripping the steering wheel a little tighter, knowing that we won't be today. "I think it's hitting Col a little harder this year."

"Because of the age thing?"

I nod as I take the turnoff. Col is the same age this year that his mother was when she was killed. I picked up that it was affecting him in our weekly video calls, but we only ever touched on it briefly. It wasn't something I wanted to discuss through a screen. I thought it'd be better to wait and have proper, longer conversations about it when he was here. But that won't be happening today.

"Col's spoken to you about it?" I ask.

"Yeah. We tell each other everything."

“I see.”

I let that sink in for a minute. Another timely reminder that I can never let whatever feelings I have for Brant progress any further. He and my son aren't just best friends, they're more like brothers. They tell each other *everything*. No way Col wants to know what his old man is like in the sack.

“It'll be okay, Hig,” Brant says as I pull into my driveway several hours later. “The weather will clear, Col will arrive, I'll shoot this damn movie on Christmas Eve's eve, and we'll all have a happy holiday together.”

“You're right,” I say, killing the engine and shooting him a smile. “Everything will work out. Christmas miracles and all that.”

Brant

There was no Christmas miracle overnight, just what sounded like some okay-ish weather news that, when Hig and I scrutinized it closer over breakfast, turned out not to be all that okay-ish, after all.

The system hammering New York with white-outs and ice-cold conditions *is* easing up a little. Problem is, it's moving over this way. So even if Col could get on a flight out of New York in the next day or two, the airport in Chicago will probably be closed by then.

It is only the sixteenth, so there's still a good chance for him to make it. I refuse to give up hope. It's bad enough that Mom is so pissed at my antics that she's refusing to spend the holidays with me. Since I'm shooting the movie here—she doesn't do weather below sixty—and she's never really liked Hig for some reason, she's using my 'shockingly poor behavior' as an excuse to go on a cruise in the Mediterranean with a couple of close girlfriends.

Being Mom-less, I can handle.

Being Col-less, I cannot.

I spoke to him last night. He was understandably bummed about not being with his dad. The day holds a special significance for both of them and spending it together had

become a tradition of sorts, a way to honor the woman who gave him life.

But when I texted to see how he was doing this morning and he replied with a string of eggplant, peach, and OK hand emojis, I knew he was feeling better. Col's got a new girlfriend, so there's a high probability they're having obscenely debaucherous sex right now.

While I'm here, alone with his father, unfortunately *not* having obscenely debaucherous sex.

It was easier to keep my thoughts about Hig chaste yesterday, given the anniversary and all. But this morning I woke up with a stiff dick, a hungry hole, and a crystal-clear image of the man I'd like to be taking care of both.

Hig slipped out to the store to get some more supplies just in case we get snowed in for a couple of days. I offered to go with him, but he said he had it *under control*.

There was something in the way his voice dipped to an even lower rumble as he said those two words that made me read it as a throwback to me refusing to let him help with my luggage yesterday. It's not that I object to him helping me, it's more that I don't want him to see me as a kid anymore.

I'm an adult, and it's time for Hig to start treating me like one. Preferably while pinning me down under his hefty body and doing all sorts of amazing things to me with his hands. And lips. And tongue. And let's not forget what I'm sure has to be a spectacular cock. Even if it's only proportional to the rest of him, it'll likely make The Big Hig feel completely inadequate.

I glance around the empty house. Hig left Christmas carols playing because the man loves the holidays. His whole house is already decked out in so many decorations it looks like a winter wonderland, a giant Christmas tree commands the corner of the living room, and there are so many lights on the outside of the house, I had to draw the curtains to block out their neon reflections.

Hig's always gone OTT for the holidays. I suspect it's his way of trying to give Col as normal a Christmas as possible. Not that anything will compensate for their loss, but it's real nice of him to go to so much effort.

He changed out of the gray sweater he was wearing before he left. It's draped over the back of the couch. I pick it up and bring it to my face, inhaling a scent that reminds me of a warm summer's afternoon and something so masculine and quintessentially Hig.

Yeah. My crush is alive and well, which is annoying, but as I'm sniffing his sweater—which, for the record, is the first and only time I have ever done this—memories from the last time I was here come flooding back to me.

Splashing around in the pool all afternoon, walking into town to watch the fireworks, coming back to the house, not being able to sleep, and... Well, I think we all remember what that led to.

I wonder how long I've got until Hig gets back.

Long enough for a quick session with my dildo? I think so.

Holding on to Hig's sweater, I race down the hallway and into the guest room. I throw the sweater onto the bed and start stripping out of my clothes. I lose my track pants and long-sleeved tee then produce lube and trusty ol' purple, a.k.a. The Big Hig, from my suitcase just as "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" comes on.

Oh, no. Ew, ew, ew. That will not do. "Hey, Alexa, play the next song."

I hear Alexa's muted confirmation from the living room speaker before "Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town" starts up. I grin. Much better. Santa won't be the only one coming.

I jump onto the bed and kneel on all fours, then coat the dildo with lube. Reaching around behind me, I bring it to my ass. With my other hand, I slide Hig's sweater closer so when I lower my forehead onto the bed, I'm breathing him in.

I close my eyes, slide the dildo into my tight channel, and let out a moan. "Oh, yeah, Hig," I murmur as I push the dildo

in deeper, enjoying that precise moment where the burn morphs into a glorious stretch. “You feel so good.”

I continue moaning as I ease more of it into me. Everything else falls away. The Christmas carol playing, the light snow that’s started to fall outside my window. Everything gives way to this incredible sensory pleasure. Some guys are just born to bottom, and I’m one of them.

I gasp when Hig’s cock is all the way in. I mean, the dildo is.

No, wait...let’s go with my original thought. It is my fantasy, after all.

My eyes flutter shut as Hig’s thick fingers drift to my hips, securing me in place.

“So good, Hig,” I growl in pleasure as he draws his large cock out of my hole before slowly sinking back in. I don’t have to say a word. He knows exactly how I need it, and he takes his time getting me warmed up and stretched out, because yeah, his cock is everything I imagined and then some.

And then he clears his throat.

My eyes fly open.

What the fuck?

Fantasy Hig has never cleared his throat. Not once in any of the approximately seventeen thousand sexual encounters I’ve had with him.

Which means... Fantasy Hig and I may have an unexpected guest.

Horror races up my throat as I slowly turn around to face the door. Oh my god...

Reality Hig is leaning against the doorframe, clutching a brown bag of groceries close to his chest.

His eyes aren’t blue or green anymore, they’ve gone a dark color I’ve never seen before.

Is he mad?

Shit. Of course he is, and who can blame him? Talk about inappropriate. I'm a guest in his house. I should've been using the time alone to go over lines, not fuck myself in his guest bedroom the second the coast was clear.

I open my mouth to speak, but no words come out.

His eyes are locked on mine. He drops the bag to the floor. A few things spill out of it. Neither one of us looks to see what.

I'm still naked on all fours with a purple dildo hanging out of my ass. My ass which is pointed straight at him.

A shiver rolls through me.

This may be inappropriate as all hell, but there is a hot side to this as well. Too soon? Yep, probably. Still, it doesn't stop my balls from tingling, but no. *No, no, no.*

This is not the beginning of some porn-inspired Christmas miracle... Is it?

Because, if Hig is pissed, why isn't he yelling?

Or looking away in disgust?

And if he wants me to stop, why is his gaze locked on mine so intensely I feel like I'm the only thing in the universe right now?

He unzips his coat and rips it off, discarding it on the floor. My breath goes shallow.

Maybe that's not fury in his eyes?

"Again." The single word rumbles out of him as he slowly paces toward the bed.

I don't understand. "Again?"

"I saw you." He reaches the foot of the bed. "On the Fourth."

My eyes bulge. He saw me? Whoa... Why didn't he say anything?

He places one knee on the bed, making the mattress dip a little. "I didn't do anything then..."

Is that regret in his voice? No. It can't be.

His eyes roam down my exposed body, and when he reaches my ass, his jaw tightens, and he visibly swallows.

He looks up at me again. "Were you thinking of me?"

I give a small nod. "Yes."

His stare intensifies. "Why?"

Because you're hot is the first thing that comes to mind, but I can't say that. I don't *want* to say that. It doesn't even begin to capture the enormity of my feelings for him. Yes, a big part of my attraction to him is physical, but there's so much more to it than just that.

My throat is clogged, but I manage to say, "Because I like you."

A brief silence washes over us, and then, "Can I touch you?"

Yes, yes, a thousand fucking times yes!

I can hardly believe it. This is real and actually happening. Hig is asking if he can touch me.

Heat skitters through my body. "Yes."

He crawls up the bed toward me until his face is right next to mine. Seeing his darkened eyes close up, so heavy with lust, makes my core tremble.

"You have no idea what you do to me," he murmurs, tucking a lock of hair behind my ear.

Oh, I think I have an idea, I want to reply, but I keep my mouth shut. I've always thought my crush was one-sided. What if it's not?

"Let's get you comfortable," he says in that deep, steady voice of his.

"Okay."

That's actually a good idea. I'm starting to cramp up a bit.

He reaches down and places his hand over mine, the one holding the dildo in place.

“Pull it out slowly,” he instructs, and I do.

Once the dildo slides out, Hig takes it and rests it on the bed away from us. I never thought there’d be a gentlemanly way to help someone remove a dildo from themselves, but Hig just proved there is.

Part of me is hoping that while his hand is down there, he’ll touch me in some other, *un-gentlemanly* ways.

He doesn’t.

Instead, he helps me flip over onto my back, and instantly, I feel the relief in my knees and wrists as blood rushes back. He places a pillow under my head and looks down at me with a smile, shaking his head. “You’re really something else, you know that?”

I grin and play into it. “Yeah. Not to brag, but I’m kind of a big deal.”

“That you are.”

His eyes drop to my mouth.

“Do you want to kiss me?” I ask.

“Yes.”

“Do you want to fuck me?”

He hesitates, and maybe I’ve pushed too far. Then again, he has caught me fucking myself *twice*, so I think we’re past the polite, let’s-take-it-slow stage.

He wets his lips. “Yes.”

“So do it, then.”

The kissing, the fucking, whatever you want, Hig. Take. Me!

He leans down, and holy shit, he’s going to kiss me. But instead of going straight for my mouth like I’m expecting, he nibbles a trail of kisses from near my ear, along my jawline and my chin, up onto the tip of my nose, and then finally, *finally*, he meets my lips.

Kiss-wise, this is as far as I've ever gotten. I've had a number of on-screen kisses, but never any open-mouthed ones. And yeah, nothing off-screen, either.

He slides his tongue along my lower lip, and I let out a soft whimper. One hand runs over the top of my chest, the other slides around my neck, holding me in place. My mouth opens, and Hig's tongue sweeps past my lips. I can taste the faint aftermath of his peppermint toothpaste, and my nose fills with a much stronger version of that manly scent I was smelling on his sweater before.

Mental note, I am claiming that sweater as mine.

I still can't believe this is happening. Hig is really kissing me, and damn, he knows what he's doing, his tongue swirling inside my mouth like it's trying to carve out some secret message in hieroglyphics.

I moan and drop a hand to his round shoulder. Fuck. His body is solid muscle.

But I shouldn't just take his shoulder's word for it. I need to do my own due diligence. It's the responsible thing.

So I run my hand over his pecs. Yep, hard.

His biceps. Also hard.

His stomach. Okay. Less hard. He's got a layer of padding there, but honestly, that only makes him even sexier.

And then I dip my hand below the waist...

Ladies and gentlemen, we have arrived at Hardness HQ. I drag my fingers along the ridge of his cock. Even with all the layers of fabric between us, I can feel the heat emanating from his body.

I grab his belt and unbuckle it. When I start to unzip his pants, I break the kiss. For some reason, I need to see his face even if I'm unsure of what I'm hoping to see.

Permission to touch him, maybe?

But when I look at Hig with his just-been-kissed lips and hooded lids, I nearly self-combust on the spot.

He's always so put together. So calm and steady. I'm witnessing a new side of him for the first time. All the feelings I've harbored for him for years—which I've tried to either suppress or ignore, wishing they'd go away—only intensify now that I'm seeing him like this.

“Touch me,” he growls.

I nod and finish unzipping his pants. He lifts up, allowing me to draw his pants and briefs down his legs, leaving them bunched up above his knees.

“Finally, the real thing,” I say when his massive cock bursts out, landing on his stomach, the thick head reaching past his belly button, that's how big it is. *Sorry, Big Hig, you just got relegated to distant second place.* I curl my fingers around the base of The Real Hig.

“What did you say?” Hig asks, and shit...what did I just say? My brain can't process holding Hig's cock and memory recall at the same time.

I smile up at him, but he's not smiling back. He's frowning.

Uh-oh. I've done something wrong.

He lifts my hand off him and tugs me up his body, moving me like I weigh nothing. “Brant, are you... Are you still a virgin?”

I wince and try to turn away, but he won't let me, gripping my chin so I have no choice but to look at him. “You have nothing to be ashamed of if you are.”

That's debatable, but I bob my head. “Yeah. Still a virgin.”

He lets out a long breath. “Then we can't do this.”

Hold up. What? “Why the hell not?”

“Because your first time needs to be with someone special. Somewhere special. Not with a schlup like me in my guestroom on some random morning.”

And just like that, Hig pours a bucket of icy cold water over proceedings. I glance down and even his cock is

retreating.

But instead of accepting that we've reached as far as we're going to go, I meet his gaze and shake my head defiantly. "No."

"No, what?"

"You don't get to decide for me. I choose how I want to lose my virginity, and believe me, this is exactly how I've pictured doing it."

"It is?"

"It is. I've been fantasizing about you for a long time. I *want* my first time to be with you. I don't care about the place or the time of day or anything else. I just want *you*."

Okay. That was a bit more than I planned on divulging, but desperate times call for desperate measures. We're alone and together. This could be the only chance Hig and I get, because absolutely none of my fantasies where Hig fucks me ever involve his son barging in on us.

His big hands cup my face, and his eyes bore into me with a steely gaze. "Are you sure?"

I stare into his eyes as I reach for his cock and answer, "One thousand percent."

Hig

And with that, Brant slides down my body and positions himself between my legs. Whatever self-control I had left snaps the second he sticks his tongue out and licks the head of my cock. An electric shock shoots up my spine. Fuck, this feels good.

“Take your time,” I tell him as he opens his mouth and starts to take me in.

His response comes out muffled as more and more of my cock disappears into his mouth.

We probably shouldn’t be doing this, but when I arrived home to see Brant fucking himself with that damn purple dildo—*again*—I knew I didn’t want to live with the regret of not doing more than I did the first time I caught him.

And then he tells me he’s a virgin and that he’s fantasized about his first time being with me? Fuck. Me. I almost shot my load on the spot.

Brant wraps his hand around my base and gets into a steady rhythm, working my cock in and out of his sexy, warm mouth as he starts getting himself off.

“You’re doing good,” I encourage him, settling into the pleasurable waves emanating from my dick and spreading out to every corner of my body.

His eyes glimmer, and he plops my cock out of his mouth. “Told ya I was a big deal.”

A chuckle rumbles out of me, quickly silenced when he removes his hand and impales himself on my cock, capturing my entire length right down to the base. His short, sharp exhales through his nose tickle the skin above my pubic hair.

“Fuck,” I cry out, grabbing his hair, my senses in overdrive.

He retreats, then slides back down, repeating the movement over and over.

“How are you so good?” I muse out loud.

He pulls off me and grins. “See ol’ purple over there?”

My eyes travel to the dildo on the bed. “Yeah.”

“You’ve only ever seen me use it on my ass. I’ve been training my throat as well.”

“Jesus,” I hiss as the mental image overwhelms me. My relationship with the color purple was precarious already, but I’m now going to have to officially ban it from my life. Anything purple will instantly take me back to this moment, to *that* revelation.

Brant gets back to work, sliding up and down on me, and this moment is pure, perfect bliss.

Actually, wait a minute.

No it’s not. Something’s missing.

“C’mere,” I grunt. Brant looks up at me with my entire cock stuffed in his mouth, my cockhead imprinted on his cheek, and fuck if that’s not the hottest thing I’ve ever seen.

I wave my hand by the side of my body. He follows my lead and inches over that way. Once he’s close enough, I hook my hands around his hips and spin him around, his mouth never leaving my cock.

I line our bodies up perfectly so that Brant is now over me, then lower his hips down, taking his cock into my open, waiting mouth.

Sixty-nining blowjobs.

Now this moment is pure, perfect bliss.

Brant's cock slides into my mouth. I'm a little out of practice so it takes me a few breaths to find my rhythm. Brant helps out, rocking his hips slowly and steadily, in sync with his mouth movements on my cock. The faint scent of coconut oil tickles my nostrils.

Pleasure surges through me as sounds of slurping and snowfall pattering against the windows fill the room.

"I'm getting close," Brant mumbles around my cock.

"Same," I say as his balls bounce across my nose. I can smell him and feel him. Now I want to taste him.

We both speed up. Brant takes my cock in faster, more urgent strokes, his body slamming into my mouth quicker, too.

"Oh shit," he cries out, as the first spurt of cum hits the back of my throat. I erupt in his mouth at the same time. Our orgasms rock through us, and we keep our bodies connected but ease up on the movement.

I clamp my mouth one last time around his cock, milking the last of his release out of him, before gently lifting him off me and swallowing his load. I bring him to me and when our lips meet, I realize he's done the same.

"Always wanted to know what you taste like," he says with a dopey grin.

"The verdict?"

He snuggles into the crook of my neck. "Better than amazing."



"Mmm. Something smells good."

I look up and smile at the sight of Brant leaning over the kitchen island, peering at me. He's wearing a long-sleeved white shirt that clings to his lithe, muscular arms perfectly.

“They should be ready in about fifteen minutes,” I say, pointing at the tray of vanilla Christmas cookies baking in the oven.

Brant’s smile grows. “Yesterday I was tasting your cum, today you’re making me cookies. Has Christmas come early this year?”

I’m chuckling as I get to my feet. “Don’t know about Christmas, but we certainly did.”

After our impromptu blowjobs yesterday, we spent the rest of the day working. The weather’s thrown a spanner into the works when it comes to the movie Brant is in town to shoot, which my company is producing.

As of this morning, all airports in Chicago are closed, and Christmas Falls might follow, meaning the cast and crew scheduled to arrive on the nineteenth and twentieth might hit delays.

Merry Litmas is a lighthearted gay holiday comedy about a group of influencers—Brant plays one of them—who get stuck in a small town—that would be Christmas Falls—for the holidays due to bad weather. Ironic, right?

One of my favorite parts of running my own production company is finding new talent. The script is by a new and incredibly talented writer, and a lot of the cast are up and coming performers. It’s also an incredibly ambitious project as it’s going to be filmed live—*live!*—in one continuous take across several locations around Christmas Falls on December 23.

“How did you go with your lines yesterday?” I ask as we move into the living room.

Brant takes the sofa and straightens his legs, wiggling his toes that are wrapped up in a pair of navy-blue fozies, which, as he told me yesterday when I first saw them, are a sock and a slipper rolled into one. They’re like walking on warm clouds, apparently. I settle on the armchair.

“Yeah, fine. We did five weeks of rehearsal in LA, so now it’s more about timing and cues and getting some of the

physical comedy stuff right. Although at this stage, I'm starting to wonder if the movie's even going ahead."

"It *will*," I say determinedly. Too much work, not to mention money, has gone into it to simply abandon it because of a few blizzards. "We're doing everything we can to get everyone to Christmas Falls."

"Have you heard from Col?"

I nod. "This morning. He's trying to book a flight, but so is everyone else. He joked about renting a car and driving." When Brant's eyes widen, I quickly reassure him. "He was kidding. Don't worry, I made sure of it."

Brant leans back into the sofa, looking relieved. "Good."

Our eyes meet across the room just as Mariah's "All I Want For Christmas Is You" starts playing through the speakers.

"Speaking of Col..." I begin, since we haven't unpacked the events of yesterday yet, and there's an obvious implication there.

The thing is, I haven't properly processed everything myself. I woke up this morning, and for a split second, I thought it was all a dream.

On the one hand, nothing's changed. Brant and I are able to be around each other with no awkwardness or anything. But we did what we did, and as much as I know there's no future for us, I can't deny there's a part of me that wants more.

I don't really know what to say. There's nothing in the dad manual for when you've exchanged blowjobs with your son's best friend. I scrub a hand down the back of my neck. "You and Col tell each other everything, right?"

I look over at Brant, and his light eyes are sparkling. He's trying—poorly—not to laugh. I shake my head and smile. "This whole thing is ridiculous, isn't it?" I concede.

"No. Not ridiculous. I enjoyed what we did yesterday. Very much." He hesitates. "Did you?"

“Of course. It was amazing.” Our eyes connect. “You’re an incredible young man, Brant. You’ve had such an unusual upbringing, and yet you’re so grounded and confident and unaffected.”

“Plus my deepthroating skills are next level.”

I chuckle as heat rises up my neck at the memory. “Yes. Yes, they very much are.”

“And to answer your question, yes, Col and I do tell each other everything, but there’s no way in hell I’m going to tell him about what we did.”

“Good. That makes sense. Best to keep it to ourselves. It was just a one-off thing anyway, there’s no point—”

“Who said it was a one-off?” Brant narrows his eyes at me.

“Well, uh, I just assumed—”

“And there you go again, making assumptions and decisions for me. I’m a grown-ass man, Hig. I can make my own choices.”

I wince. “Sorry. You’re right. I didn’t mean to imply you had no say in the matter. I just... I just thought you wouldn’t be interested in anything else.”

He rolls his eyes and shakes his head, muttering something under his breath. He crosses the floor and perches on the side of my armchair.

With his olive eyes pointed straight at me, he says, “Do you have any idea how long I’ve been crushing on you?”

I shake my head because I don’t. I never for a minute thought I even registered on Brant’s radar in that way. “You’re so young,” I begin. “And rich and famous and successful. You can have anything and *anyone* that you want.”

That earns me another eye roll. “I’ve done that this year, remember? Tried to have some fun and do all the things I thought I was missing out on. Turns out, they’re not as great as they’re cracked up to be.” He leans over and cups my face in his soft hands. “And I don’t want just anyone, Hig. I want *you*.”

He presses his forehead to mine, and I inhale that delicious coconut fragrance that must be in either his body wash or cologne.

“I’ve been waiting...for you,” he says, and I close my eyes, letting the words sink in.

It’s been so long since anyone has stirred up such deep emotions in me. I exhale slowly, trying to unscramble my mind and my heart, while reminding myself that Brant is talking about sex and nothing more. I’m the sole weirdo here who conflates physical intimacy with emotional connection.

Brant moves back slightly so we can see each other properly. A small, friendly smile plays on his lips. “I realize this may be new to you. For me, I’ve been dreaming about you for—”

“It’s not new for me,” I push out, then clear my throat to dislodge some of the emotion that’s lodged there. “I’ve been harboring...thoughts about you, too.”

Brant lifts a brow. “Harboring thoughts sounds like the title of a cheesy romance novel... Or a guide to boating.” He taps his chin. “I don’t know which is worse.”

I can’t help but smile. Some of the tension eases out of my shoulders. “You sure this is what you want?”

He nods so hard it causes a few strands of his reddish-blond hair to fall onto his face. I reach out and twirl them around my fingers.

“We have at least a few days until Col gets here. I just need to read the script a couple of times to keep everything in my head. What have you got on?”

“Mainly just emails dealing with getting the cast and crew to Christmas Falls. Everything else for the shoot is set. We’re stocked up in the house so even if we get snowed in, which I don’t think is likely, we’re prepared.”

“Great.” He beams. “So, we can do our work first thing in the morning, and then check in again on things in the evening, leaving our days...open.”

“Open,” I agree with a nod. My hand reaches out, and before I’m fully aware of what I’m doing, I’ve pulled Brant into my lap.

“My, my, my,” he says, grinning big, grinding his ass against me. “Looks like Santa got me something very big and hard this year.”

I chuckle like an idiot until he presses his lips to mine, gives me a few soft kisses that leave me wanting more, then pulls back.

His grin is gone, replaced by a fierce hunger igniting his eyes. “I want you to fuck me, Hig. On that rug. In front of the fireplace. Right. Fucking. Now.”

Brant

I'm on all fours, naked, in front of the fireplace, with Hig on his knees behind me, gently running his fingertips over my ass.

It took us less than two minutes to get naked, find supplies, and get into position. It would've taken even less time but Hig had to dash into the kitchen. He had the good sense to take the cookies out of the oven. At least one of us is still able to think with our big heads.

I am done with logical thinking for now. *This* is what I've been craving. The moment I've imagined in my mind countless times. Losing my virginity to Hig.

The fireplace crackles in front of me, licking my bare skin with a beautiful warm heat, and the air is filled with a sweet vanilla aroma drifting in from the kitchen. The snow is falling harder outside, and I really can't think of a more perfect scene for my first time.

Hig chuckles, and I turn to look at him, dipping my cheek into my shoulder.

"This kinda reminds me of what I saw on the Fourth," he tells me.

"Wish you'd have said something or let me know you were there."

“I... I wanted to respect your privacy,” he says with hardly any conviction. It sounds more like he thinks it’s the right thing to say.

“I was fucking myself with the door wide open. I kinda forfeited my rights to privacy.”

He inches forward slightly and nudges his sheathed cockhead against my taint. “You sure you want this?”

I shudder. “Yes,” I reply, because I’ve never wanted anything this badly in my life.

Hig’s hands slide around my hips, and he gets a good grip. “I’ll go slow,” he says, his voice dropping even lower. “If you need me to stop at any time, just say the word.”

I nod, look into those incredible eyes of his, then turn around and get myself comfortable. The mechanics of what’s about to happen aren’t new to me thanks to numerous sessions with The Big Hig, but I already know that what The Real Hig and I are about to do won’t even compare to that. It’ll be on a whole new level.

I extend my arms in front of me, sliding my fingers along the bearskin rug, and tilt my ass slightly higher into the air.

That’s met with a primal growl from Hig, and I can’t help but smile.

He swipes his meaty cock up and down my crack a few times, getting the whole area wet with lube. And then he stops at my entrance and gives the barest of nudges.

A current of heat builds in my core. We’re doing this. We’re really doing this.

Tightening his grip on my waist to keep me perfectly still, he presses forward, and the thick head of his cock enters me. I let out a gasp as I adjust to his size.

“You okay, Brant?”

“Yep. All good.” I keep breathing. “Don’t stop.”

Hig continues, pushing deeper and deeper inside me. The stretch is unlike anything I’ve ever experienced. I feel so full

and yet I'm getting lightheaded at the same time. I grit my teeth and just when I think it's too much to take, the pain subsides and a rush of bliss crashes over me.

"Holy fuck," I cry out as Hig bottoms out his monster cock deep in my ass.

He groans in pleasure, his hands now running up and down my back. "How's this?" he asks.

"So. Fucking. Good."

A pause. "So, better than ol' purple, then?"

I bite back a smile even though I'm facing away from him. "Hard to tell. You're not really doing anything yet."

"Is that a challenge?"

"Only if you're up to it— *Oomf*. Jesus." I lurch forward as Hig slams into me with full force.

"You like that?" he grunts.

"Uh-huh."

"That's a fucking warm-up."

My eyes widen, and I force myself to swallow so I don't choke on my saliva. *That* was a warm-up? I turn my head to look back at him. "You mean there's more?"

He nods, then smiles dirty at me in a way that lights my whole body up. He reaches his hand out, and since I'm leaning on my arms, I open my mouth. He guides his thumb up and I suck on it as he tells me, "I just want to make you feel good. If you like it rough, I'll give it to you rough. If you want it soft and tender, just tell me, and I can switch gears."

"Rough," I say, with his thumb still in my mouth.

"You got it." The corners of his mouth quirk up. "Hold on, baby."

With our eyes locked and me sucking on his digit like a lollipop, Hig proceeds to give me the fucking of a lifetime. Full, deep thrusts. A strong, steady rhythm. A masterclass in top control.

My body melts. Every time he spears that massive cock into me, my channel opens up even more to accommodate him, and my entire body sizzles with pleasure.

He's still pounding into me as I turn around, lowering myself onto my elbow to free up a hand and get myself off.

I'm so close that all it takes is a few frantic strokes and I'm right there on the edge. "Close," I grit out.

"Same," he mutters.

"Wanna see you as we—"

I don't even get all the words out. I'm being spun around, my back meeting the warm rug. Hig's massive frame looms over me, and I get exactly what I want—his intense eyes trained on me.

I run my hands down the thick column of his neck, then across his chest to tweak at his nipples before going lower. There's no six-pack, but the solid layer of padding I'm met with makes even more pre-cum ooze out of my slit. Hig's a real man, not some gym bunny poser.

He drops his gaze and notices I'm leaking, smirking as he runs his thumb over my tip and collects the few drops, then brings them to his lips. "You taste so good, baby."

I'm overcome by the need to taste him, too. "Come on me," I say, not even caring how desperate I sound.

He nods and withdraws, but before I can miss the sensation of him inside me, two fingers are spearing into me, keeping me nice and full.

I grab my cock and we both jerk off, staring at each other. Hig's skin is lit up golden by the fire, and the muscles in his arm are flexing like crazy as he adds a third digit and finger fucks me mercilessly while fisting his enormous cock.

"I'm close."

His eyes shine bright. "Wanna see you come, baby."

Two more strokes, and I'm emptying myself all over my chest and abs.

Hig's fingers ease up inside me, as he closes his eyes, throws his head back, and explodes all over me, adding his release to mine.

When his body stops shaking, he opens his eyes and looks down with a smile. "We've made quite a mess here."

I look down and chuckle, because yeah, we have. It looks like someone's dumped a whole bunch of frosting over me.

I take Hig's wrist and run his hand through the middle of it, then bring it to my mouth and lap at it. I don't know whose load I'm tasting. It could be mine or it could be his, but as I lick his fingers clean, I realize...I don't really care because whatever I'm tasting will always remind me of this moment.

The time I lost my virginity to Hig Langdon.



"Wow. It's really coming down now."

Hig joins me at the window. "It is." He slides one hand around my waist and brings the other to my mouth. "Here. Try this."

He's holding it too close for me to see. "What is it?"

"The cookies I made."

"Ooh nice." I lean forward and take a nibble. They're still a little warm and positively delicious.

"Your verdict?"

I spin around and loop my arms over his massive shoulders. "Yummy. But I've had better *icing* today."

Hig smirks and takes a bite. "That so?"

"Yeah. But if we found a way to combine the two..."

His smirk grows into a smile. "Cookies and cum. That could work."

"We could definitely make it work." I pull down on his neck and bring him closer, crashing his lips into mine. I've

never kissed someone who's been inside me, and it's wonderful and thrilling and totally addictive.

Eventually, Hig breaks our impromptu make-out session. He peers into my eyes as if he's searching my soul for answers to questions he hasn't asked yet. "How are you feeling?"

"Good." I shrug. "Like I've just been fucked by a massive cock."

He cups my face, studying me. "Are you sore?"

"No. I'm not. I'm fine.

"Really?"

"Yes. Really."

I look down. The cookie's on the floor. Hig must've dropped it, but he doesn't care about that. He's too focused on me. He's really concerned that I'm okay after we had sex. I'm not used to the people in my day-to-day life genuinely caring about my well-being. It's...nice.

"And are we okay?" He waves his hand between our faces. "We've done some *things* these past two days. Just wanna check in with you."

"I'm good." I smile only because it's so surreal to hear Hig asking me how I'm doing after we've blown and fucked each other. Never covered this terrain in any of my fantasies. "I like how things are still the same between us."

Hig nods. "I like that, too. There's no post-sex awkwardness."

"There really isn't." I'm about to ask him why he thinks that is, but I decide not to. Maybe we've landed in some magical snowy vacation bubble. I don't want to break the spell with analysis.

"I need to respond to a few emails, which will take me about half an hour. What would you like to do after that?"

"Um..." I tap my chin. "First, I want to blow you. Then I'd like to have some lunch. Sex really builds up an appetite."

Hig's eyes shimmer as he smiles at me. "Usually, dessert comes after the meal, not before it."

I tug his shirt and pull him in so that the tips of our noses touch. "Can't wait that long. But I can blow you before *and* after the meal if you like. I believe that's called a compromise."

Hig chuckles, and I can smell the aftertaste of vanilla on his breath. "I like your version of compromising."



One toe-curling blowjob later, Hig and I are digging into the chorizo carbonara he whipped up.

"Sorry if this isn't as good as what you're normally used to," he says with a bashful smile. "I did buy you kale and other *green stuff* that you probably prefer."

"You kidding me? This is great." I pop a bite of cream-laden chorizo into my mouth. "And for the record, I love pasta, I hate kale, and I eat pretty much whatever I want."

"And still look like that?"

"Yeah. It's called being twenty-five."

A hint of color rises on Hig's cheeks, and he puts down the fork. "Since we're talking about age. Sorry if I'm not..." He pats his stomach. "In as great shape as I could be."

My eyes widen. "Are you being serious right now?"

He nods, then looks away.

"Hig, look at me. Please."

He turns his head slowly until his blue-green eyes are on me again.

"You have a fantastic body, and I love everything about it. Especially your stomach."

"Really?"

“Yes, really. Fuck six-packs and guys who avoid carbs like the plague. Life is too short not to eat bread.”

Hig smiles.

“And besides, with the way you fuck me, I need as much of you to hold on to as I can.”

He reaches over the table and takes my hand in his. “Thanks, Brant. You really are something special.”

Usually I’d come up with a quip or comeback, but this time, I’ve got nothing because the way Hig is looking at me tells me this isn’t a lighthearted moment.

Maybe he’s a little self-conscious about his body. Maybe I’m one of the few people he’s ever trusted enough to share that with.

Which means that maybe, just maybe, what’s happening between us is more than just sex?

Hig

“You sure you don’t mind doing this?”

I chuckle. “If I minded, I wouldn’t have offered. Now hand it over and let’s get into it.”

“Okay. But if you get bored...” Brant walks over and hands me a copy of the script. “Just let me know and we can... do something else.” His eyebrows waggle adorably.

I fold the script and lightly smack his ass with it. “No sex until you’ve got your lines down.”

“Ooh, bossy. I kinda like that.”

“Also, forty-two, so my dick needs recovery time.”

Brant plops himself down on the sofa and wriggles his foozie-wrapped feet at me. “Aw. It’s cute you think I’ll be taking that into account.” He peers up at me over his script and lifts a brow. “Because I won’t.”

I laugh and shake my head. “All right. From the beginning. Let’s go.”

It’s an ensemble cast, but Brant’s character has got a fair amount of dialogue. As we run through all of his scenes, I’m impressed that he’s got it all down. Not only that, he’s putting real effort into it, reciting the lines as if the cameras were rolling and not like we’re rehearsing in my living room.

He plays Toby Jordan, a sassy influencer looking to find more meaning to life than chasing likes and follows.

It's a great part for Brant, allowing him to show off his natural charm as well as his comedic skills. He's got a hilarious scene where he runs through the main street of Christmas Falls shirtless with a goat chasing him after a selfie fail.

He's going to nail it. Audiences will love him, and hopefully it'll get his manager off his back, too.

"You were fantastic," I say once we've wrapped up his final scene. "Looks like you're all set for filming on the twenty-third."

"Yeah." He puts the script on the coffee table and forces a smile.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"Nothing."

"No. It's something. I can tell."

He blows out a breath and uncrosses his feet, hugging his knees into his chest. "You'll think I'm an ungrateful asshole."

"I promise I won't." I toss my script onto the coffee table, too. "And also, I've seen your asshole, so I am banning the use of that word as a pejorative from now on."

His forced smile is replaced by a real one. "Thanks. The thing is... I don't want to be doing this anymore." His eyes drift over to the scripts atop the coffee table.

"You mean this movie?"

He shakes his head. "I mean acting. I'm over it. It's the only thing I've ever done in my life, but I don't want to do it anymore."

"That doesn't make you ungrateful," I say. "It just means that you're aware it's no longer working for you. What would you like to do instead?"

"That's the thing." He slumps back into the sofa and plays with his hair. "I have no idea. I've never pursued anything

other than my career. I don't have any hobbies or interests outside of this.”

“Hmm.”

I lean across and look down at his script, sliding it over to inspect it more closely. Actors highlight or make notes in their scripts. That's normal. But Brant's is filled with more notes than usual. Even the backs of the one-sided pages are covered with his writing.

“What's all this?” I ask, lifting up a full page of his handwriting for him to see.

“Oh, nothing,” he says dismissively. “Just some changes I'd make if I were writing it myself.”

I take a moment and realize that he's re-written a whole section—his shirtless scene with the goat—and I chuckle. His changes make it even funnier.

“You shared this with the director?”

“Oh, sure. Of course. Because directors just *loooove* it when actors offer their suggestions.”

“But this is good, Brant.” I brush off his joke. “And I know the director. Sally Anderson and I have worked together a few times. She's a good person, and I'm pretty sure she'd be open to feedback.”

“Nah. I'm staying in my lane.”

“Okay. Your call... Does staying in your lane mean you'll stop pranking the press with all your ‘having fun’ antics?” I ask, putting the words in air quotes.

“Oh, for sure. I'm totally over that now. Lesson learned.” Brant sits up and crosses his legs. “Besides, why would I pretend to be having fun when I have the real thing right here?”



The next morning, after several rounds of *real fun* yesterday, I'm sitting at my desk in my home office dealing with the logistical nightmare brought on by the weather.

Accommodation is proving to be one of the biggest challenges. It was hard enough in the first place finding places for the cast and crew to stay at this time of year, given it's peak tourist season. I wasn't able to book them into one spot, but rather a hodgepodge of inns, a few motels just out of town, and a smattering of Airbnbs.

I'm emailing with Arlo Harper, the owner of the Gingerbread Cottage, to see whether he's able to help accommodate some of the cast and crew. Brant pads into the room and stands behind me, massaging my shoulders as if it's the most natural thing in the world.

"Morning, sleepy head," I say, looking up.

He blinks down at me, bleary-eyed, and smiles. "What time is it?"

"Almost nine."

"God. That's late. I'm usually awake before you. I never sleep in like this."

"Wouldn't have anything to do with our marathon sex sessions yesterday?"

His lips stretch into a sleepy smile. "Maybe. I might only be twenty-five, but I think my ass needs some recovery time today."

"Noted." I spin around on my chair and look up at him. "What would you like to do today instead? We can check out the Christmas Falls Festival if you like? There's heaps of cool stuff happening all over town."

He chews on his lip as he thinks about it. "Mind if we stay in? I'm not up for people and stuff."

I chuckle. "That's fine. How about we pretend we're snowed in then?"

His eyes light up as he smiles. "Ooh, yeah, I love that. In that case, let's do coffee, breakfast, a round of blowjobs since

they don't involve my butt, and then we can, like, sit by the fire and talk... Unless that's boring?"

"Not boring at all." I lean forward and press my nose into his T-shirt, inhaling the sweet coconuty smell I like way too much. "I can't think of a better way to spend the day."

I get up and make Brant coffee and his favorite breakfast—pancakes with ice cream and strawberries. I remember because it's Col's favorite, too.

After that, our fireside talking plans get delayed a bit, because rather than the one round of blowjobs Brant suggested, we end up having three. Guess my forty-two-year-old cock is entering his *I don't give a fuck about age* era.

By the time we finally make it to the rug in front of the fire, I am in a thoroughly blissed-out, sexed-out state of mind. I can't remember the last time I felt so relaxed. So happy.

We're both lying on our sides, facing the flames, with Brant in front of me. I wrap an arm around him. "You comfortable, baby? Shit." I catch the endearment only after it slips out. "Sorry. Didn't mean to say that."

Brant pushes back, wedging his body against mine. "It's okay. I don't mind. You called me baby yesterday."

"Yeah, but that's while we were..."

"Fucking each other's brains out?"

I chuckle softly. "Correct. It just slipped out now. Don't want to make this weird."

"Not weird for me. I actually like it."

"Hmm." I pull him in closer and take in the beautiful fire burning in front of us. Well, if he likes it, maybe I could slip it in occasionally? What's the harm, right?

"This feels so good," I murmur into his hair.

"It does."

We lie in cozy silence for a while, just watching the flames flicker. I could stay like this forever. It's been so long since I've had someone to hold. I'd forgotten how nice it can be.

“Can I ask you a question?” Brant murmurs, so quietly I barely hear him over the crackling of the fire.

“Of course.” I weave my fingers through his hair. “Anything...*baby*.”

He inhales sharply, and I snuggle against him even harder. “When did you realize you were bi?”

“I guess I’ve always known, but things were different back in the ’90s. We didn’t have—”

“Electricity?”

I fumble around his chest, tweaking his nipple through his shirt when I find it. “I was going to say we didn’t have access to as much information as we do nowadays.”

He giggles, then places his hand over mine and draws it down his chest until I’m cupping his junk through his sweatpants. “Keep talking,” he says, and I do, because me holding him there feels more intimate than it does sexual.

“So yeah, no internet,” I go on. “And then, of course, Marianne and I fooled around that one time.”

“Was that your first time?”

“First time having sex, yes. I messed around a little with a male friend in the locker room after football practice a few times, but yeah, that was about the extent of my sexual experience.”

“So are you, like, fifty-fifty bi, or do you prefer one sex over the other? How does it work?”

“I’d say that perhaps physically, I’m more interested in women. I think their bodies are beautiful and there’s something about the female form that really turns me on. But I’m very into men, too, and I think relationship-wise, I might be more wired to guys. Or at least, I can see myself with a guy more than I can with a woman.”

“Have you had any long-term relationships?”

I’m pretty sure he hasn’t, but who knows, maybe he’s been seeing someone without telling Col.

“Nope. No short-term ones, either. You might not know this, but being a dad is a full-time job.”

Brants shuffles away then spins around so he’s facing me. “Wait. Are you saying— What exactly are you saying?”

“I’m saying that I’ve never had a relationship.” I blow out a slow breath. It’s not like this is a revelation to me, but speaking the words out loud causes a sudden heaviness to come tumbling into my chest.

Brant strokes the side of my face with the backs of his fingers. “Being a dad so young means you missed out on a lot, huh?”

I open my mouth to say something, but before I can, Brant jumps in with, “And I don’t mean that in a pitying, I-feel-sorry-for-you way. I’m just stating a fact. Right?”

“Correct.” I was literally about to say I didn’t want him feeling bad for me. “I don’t regret a single thing about my life. I wouldn’t change anything because I got the best gift in the world. My son. I only wish his mother were still alive to see the incredible man he’s grown into.”

“Col really is the best.” Brant’s gaze drops to my lips. “Too bad he’s straight, and I have to settle for his dad.”

“I’ll give you *settle for his dad*.” I grab at his sides, quickly finding the precise spot that makes Brant erupt in laughter.

“Okay, I’m sorry!” he laugh-yells, trying to smack my hands away, but I’m stronger.

I roll us over so I’m straddling him, still jabbing at his sides and making him crazy with laughter. God, he looks beautiful like this. So free. So joyous. I file this moment away in my memory bank under Keepers.

I finally relent, and he starts to settle. “Thank fuck that’s over.”

“Any more cracks about my age and you can expect more of that,” I say.

We’re both smiling at each other.

“Deal. And if you keep looking at me like that, you can expect me on my knees in front of you all. The. Time.”

I laugh. “How am I looking at you?”

“Like you want to devour me.”

I lean forward and bring our faces nice and close. “That’s because I do, baby.”



“I think I’m ready for you to fuck me again,” Brant announces as we’re washing up after dinner. “Just finished a Zoom call with my ass and got the all clear. Things are nice and relaxed down there.”

I chuckle, handing him a clean plate to dry. “You’re nice and relaxed because we barely moved from the fireplace today. And no. No fucking tonight. You still need to recover.”

Brant stops drying the plate and pouts, fucking pouts, at me, sticking his bottom lip out adorably.

I stab my chest with my thumb. “Bossy top here, remember?”

He’s still frowning as he retorts, “Yeah, well, maybe I’m a bossy bottom.”

I smile. “You’re many things, Brant Lombardi, but bossy is not one of them.”

We finish cleaning the kitchen, then head down the hall toward our bedrooms. Brant’s been quiet since our whole bossy convo, and I sense something’s playing on his mind.

“You okay?” I ask when we reach the door to his bedroom. His gaze shifts between me and the door a few times, and I think I cotton on to what’s going on.

“Would you like to sleep with me?” I ask, and his eyes light up like a Christmas tree. “No sex,” I point out. “Just sleep.”

Brant scrunches up his nose and ekes out a timid-sounding, “Would blowjobs be okay?”

I laugh because he’s so damn cute and ridiculous it’s impossible to resist him.

“Yes, blowjobs are okay,” I say, taking his hand in mine and leading him down the hall and into my bedroom.

Blowjobs are *very* okay.

Brant

I slide my tongue along the thick vein that runs the entire underside of Hig's meaty cock, flick my tongue when I reach his crown, and then suck his swollen purple head into my mouth.

Why did I wait so long to do this? Sucking cock—the real kind, not a dildo—is the best thing in the world.

Correction. Sucking *Hig's* cock is the best thing in the world.

And I guess I just answered my own question. The reason I waited was this. I really did want my first time to be with him.

And now that I've had a taste, I can't get enough. You'd think exchanging blowjobs last night before bed would have satisfied my hunger. And you'd be wrong, because I woke up this morning more ravenous than ever.

"Morning, baby." Hig peers down at me, scrubbing a hand over his face. "This is a nice way to wake up."

I stick my tongue out and slap his cock against it a few times. His sleepy eyes widen. "Please tell me I'm awake and not having a wet dream."

"You're definitely awake," I say, tonguing his slit. "This is definitely not a dream, but I can't guarantee that we won't end up wet."

Hig props himself onto his elbows. “Fuck, you’re gorgeous.”

It’s been snowing overnight, but the sun is out and a ray of light illuminates the left side of Hig’s face, neck, and naked torso. “Can say the same about you.”

I lower down and swallow all of his cock. His thick fingers weave into my hair as he lets out a moan and spreads his legs wider on the bed.

I love the way Hig smells. He’s got a neatly trimmed bush that tickles my nostrils every time I deepthroat him, and it has this wonderful, manly scent that’s just so him.

“Since I’ve been ambushed, afraid I might not last long,” he warns me.

“In that case, I want you to fuck my face.”

Hig’s blue-green eyes grow big, but his hands slide out of my hair and cup the sides of my face. “You sure, baby?”

“I am. I’ll consider it breakfast in bed.”

Hig chuckles, but then I inhale his cock. He lets out a loud hiss, his lower back arching off the mattress. Keeping my face perfectly still and in position, he begins to rock his hips, fucking his cock into my mouth.

“So good,” I say and hope he can understand it since it is a little hard to talk with your mouth full.

His eyes connect with mine. “You like that?”

I give a little nod.

“You want it rougher?”

I give a big nod.

And holy fucking shit, Hig wastes no time, coming to life and strengthening his grip on my face as he pistons his dick into me, hitting the insides of my mouth from all angles.

I love how he can manhandle me like this, and yet I feel entirely safe the whole time. I get the feeling that it’s not his

position of power that's getting him off, and I know he'd stop the second I asked him to.

I just like making him feel good, and weirdly, this makes me feel so good, too.

With only a guttural growl as warning, warm spurts of cum are soon pouring into my mouth, falling onto my tongue, and I close my eyes and savor the taste of him, before swallowing down every last drop.

Hig bends over to give me a full open-mouthed kiss as his hand reaches between our bodies. It only takes a few rough strokes to bring me over the edge. He catches my release in his open palm and laps it up, his eyes glued to me the entire time.

"You're not the only one who likes breakfast in bed," he says with a devilish grin before collapsing back onto the bed. "What a way to wake up."



"How's everything looking?" I ask, stepping into Hig's home office after we've showered and had an actual breakfast.

He swivels in his chair to face me and smiles. "Great. The airport in Chicago has re-opened. We'll be able to get most of the cast and crew in before the twenty-second. That'll give everyone some time for final live dress rehearsals and any other last-minute planning."

"That's brilliant." I walk over to him and plant a kiss on his forehead. "And Col?"

"We're just chatting now. He's on standby for a flight tomorrow."

Tomorrow. Tomorrow. *Tomorrow.*

The word echoes in my head like rolling thunder.

If Col arrives tomorrow, then it means—

"You okay?" Hig looks up at me with those same eyes I've spent most of my whole life looking into, because my best

friend's look exactly the same. Well, almost the same. But this is the man he gets them from.

And with Col being here, it's going to mean, what? That this thing with me and Hig has to stop. Because it does have to stop...right?

“What's the matter, ba—Brant?”

Shit. It's stopping already. I glance down at Hig, who smiles sheepishly at me. “Your face looks about how I'm feeling right now.”

“Confused as fuck?”

Hig nods then gets to his feet, entwining his fingers with mine. “Come on. We need to talk.”

“I agree.” But I pull my hand away as we head for the door. I know what he's going to say—that it was nice while it lasted but that our time together has come to an end—so I don't want to keep touching him or having him so close to me. That has to end. I need to start weaning myself off Hig before Col gets here tomorrow.

We walk into the living room in silence. Hig orders Alexa to stop playing Christmas carols. The room goes quiet except for the fire roaring away. God, was it only yesterday that we spent pretty much the whole day there, having sex and talking to each other about everything and nothing?

I claim my usual spot on the sofa, and Hig takes the armchair. He glances down at my bare feet. “No fozies today?” he asks.

“They're in the wash.”

“Ah, right.” He gets up and walks over to a small wooden container beside the fire. He grabs a blanket and throws it over the lower half of my body, covering my feet. “There you go.”

“Thanks,” I say.

It's hard trying to smile when you feel like crying.

Why am I getting so emotional? It's only been a few days that Hig and I have been doing stuff, but it feels like so much

longer. Guess that's because I've known him forever.

Still, I have to be smart about this. There's no way Hig and I have a future together.

I look over at him, waiting for him to tell me exactly that.

He's wringing his hands. When he glances up at me, he's frowning hard. "I like you, Brant," he says, but the words do nothing to quell whatever's going on inside me because they don't match the tight expression on his face.

"But...?"

"No buts. I like you. That part is simple."

"But the Col part isn't?"

He nods slowly. "Col is a factor, yes. A very important factor, but not the only one."

"What else is there?"

His mouth flattens into a tight line. "We're in very different places in our lives. For a start, I'm a lot older than you. I have a life here, just like you have yours in California. And I... I think I'm looking for a change of my own."

"A change?"

"Yeah. Look, I know you've been pranking the press with your whole 'year of fun' thing, but it got me thinking. I could relate to what you were doing, because, in a way, I haven't really had fun, either."

I nod because I get it. He was a dad at seventeen, and I can't even imagine the impact that would have had on the trajectory of his life.

"Don't get me wrong," he adds. "I love being a dad. I'm proud of how well my business is doing. But... But I want more out of life, too."

"I get that. What would you like to do?"

"Travel," he replies without a moment's hesitation.

"Why travel?" I ask.

He smiles wistfully. “Growing up, my family was poor. We could only ever do day trips to the beach. As a kid, I always said to myself that when I grew up, I was going to get out there and see the world.”

“Where would you like to go?”

“Anywhere. Everywhere. Heck, I’d be happy seeing more of this country. Some of the most beautiful natural wonders are right here. The Grand Canyon. Yosemite. Niagara Falls. The Hawaiian Islands. I want to see it all.”

I like seeing Hig get excited like this. I want that for him. I want him to be able to finally live his life for himself and have the fun he deserves. He’s worked hard and sacrificed so much, now it’s his time to do what he wants.

And then it clicks.

I can’t give him that life.

I’m barely coping as it is, stuck in LA, working in a career I’m grateful for but don’t see any way out of, dealing with a domineering yet emotionally distant mother. There’s no way I can help Hig achieve his dreams when I’m barely functioning on my own.

“So, what are you saying?”

He drops his head into his hands. “I think what I’m saying is that I’m confused. About a lot of things.” He looks up at me. “Including you.”

“Me?”

“Yeah, you.” His brows slant together. “You were always in a box. Col’s best friend. Simple.” He takes a breath. “I can’t pinpoint when it first started, but over the past few years, as I’ve harbor—I mean, as I’ve *developed* feelings for you, I’ve forced myself to keep them reined in. You were a fantasy. A naughty little secret. That I never planned to act on. And then...”

Our eyes meet, as I mutter, “The Big Hig.”

Hig frowns. “The big what?”

“My purple dildo. That’s his name.”

He shakes his head, grinning. “I’m honored. Hope I stack up.”

“It’s not even a contest. I’ve already booked a month’s worth of therapy for The Big Hig when we get back. He’s completely devastated that you’ve put him permanently out of business.”

Hig lets out a hearty laugh. “I might need some therapy, too. You’ve ruined the color purple for me. As well as coconut oil.”

“Coconut oil?”

“Yeah. You smell like coconut oil, and it drives me crazy. In a good way. I mean, a bad way.” He lets out an exasperated sigh. “I don’t know what I mean. You scrambled my brain good, Brant. You really have.”

“Me? What about you? You think you’re being fair walking around looking as hot as you do, being as cool as you are? You’re basically the ideal man, Hig, everything I’ve ever wanted in someone. And for the record, you smell great, too. Not coconuty, but something I don’t know how to describe. And I’m... I’m... I’ve stolen your gray sweater.”

Hig cocks his head to the side. “The one I caught you sniffing?”

“That’s the one. It’s mine now.”

“Fine.” He sits up straighter, his eyes darting about the room until his gaze lands on the blanket he handed me. “In that case, I’m stealing your fozzies.”

I scrunch my nose. “Ew. You want my old socks?”

He winces. “Not when you put it like that. But I’m... I’m stealing something of yours before you leave, too.”

I fold my arms across my chest. “Fine.”

Hig does the same. “Fine.”

We stare at each other for what feels like a good minute. I’m the one to crack first. “Wait. What are we doing here? Is

our first fight seriously going to be about stealing each other's clothes? Because that's all kinds of fucked up."

Hig lets out a deep chuckle. "It is, isn't it?"

"Also, just so you know, I am not a sweater sniffer. That was a one-time thing that I only did because I was desperate for you."

"And just so you know, I don't have a sock fetish. Or a foot fetish, either. Even though you do have very nice feet."

"Thank you. Noted."

I unfold my arms. Hig follows suit, then asks, "How is it possible I'm more confused after this conversation than I was at the beginning?"

"Probably physics, or something."

He smiles.

"You're asking the wrong guy. I was homeschooled, remember?"

His smile vanishes. "That doesn't mean you're not intelligent, because you are."

"I know. I was only kidding." But god, I love it when he gets all defensive and protective over me. "So, what are we going to do?"

He pushes to his feet and runs a hand through his hair. He starts pacing, and I follow him with my eyes as he processes everything that's going on. Finally, he stops and turns to face me.

"You and I are never going to work, right?"

"Um... Right," I agree somewhat begrudgingly and mainly because I feel like he's going somewhere with this, and I don't want to mess with his flow.

"And you want to have some fun with me?"

"Yeah."

"And I want to have some fun with you, too."

"*Riiight.*"

He pulls out his phone from his back pocket and checks something. “Good news. Col managed to get a flight. He arrives at 10 p.m. tomorrow. It’s now...10 a.m.”

“*Okaaay.*”

Where is he going with this? It’s unlike him to be so erratic.

Hig takes three giant strides and then he’s next to me, dropping to his knees. He takes my hands in his, clutching them tightly, and my heart holds its breath, waiting for whatever’s coming next.

Hig’s eyes shine brightly as he says, “Brant Lombardi, would you like to be my boyfriend for the next thirty-six hours?”

Hig

“Boyfriend?” Brant repeats, blinking at me a few times.

I nod furiously. Maybe a little too furiously and I look like a madman, but I don’t care. I’m struck by the brilliance of my idea.

Brant and I not being able to be together is a problem for Future Us.

Right now, Current Us have a window to be together in whatever way we want to be.

It’s better to have loved and lost for thirty-six hours, than never to have loved at all, right?

“Yeah,” I say, realizing my idea might need some explaining. “For the next day and a half, let’s be together.”

“As boyfriends?”

I nod. “Yes. We can fuck wherever we like, whenever we want. I can make you pancakes and call you baby. We can talk by the fire. Dance to Christmas carols. Bake cookies. Go for walks in the snow. We can do whatever the fuck we want to do, Brant. We can have *fun!*”

I exhale and stare into his light-green eyes. He’s... beaming, and thank fuck he is, because for a moment, I thought I’d lost him. This idea is a little out there, I’ll admit.

“I love this on so many levels,” he says, his smile growing. “We only have thirty-six hours, but that doesn’t mean we can’t make them the best thirty-six hours of our lives.”

“Exactly.” I lean in and give him a quick kiss.

He pulls back, his eyes darkening. “Fair warning. Being a boyfriend makes me all kinds of slutty.”

“Fair warning right back at ya.” I lean in closer. “I can be even sluttier. Now what’s the first thing you’d like to do as boyfriends...baby?”



“This!” Brant announces, stepping out onto the back patio.

I have to confess, when he didn’t answer my question straight away, instead leaping to his feet, taking me by the hand, and leading me to my bedroom, I thought the answer to what our first act as boyfriends would be was a given.

But when we got into my room, instead of undressing me, he ordered me to put on some warm clothes before ducking into the guest bedroom to do the same.

And now here we are, standing on the back patio, with Brant pointing at three misshapen Christmas trees in the backyard by the covered pool.

“I don’t understand,” I say, sidling up next to him and wrapping my arm around his middle.

He leans into me and smiles. “I love how you always buy extra trees. The ugly ones.”

“Not ugly,” I correct. “Beautiful in their own way.”

He smiles more, causing the skin around his eyes to wrinkle some. He opens his mouth and his lips move, but no words come out.

“Say it,” I say with a smile. “Whatever it is you stopped yourself from saying, just say it.”

He lets out a puff of air, his eyes twinkling. “I... I... I really like you right now.”

I give his waist a squeeze. “Only right now?” He laughs, and I press a kiss to his forehead. “I really like you, too. And for the record, not just right now, but all the time. Anyways, tell me what you want to do with these trees.”

“Decorate them, duh.”

“But these ones aren’t for decoration. I only buy them so they don’t have to suffer the indignity of being passed over all season before getting chipped.”

“Yeah, but I’ve... I’ve never decorated a tree before.”

“What? Never?”

He drops his head and readjusts his beanie. “Nope. Mom isn’t a huge holiday person, so she’d always get the maid to put the tree up.”

“Oh, Brant.” I pull him in for a side hug. “I’m sorry.”

His mother is a real piece of work. I’ve had issues with her in the past, but for the sake of the boys’ friendship, I’ve kept my feelings to myself and never said anything. She’s one of those people who’s always right, so there’s no way to win with her or make her see how her actions are affecting people. I suspect that’s why Brant’s never stood up to her.

“All right. Let’s do it.”

He tilts his head at me. “Really?”

“Of course.”

“You know what? Maybe it’s a dumb idea. You already have such a beautiful tree inside, we don’t need to—”

“Brant, we are doing this. I’ll bring one of these trees inside. You go get decorations from the basement. I’ll meet you in the entryway.”

Five minutes later, we’re in the entryway. I’ve hauled the most-beautiful-in-its-own-way and least-likely-to-topple-over tree inside, and Brant’s lugged up two big boxes of leftover tree decorations, so there’s really nothing left to do but...

“Let’s get to work,” I say, clapping my hands together. “What sort of Christmas carols are you in the mood for? Upbeat? Traditional? Jazzy?”

Brant lifts a brow. “Jazzy Christmas carols are a thing?”

“They are. They’re nice for when you just want something playing in the background.”

He nods with a smile. “Cool. Let’s do that then.”

“Alexa, play Hig’s Jazzy Christmas Carols playlist.”

The piano intro to “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” comes on, and I look over at Brant with a grin. “Now that music’s sorted, let’s dive in.”

“Uh...” His head shifts between the boxes and the tree and then he aims his gaze at me. “How do we do this exactly?”

“You’re adorable.” I point to the boxes. “We just open them up, see what we pull out, and find a spot for it on the tree.”

He nods, and I suppress my smile. He’s taking this way more seriously than is needed, but then I remind myself that it’s because he’s never done it before. *What sort of a parent—*

I cut off that unwanted train of thought by striding over and opening the first box. I hand him the first thing I pluck out. A blue bauble.

He waves it in front of the tree. “I just put it...anywhere?”

“That’s right, baby.”

He approaches the tree and hesitates. “How will I know if ___”

“Brant.”

He turns and those light-green orbs soften when they land on me.

“There’s no right or wrong way to do this,” I say gently. “This is our little tree, and whatever we do will be beautiful.”

He gives a cute little nod and relaxes a little, placing the decoration on a branch in the middle of the tree.

“Perfect,” I say.

He takes a step back, inspects his work, then breaks out into a wide smile. “I think I’m going to nail this.”

Warmth fills my chest. “You sure will.”

And he does. We spend the next however long decorating the tree with baubles, tinsel, the works, laughing and chatting away the entire time, until the last thing left to put on is the star.

I’ve taken it out of the box and am about to hand it to Brant, so he can do the honors of placing it atop the tree, when he suddenly reaches for my wrist and yanks it over his head, then draws himself near so that he’s standing under it.

“What are you doing?”

“Aren’t you meant to kiss the person under the star?”

“You are too cute for your own good. That’d be mistletoe.”

“Mistle...toe?” His eyes narrow. “You sure you don’t have a foot fetish?”

I chuckle at his joke, then remind him, “But we don’t need mistletoe to kiss. We’re boyfriends, remember?”

“Ah, that’s right.” His eyes sparkle as he places the star on the floor then fists my shirt and tugs me into him.

Brant leans in and swipes his tongue over my lower lip. I part my lips, inviting him in, and he accepts, sweeping into my mouth. My hands smooth their way down his chest, and I love how tightly packed he is. He’s muscular, but lean. So unlike my own bulky frame.

The kiss deepens. I tug him in closer with one hand, running the other along his neck and into his hair. It’s so soft and silky, and when he lets out a tiny moan, I gently tug on a few strands, producing a deeper groan from him.

For someone completely inexperienced, Brant doesn’t seem to have any problem with me being too rough with him. In fact, judging by the erection pressing into my hip, I’d say he likes it this way.

When we finally pull apart, I look at him and smile. He's so beautiful, and even though we're in the entryway, glows of ember and orange from the fireplace reach us and dance across his beautiful face.

"All this hard work has made me hungry. Whaddya say I make us some..." I look at the time. Shit. It's after two. "Late lunch?"

"Sounds good." Brant runs his fingertips over his lips, and his eyes gleam in a way I've come to recognize only means one thing. "Can I have dessert first, though?"

I grab his hand, chuckling as I pepper his knuckles with small kisses. "You can have anything you want, baby."



I've lost count of how many times I've come these past few days. I'm surprised my dick hasn't fallen off and my nut sack hasn't pruned. Needless to say, keeping up with a twenty-five-year-old is hard.

Good thing then that I'm a *hard*-working man.

I'm still pinching myself that this is even real. So much has happened in a short space of time. From walking in on Brant pleasuring himself with The Big Hig—that nickname will never not make me smile—to being boyfriends for thirty-six hours. It's enough to make my head spin.

And yes, I'm well aware that we're not real boyfriends. Because real boyfriends aren't time-boxed the way we are. Real relationships are meant to last forever. They don't have an expiration date. Whereas we very much do.

One that's imminent and getting closer and closer with each passing minute.

But again, Future Hig can deal with the fallout of that when it happens. For now, I'm content, having spent the day with my insatiably slutty boyfriend, putting up his first tree, before fucking him four times in the afternoon.

We've finished dinner and are sitting in the living room. Brant's lying on the couch under a blanket with his fozzie-covered feet on my lap. I've just added a few more logs to the fire, and it's burning brightly, throwing off a good amount of heat. The room is nice and toasty, and jazzy Christmas carols play quietly in the background.

"How do you feel about not spending Christmas with your mom?" I ask, pressing into the ball of his foot.

He shrugs. "It's fine."

I glance up at him, and he doesn't seem too bothered by it, but for some reason, I am. I've been trying not to think about it, telling myself it's none of my business, but seeing how much fun he had decorating the Christmas tree today, the thought kept niggling in the back of my mind. Why would she never let him have that experience as a kid? He didn't even know what freaking mistletoe was.

I've always tried so hard to make the holidays special for Col, and sure, I was overcompensating for a tragic loss, but don't all parents want to make the holidays a wonderful time for their kids? Even when money was tight and I had to work overtime, I did everything I could to make kid Col believe in the magic of this time of year.

"Did you and Mom have a fight or something?" Brant asks softly.

My shoulders tense up. "What makes you say that?"

He sits up, his feet sliding from my lap. "You guys have never seemed close."

"We...aren't," I say.

"Is there a reason?"

I inhale then hold it in before releasing it slowly. "Yeah. There's a reason."

Brant moves closer, touching my arm. "Tell me. Please."

"I haven't said anything because I never wanted to create a problem and jeopardize your friendship with Col. Especially when you boys were just that, boys."

“I’m not a kid anymore, *Hig*.” There’s a hint of annoyance in the way he says my name.

“I realize,” I say, smiling as I rub his leg. “You’re all man now.”

He grins. “I am. Now spill the beans.”

“It’s not a very nice story, I’m afraid.”

“I can handle it.”

Brant lies down on his side, facing the fire, placing his head in my lap. My fingers lazily comb through his hair as I begin talking.

“Your mom had a bit of a thing for me.”

Brant looks up and smiles. “Must be genetic.”

“Maybe, but...your mom was very *insistent*.”

“Oh.”

The lighthearted vibe deflates.

“Oh, indeed. She used to hit on me whenever we dropped you guys off for sleepovers. I kept trying to be polite about it, but you know, people have egos.”

“And hers is very fragile.”

“So I learned. One night, she must’ve had a few drinks, she showed up at our house unannounced and basically told me if I didn’t sleep with her, she wouldn’t allow you and Col to see each other anymore.”

“Oh my god. Really?”

“Yeah. “

“What did you say?”

“I said no to sleeping with her, and I urged her not to be vindictive and take it out on you guys. You were kids, for chrissakes.”

“What did she do?”

“Thankfully, nothing more. Our contact decreased to only the bare minimum after that, and that’s where we’ve been ever

since.”

“Wow. Way to go, Mom. She almost ruined the best friendship I’ve ever had.”

“But she didn’t.” I’m still stroking Brant’s hair, tracing my fingers in patterns against his scalp. “I wouldn’t have let her.”

Brant sits up, frowning. “You would’ve slept with her?”

“No. Jesus. I mean, I would’ve found a way to have you guys see each other. I... I can’t sleep with people I don’t like.”

His lips curl into a smile as he reaches out and touches my cheek. “So does that mean you like me then?”

I shrug. “Well, let’s just say you’re a step up from your mo—*Oomf*. What the hell was that?”

Brant swings the pillow all the way back, menacingly letting it hang over me, but he’s smiling. “Don’t *ever* compare me to my mother.”

“Deal.” I look at the pillow then into his sparkling eyes. “And you won’t ever compare me to my son?”

“Deal.” He lowers the pillow. “And now as your punishment, take me to your bed, and fuck me like the slutty boyfriend that I am.”

Brant

“Oh, yeah, right there, Hig. Harder. That’s good. That’s so good. Yeah. More. More. *Mooooore!*”

Hig pounds into me even harder, his grunting turned up so loud it sounds like there’s a group of wild bears behind me.

“Fuck, I love your cock,” I gasp as I fumble around for my own. It’s bouncing so much it’s hard to get a handle on it. When I do, it’s rock hard and wet with pre-cum. I start jerking off as Hig continues driving into me with strong, powerful thrusts.

I love this so much. How I can be so wild and free with him. Totally myself. Nothing to hide. Nothing to worry about being judged for.

Earlier today, I was the loser who’d never put up a Christmas tree in his life, and now? Now I’m getting fucked so hard I’ll be able to feel it with every step I take tomorrow. At least I hope I will.

I’ve loved so many things about the past few days. Getting to know Hig better. Opening myself up to him. Just hanging out together. But walking around feeling the aftermath of his massive cock inside me might very well be my new favorite thing.

And that thought does me in.

My balls clench up close to my body, and my channel starts spasming as an eighteen-wheeler of an orgasm barrels into me. As always, Hig follows right behind me, letting out a guttural roar that reverberates throughout the entire house.

He collapses on top of me, resting on his elbows so I'm not bearing the full brunt of his weight. Not that I mind being pinned down under him, but it's nice he's so considerate.

He kisses the back of my neck and shoulders before inhaling my hair. "I'm buying stocks."

"Excuse me?"

"In whatever shampoo you use, I'm buying shares. I never want them to go out of business."

I grin until Hig starts pulling out of me. For as much as I love getting fucked five ways to Sunday, this part sucks. It physically *hurts*. The loss of him feels like someone's doused me with a bucket of ice while stabbing my heart with an icepick.

He positions me on my side and lies down behind me. I nestle into his body, loving the way we fit so snugly together. He bundles me into a tight hug, and I never want him to let me go.

But time is ticking.

As much as I try to freeze that thought out, it's never too far from me.

"You know what really sucks?" I murmur, running my fingers lightly up and down his forearms.

"What, baby?"

"Thirty-six hours together means we only get to spend one night as boyfriends."

A rush of warm air hits the back of my neck as Hig exhales loudly. "Yeah. That does suck... Have you had a good day, though?"

I smile and latch on to his forearm. "I have. It's been the best. You?"

“Same.” He pauses. “Do you think it’s so good because we both know we only have a limited amount of time, or do you think it would be just as good if it were real, time-unlimited?”

Whoa. Okay. He’s going there.

“Hard to say. I’d like to think we’d be good if this were real, but I’ve never had a relationship before, and I don’t really know anyone in a stable and healthy long-term relationship.”

His big arm tightens around me. “You don’t?”

“I live in LA, remember? The only successful long-term relationship most people in showbiz are interested in is with themselves.”

Hig lets out a deep, rusty chuckle, and it rumbles straight through me. I love how big and manly he is.

“Don’t all relationships eventually fizzle out anyway?” I ask, then silently berate myself for coming out with something so negative.

“I’d like to think they don’t. That when two people who are meant for each other find each other, they make it work. Doesn’t mean it’s easy, but it’d be worth it... I think. Relationships aren’t exactly my area of expertise, either.”

“Well, you came up with this brilliant relationship suggestion. I really am having the best time ever being your boyfriend for a day and a half.”

“Sure you wouldn’t rather be getting hammered in a nightclub somewhere, getting snapped by photographers, or *clausing* a scene in WeHo?”

I spin around, my mouth hanging open. “Did you just say *clausing* a scene?”

He shakes his head, laughing. “I did. Slip of the tongue. Sorry.”

I run my hand across his solid chest. “I think *you* secretly like Christmas. Yeah, you did a lot of it for Col, but that doesn’t explain why you’re still going to all this effort now.”

He smirks at me. “I don’t really think it’s that much of a secret, baby. My production company specializes exclusively in holiday movies.”

“Uh, yeah. True. Sorry.” I shake my head. “You’ve fucked me so hard I can’t think straight.”

His fingers brush over my lips, and he stares deeply into my eyes. “*Never* apologize for me fucking you too hard, Brant.”

I swallow as an idea pops into my head. A crazy, stupid, impulsive idea. If I give it too much thought, I won’t go through with it. Hig and I only have this one night as boyfriends, so unless I say it right now, I won’t ever get the chance.

I cup his face in my hands. “I love you, Hig. You’re the best fake-ish first boyfriend I could have ever asked for.”

His eyes darken, then he narrows his gaze. He doesn’t say anything for what feels like an eternity. Was that too far? Shit. It probably was.

“I just wanted to say the words,” I whisper softly, to fill the silence I’ve created. “To know what it feels like in case...in case I don’t ever get the chance to say them again.”

I let go of his face and look away, heat climbing up my neck and onto my cheeks. I’m embarrassed. I feel so vulnerable. So exposed. So stupid. I’ve ruined the moment. I wish I could turn back—

“I love you, too.” His voice is firmer and deeper than I’ve ever heard it. He takes hold of my chin and gently lifts my face so that we’re looking at each other. “And I promise you that one day, you will be saying those words for real. And that guy is going to be the luckiest sonofabitch in the world. I may secretly hate him, but that’ll be my cross to bear. All I want is for you to find love and be happy, *baby*.”



I've dined at the finest restaurants in LA and partied with celebrities at the fanciest, most ultra exclusive hotspots. I'm rich and famous. I have a freaking Emmy on my mantle.

But none of that compares to waking up in a cozy bed, curled up against my boyfriend's warm body, with his hard cock pressed against my ass. This is the *only* way I want to be waking up from here on in.

Without moving my head too much, I peek out a small crack in the curtain and see blue sky and light snowfall.

Steady puffs of air hit the back of my neck, and I smile to myself. Yesterday was quite possibly the best day of my life.

And then what he said last night...

Swoon me to all swoonery, that shit was so fucking romantic, I could die.

But I won't.

At least not until *after* today. Because for the next fourteen or so hours, I still get to be Hig Langdon's boyfriend.

And I think I know just the right way to start the day.



"Um..." Hig bites his lip, his forehead covered in squiggly lines. "What am I looking at here?"

"A pancake?" My voice squeaks so high at the end it sounds like I'm asking a question. Which, I kind of am, because how the hell did I mess things up so badly?

"Thank you." Hig reaches for the knife and fork, but I snatch them away. I scoop up the plate with the dry, deformed-looking, barely circular monstrosities and take it back into the kitchen.

Hig follows close behind me, wrapping his strong arms around my waist. I lean back into him and sigh. "I fucked up pancakes. Who does that?"

“You do,” he says as he chuckles and kisses the nape of my neck. “It’s just one of the many things I love about you.”

My heart implodes with happiness. So we’re still doing the whole I-love-you thing. I’d wondered if, after the intensity of last night, Hig might back off a little today. But nope, he’s holding me close, appears unfazed by my lack of culinary skills, and even though this is our last day together, which sucks so much, I can tell that we’re going to make the most of it.

As if he’s reading my mind, Hig circles his palm against my chest and whispers into my ear, “Since we only have thirteen hours left, what do you say we spend some more time in bed trying to break my dick?”

I laugh even though it’s a gross image. “You really know how to turn a guy on, don’t ya?”

“Never been big on smooth talking.”

I twist around so I’m facing him. “And that’s just one of the many things I love about you, Hig. You’re real. There’s no bullshit.”

I grab his already hard cock through his pants and give it a squeeze. “It might take me a *very* long time to break this guy down, though.”

Hig smiles. “Good thing that we’ve got—”

There’s a knock on the door.

A loud knock.

A loud knock I instantly recognize because there’s only one person in the world I know who pounds on a door like his life depends on it.

Hig and I jump away from each other.

“That’s Col,” I mouth.

Hig smacks his head and a range of emotions wash over him. I’m pretty sure he’s as bummed as I am that our boyfriend time is ending way sooner than we expected it to,

but at the same time, he gets to see his kid again. And that's a good thing.

A really good thing.

A thing I have no intention of breaking up or interfering with.

I'm not sure how Col would react if he found out about our shenanigans these past few days, and I have zero intention of finding out. I love him too much to do anything to fuck up our friendship, and I would never want what Hig and I did to affect Hig's relationship with Col, either.

"You should probably get the door," I say right as Col launches another attack on it.

"Uh, yeah, sure." Hig goes to move, then stops, his eyes locking on me. His mouth opens and closes a few times, but what can he possibly say in the next ten seconds—which is about all the time we have before Col breaks the door down—to make this okay?

Because it's not.

We're...over.

And there's nothing left to do but accept it and look back fondly on the short time we spent together.

I smile at Hig while trying to hold back the tears welling in my eyes. I already know that when I'm on my deathbed and reflecting on my life, these past few days will be some of the happiest memories I'll have ever made.

Hig

I swing the front door open and there he is. My little boy who's not so little anymore.

Col's eyes light up. "Dad!"

He pulls me in for a hug. "When did you get so strong?" I dad-joke.

"Been stronger than you since I was fifteen, old man," he kid-jokes back.

We pull apart, smiling at each other. "What are you doing here?" I ask. "I thought your flight didn't get in until tonight."

"Freezing my nuts off on the porch is what I'm doing," he retorts.

"Come in, come in." I wave him inside, then grab his luggage as he steps through the doorway.

"Brant!"

Shit. *Brant*.

I haul Col's two suitcases in and shut the door, watching with my breath stuck in my throat as my son wraps his arms around his best friend...who I've been fucking in every way imaginable these past few days.

Guess that's all in the past now, relegated to a few fond memories and some unforgettably filthy images seared into

my subconscious.

Col jerks his head back and points at Brant's chest. "What is this? Are you shopping at Dad Mart now, or something?"

Brant looks down as my eyes bulge.

"Uhhh..." he begins.

Brant's wearing my gray sweater. The one I caught him sniffing that he's claimed as his own.

Col looks over at me, smirking. "Don't you have a hideous sweater just like this, Dad? No offense."

"None taken," I grunt back, happily occupying myself with taking his luggage to his room and getting the hell out of there.

I need a minute.

I shuffle the suitcases into Col's bedroom, then walk over to the window and watch the snowflakes falling.

So much for spending the day with Brant. A double shot of guilt punches me in the gut. One for fucking my son's best friend every which way and the other for not being thrilled Col's here. I mean, of course I'm happy to see him, I just need a moment to process the implications of him being here.

Because Col's presence spells the end of whatever Brant and I have been doing, that much is clear.

Funnily enough, even though we've been having a shit ton of sex, that's not what I'll miss the most. In all honesty, it's the talking, the laughing, all those little moments spent getting to know him, that I'll look back on with the most fondness.

I haven't even properly begun to discover all the different facets to him, and I guess now I won't get the chance to.

I'd never do anything to come between the boys, and if Col ever found out, it could cause a rift between them. I'm not willing to take that risk.

I heave in a few more deep breaths then trundle down the hall and into the kitchen just in time to hear Col ask, "How was it spending a few days with my old man? Hope he wasn't too much of a drag." Col spots me and grins. "No offense."

“None taken.” I grin back and keep my gaze fixed on Col for a few beats, before my eyes slowly drift over to Brant. I don’t want it to seem like I’m looking at him a certain way, but then again, I also don’t want Col to think I’m avoiding Brant. Fuck. When did just looking at someone get so complicated?

Brant seems to have recovered from his initial shock of Col arriving. He looks...normal, I guess. Which is good. He’s perched on a stool at the breakfast bar with his legs crossed. Our eyes meet and yep, there’s nothing unusual about that.

Outwardly, at least.

I hope I look as composed as Brant does because I sure as hell don’t feel it. My heart’s racing, and my pulse is drumming in my ears.

“So, what did you two get up to?” Col asks, sticking his head into the pantry. Seriously, that boy never stops eating.

“Work,” we both reply at the same time.

Col finds a tube of Pringles and looks between us as he takes off the cap. “Never a dull moment,” he says dryly.

“How did you get in so early?” Brant asks.

“I was on standby for an earlier flight. It was a last-minute thing.” He begins stuffing his face, leaving us to wait. Brant’s not looking at me, so I guess the smart thing would be for me to stop gawking his way. “Besides, my anxiety’s been playing up,” Col adds around a few noisy chews.

I’d been picking up on something in our weekly video calls. I knew the anniversary of his mother’s death had been playing on his mind, but I had no idea it had escalated into full-blown anxiety. It’s something we’ve dealt with, on and off, since it was first diagnosed when he was fifteen.

“Guys, it’s fine. I’m fine.” Col looks between Brant and me, sensing our concern. “I’m here now. We get to spend the holidays together. This is going to be the best Christmas ever. What did you guys have planned for today?”

Brant’s cheeks flush a deep crimson, so I clear my throat to divert Col’s attention away from him. “I was going to work,

but I checked my emails right before you got here, and I'm all good. Maybe we can go for a walk around town?"

Col nods. "Sounds good. Brant, wanna come?"

"I should stay." The color's softened on his face, but he still looks a little flushed. "Got a Zoom rehearsal starting soon."

"Cool. Looks like it's just you and me, Dad."

"Great. I'll just grab my jacket."



"It's good to see you, son." I wrap my arm around Col's shoulder and give him a squeeze through his black puffer jacket. I smile warmly at him, feeling bad that my initial reaction when he showed up might have been a little less than enthusiastic.

Not that he seems to have picked up on that...or on any *vibes* between me and Brant. Thank god. Maybe he won't ever, and if Brant and I don't give him any reason to suspect anything has happened, it looks like we might just be able to keep this little secret from him for good.

"It's good to see you, too, Dad."

We're walking down Christmas Boulevard (a.k.a. Main Street) that runs through downtown (a.k.a. Santa's Village). There's a break in the weather so even though it's cold, it's still a wonderful winter's morning with a bright blue sky.

"Christmas Falls is always beautiful," Col says, looking around the bustling street, "but it really comes alive this time of year. It feels...magical."

I smile, taking in all the tourists and excited children wandering around. "It really does. Wouldn't want to live anywhere else."

I've found my home here. For a Christmas tragic like me, what better place to live, right?

“Did you and Brant check out any of the festival activities?”

“Uh, no.”

We were busy with other activities.

Hopefully, he’ll drop it.

“Why not? I know the weather’s been patchy, but it’s not like you were snowed in or anything.”

No, we just shut out the outside world and lived in a make-believe fantasy land.

I look at my son and ask myself, *how do I get out of this one?* Withholding information is one thing, but I’ve never downright lied to Col’s face, and I’m not keen on starting now.

“We both had work to do,” I say, because that is true. “Brant’s gearing up for filming, and I’ve been dealing with the logistical nightmare the weather has caused. Thankfully Arlo came through and was able to take in a few cast and crew at his B&B.”

Col’s met Arlo a few times. He smiles. “Of course he came though. He’s a great guy... Is he seeing anyone?”

“Beats me.” I don’t know Arlo that well, and even if I did, I’m not one to pry. “Why do you ask?”

“No reason. Just curious, is all.” Col’s eyebrows waggle. “And what about you, Dad? Arlo’s not the only eligible bachelor in Christmas Falls. Any news on the love life front?”

“Oh, look.” I point toward some graffiti painted under a cafe storefront window.

“What’s that?” he asks as we move toward it, while I keep my fingers crossed that my deflection tactic works.

“Christmas graffiti has begun appearing all around town,” I say. “First, it was a gnome. Then someone left a Santa bag of toys in the park. And now random graffiti artwork is popping up all over the place.”

We reach it at the same time and kneel down. It’s a simple illustration of what appears to be a father and his daughter,

standing in front of a Christmas tree.

“That’s really neat,” Col says with a smile. “And no one knows who’s behind it?”

“Nope. It’s a mystery.”

“That’s got to be driving Griff bonkers.”

I let out a chuckle. “Yeah. It is.”

Griff is the director of the Christmas Falls Festival and this random artwork is messing with all of his carefully orchestrated plans.

“It’s taken on a life of its own,” I say. “People are now posting pics to social media. It’s got everyone talking.”

“Ooh, let’s take a selfie,” Col suggests, whipping out his phone. It’s kind of awkward since we’re crouching because the graffiti is so low to the ground, but with some deft camera angling, Col gets his shot.

“Posting it right now,” he says, tapping away furiously. “Wanna make sure no one gets in and posts this before us.”

“I don’t think that’s how it works. It’s not a competition.”

Col pauses briefly and shoots me a look. “*Everything* is a competition.”

“Of course.” I grin. “Forgot who I was dealing with. No wonder you’re killing it in your career.”

He glances back down at his phone. “I’m almost done. What hashtags should I use?”

“Hashtags?”

“Yeah. Those words with a funny symbol in front of them.”

“I’m not that old.” I smack him across the chest. “I know what hashtags are. I just don’t know which ones to use.”

He rolls his eyes. “You’re no help. I’ll just do all the standard holiday ones. Oh, and I’ll add #MerryLitmas since that’s the name of Brant’s movie. I’ll do #ChristmasFallsFestival so Griff doesn’t have a conniption,

and..." He stops and thinks for a moment. "I'll throw in #ChristmasFallsThePlaceToBe as well."

Once he's done, I suggest we grab a coffee to warm up a bit. We pop into the cafe and grab two coffees to go.

"So, what's been going on?" I ask as we head back out. Part of me doesn't want to bring up what's been playing on his mind since Col seems to be in a good mood right now, but this is what he does. He swings wildly, up one minute, down the next, and I can't ignore what he said earlier. "Your anxiety been playing up?"

Col sips on his coffee. "Forget it, Dad. I'm fine."

As if I'll forget it. "Does it have anything to do with the anniversary?"

His eyes meet mine, and I notice he looks more tired than normal. "Yeah. That. The flight. Everything."

Col's never been a good flier, which, after what happened to Marianne, is perfectly understandable. He's gotten better about it since he has to fly so much for work, but there's no way he'd ever get on a small-jet aircraft like the one his mom was on.

"I'm sorry we weren't together on the day," he says.

I stop walking and grab his arm. "That wasn't your fault, Col."

"Yeah. I suppose. Anyway, I don't wanna talk about it."

"Hig, good to see you," one of my neighbors says with a smile as he walks past us.

I nod. "Good to see you, too."

A busy sidewalk isn't the ideal place to have a deep conversation. So I say, "Look. It's Christmas. The three of us are together. We're going to have a great time. I'm here whenever you need me, but remember you've also got Brant, okay? If you don't want to talk to me, you can always open up to him."

To my surprise, Col steps forward and gives me a big hug, right here in the middle of the street. “I don’t know why I’m not feeling okay, Dad,” he whispers into my ear. “I’ve always been strong.”

When we break apart, I tell him, “Admitting you’re not okay is a sign of strength, not weakness. You know that, don’t you?”

“I do.” He gives me a small smile. “And you’re right. A few days with you and Brant is just what I need.”

We start walking again, and even though I’m getting the feeling more is going on with Col than he’s letting on, I don’t push. I’ve learned over the years that he needs space. The more I try to pry information out of him, the more he clams up.

We walk and sip our coffees in silence. “So. Am I the only Langdon getting laid?” Col asks, bumping his shoulder against mine.

I choke on my coffee and start coughing. Dammit. I thought we’d moved on from this.

“Jesus, Dad. You okay?” He gives me a few hearty claps on the back.

“Yeah. All good.”

He looks at me funny. “Is something going on?”

“Nothing is going on,” I say, clearing my throat one last time. “Everything is normal. Just work and getting ready for Christmas.”

And nailing your best friend.

“And Brant?”

“What about him?”

“Was it weird hanging out with him without me there? You can be honest. I won’t tell him. Was sitting around and talking about me and how fantastic I am the only thing you guys did?”

I let out a relieved laugh, grateful his comment couldn’t be any more off the mark.

“Yes, son. That’s *exactly* what we did.”

Brant

I'm sitting on the couch, legs stretched out, going over my lines when I hear a bedroom door open. I can't tell whether it's Hig or Col, but given that it's before midday, I'd say the chances are it's Hig.

My fingers tighten around the script. Hig and I haven't spent a second alone since Col showed up yesterday. By the time they got back from their walk, I'd left for an impromptu in-person rehearsal with the director and some of the cast who'd already arrived.

Then when I got back, the three of us spent the day together at the house. Hig excused himself in the afternoon saying he had some work to catch up on, and then he turned in early after dinner.

In some ways, it felt like it always does with the three of us. Easy. Familiar. *Familial*.

But try as I might to compartmentalize Hig into the usual off-limits box I've kept him locked away in for so long—my best friend's dad, older than me, wouldn't be interested in me—as the day wore on, it got harder and harder to ignore my emotions.

I'm not just attracted to Hig physically. My feelings run deeper than that. Yes, he's the man I lost my virginity to, and no, I don't need to have any other experience to compare it with to know that the man gives good sex, but that's not all that I'm feeling.

I like him.

I really, *really* like him.

Not having those precious last few hours together yesterday was a sucker punch. One I haven't fully recovered from.

Footsteps pad closer. "Morning, ba—Brant."

Hig's in his plaid sleep pants and an old Metallica shirt that's so worn-out it's fraying at the seams and has a small rip right about his right pec.

I put my script aside and fold my legs under my body. "Morning."

I smile when Hig takes a seat on the sofa next to me and not in his armchair.

"Sleep well?" he asks.

"No."

Our eyes meet. He doesn't look like he's had the best night's sleep, either. He flicks his gaze toward the hallway, then leans over slightly. "We haven't had a chance to talk since Col arrived."

"I'm aware," I say glumly.

He grabs my fozzie-covered foot and gives it a squeeze. "I'm bummed we didn't get to spend the day together yesterday like we planned."

"Same." I take a deep breath. "I guess this is the part where we break up, right?"

Hig's normally vital eyes narrow as he frowns, and he drags a hand through his hair. "If breaking up is the right thing to do then why does it feel so wrong?"

I shrug because I don't have an answer for that. Do we get into a discussion about the pros and the many more cons of us being involved, or do we simply accept reality? That there is no future for us. That too many things stand in our way for us to make it work.

I adjust the way I'm sitting so that Hig's no longer touching me. I'm meant to be weaning myself off him, but when he holds me, even if it's something incidental like him squeezing my foot, it makes me want things I can't have.

It makes me want him. All. The. Time.

"Here," I say, leaning over the back of the sofa to pick it up. "I should probably give you this."

Hig takes it from me, and he looks so freaking sad, like I'm handing him a basket full of dead puppies and not his gray sweater. Col catching me wearing it yesterday was a close call. We got away with it that time, but we can't afford to keep raising his suspicions.

"Keep it." Hig pushes it back into my hands.

I shake my head. "We can't risk Col cottoning on."

"This fucking sucks." Hig huffs out a breath then falls back on the couch. "I don't want this to stop, Brant. But I'm just...unsure where to go from here."

"Nowhere," I say, trying to sound like I know what I'm talking about. "We go nowhere. We can't be together. It's as simple as that."

Hig jolts upright, turning to me with a fire burning in his eyes. "In that case..."

Next thing I know, his hefty frame is crashing over me, his lips meeting mine in a bruising, punishing kiss. With his fingers charging through my hair, I wrap both arms around his waist, tugging him even closer as our tongues duke it out in a fiery, wet, hot battle for dominance.

Hig made a good point. If breaking up is the right thing to do, why does it feel wrong?

But why am I thinking about that when I should be squeezing every last ounce of goodness from this kiss?

The sound of a squeaky door opening has Hig flying off me almost as fast as he descended onto me. We both swipe at our mouths, erasing the evidence of our kiss.

Our *last* kiss.

That thought sobers me up, so by the time Col reaches the living room and greets us with a yawn while scratching his butt through his sleep pants, I don't look like I've just had the life kissed out of me by his father.

I cast a quick glance over at Hig, who's already making his way to the kitchen, no doubt to get started on breakfast. And possibly to create some distance between us, too.

“Morning, son,” he rumbles, and maybe it’s me, or maybe his voice is a little gruffer than usual.

“Morning, Dad.” Col can barely keep his eyes open. “Hey, Brant.” He drops onto the sofa, taking the place where Hig was sitting barely a few moments ago. “What’s on the agenda for today?”



Being chased down the street by a goat while shirtless in the freezing cold is what’s on the agenda for today.

Can’t say I’ve ever been much of a goat person, but Speckles is absolutely beautiful—she’s an Angora goat with a long white fluffy coat—and she’s single-handedly very much turning me into one.

This scene is the one I’m most worried about. Shooting live with a wild animal, what could possibly go wrong? The nightmare scenarios are endless, but Speckles is so calm and even-tempered that both times we’ve rehearsed the scene, on a quiet side street, she’s nailed it.

It’s a little complicated because first she needs to nip at the hem of my shirt, which, thanks to the magic of the wardrobe department, causes it to fall right off in one swift motion, and then she needs to chase me as I run down the street, making it look like she wants to bite me—without actually biting me. A small, but very important distinction.

“I think we’ve nailed it,” the director, Sally, calls out as she approaches me with a smile. And a thermal blanket.

“Thanks,” I say, taking the blanket and wrapping it over my shoulders. “Do we need to do it again?”

“Nope. I think we’ve got it. Unless you want to? I’m guessing this scene is the most nerve-racking for you.”

“It is, but I’m less nervous now that I’ve met Speckles. She’s great.”

Sally smiles. “She is. And look, if shit goes pear-shaped, we’ll zoom in on you and your shirtless body, and I’m sure America won’t mind a bit.”

I roll my eyes and laugh. I’ve worked with a lot of directors and Sally is one of the nicest. She glances down at her iPad. “Hey, listen. Why don’t you get dressed so you don’t freeze out here, and once you’re done, can you come see me in my trailer?”

“Uh, sure... Is anything wrong?”

“Nope.” She rocks on her heels and smiles widely. “The opposite, in fact.”



“Hey, is anyone home?” I call out, letting myself into Hig’s house and shrugging off my coat, beanie, scarf, and gloves in the entryway. I smile as I look at the pathetic excuse for a Christmas tree that Hig and I decorated the other day. How is it possible that it feels like so long ago now?

“I’m in the kitchen,” Col yells back, so that’s where I head.

“Do you ever not eat?” I chuckle as I sit down at the breakfast bar.

“I’m a growing boy,” he replies as he raids the fridge for what looks like sandwich supplies. “How was the rehearsal?”

“Yeah. Good. It was a long day, but I finally feel confident about the goat scene... And then something interesting happened.”

“Like?”

“Uh, where’s your dad?”

“Out running errands. Why?”

“I need to talk to him.”

Col stops buttering the bread. “What’s going on?”

Even though I'd prefer to speak with Hig about it first, I don't want Col getting suspicious by me not telling him, so I say, "Your dad sent through some notes I've been making about the script to the director."

"Oh. Is that a bad thing? Should he not have done that?"

"No. It was actually very nice of him."

When Hig saw my script a few days ago and read the notes I'd made, I didn't think any more of it. I certainly didn't expect him to forward them on to Sally who was so impressed she passed them on to the writer who is happy to incorporate a few of my ideas into the movie.

"Any idea when he'll be back?"

Col sniggers as he brings his plate stacked with sandwiches over. "I'm starting to think you want to spend time with Dad more than you do with me."

"What? No. That's ridiculous." *Okay, slow down, Brant. No reason for your voice to climb an octave.* "I'm pumped you and I get to hang out. Really, I am. Let me just get changed, and then we can hang out properly."

Five minutes later, Col and I are sitting in the living room. He's demolished the sandwiches he made and is trying to get the fire going. He's doing it all wrong. But I can't say anything because if I do, he'll want to know how I know, and the answer to that is because I've seen how his father does it.

Sigh. I never realized how all-consuming it would be keeping this secret from Col.

"So what's been going on with you?" I ask once the fire finally takes and he joins me on the couch. I've been meaning to check in with him ever since he let slip that he's been feeling anxious. I'm also curious to know how things are going with his new girlfriend. "How are things with—"

"We broke up," he says, staring at the fire.

"When?"

"Last night. Via text."

“Oh, man. I’m sorry.” I knew it wasn’t anything serious, but still, talk about bad timing. Breaking up with anyone, even if it’s casual, right before Christmas sucks.

Col shrugs. “No big deal. It was more of a friends with bennies situation than anything long-term.”

“Ah. Okay.”

“And how’s work going?”

“Good. Looks like I might get that promotion which would mean a trip to Australia next year.”

“Wow. That’s awesome. Well done.”

“Thanks. Hasn’t happened yet, but I’m in with a good chance.”

On the surface, it probably seems like we’re having a normal, casual conversation. But I know Col, and there’s something else going on with him. And it’s precisely because I know him as well as I do that I’m treading carefully.

The key with him is not to push since that’s a surefire way to get him even more guarded than he normally is. Col can be loud, vivacious, the life of the party. A lot of people may feel like they know him, but they only know one side, the side he shows them. When it comes to real stuff or anything hard, he does that typical straight guy thing and keeps things bottled up.

We both look at the flames, sharing the type of silence that only two people who have known each other most of their lives can share.

“Can I tell you something?” Col asks softly after a few minutes.

“Sure, bud. Anything.”

He’s still staring at that fire like it’s the only thing in the world. He’s folded his arms across his chest. “I’m... I’m struggling with the Mom thing.”

I had a feeling he might be. “What’s going on?”

The muscle in his jaw twitches. “I can’t get over the fact she was my age when she died.” He frowns deeply, and god, he reminds me of Hig so much right now. His lower lip trembles. “Life is short enough as it is, and then hers ended at twenty-five. How is that fair?”

“It’s not,” I say, shaking my head. “It’s not fair at all.”

“I just wanna live my life, you know?” He turns to me, tears welling in his eyes. “Make it count so that I make her proud.”

“She would be so proud of you. I mean, I’ve seen the way you inhale food. That’s a skill, dude.”

He smiles and throws a pillow at me. “I love you so fucking much, Brant. I really do.”

I lean over and give him a side hug. “I love you so fucking much, too, Col.”

Hig

Brant's on the couch again when I wake up, in the exact same spot he was in yesterday, script in hand, legs stretched out, looking good enough to eat in nothing more than a pair of gray sweats and a long-sleeved white Henley.

And those damn fozies.

I swear I don't have a thing for feet, but there's something about those silly furry slipper-esque sock things that pulls at my heart. Although, I suspect that feeling comes as much from the man wearing the ridiculous socks as it does from the socks themselves.

I've been trying to maintain some distance from him. This thing between us is...complicated, to say the least, and I don't want to do anything that will take Brant's focus away from the movie.

It shoots tomorrow. He needs to be one hundred percent focused on that. Everything else is going to have to wait.

Including us.

If there even is an us, which is highly doubtful.

"Mornin'," I say, stepping into the living room.

He looks up and smiles. "Morning, Hig. Sleep well?"

"Yeah, fine," I lie.

I may have only had him in my bed for two nights all up, but the withdrawal symptoms are real.

I miss him. I want him. The last thing I want is for this thing between us to be over, but all the reasons why we won't work are as real as they ever were. Nothing's changed, and yet my heart is still persistently clinging to whatever hope it can latch on to that maybe, somehow, we'll find a way.

Could there be a way?

I tip my head toward his script. "Wanna go over lines?"

“Nah. I’m good, thanks.” He checks the hallway is clear. “I have something I want to talk to you about. Two things actually.”

“Go for it.” I bypass the sofa and take my usual spot in the armchair. “What’s up?”

“Sally spoke to me about the notes I made on the script.”

I raise my hand and interject. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t’ve done that.”

It only hit me *after* I pressed send on the email that even though my intentions were good, it flew in the face of the one thing Brant wants, which he’s pointed out several times already—to be treated like an adult. “I wasn’t trying to interfere.”

“Yes, you were.” Brant leans back, a slow smile lifting his lips. “And I don’t mind. I know you. You did it for the right reasons.”

“I just wanted Sally to see what you wrote and have her tell you that it was good, since you didn’t seem too convinced when I tried to tell you.”

“That’s probably because you were only saying it to get in my pants.”

I snicker. “I don’t recall needing any help in that department.”

Brant’s eyes light up. “No. You most definitely did not.”

“Thanks for being cool about it. And for the record, I absolutely see you as an adult capable of making his own decisions. Interfering Hig is gone.” I wave toward the door, sending imaginary Interfering Hig on his merry way. “What’s the other thing you wanted to talk to me about?”

“Col.”

I straighten. “Is everything okay?”

“We talked last night. He’s going through a rough patch.”

I inhale. “Yeah. He told me that, too. Didn’t give me any details, but I was hoping he’d confide in you.”

Brant smiles. “That’s what best friends are for.”

I’m so happy Col has someone like Brant in his life. It almost makes it worth the price of not being able to pursue him.

Almost.

“Not meaning to pry, but is there anything I can do to help?”

“Just keep being a great dad. He’ll come to you when he’s ready. It’s important to him that he figures this out on his own.”

I really want to pry so freaking much, to know what’s really going on with my son, but it wouldn’t be fair to put Brant in the middle like that. I have to make do with the fact that at least Col is talking to someone. Even if that someone isn’t me.

“Okay. Good, then. He knows he can come to me anytime about anything, right?”

“Of course he does. You’re the best...” Our eyes connect, and Brant swallows thickly. “Dad.”

I close my eyes and shake my head. “I hate this, Brant.”

“What?” He raises his hand in front of his mouth and huffs into it a few times. “My morning breath isn’t that bad.”

“Please don’t make me smile when I’m fucking miserable. And at Christmastime, too. That should be illegal.”

“I’m sorry.” Brant gets up and crosses the room. He steals a quick glance over his shoulder to make sure the coast is clear before settling into my lap. “I hate that you feel bad. Is there... anything I can do to make you feel better?” His eyes glimmer as he traces his thumb over my cheek.

“Would you look at that? I’m feeling better already.”

He smirks. “Ah, so that’s not a gun in your pocket, you really are happy to see me.”

I laugh quietly, mindful that Col is just down the hall. My dick presses harder into Brant’s ass. “And that’s the *real* Big

Hig right there, too.”

“Good because I no longer accept cheap imitations.”

A growl rumbles from the back of my throat. Fuck, I want him so much. In all my forty-two years, I’ve never wanted anyone more.

Brant slides his hand around the back of my neck and then leans in and kisses me. It’s slow. It’s sensual. It’s like throwing fuel on a damn fire.

My desire for him isn’t going away or fading. If anything, it’s only gotten stronger since we got the chance to spend a few days together. Even with Col here, my need for Brant hasn’t diminished in the slightest.

I’m so wrapped up in the kiss that when Brant clears his throat it doesn’t register that it’s impossible for him to clear his throat with his tongue probing deep inside my mouth.

Which means...

Holy fuck!

The same realization must hit Brant, too, because he flies off my lap like a space shuttle launching at Cape Canaveral.

I scramble to my feet and then the three of us are standing there in my living room, Brant and I gaping at Col, who’s rubbing his eyes.

“Morning,” he says, letting out a huge yawn. He’s always a groggy mess in the morning, pawing at his chest a few times.

Why isn’t he saying anything about what he just walked in on?

Unless...

Wait...

Maybe he didn’t see it?

That’s got to be it. Col’s such a deep sleeper that one night he slept through a snowstorm that almost tore the roof off. Getting him out of bed has always been a struggle. Maybe he

didn't see us making out? Maybe we're actually going to get away with it?

"You making breakfast, Dad?" he asks around another yawn.

I don't know when I started holding my breath, but I release it in one big gust. "Sure thing, son," I say, shooting Brant a lightning-fast *Phew! Looks like we dodged a bullet* look as I head for the kitchen.

"Unless you already made food, and you and Brant were feeding it to each other...with your mouths."

I freeze on the spot, wincing hard. Fuck. So he *did* catch us. I thought it was too good to be true.

I drop my head and let out a sigh. What else can I do but face the music? I slowly spin around to face him, and Col is... He's smiling.

What the hell?

Brant's gaze is darting between Col and me. He looks about as confused as I feel.

"What did you say?" I ask my son, clinging to the last long shot chance that maybe I've misconstrued his meaning somehow.

"Oh, puh-lease. Are you guys really that clueless?"

"Clueless about what?" Brant asks before chewing on his lip nervously, which has no right being as adorable as it is. Probably best I not think about that right now.

Brant and I don't move as Col rolls his eyes and ambles over to the couch.

"I arrive, and the place smells like sex. Like, reeks of it. I thought you might've been burning cum-scented incense."

I scratch my chest. The thought never even crossed my mind that the place might need an airing after our almost nonstop fuckfest.

"You were wearing my dad's ugly-ass sweater." Col points to Brant and then looks at me. "No offense."

“None taken,” I croak.

“You guys spent a day putting up a Christmas tree that looks, well, pretty damn shitty. No offense, Brant.”

“None taken,” he croaks.

“And then whenever you guys look at each other, which is literally all the time, it’s like when a cartoon character falls in love and has those bright red hearts shooting out of their eyes. And to top it all off, I wake up to this little spectacle. For the second day in a row.”

He waves to the armchair where we were...spectacling. “I mean, unless you want to try to convince me you were helping Brant out with his lines, or maybe Brant’s got some secret Santa fetish and you guys were role-playing? No offense to anyone with a Santa fetish.”

Brant and I stay silent.

Col throws his head back and laughs. “Guys, relax. Oh my god. I love this for you.”

“You...do?” I ask, still unable to shake the prickly feeling that he’s going to blow up any minute now. That his seemingly positive response to this is the calm before the storm, like maybe he’s still in shock and once it wears off, then he’ll really go off.

“Of course I do. Life is fucking short, you guys.” He tips his head toward Brant as he says that. “I want you guys to be happy. And if being together makes you happy, don’t let me, or anyone, or anything stop you.”

“I... I don’t know what to say.”

Col gets up and walks over to me. He reaches for my hand then pulls me toward Brant, lifting Brant’s hand and joining it with mine.

“Just two quick things,” Col says, smirking, which only makes my head spin even more. Is this really happening?

“Remember, the walls in this house are *paper thin*. And also, whatever happens with you guys, I am never calling

Brant *Dad*.” He turns to his best friend. “I’m one month older, remember?”

“As if you’ll ever let me forget,” Brant quips, still in shock, but recovering slightly.

And then, with my son standing between us, the tiniest of tiny vibrations flickers through my chest, giving me hope that maybe, somehow, against all the odds, Brant and I can find a way to be together.



“Hey, Dad,” Col says, stepping into my office after breakfast. “You got a sec?”

“Sure.” I hit send on the email and spin around to face him. “What’s up?”

The morning’s flown by in a blur. After Col caught Brant and me kissing, the three of us had a quick and relatively normal breakfast before Brant had to take off for rehearsals. He said he wouldn’t be back until late, which, given it’s the day before the film shoot, makes sense. This is their last chance to iron out any remaining wrinkles and get themselves one hundred percent ready before they perform live for the whole country.

I would’ve loved a chance to steal a few minutes with him so we could go over the most recent *us* development, but what little time we had I spent reassuring him that he was going to give a brilliant performance. That’s what he needs to concentrate on. We can have *the talk* later.

Col saunters over to the window, smiling as he looks outside. “It’s so pretty here.”

I join him. “It really is.”

Even though it’s just your typical small-town street, everything looks so much cozier when it’s coated in a white blanket. I grew up in LA, but I never liked it that much. I prefer places where people know each other and there’s a

sense of community. Plus, the cold. I could happily live in a freezer. I'm a snow bunny, through and through.

I steal a quick glance at Col. I'm keen to learn more about what's on his mind, but I bite my tongue. I know how this goes. He'll start talking when he's ready.

A few minutes pass before he says, "I've been struggling with Mom's anniversary this year."

I place my hand on his shoulder. "Let's go sit down."

I have two lounge chairs in the corner of my office. Col flops down into one and starts telling me about how confronting he found the anniversary of Marianne's death this year, given that he's now the same age she was when she died.

I keep mostly quiet, simply glad he's finally opening up to me. When he's done, he drops his head back. Tears are streaming down his cheeks.

"There's nothing I can say to make this any better," I begin. "But thank you for talking to me, son."

He wipes his tears away. "This has really knocked me around lately, but I feel better having spoken to you and Brant about it."

"Sometimes just talking about things helps."

He lifts a brow.

"What?" I ask.

"Dad, I love you, but the reason I didn't want to talk to you about this is...well...you."

"Me?"

He nods. "Yeah. You *never* talk about Mom. I know you guys weren't in love or whatever, but I don't know how you feel about anything because you never say a word about her. You just go into this Christmas overdrive, and I get why you do and I appreciate it, but we never really talk about her."

Fuck. He's right.

Nothing like having your kid call you out on your shit.

“You have a point,” I say. “My reason for not bringing your mom up was because I was trying to spare you the pain, but I can now see how that might not have necessarily been the right approach.”

“You’ve done the best you can, Dad. And I love you for it. Don’t beat yourself up.” Col looks at me and smirks. “That’s Brant’s job now, isn’t it?”

My mouth falls open. I am completely unprepared for a discussion with my son about my potential romantic relationship with Brant. And that’s the key word here, *potential*, since Brant and I haven’t had a chance to discuss things. Col was one consideration for us not pursuing things, but there are a number of other factors at play, too.

“It’s all very new and fresh, Col. I don’t even know if we’ll be able to make it work. Or if Brant wants to make it work.”

“He does. Believe me, he does.”

“Why? Has he said something?”

Col shakes his head. “Doesn’t need to. I know him almost as well as he knows himself. He’s been crushing on you for *years*. He’s a good actor and all, but he ain’t no Meryl Streep.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. Meryl has unparalleled versatility and range. She can play anyone from a prime minister to the editor of a maga—*Oomf*.”

The cushion I pegged lands square in his face. “I don’t mean that. He’s been crushing on me for that long?”

Col pulls the cushion into his chest, looking up at me with his puppy dog eyes, and simply nods. “He’s got it bad, Dad. Real bad.”



I’m reading in bed late that night when I hear the front door open. I put the book down and make my way down the hall.

“Hey,” I say, stepping into the kitchen as Brant pours himself some water.

He smiles. “Hey.” He throws back the entire glass in one go. “Needed that.”

“Tough rehearsals?”

“Brutal. But in a good way.”

“You hungry?” I open the refrigerator. “I saved you some dinner. I can heat it up if you want?”

Two arms slide around my waist. “What if I’m not hungry for food?”

I almost drop the plate but manage to place it back on the shelf before closing the door and spinning around. Heat dances in his eyes as Brant peers up at me. I brush my fingers along his cheek.

“We need to talk,” I say.

“Naked?”

“I can do naked.” I chuckle. “In that case, let’s go to my room. Getting busted by Col once is enough for today.”

“Agreed.”

We scamper down the hallway like two naughty school kids, and I quietly shut my bedroom door behind us, well aware my son is asleep in the next room.

Brant wastes no time stripping out of his clothes. I run my hand over his smooth shoulder, reaching that sensitive spot where his neck and shoulder meet. He lets out a little shiver, smiling as he whispers, “I’m a little ticklish there.”

“I know.” I flash him a cocky grin, proud that I’ve committed so many little things about him and his body to memory.

I quickly get undressed, too, and then hold up the comforter so Brant can get into bed. I slip in on the other side and lie so we’re facing each other.

“Well, that was quite a morning,” I begin.

Brant grins. “It sure was. Good thing we weren’t dry humping.”

I let out a laugh, and Brant covers my mouth with his warm hand. “Shhh.”

“Stop being so funny then,” I say when he pulls it away.

He lets go of my face then glides his hand down my neck, my chest, my stomach, stopping only when he reaches my cock. He gives it a hearty tug.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“Stop being so sexy, then.” He pokes his tongue out.

I shake my head, smiling, feeling like...a teenager? Is this what being a teenager is like? Sneaking around. Keeping quiet. Giggling in bed. Sure, there are a few differences here, namely that it’s my son in the next room and not one of my folks, but this is what I imagine I might’ve been doing if my teenage years had panned out differently.

“Okay,” I say, trying to steer the conversation back to what we need to discuss. “We need to get down to business.”

“Agreed. How would you like to fuck me?”

“Brant,” I growl.

“Fine.” He lets out a dramatic eye roll. “Let’s talk.”

I grab a pillow and place it between our bodies.

“What are you doing?”

“Creating a barrier so that we can actually focus and talk about what’s going on and what we both want.”

He shakes his head with a smile as I finish adjusting the pillows, then says, “It’s simple, Hig. I want you.”

His voice holds a tender edge, which my heart clings to because I want him, too. But unfortunately for us... “It’s not that simple, I’m afraid.”

“Why not?”

“Where do I start?”

“At the beginning. You heard Col say it. Life is short. We shouldn’t let anything get in our way... If this is what we both want.”

His eyes search mine, waiting for me to say it. That I want to be with him. But there’s that final barrier there, the one that’s trying to get me to see things logically and not simply abandon all reason and go with what my heart wants.

When I don’t say anything, Brant slides his hand over the pillow separating our bodies and caresses my upper arm. “I feel safe with you, Hig.”

That does it. That seals the deal. His words, that look of pure trust in his eyes, the way he makes me feel just by being close to him.

The answer has always been clear. I know what I want more than anything in the world—so why the fuck am I holding back?

Consequences. Implications. Details. I offload all that nitty-gritty life stuff to Future Hig, the poor bastard.

Current Hig responds with, “I want to be with you so fucking much, Brant.”

“I want to be with you, too.”

And then Current Brant yanks the pillow away and takes The Real Hig in his hands, slides his body down, and does one of the things he does best.

Brant

It's the day of the shoot, and I feel the way I always do when I step onto a film set.

Calm.

But it's not a relaxed type of calm, like when you're chilling on the couch engrossed in a good book and not thinking about anything else.

It's a focused type of calm. I have a job to do.

My lines are perfectly placed in my head, alongside all my cues and prompts. In my mind, I can clearly visualize what's going to happen, how these scenes are going to play out, and now it's my job to bring that vision to life.

I may be having second thoughts about my career, but I know how to perform. I've been doing it since I was a toddler, after all. I feel more at home on set than I do in my actual house.

"You're going to fucking murder this shit," Col says, wrapping me into a hug.

I smile as he basically hands me over to his dad. Hig embraces me with a chuckle. "What he said but with less swearing."

"Thanks for dropping me off, guys," I say, looking at the two most important people in my life. My best friend and my... Huh, we never got around to clarifying what we're going to call each other, but it doesn't matter. Hig and I *are* together, and we can sort out all the details, including official titles, once I get through today.

"Hig, hi. I thought that was you," Sally says, approaching us, and they exchange a quick hug.

"We'll get out of your hair," Hig says, tapping Col on the shoulder.

"And we'll be watching," Col adds with a smile. "Along with the rest of America."

“Don’t suppose I can ask you something?” Sally mutters quietly to me as we both watch them leave. Jesus, Hig sure knows how to wear the fuck out of a pair of jeans.

“Sure.” My eyes remain glued to Hig’s splendid ass.

“Do you know if Hig’s single by any cha—”

“Taken,” I reply flatly before turning to Sally. “He’s *taken*.”



We’re two-thirds of the way through filming the movie, and so far—knock on wood—everything has gone off without any major hitches.

The scene in the bakery, Ginger’s Breads, where my character, Toby, and the other influencers eye up all the incredible goods on display, lamenting we can’t have any of them because there can only be one fat man at Christmas.

The bit at the toy store, Santa’s Workshop, where we got to include a real-life local extra, James. He had to play a super grouchy dude, and from what I’ve heard, it wasn’t that much of a stretch for him.

I’ve just wrapped the scene at Rudolph’s, an intimate pub with dark wood accents, hardwood floors, and cozy booths along one wall, where Toby has had one too many eggnogs. Once all my friends left, I got up and sauntered over to the wall displaying a bunch of Christmas movie posters before my character had a major life realization. Seeing the movie posters reminded him of what the holidays are all about, that there’s more to life than obsessing over follower counts and refreshing social feeds like a madman to check on engagement metrics.

Cue the goat scene!

And I’d better hurry because it’s coming up in less than two minutes.

I'm breathing steadily, totally in the zone, as the props guy leads me and Speckles the goat to my mark in the middle of the main street. We've got barricades set up, but I pay no attention to the people gathered on the sidewalk, or the light snowfall that's only started in the last few minutes, or that it's almost freezing and I'm about to lose my shirt and be chased by a goat.

I. Am in. The Zone.

The wardrobe guy fusses with my shirt one last time, pulling it out at the back. The goat just needs to barely nudge it, and it'll peel straight off my body. I get handed Speckles's lead. I have to hold it behind my back for the first part of the scene, but it'll be out of sight from the camera so the audience watching at home won't see it.

The lights brighten, and I get that familiar *whoosh* I always do right before we start rolling. Two cameras are pointed at me as Sally flies over from the interior scene that's just wrapped and yells out, "Action."

"Whoa, there. You're a...goat," my character, Toby, says. He's a city boy through and through, and he's low-key petrified of the goat, but trying not to show it. He's also low-key tipsy from the drinks he threw back at the pub. That's the bit I added, and I have to say, it's taken an already ridiculous scenario and amped it up even more.

"Easy there, little fella...or girl fella. Whatever you *are*."

I emphasize the last word because that's Speckles's cue to grunt—which she does, adorably—then my eyes go big as I start to freak out—also adorably—before I turn around to make a break for it.

With my back turned to Speckles, she presses her face into my back ever so softly and my shirt falls off.

I look down at myself, start yelling and bringing out all the theatrics, discreetly let go of the lead, and race down the street, arms flailing and slipping and sliding in the fake snow as Speckles charges after me, looking like she's about to maul me.

There are gasps and hollers from the spectators, along with a ton of laughs. I hear a little girl's voice saying, "Mommy, is that man okay?" while a few guys are egging Speckles on to get me. I'm hoping their reactions are a sign I'm pulling this off and it looks as comically absurd as it's meant to.

"And cut!" Sally yells once I reach my mark. "That was brilliant," she says, jogging over to me before dashing off to the next scene.

I have a five-minute break until I'm on again, so I wrap myself up in a blanket the boom guy gave me. I'm smiling so big as I head to wardrobe to change. This is going so well. I've got a really good feeling about this.

I really hope this movie's a hit.



Ask any creative person, whether they're a performer, writer, musician, or whatever, and they'll tell you—*do not* read reviews. Once the work is done, it's done. Get advice and ask for feedback from the people around you, not critics who are often just as concerned about coming up with something funny or clever as they are about actually being helpful about your work.

But the second I get my hands on my phone after the film wraps, I'm tapping through to a few of the industry sites. It's a bad habit, I know, but I can't help it.

Heartwarming and cheesy, Merry Litmas is a fast-paced, frolicking good time!

Bubbly, energetic, and over-the-top in all the best ways.

Great cast make the best of a mediocre script.

"Asshole," I mutter to myself, making a note to send flowers and a thank you card to the writers, then I recommence scrolling.

Brant Lombardi, shirtless and being chased down the street by a goat is pure comedy gold. The child star turned

recent Hollywood bad boy put in a brilliant and surprisingly nuanced performance. Now if only he can manage to keep his personal life on track in the new year...

I shrug my shoulders. Yeah. I'll take it. Could've done without the commentary on my personal life, but overall, I'd say mission accomplished. Looks like this movie will be the reset I was looking for.

Or the reset my agent and my mom were looking for.

The cast and crew are milling around. Everyone's buzzing with excitement, riding a post-show high. I am, too, but there's someone else I'd rather be buzzing with. Still, I don't want to appear rude, so I stick around until the first people start leaving, hug and thank everyone for their great work, snap a few selfies, then take off.

The movie's done, and now it's time to focus on my future and the one person I want in it more than anything else.

I order an Uber and shuffle on my feet as I wait for it, my thoughts running away from me, imagining my life with Hig. Waking up in his bed. Hanging out in the kitchen while he cooks and tells me about his day. Watching movies on the couch.

Nothing earth-shattering or groundbreaking, but for me, it sounds like fucking paradise. I'm done with Hollywood and acting and my entire life as I know it.

I'm ready for a change. To live my life the way *I* want to live it for the first time ever.

Hig's talked about wanting to make changes, too. He wants to travel and see the world. Maybe that's our opening? Maybe we can both make some changes...together?

The car arrives, and I jump in. I can't wait to get back to Hig's place and wrap myself in his arms and kiss the ever-loving festive spirit out of him.

I'm so fired up I could freaking burst. I'm still smiling like a lunatic as the car takes off.

And then my phone buzzes...



“What’s wrong?” Hig asks the second I walk through the front door.

I shake my head as I walk toward him. He drops what he was doing, strides over to me, and wraps me up in his big strong arms. I breathe in his smell through his shirt, and some of the heaviness melts away.

“Let’s sit down,” Hig suggests, guiding me to the couch.

“Where’s Col?” I ask.

“In his room. He wanted to give us some privacy.”

I smile. “That was nice of him.”

“The shoot went well?” Hig asks, perched nervously on the edge of the sofa.

“It’s not the shoot.” I hand him my phone. “It’s Mom.”

His blue-green eyes dart left to right as he reads the string of messages we exchanged in the short ride over. Funny how the only person in the world who can bring me down from an epic high in less than five minutes is the same person who gave birth to me.

When Hig is done reading the texts, he takes a deep breath and hands the phone back. “I’m sorry, Brant. I don’t like speaking badly about her because she is your mother, but she’s really outta line with that shit.”

“Tell me about it.”

I glance down at her texts. She started off with a tepid congratulations, and it went downhill from there. Apparently, I need to get a dietitian and a personal trainer when I get back to LA because the shirtless scene was *not* flattering. She also said my performance was ‘just okay’ and that I could ‘do a lot better.’ So, maybe some more acting lessons?

“She can never just be happy for me,” I say, falling back onto the couch. “I get that she wants me to improve and keep

pushing myself, but come on, can I have, like, two seconds to celebrate something before we're on to the next thing?"

Hig moves closer and gives my leg a squeeze. "Of course. That's perfectly reasonable."

"Really?" I shoot him a look. Mom is also the only person in the entire universe who can make me second-guess myself. I get so conflicted, so guilty, whenever I try to push back against her, telling myself that without her, I wouldn't have any of this.

The irony is, I don't want any of it anymore. But does that make me sound like an ungrateful brat? I hate that it's so confusing.

"Yes, really." Hig moves in closer so that his thigh brushes up against mine. "Parenting is hard, and there's no one right way to do it. But as your kids get older, your job as a parent changes. You get eighteen years to shape and influence your kids into the people you would like them to be. After that, it's on them. You don't think it kills me sometimes to see Col go through hard stuff and not open up to me? But I don't push. All I can do is love him and hope he knows that I'll always be there for him. He's an adult, and it's his choice to take me up on my offer of support. Or not."

Hig reaches for my hand and his thick fingers thread through mine. "It sounds like you need to talk to your mother. When you're ready and the time is right, of course. As you've reminded me several times, you are an adult, and part of adulting is recalibrating the relationship you have with your parents."

I let out a long exhale, taking in everything he's saying. He's absolutely right. I do need to talk to Mom. It's long overdue.

I smile as I look at him. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For always knowing the right thing to say. For being honest and direct without being overbearing or leaving me feeling like shit."

“You never have to thank me for that. It’s how I’ll always treat you.”

“That means a lot to me.”

He lifts our joined hands and peppers my knuckles with tiny kisses. “That’s what best friend’s dads are for, right?”

I shake my head, chuckling. “Might need to work on that. Doesn’t exactly roll off the tongue.”

He smiles and gets to his feet. “Come on, baby. You’ve had a long day.”

“The funny thing is, with each step we take toward your bedroom, I feel like I’m getting a second wind.”

Hig chuckles as we enter his bedroom, and my breath catches in my throat. He’s set it up all romantic like, with flowers and candles everywhere. And of course, because it’s Hig, jazzy Christmas carols are playing quietly in the background.

“What’s all this?” I murmur.

“It’s not what you may be thinking.”

“What do you think I’m thinking?”

“I wasn’t planning on fucking you, Brant.”

“Oh.” That’s exactly what I was thinking.

Hig runs the backs of his fingers along my cheek. “I wanted to create a nice environment so we can lie down and talk, if you’re not too tired.”

I loop my arms over his shoulders. “I’m not.”

“And during the course of the conversation, I was hoping you would agree to...be my boyfriend. Officially.”

“Oh, Hig.” I reach up and kiss him. “You really are the perfect guy.”

His lips stretch into a grin. “So is that a yes on the boyfriend front?”

“Yes, it’s a yes. It’s one giant, whopping yes.” I pull back slightly. “You just need to change one thing.”

“What?”

“Your plan about not fucking me has to go. Because, in case you’ve forgotten, being your boyfriend makes me super, *super* slutty.

Hig

I'm interfering.

Again.

I know I probably shouldn't, but I can't hold back any longer. I've been restraining myself for years when it comes to his mother, but after I saw how her god-awful texts affected him yesterday, I'm done being Switzerland.

How can she be so insensitive?

I'm not going to fly off the handle and say something I'll regret and have to walk back later. She is and will always be his mother, and I fully intend on respecting that. I don't have to like it, but I will respect it.

I'll try to keep a lid on my anger, but the woman needs to have her eyes opened. Why can't she ever be happy for her son? Why doesn't she give him the basic love and support he so desperately craves from her? And why is she so oblivious to the negative effects this has on him? I'm not being unreasonable with these questions I'm emailing her. It's the freaking foundation of parenting—love your kid no matter what. Period.

I can't encourage Brant to speak with her and tell her how he feels when I haven't done the same.

"There," I say once I send the email. "And now it's time to start Christmasing."

I power my computer down and shut the door to my office, shutting away everything that isn't related to the holidays. It's Christmas Eve, and I am officially done with work for the year. I'm spending the next few days with my son and my boyfriend, and that's all that matters.

Last night couldn't have gone any better. I still haven't figured out all the details of how we'll make it work, but we will make it work.

Or at least, give it the best fucking shot we can. Because I like Brant. A lot. And something tells me that, despite the craziness of falling for my son's best friend, he might just be the one for me.



“Remember the time we had a taco eating contest and you ate so many that you ended up throwing up all the way from the living room to the bathroom?”

Brant groans. “Don’t remind me. That was the last time I ever underestimated how much food you could pile away.”

I top up the boys’ eggnogs, reminding Col he did in fact once lose a hot dog eating contest.

He counters that because it was in Texas, it doesn’t count. Not sure I quite follow the logic there, but who cares. The three of us are having a fun trip down memory lane.

I return the empty pitcher to the kitchen, and when I return to the living room, my eyes dart between the armchair I’ve been sitting on for most of the afternoon and the empty spot on the couch beside Brant.

Fuck it.

I park my ass on the couch.

Col will need to start getting used to seeing Brant and me together. Besides, it’s not like I’m going to maul the guy in front of him. I’m a grown-ass man. I can control my impulses to ravage his best friend until later, like the responsible father I am.

Col takes a sip of eggnog then smiles, tilting his head to the side. “You guys look nice together. Like you fit.”

“Thanks.” I look over at Brant and grin. “I think we do.”

“Does this mean you’re officially together?” Col asks.

“We are,” Brant answers. “Although neither of us has updated our Instas yet.”

“Also,” I interject. “One of us doesn’t have an Insta.”

Brant threads his fingers with mine. My eyes shoot to him, then to Col. He’s noticed, but he seems cool with it. When I look back at Brant, he gives a small nod, silently giving me permission to update my son.

“We’re boyfriends,” I say.

Col’s face lights up with a big smile. He trudges over to us, giving Brant a high five and me a back slap. “That’s awesome, guys. Congratulations.”

“It’s early days,” Brant says.

“*Very* early days,” I reiterate. “We still have a lot to talk about and a lot of decisions to make, but we’re going to try to make this work.”

Brant smiles at me. “Actually, I’ve already made a decision about something.”

Col and I snap our heads to Brant.

“When?” I ask.

“Right after lunch when I disappeared for half an hour.”

“Thought you were taking a super long dump.”

“Col!” Brant and I admonish him at the same time.

He just laughs it off. “I’m kidding, geez. What decision have you made?”

Brant’s grip on my fingers gets firmer. He takes a deep breath. “I’m going to quit acting.”

Col’s mouth drops open. “What? Why? I mean, I know why. You’ve been unhappy for a long time, but... What are you going to do?”

“Well...” Brant’s eyes find mine, and he looks a bit nervous, a bit excited.

“What is it?” I coax, curious to hear what he’s come up with.

“Sally put me in touch with one of her writer friends, and he’s going to meet with me when I get back to LA to give me

some guidance about pursuing a career as a screenwriter.”

“Oh my god, that’s incredible, Brant,” Col enthuses.

“It is.” I pull Brant closer. “I’m so happy for you, Bra—*baby*.”

Brant looks at me, his eyes packed with emotion, and I can’t help it, I have to do it. I lean forward and bring my lips to his. I keep it brief and chaste since we have an audience, but I cannot *not* kiss him.

“I’m so proud of you,” I murmur, before moving away slightly.

“I haven’t done anything yet. I could end up having no talent.”

“When’s that ever stopped anyone in Hollywood?” Col jokes.

“Exactly. And besides, you know the head of a production company who’s very willing to work with you.”

“All right. That’s it. I’m done. I love seeing you two together, I really do, but I came this close to making a joke about giving head to the head of a production company, then I realized I’d be making an oral sex joke about my old man, and I’m sorry. I just can’t. I’ll give you guys some time.”

“You don’t have to leave,” I say as Col pushes to his feet.

He smiles as he makes his retreat. “I know. But you guys have stuff to talk about and, I’m assuming—not that I want to think about it too much—more kissing and other stuff to do, so knock yourselves out. I’ll be back for dinner.”

And with that, he grabs his coat, beanie, gloves, and scarf, and heads out.

“Well, there you go,” I say, wrapping an arm around Brant and pulling him in by my side. “I officially have the coolest son in the world.”

“You do,” he agrees.

I kiss the top of his head. “So, no acting, huh?”

“Nope. And I have you to thank for it. Although, fair warning, Mom might put out a hit on you.”

“Speaking of your mother...” Brant groans and sits up to look at me. “I did something this morning.”

“Go on.”

“I emailed her,” I say, looking him right in the eye. “I wasn’t too angry, but I made my feelings clear about her parenting style, and highlighted in hopefully not too much of an aggressive way, some of the tactics she may choose to consider to perhaps better said parenting style.”

Brant starts to chuckle, and as it goes on, it morphs into a full-on, shoulder-shaking laugh. “That is the most diplomatic way I’ve ever heard anyone call out my mother for being a bitch.”

“I never said she was a bitch,” I correct him, keenly aware that although he’s laughing now, this is an incredibly delicate topic. “But I do believe you deserve better from her.”

“Thanks, Hig.”

We sit quietly for a few moments until I break the silence with a question I have to ask. “I’m just making sure, but your decision to quit acting doesn’t have anything to do with what’s happening between us, does it?”

“Honestly?”

I nod. “Please.”

He peers over at me, a delicate pink crawling up his neck. “Yes. But let me explain.”

“Go on.”

“I’ve been miserable for a long time. Acting just doesn’t excite me anymore. Even as great as I felt when we wrapped the shoot yesterday, I didn’t want to hang around with the cast and crew. I wanted to...come home. To you.”

“Brant.”

“Hear me out. I’m not doing it *just* for you. Ninety...three, four, five percent is about me. But, I’m not gonna lie, five

percent is you, Hig. If I pursue screenwriting, I can do that from anywhere. Including here with you.”

“But that’s the thing. I’m not sure I want to be here. I was thinking of buying a van or getting a round-the-world plane ticket and just heading out...somewhere. I don’t even know or care where.”

Brant blinks a few times. “Will there be room for two in your van?”

“Sleeping quarters are going to be very tight,” I tell him, trying to keep a straight face. “We’ll have to conserve any space we have.”

He grins. “I’m down.”

“Are you really? What about the rest of it?”

“The rest of what?”

“All the other things working against us.”

“Like what?”

“How about the age gap between us?”

He shrugs. “No big deal. If it means I have to teach you how to use social media and explain how young people talk, I’m prepared to do that.”

“You’re so generous,” I mutter sarcastically, and he laughs.

“How many times do I have to tell you I’m a big fucking deal?”

I swipe my hand through his silky hair. “You really fucking are.”

“So yeah, we can focus on the differences between us, or we can choose to concentrate on the similarities. We share the same values. We want the same things out of life. We both love it when you fuck me senseless. Am I missing anything?”

“No, baby.” I pull him in so he’s sitting on my lap. “I think you covered it all.”

I press my forehead against his, soaking it all in. This is finally happening. We’re really together. Brant is mine, and

I'm his.

I can feel the curve of Brant's cheek as he smiles. "Hey."

"Hey what?"

"Col said he'd be back for dinner, right?"

"He did."

"That's still a few hours away."

He pulls his head back, glancing at me with mischief and desire written in bright neon letters all over his face.

"Well, then..." He stands up and extends his hand. "How about you and I work up one almighty appetite?"

Brant

“How was your walk?” Hig asks Col over dinner a few hours later.

“Less eventful than whatever you two got up to,” he quips.

I smirk to myself as I chow down on the delicious steak Hig made. Col’s right. Hig and I worked up one helluva appetite, and even though we made sure to shower and scrub off any lingering sex smells, I guess there’s no way of hiding our post-sex glow.

I still can’t get over how incredibly cool Col is with everything. If anything, the only real surprise is how un-weird everything between the three of us is. We’re having Christmas Eve dinner together, catching up and laughing like nothing has changed...when *everything* has changed.

Screw my dumb ‘year of fun’ bullshit idea, next year I’m finally going to start living my life. For real.

With Hig.

I don’t know what the future holds for my career. My screenwriting may or may not pan out, but I’ve been good with my money, so I can take as much time as I need to figure stuff out.

With Hig.

“Uh-oh.” Col interrupts my thoughts, and I realize both he and Hig are looking at me.

“What, uh-oh?” I say, hoping I haven’t missed too much of the conversation.

“He’s got that grin again. What did you do to him, Dad?” Col scrunches up his nose. “On second thought, I don’t wanna know.”

Hig tries to hide his smile. “Probably better that way, son. But if you ever need any tips in that departm—”

“La la la la.” Col covers his ears to drown out his father, and I laugh.

See? Normal. I’m still in shock, but I love it so much. I really do have the *best* best friend in the world.

After dinner, Col and I offer to wash up, so Hig retires to the living room and throws a few more logs on the fire to keep it going. Christmas carols play in the background.

“Have you heard anything from your mom?” Col asks, handing me a sudsy plate.

“Nope.” I take it from him and start drying. “And I don’t expect to, either.”

Hig and I filled Col in over dinner about the email Hig sent her.

“Are you mad?” he asks.

“At who? Her?”

“No. Dad.”

I shake my head. “I’m not angry at Hig.”

He’s not the one who’s been trying to sabotage my friendship, I think to myself, but I don’t want to bring that up right now. The list of issues I need to raise with Mom only seems to grow longer by the day.

“I can understand why he did it,” I say. “He’s held back for so many years, keeping his mouth shut so as not to upset Mom and potentially have her try to wreck our friendship.”

Col’s eyes widen. “You really think she’d be capable of doing something like that?”

I *know* she would, but I bite my tongue. It’s Christmas Eve, not the best time to be getting into this. “I’m actually glad he finally said something. Mom needs to get called out on her behavior. I let her get away with too much.”

“You do.” Col wipes his hands on a dishcloth and places a hand on my shoulder. “Can I ask you something I’ve been meaning to ask you for years?”

“It’s NIVEA,” I say, smiling.

“Huh?”

I poke him with my elbow. “Weren’t you going to ask me what the secret to my flawless skin is? Because I’ve been using NIVEA twice daily, and look”—I run my fingers along my smooth cheek—“flawless.”

“You’re an idiot.” Col laughs, then looks closer at me. “And I hope for both of our sakes that that little white patch on your chin *is* face cream and not my father’s semen.”

“What?” I race over to the table, grab my phone, and tap into the camera app, checking myself out. No white patch on my face, but I do spot Col laughing hysterically behind me.

I turn around slowly. “You’re dead to me.”

Col’s laughing so hard he’s keeled over, hands on knees. “Oh, man. I got you so good. That’s a top fiver for sure.”

I plonk myself down at the dining table and fold my arms, pretending like I’m pissed. He finishes washing up, then claims a spot next to me. “I actually wanted to ask you something about your mom,” he says.

“Yeah?”

“You’ve always let her treat you poorly, and I guess what I want to know is...why?”

My throat closes up. I have an answer to his question, but I’m almost afraid to say it. But he’s asking, so I guess I should tell him.

“Actually, some of it comes down to you,” I say.

“Me?”

I nod. “Having a best friend who’s lost his mother has had a big effect on me. I saw how much you missed your mom, especially when we were kids, and it made me realize that although my mom isn’t perfect, I’m lucky to have her.”

Col runs it over in his head for a few moments. “That makes sense. Can I tell you something?”

“Of course.”

“I... I still haven't scattered my portion of her ashes.”

“You haven't?”

“I was waiting for...this year. I thought it would be the right time to do it. But then the weather fucked everything up, so, yeah, still haven't done it.”

Honestly, I'm a little surprised he hasn't done it by now. She died eighteen years ago.

“When do you think you will?”

“Don't know. It'll have to be next year, I guess. I'd like for it to be symbolic, you know? Whether it's a date that matters like her birthday, or something else, I want it to be... significant. Does that make sense?”

“Of course it does. And if you want me to be there, I'd be honored. Or if you want to do it on your own, I fully understand that, too.”

“Thanks, Brant. You're the best.”

I reach over and give his arm a squeeze. “I really am.”

He smiles. “And as touching as your reason is for going soft on your mom, please don't let me be the reason you let her steamroll over you so much, okay? Your feelings are valid, and you deserve to be treated with respect.”

“I know. Thanks, buddy. Family is hard.”

Col smirks. “I could so say a joke about a particular family member being hard, but I won't.”

I grin. “Please don't.”

“I just hope for your sake that she does the decent thing and reaches out to you tomorrow.”

“I'm not holding my breath on that one.”

“It's the holidays. There could be a Christmas miracle?”

I nod, but don't say anything, because at this point, it pretty much would take a miracle for Mom to contact me tomorrow.

Oh well. At least I get to spend the day with my best friend and my boyfriend.



“Am I allowed to ask what you and Col were talking about in the kitchen after dinner?” Hig asks after we’ve said goodnight to Col and are in his bedroom.

“No, you cannot.” I fold my arms across my chest, hold a mildly pissed-off look for about five seconds, before grinning. “At least, not with clothes on.”

“Don’t scare me like that.” Hig huffs out a breath. “The pitfalls of dating an actor.” He dutifully starts undressing, then stops. “Wait, you don’t ever act...?” His eyes trail over to the bed.

“Why would I need to act there? You give good dick.”

Hig smirks as his pants come off. “Just *good*?”

I cross the floor and hook my arms over his round shoulders, staring into his beautiful dual-colored eyes. “Oh, Hig. They haven’t invented a word to describe how amazing that dick of yours is.”

He growls approvingly, sliding his arms around my waist, and tugs me into his body. Our lips meet as my hands slide down his meaty chest before tracking lower, lower, lower until they finally land on that gorgeous, exceptional, thick cock of his.

The kiss deepens as Hig’s strong hands land on my ass, and he spreads my cheeks apart. Gently, he slides his fingers toward my twitching hole. It’s amazing how in tune we’ve become to each other’s bodies in such a short amount of time.

“That’s so good,” I murmur into his mouth, feeling his lips curve into a grin.

He pulls back slightly. “Yeah. I know. I’m kind of a big deal, too.”

That he fucking is.

We start kissing harder, and it whips up a frenzy of emotions in me. Feelings and desires I've kept buried for so long, scared to let out because I thought they wouldn't be reciprocated or that they'd cause damage.

But none of my fears have come to pass.

I haven't made an idiot of myself by telling Hig how I feel because he feels the same.

I haven't damaged his relationship with his son or mine with my best friend because, well, Col's just the fucking best.

If anything, being with Hig has opened me up to a whole new world of possibilities, like—

“Gonna come,” he grunts.

I look down just in time to see jets of hot cum surging from his cock. I hold off on stroking myself, watching spellbound as his release lands on my dick. When he's done, I run my fingers along my sticky shaft, using his cum as lube as I bring myself closer, closer, *closer*—

“Fuuuck.”

My knees buckle, and Hig props me up as I erupt all over his stomach, my legs shaking so hard I wouldn't be able to stay upright on my own.

Once I'm done and have regained my balance, Hig dashes away, returning a few moments later with a wet washcloth. He cleans me up first, being extra careful with my sensitive dick, before wiping himself.

“Come on,” he says, leading me to the bed. I get in and as I lift my legs, he takes my fozies—the only thing I'm wearing—off each foot.

It takes just a few seconds for him to turn off the light on my side of the bed and get in to big spoon me, and I'm already struggling to keep my eyes open. But then I remember he asked me a question before we got dickstrated.

And even though she's the last person I want to be thinking about at the moment, I do want to answer Hig. “Mom. Col and I were talking about Mom in the kitchen earlier.”

Hig pulls me into him a little closer. I can feel his heartbeat against my back. “Are you okay?”

“Yep. I’ve set my expectations to low so that I don’t get hurt when I don’t hear from her tomorrow.”

“Oh, baby.” He runs a small circle along my stomach. “I’m sorry you have to deal with that.”

“It’s okay. I’m used to it. Besides, I have you guys.”

“You do. And you always will. Do you want to talk?”

“Too sleepy.” I let out a yawn. “Thanks for checking in, though. I really am good. But I’ll never knock back a few more Christmas BJs, if you’re feeling concerned about me.”

He chuckles, the rumble in his chest vibrating through my body. “I’ll file that away for future Christmases. Good night, baby.”

“Night, Hig.”

I want to say more than just goodnight, specifically three words, but even in my half-asleep haze, I know it’s too soon, right?

Even though I’m fully aware of what I’m feeling—that I do love Hig—it’s almost as if some time needs to pass before I say those words to him, so that the *best friend’s dad* love I’ve had for him most of my life has time to be replaced by the *you’re my boyfriend and I want to spend the rest of my life with you* love that I’m feeling for him right now.

As my eyes drift shut and my breathing evens out, I feel so safe and snug, wrapped up in Hig’s arms, pressed against his warm body, knowing that one day soon, that time will come.

Hig

Is there any better time of the year than Christmas morning?

Yes, I got woken up ridiculously early by Col banging on the bedroom door in that *the world is on fire* way of his because my son is twenty-five going on twelve.

Yes, I made him and Brant their favorite breakfast of pancakes with ice cream and strawberries because, secretly, it's my favorite, too.

And as we sit in the living room opening presents, with the fire crackling and snow falling outside, there's nowhere in the world I'd rather be than with my son...and my boyfriend.

I look at the pair of them sitting on the couch about to exchange gifts, and I couldn't be any happier. This is not what I envisioned when I went to pick Brant up from the airport ten months ago.

Sorry, my mistake. Ten *days* ago.

It feels like so much longer ago than that. Hard to believe we're only a few days into being together, but I guess that's what happens when you know someone for such a long time before you date them. It's fresh and exciting because we're now new things to each other, but there's an underlying familiarity there that fills my soul and gives me hope that anything is possible.

I have no way of knowing what the future holds—for Brant, for me, for us—but I'm confident that whatever comes our way, we'll get through it. Because like Col said, life is too damn short and precious to let things get in the way of what we want. And there is nothing I want more than to share my life with Brant.

"Open yours first," he says to Col, and Col being Col, he doesn't argue.

He yanks at Brant's carefully wrapped present, tearing away the shiny silver paper and pulling out a box.

“Aww, Brant-Brant,” he says, lifting out a large gold photo frame. He smiles as he takes in the picture before turning it around so I can see. It’s the photo I took of the two of them by the pool on the Fourth. They’re both sporting huge smiles, hugging each other as they stand side by side with the sun shining down on them.

“That’s a great photo,” I say, then I look at Brant. “Better than that ass selfie you wanted to take.”

“Hey. Are you knocking my ass?”

We both turn to Col who looks like he’s about to burst. “Stop setting me up like this, guys. It’s not fair.”

The three of us laugh before Col hands Brant his gift.

“Thanks, bud,” he says, taking it from him. It looks like a five-year-old wrapped it, but Brant handles it with all the care in the world, looking for the tape so that he can peel it off carefully.

It’s hard to believe these two are best friends. They couldn’t be more different in so many ways.

It takes Brant a while to unwrap it and when he does I do a double take because as he pulls it up in front of him, all I see is...purple.

“Oh, Col.”

Brant has lifted the gift up—obscuring his face so I can’t gauge his reaction—but I swallow as I look at what he’s holding, silently willing my body not to betray me.

Not today.

Not in front of my son.

“It’s...beautiful. Thank you.” Brant is elongating each word, and it’s my only clue that he’s just as shocked as I am at the purple sweater Col got him.

A *purple* sweater, people. Of all the damn colors in the world, he had to choose that one.

Col leans back with a smile, looking pleased with himself. “Picked it up in a cute little shop in town yesterday. Figured

it's a bit more modern than Dad's hideously boring gray sweater you borrowed. No offense, Dad."

"None taken," I say, clearing my throat and forcing a smile so that Col doesn't suspect that his actually quite thoughtful gift for his best friend is a potential turn-on trigger for his old man.

Brant lowers the sweater, and his eyes meet mine. He's trying so hard not to laugh, while I'm just praying my dick, even after all the action he's been getting lately, doesn't cause a situation. Also, why am I still wearing sleep pants?

"I love it. Thanks, buddy." Brant gives Col a hug while I do my best to think *alllll* the unsexy thoughts. There is absolutely no way Brant can ever wear that thing in front of me if he doesn't want me to maul him there and then. Which, come to think of it, means he'll probably be living in it twenty-four seven.

I get up to throw some more wood on the fire, and hopefully distract myself from developing a wood situation of my own, when Brant's phone buzzes on the coffee table.

"Oh. Fuck." He looks up at me. "It's Mom."

I hurry over to him. "If you feel like answering it, pick it up. Otherwise, it's okay not to. Do what feels right."

He glances between me and Col a few times, taking a deep breath as if he's summoning the strength needed to take the call. And with a nod, he does just that.

"Hey, Mom."

It's a video call, so he's holding the phone out in front of him. Col slinks away from the couch and joins me as I make my way to the fire to give Brant some space.

"Hope she's not going to be a mega bitch and ruin his day," he whispers to me.

"She can't ruin his day." I throw some wood onto the fire, then dust my hands off as I get up. "Not with the two of us here."

Col smiles. "Merry Christmas, Dad."

We hug.

“Merry Christmas, son.”

“Uh, Hig.”

Col and I break apart. Brant’s waving the phone in the air.
“Mom wants to talk to you.”

Of course she does. I stride over and take the phone from Brant. “Merry Christmas, Lana,” I say, trying to sound like I mean it.

There’s a beautiful view of the ocean behind her, the sun descending into the water. “Merry Christmas, Hig.”

She’s wearing an oversized hat and equally oversized black glasses so I could be speaking to a Muppet for all I know. “I received your email.”

“I see.”

Today isn’t the day I would’ve chosen to have this conversation, but then again, I’m not the one making that decision. Still, in keeping with the spirit of the season, I strike a cordial note. “I apologize if it upset you.”

“It didn’t upset me. It…” She takes off her glasses, and my breath catches, struck by how similar her eyes are to Brant’s, the exact same shade of light green.

“It was something that, I can concede, perhaps needed to be said.”

“Oh.”

“Oh.”

“Oh.”

The boys have come over. They’re standing in front of me and out of view of the camera, but close enough to hear everything.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t be there,” Lana continues. “I considered flying back, but then I’d be disrupting the holidays for our pilot, the security team, and my personal chef. It’d be a nightmare, and I didn’t want to do that.”

I hope I'm able to hide my shock. Is... Is Lana Lombardi actually being considerate of others?

“Oh.”

“Oh.”

“Oh.”

“Maybe we can catch up in the new year, all four of us?”

“No. No. No.”

That's coming from Brant as he flails his arms about, shaking his head wildly from left to right, but I shrug and say the only thing I can say to Lana. “We'll figure something out.”

I can't outright refuse, now can I?

And besides, at some point, Brant is going to have to sit down and talk with her. There's years of accumulated issues to be raised, not to mention a few recent developments he might want to fill her in on, too.

When and how he does that is totally up to him. I'm done interfering. Plus, Lana has bodyguards, and I'm pretty sure they're armed, so I am staying well clear of this one.

We exchange holiday wishes, she says a quick hello to Col, asks Brant to ring her later, and then I end the call.

“She called!” Col says, smiling at Brant. “That's a good thing.”

“Yeah. It is.”

Brant's smiling, but he seems a little...uncertain.

“Everything okay, baby?”

“Yeah. I can't believe that she called. And that she said she wanted to fly back but decided not to because it would mess up Christmas for so many people.”

“I clocked that, too,” Col says, and I give a nod.

“We can chalk it down to a Christmas miracle,” I say.

Brant's eyes find me, and his smile grows. “Yeah. It is a Christmas miracle. You know, guys, I think this is going to be

the best Christmas ever.”

“Does the best Christmas ever involve food?” my constantly hungry son asks.

Brant and I laugh.

“Sure,” I say, taking Brant’s hand in mine. “Let’s do food.”

And with that, my son and my boyfriend and I head into the dining room to enjoy our Christmas meal.

I squeeze Brant’s fingers. I can’t believe I get to call this incredible man my boyfriend. My heart overflows with happiness. And to think, it all started with a purple dildo.

Life really is a funny thing, isn’t it?

I’m smiling as I set the food out on the table, so grateful I get to spend the day with the two most special people in my life.

That’s all I need. The presents, the music, the food, the weather, it all adds to the wonder and magic of the season, but all that stuff pales beside the real meaning of the holidays—spending quality time with the people you love.

This really is the best Christmas ever.

EPILOGUE

Seven months later, the Fourth of July

Hig

I never thought I'd be the type of man willing to share his boyfriend with anyone else... And I'm still not.

However, I am prepared to make one exception.

Not for another man, but for another *me*.

“Oh, fucking hell, yessssss!”

Brant fists the sheets as I slide into him along with the The Other Hig dildo. Yep, ol' purple had to go. Apparently, the constant size comparison was too much for him, so he bought a time-share in Florida and is living out his days there.

When Brant suggested I get a silicone mold made of my cock, I honestly thought he was having me on. But he wasn't, and since we had to spend some time apart in the first few months of our relationship while we finalized our lives in LA and Christmas Falls, I obliged since I have a very needy bottom boyfriend.

“That's so fucking good. Don't you dare ever stop,” he cries, as he gets his hole stretched out by two cocks at once.

As if I'd ever stop.

For as needy as Brant is, I'm ten times worse.

Never in my life have I had this big, all-consuming love. I think about him all the time. I want to be with him all the time. And in those first few months of the year when we were apart, I missed him so much it was unbearable.

Thankfully, our *apart* days are officially behind us now.

I slam my hips into Brant's body, thrusting deep into his warm, tight channel. He yells out in pleasure, and I seriously hope this hotel suite is double-walled, otherwise our neighbors are copping an earful.

That gives me an idea. I know one way to keep Brant quiet.

I carefully ease my way out of him, keeping The Other Hig in place as I shuffle around on the bed, positioning myself right in front of Brant's mouth.

He kisses the slit of my cock before peering up at me, smiling seductively as he bats his lashes. "You wouldn't be feeding me your cock to shut me up, would you?"

"One hundred percent."

He throws back a laugh before swallowing me down to my base. I lurch forward and use one hand to work the dildo in and out of Brant's ass, while the other one runs up and down his muscular back as he bobs up and down on my cock.

Even though this is our third session for the day, I'm already close.

"Gonna come," I tell him.

He speeds up in response, letting out sexy little whimpers that push me over the edge. I unload in his hungry, wet mouth, and he laps up every last drop of my seed like it's the sweetest nectar he's ever tasted.

As we roll over, I see his own hand is glazed with his release. Unable to help myself, I grab his hand and bring it to my mouth, then suck his cum from his fingers. I'm obsessed with his taste.

I stretch out on the bed as Brant nestles into the crook of my neck. That coconut smell I've grown addicted to tickles my nostrils. I fucking love that smell.

His taste. His body. His mind. His beautiful heart. I love every fucking thing about Brant Lombardi.

"You enjoy that, baby?"

"So much," he replies. "But at the risk of sounding like Col, I could really go for some food."

"Well, it is almost lunchtime. Wanna get room service?"

“Actually, do you mind if we eat out?” He props himself up on his elbow. “We’ve been here for two days, and I feel like we haven’t left our room to explore the resort.”

I chuckle, tucking a strand of hair behind his ear. “That’s because we haven’t. But I agree, it’s time to explore and make some travel plans.”

His eyes light up. “Yay!”

Fifteen minutes later, we’re showered, dressed, and seated at a beautiful table overlooking the Gulf of Mexico.

“I’m so glad Col recommended this place,” Brant says, perusing the leather-bound menu.

“I am, too.”

Elysian is a luxury all-male, LGBT resort that is nothing short of a tropical paradise. I’m looking forward to leaving our suite and exploring it some more. My cock is, too. Poor fella is considering taking strike action. He’s been begging for at least a twenty-four-hour sex break... Yeah, I don’t like his chances.

And how did Col, my straight son, hear about this place? He visited it with a friend earlier in the year.

Brant rests the menu on the table and smiles. “I still can’t believe Col is bi. I am so, so happy for him.”

I beam. “I was just thinking about him. And I’m thrilled for him, too.”

Yep, Col came out to us as bisexual Memorial Day weekend.

He’s been doing a lot better this year. He started seeing a therapist in New York, and he raves about her. She’s helping him deal with some long-held issues. There’s nothing more a parent could ever hope for than to see their kid happy, and if they’re not happy, working on themselves to get better. He’s doing that this year. He really is, and I am so proud of him.

“Have you heard from him?”

I shake my head. “Nope. Must be out of range.”

“I think this trip will do him the world of good.” Brant smiles, and it’s that smile your partner gets when they know something you don’t.

“What am I missing?”

“Oh, nothing.” Brant picks up his menu again and starts casually flipping through it. “I just told him to go for it last week.”

Col was the first stop in our *let’s go wherever the hell we want to* world adventure. We dropped in to see him last week in New York before coming here, since he was due to fly out to Australia for work.

“What did you say to him?”

“I just told you, for him to go for it. I mean, hello. He’s going to be in Australia for a whole month. Australian men—and women—are fucking hot. And trust me when I say you don’t want any more details than that.”

I nod and pick up my menu. “Okay. Enough said.”

We order food and as we wait for our meals to arrive, I take out my phone and open up the shared Travel document Brant and I created at the start of the year. I look at all the places we’ve listed as destinations we’d like to visit and smile. “God, can you believe where we are now? How far we’ve come in seven months? It really isn’t all that long when you think about it.”

“I *can* believe it.” Brant reaches over the table and takes my hand in his. “It’s because we’re meant to be together. The universe has been giving us nothing but green lights all year.”

“It certainly has, baby. I love you so much.”

Brant’s green eyes sparkle, and he gives my fingers a firm squeeze. “I love you, too, Hig.”

Brant

I don't think I'll ever tire of hearing Hig say he loves me or of saying those magical words to him.

I waited until Valentine's Day before dropping the *L* bomb. Hig was visiting me in LA, and I organized a catering company to set up at my house. It was the perfect romantic setting with the perfect guy. I could just feel in my bones it was the right moment, so just before dessert, I walked around the table, perched myself in Hig's lap, and whispered those three words in his ear.

His response was immediate. Let's just say, we didn't stick around for dessert.

And I've been telling him I love him every chance I get. Showing him, too. Jesus, my ass is so stretched out, I feel the effects of our lovemaking with every step I take. Let me tell you, the only thing better than getting fucked by one Hig is getting fucked by two.

"I'm so glad I went with the fish." A perfectly grilled, freshly caught piece of fish hangs on my fork. "This is the best seafood I've had in my life."

"Glad you like it, baby." Hig smiles. "The chicken is incredible, too."

How did I get this lucky? I mean, being best friends with one Langdon is amazing enough on its own. But having two Langdon men in my life is like winning the life lottery.

It's been a big year, had its share of ups and downs, but through it all, for the first time in my life, I feel like I'm having fun because I'm finally living my life for me. The way *I* want it.

My eyes flick to the open document on Hig's phone. We haven't made any plans after Florida, so we can go wherever we want to in the world. Nothing's holding us back anymore.

Hig brought on two business partners to run HoliGay Presents and has stayed on as a silent stakeholder, while I'm doing an online screenwriting course. I've read thousands of scripts in my life, but I'm not arrogant enough to think that that means I can write one myself. I'm learning a lot and filing

away a ton of notes for when I'm ready to sit down and write my first screenplay.

"You know." I point toward the phone. "Mom's going to be in London at the end of the month."

Hig stops chewing. "Are you saying we should avoid the entire continent then?"

"Maybe." I grin. "Or maybe we ambush her? She might be more amenable on foreign soil."

"Hopefully," Hig says, but his eyes say, *Doubt it*.

Mom copped a double whammy of big news when I returned to LA after Christmas. She almost fainted when I told her about my plans to quit acting, and then I legit thought she was having a heart attack when I told her about me and Hig.

I also used the occasion—*while we're going through things*—to tell her how it made me feel every time she put me down or pointed out a flaw or mistake I'd made. As well as her constant, relentless focus on the next thing and the next thing and the next thing. I told her I appreciated her commitment to my success and said I understood where she was coming from, but if her motivation was to help me, it was having the complete opposite effect.

It was a lot to take, so of course she did what any reasonable parent would do when their kid finally reveals some deeply buried truths they'd put off saying for years because they were afraid to—she jetted off back to Europe.

We've only spoken twice since then. She might need time to come around to the changes I've made in my life, or she may never come around. That choice is hers.

I am and will always be her son. And I think that if she reflects on things honestly, she'll see how much I've tried to accommodate and appease her over the years. I'll never shut her out of my life completely, but the type of future relationship I'd like to have with her is one based on honesty, respect, and treating each other well. I don't think that's asking for too much, is it?

I hope she comes around one day. I really do.

“Where would you like to go next?” I ask Hig in an attempt to get my mind off my mother.

He reaches for his phone, taps away, then lifts it to reveal the most picturesque mountain range I have ever seen. “Is that a screensaver, or is it real?”

“It’s real, baby. The Cascade Mountain Range.”

“That’s here? In this country?”

Hig rumbles out a chuckle. “It sure is. I know it’s summer, but I thought it might be nice to rent a cabin. Go hiking. Catch some fish. Go off-grid for a bit.”

“I love that idea. Tell me more about the cabin. I’m assuming it’ll be secluded so I can make all the noise in the world while we make love?”

“You assume correctly.”

“Then I’m in!”

Hig smiles, and he looks so freaking happy I could cry. I love that I make him just as happy as he makes me. We’re a team. We might be different ages and have led different lives to reach this point, but when we’re together, none of that matters one bit.

The love Hig and I have for each other is the realest thing in the world. And just think, if I hadn’t been fucking myself with a purple dildo in his house—*twice*—maybe none of this would’ve happened. He’d still be an object of my fantasies, not my very real boyfriend.

“What are you smirking about?” Hig asks.

His eyes have gone dark, like he knows *exactly* what’s on my mind.

I fold my napkin and place it on my empty plate. “I think I’m done exploring the resort.”

Hig chuckles again. “We literally only walked four hundred feet from our room to get here.”

“Yeah. And that long walk really killed me.” I dab at my forehead a few times. “Must be the Florida heat or something.

I should probably get some bed rest.”

Hig’s eyes glimmer. “Okay. Let’s get you to bed.” He smacks his lips and leans forward, lowering his voice to say, “But you ain’t gonna be getting no rest, baby.”



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