

NEVER HAVE I EVER:

HAD A

BROMANCE

with a Teammate

BOOK THREE

WILLOW DIXON

**NEVER HAVE I EVER: HAD A
BROMANCE WITH A
TEAMMATE**

WILLOW DIXON

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MATT

Knock knock knock.
“It’s open.”

“Quick question.” Alex peeked his head into my room. “If you’re here, who’s in the shower?”

“Jax.”

He smirked. “Another question. Does he have water at his place?”

I resisted the urge to roll my eyes as he pushed the door to my room open and leaned against the doorjamb.

My roommates constantly made fun of how much Jax was at our house. In fairness, he was here almost as much as I was, but I knew it was all in good fun.

I’d lucked out when I’d applied to live in the house. I’d spent the last three years in the dorms. Mind you, I’d been in the jock house, so my accommodations had been better than those of the average student. Single room, private bathroom, and a double bed with extra floor space.

It was a sweet deal.

But I’d hated not having a break from my team and the whole sports culture on campus. I’d applied for shared housing last summer, and my roommates were awesome, especially considering the horror stories I’d heard about rooming with strangers.

“You going to that party at Kappa?” I asked.

“For a bit.” He brushed his dark hair back from his face.

“Are you going to be around this weekend?”

“Not until late Sunday.”

Alex’s boyfriend had an apartment across town. He lived alone, so Alex spent most of his weekends over there, and Kai was a regular fixture at the house in the evenings.

I liked both Alex and Kai, but it was weird having so many couples around.

Beck and Finn, two of our other roommates, started hooking up at the start of the year and had finally admitted they were dating a few months ago.

The funny thing was that I’d thought both Beck and Alex were straight, but it turned out they were bi.

I didn’t care who my roommates hooked up with—guy, girl, whatever—but the constant sex noises from Beck and Finn, and Alex when Kai came over, were a reminder I hadn’t gotten laid in months.

“Want to game for a bit when your better half stops using all our hot water?” Alex asked.

“Sure.”

“Cool. Meet you downstairs.”

Alex closed the door. I was picking up my phone when it swung open, and Jax walked in.

“Forgot your clothes again?” I asked.

“Shut up.”

“What the fuck is that?” I pointed to the tiny towel around his waist.

The two ends barely met around his hips, and a massive gap in the material showed off most of his cut thigh.

“The only towel you had in there.” He pulled it from his waist and rubbed it through his hair.

Jax and I had been teammates and best friends for the past three years, ever since we met during hell week. We’d spent so

much time in locker rooms together that seeing each other naked was just another day ending in *y*.

“Someone stole the one I brought,” he added pointedly.

“Not my fault.” I grinned as he wiped off his chest and arms. “You bring a huge fluffy towel over and think I’m going to leave it for you?”

“It’s obvious you’re an only child.” He tossed the towel at me.

I caught it with one hand before the wet terrycloth could hit me in the face.

“What’s yours is mine, and what’s mine is mine.” I threw it back at him.

He caught it and tossed it onto the pile of clothes that served as my hamper. “You’re a spoiled brat. You know that, right?” He tugged on a pair of boxer briefs.

“Yup.” I blew him a kiss.

His answering smile was filled with affection.

Something in my chest fluttered. I turned my attention to my phone as Jax finished getting dressed.

I didn’t understand why, but every once in a while, Jax would look at me a certain way, and a pleasant flush or a little flutter would move through me.

Jax was my BFF, but he was also our team catcher. As the starting pitcher, I spent a fuckton of time with him on the field and during training. Our friendship outside of the team was the reason people called us the “dream team.” Well, the school press called us that, and our team did too because they thought it was hilarious. I would have preferred a less cliché nickname, but beggars couldn’t be choosers.

“Want to game with Alex for a bit before we head out?” I asked when Jax was dressed.

“I figured we’d pregame. Kappa is serving seltzer and light beer tonight.”

“Seriously?” I tucked my phone into my pocket and stood, lifting my arms above my head to stretch.

Jax poked me in the ribs.

“Asshole.” I rubbed my side. “Why the change? Kappa always serves top-shelf stuff.”

“They got in shit after their last party.”

“What happened?”

“No clue. But they’re on the dean’s radar, so it’s low alcohol options only for a while.”

“Grab the rum, and we’ll see if Alex wants to pregame with us.”

“He’s going to the party?”

“For a bit. Kai’s working tonight.”

“What does he do?” Jax followed me out of my room.

“I’m not sure. He works in the city and does super late shifts. I think he’s a bartender or maybe a bouncer.”

“He’d do well as a bouncer. Between his tats and how fucking ripped he is, he’s intimidating as hell. It’s crazy how he’s so jacked, considering he doesn’t play sports or anything.”

“He’s definitely a gym guy.”

“It works on him. That man is sex on legs.”

A little niggle of unease shot through me.

Jax was gay and had been out since high school. It was one of the first things he’d said to me when we’d met during hell week. I’d heard him go on about the guys he thought were hot and all about his hookups over the years, and it had never bothered me.

Lately, things felt different, though. I didn’t understand why, but hearing Jax talk about a hot guy or even just random comments like he’d made about Kai set off a primal part of me that wanted him all to myself. It was fucking weird.

“Who’s sex on legs?” Alex asked. He sat on the loveseat, a controller in his hand.

“Your man.” Jax plopped down on one end of the couch.

“He is.” Alex smirked. “Jealous?”

“Fuck, yeah.” Jax put the rum on the table. “Never hooked up with a bad boy. It’s on my list, but all the hot ones are either taken or straight.”

“Never say never. Every bi boy is straight until they aren’t.” Alex nodded at the bottle. “Pregaming?”

“Yeah, Kappa’s in shit, so they’re serving light crap.” I sat next to Jax. “You in?”

He shook his head. “I have to drive later. I’m taking it easy on the drinking.”

“Smart man.” Jax glanced at me. “Want to hit it now, or sneak it into the party?”

“How the fuck are you going to sneak a bottle in when your pants are painted on?”

“You and your dumbass cargo pants to the rescue.”

“I’ll have you know that chicks dig cargo pants.”

Alex snorted. “Pretty sure they dig you and put up with the cargo pants.”

“What he said.” Jax grinned and pointed at Alex.

“Whatever. You’re just jealous that every chick hits on me.”

“Because they know there’s no point hitting on me.” Jax turned to Alex. “Objectively, which one of us is hotter?”

Alex smirked. “Yeah, not getting between you two on this one.”

“Beck!” Jax called out as Beck and Finn came out of the kitchen together. “And you too, Finn. You guys like guys.”

Beck and Finn glanced at each other.

“We do.” Beck shot Jax a puzzled look.

“Which one of us is hotter? Me or Matt?”

Finn rolled his lips inward like he was trying to cover up a smile. Beck looked between us. “I feel like this is a trap somehow.”

“We’re trying to settle an argument.”

“A discussion,” I cut in.

“Right, a discussion. Which one of us would get more ladies?”

“Or guys.”

“Or guys,” Jax said.

“Yeah, this is definitely a trap.”

“You suck.” Jax glanced over at the stairs. “Eli!”

“You’d get more.” Eli didn’t pause as he came down the steps.

How the guy always managed to look graceful and poised was beyond me. He floated down the stairs like some ethereal specter while I sounded like an elephant, even when I tried to be stealthy.

“Burn,” Alex crowed.

“No way.” I shook my head.

“You’re hot too, but I think Jax would appeal to more guys.”

“Fuck, yeah, I do.” Jax punched me in the shoulder.

“Whatever.” I ignored Jax, who did a stupid victory dance next to me. “I bet I could get just as many numbers from dudes as you do.”

“You really want to bet on that?” Jax raised his eyebrow.

“How hard could it be? Flirting is flirting, right? Guy, girl. It’s all the same.”

Jax glanced at Alex, and they both snickered.

“Back me up on this one.” I turned to Beck and Finn.

“Nope. Not getting involved in any of this.” Finn waved his hand at us.

“Eli? Come on, man.”

He just smiled, his too-pretty face serene, and headed into the kitchen.

Was Eli into guys? It was hard to get a read on him.

“You all suck,” I grumbled.

“We do,” everyone said in unison.

I laughed along with them.

“I still say I could pick up any guy I wanted,” I said when we’d quieted down.

“Newsflash. Not all guys are into the pretty boy look,” Alex said. “You’re definitely not my type.”

“You guys think I’m hot, right?” I asked Beck and Finn, who still stood near the kitchen door.

“Thinking you’re hot and being attracted to you are two different things,” Finn said.

“Obviously.”

“So yeah, you’re hot. But you’re not my type.” Finn clutched Beck’s hand tighter.

“Sorry, dude. Not mine either.” Beck shrugged.

“You guys are hell on my self-esteem. You know that, right?”

“Poor baby didn’t get the compliments he was fishing for.” Jax rubbed my head in the same manner one would pat a toddler on the head when they did something cute.

I slapped his hand away and glared at him.

“Put this in your stupid pants, and let’s head over to Kappa house.” Jax shoved the bottle at me.

“Not even my pockets are big enough for this monster.” I grabbed the bottle and stood. “I have a few flasks I can fill. Those I can sneak in.”

“We’ll head out when you’re done?” Jax asked.

“Sounds good.”

Beck and Finn gave us a little wave and headed upstairs.

Something told me they’d be enjoying the nearly empty house tonight, loudly, multiple times.

JAX

“Are we early?” Matt asked as we walked into the Kappa house living room.

“It’s invite-only tonight.”

The crowd was small. Only a few dozen people milled around the room. The music wasn’t loud, and no one was dancing. A far cry from the usual ragers Kappa hosted.

“Want to check out the kitchen?”

I nodded and fell into step behind him.

A group of our teammates stood in the corner with red cups in their hands.

“The twins finally show up.” Cooper, our team captain, held out his fist for us to bump.

“Nah, man. They’re the *dream team*.” Hayes saluted us with his cup.

“How’s the swill tonight?” Matt asked.

“Pathetic.” Adams made a face. “Like drinking beer-flavored water.”

“Gross.”

“Did you see Zoey tonight?” Davis, or Big D as we called him, asked.

Matt motioned to the door as the guys started talking about which girls they thought were hottest. I nodded, and we headed toward the living room.

“Jax, my man.”

I turned. Elio stood a few feet away. We’d had a bunch of classes together over the years and were casual friends. The only time we hung out was at parties, but that was how all my non-team friendships worked.

“Want to come upstairs and have some fun?” he asked.

Matt and I glanced at each other.

“Sure.”

Elio grinned and motioned for us to follow him. He led us up to the third floor, then into his room.

“Make yourselves comfortable.” He flopped down onto one of the bean bag chairs in the middle of the floor.

“Hey,” the other people in the room chorused as we squished onto a bean bag chair, which was the only free space in the room.

“Hey,” we greeted.

“Watch it.” Matt slid off the chair and gave me a little shove.

“Not my fault your ass is too big to fit on here.”

Matt smirked. “I’m not the one with the huge ass.”

“He’s right. Your ass is way bigger,” Aspyn said, her voice filled with longing.

“It really is,” Paichynce and her twin sister, Paizleigh, said together.

“Life of a catcher. I basically spend twenty hours a week doing squats.”

Matt settled on the floor and shot me a pleading look.

I blew him a kiss.

“Asshole,” he muttered.

“Those baby blues don’t work on me.” I patted his head. “You can go ahead and get comfy down there.”

He slapped my hand away.

“You two are like an old married couple.” Brendan looked between us.

“We get that a lot,” we said together.

The girls dissolved into giggles. Elio reached behind his chair and pulled out a half-full bottle of rum.

“How about we play a game?” he suggested.

“What do you have in mind?” Brendan asked.

“Never Have I Ever?”

I eyed the bottle. It wouldn't go far split seven ways.

“We can't get shit-faced, so we'll do half shots.” He put the bottle on the floor in front of him. “Grab the cups off the table.”

Brendan picked up a stack of tiny red Solo cups. He took one, then handed the stack to Aspyn.

When we all had a ridiculously small cup, Elio passed the bottle around. We filled our cups to the halfway point, using about a third of what was left in the bottle.

“I'll go first.” Elio saluted us with his tiny cup. “Never have I ever had a threesome.”

Matt took his shot, a smirk on his face as everyone but me gaped at him. I'd heard the story about how two girls had gone down on him freshman year dozens of times. When people asked, he didn't give many details, but he'd told me that the experience had been awkward and weird, and he had no desire to ever do it again.

“Seriously?” Elio asked enviously.

He nodded and grabbed the bottle to refill his cup.

“I'll go next,” Aspyn said. “Never have I ever lied about being a virgin.”

The twins giggled and took their shots. After a pause, I did too.

“Wait, what?” Matt turned to me. “How did I not know this?”

“It’s never come up.” I filled my cup and handed the bottle to Brendan so he could pass it to the twins.

“My turn.” Paichynce looked around the room. “Never have I ever woken up next to a stranger.”

No one moved.

“Never have I ever done butt stuff,” Paizleigh said.

I took my drink, and so did Elio.

“Does that count?” Aspyn asked me. “I mean, isn’t pretty much everything you do butt stuff?”

“I also like playing with dicks.” I filled my cup.

“Who doesn’t?” Paizleigh said.

“Right?” Paichynce held her cup out for her sister to clink.

“Never have I ever given someone a fake name,” Brendan said.

The girls all drank.

Matt waited as they refilled their cups. “Never have I ever kissed someone of the same sex.”

Everyone but Matt shot back their drinks.

“Seriously?” Matt looked between Brendan and Elio. “I knew about this one.” He hooked his thumb at me. “But you guys too?”

Elio shrugged. “Spin the bottle.”

“Same.” Brendan took the bottle from Paichynce and refilled his cup.

“Bonus round.” Aspyn sat up straighter, her eyes sparkling.

“Bonus round?” Matt and I said together.

“Yup.” She looked between us. “I dare you to kiss each other.”

“But we’re playing never have I ever...” Matt said.

“I know. But if you do it, you get to take a full shot.”

“You just going to give away all my booze?” Elio glanced at her.

“You know it.” She gave him a sweet smile.

“Fine.” He turned back to us.

The twins had also perked up and were staring at us with open hunger in their eyes.

I turned to Matt to tell him that this was a dumb idea, but the challenge in his eyes stopped me before the words formed.

Matt and I might be best friends, but I was also a healthy twenty-one-year-old gay man with eyes. He was ridiculously hot. I’d managed to keep him in the friend zone for the past three years by not thinking about him as anything other than my bestie.

“You want to?” I asked as he dropped his gaze to my lips.

“Why not?” He lifted his eyes. “Afraid I’ll be better than you?”

“Fuck no.” I put my tiny cup on the floor. “Bring it.”

Matt placed his cup next to mine, then leaned in.

His kiss was brief and chaste.

“No fair. That wasn’t a real kiss.” Aspyn grabbed the bottle and held it on her lap. “No shots until you do it right.”

Matt got up on his knees so he was taller than me, then hooked his hand around the back of my neck and tugged me toward him. The force of the move surprised me, and I had to grab his thighs to stop from crashing into him.

This time, when his lips met mine, the kiss was slow and soft. The contrast between the rough way he was handling me and the sweetness of his kiss was disorienting, and I didn’t respond for a few seconds.

Matt parted his lips and brushed my bottom lip with his tongue. My entire body came alive.

Fuck.

This is Matt, your straight bestie.

I repeated that over and over like a mantra as he angled his face and deepened the kiss.

Goddamn, he felt good. His lips were soft but firm, his kiss commanding but still sweet. His stubble scraped across my skin, and the heat from his hand on my neck seeped into me.

I gripped his thighs hard. Not because I was in danger of falling but because my palms itched to run all over his big, beautiful body.

Matt sighed against my lips. The sweet slide of his tongue against mine sent shockwaves of desire and awareness through me.

He moaned low and soft, the most beautiful sound I'd ever heard.

My dick was rock hard, and my heart pounded as he gently bit my lip.

Holy goddamn shit.

This is Matt, your STRAIGHT bestie.

“Wow.”

A voice penetrated the little haze I'd fallen into, and Matt pulled away.

“Wow,” Aspyn repeated and held the bottle out to us. “That was so hot.”

“Yeah,” the twins chorused.

“Fuck, I think we're all a little gay after that.” Elio glanced at Brendan, who nodded.

Matt took the bottle and lifted it to his lips. “Told you I'd be better than you.”

It was on the tip of my tongue to remind him which of us had moaned, but I held back. Instead, I took the bottle from him. I didn't want to embarrass him, but more than that, I wanted to keep that little moan just between us.

“You were passable.” I took a big swig.

“Passable?” Matt grabbed the bottle out of my hand. “Do-over. Then I can prove I’m better.”

“Obviously, I’m better if you can’t get enough of me,” I said sweetly, falling back into the role of best friend.

The kiss had been a dare and nothing more. Matt might have enjoyed it, but it would never mean anything.

I’d always hated the stereotype that gay guys couldn’t have straight friends they were attracted to. My best friend from high school was straight and hot as fuck, and there’d never been any weirdness between us.

Same with Matt. He might be my type, but he was off-limits.

“You wish,” he scoffed and pulled one of the flasks out of his pocket.

“Dude, you’ve been holding out.” Elio held his hand out for the bottle.

Matt passed it to him, then returned his gaze to mine. “This flask says I kiss better than you.”

“How are we supposed to judge that? We’re just going to pick ourselves. It’s a guaranteed stalemate.”

“We let the girls decide.” He glanced at them. “You in?”

The twins nodded eagerly.

“Hell yeah.” Aspyn fanned herself. “Watching two hot guys make out is my kryptonite.”

“Same,” the twins said.

“You’re insane,” I said when Matt turned back to me.

“It’s okay if you want to back out.” He smirked. “Better to concede than to lose.”

“This is the weirdest game of gay chicken ever.” Brendan looked between us.

“Is it gay chicken when one of them is actually gay?” Elio asked.

“Totally counts.” Matt waved dismissively, his eyes bright with both challenge and adrenaline.

Matt was the most competitive fucker I’d ever met, which was one of the reasons we got along so well. We could turn anything into a contest.

Including kissing, it would seem.

“Fine. But I’m not holding back,” I warned.

“Do your worst.” Matt licked his bottom lip, leaving behind an irresistible shine.

This time I was the one who grabbed him behind the neck, dragged him forward, and smashed our mouths together.

He gasped, fisting my shirt.

I cupped his chin and angled his face. The moan he let out went straight to my already rock-hard dick. Thank fuck my pants were tight enough that the bulge wouldn’t be noticeable unless someone got up close and personal with it.

I didn’t bother repeating my little mantra and threw everything I had into the kiss until it was a battle of teeth and tongues and lips.

Matt shifted closer, trying to use his slightly higher position to take control. I didn’t let him.

We continued to battle it out, the kiss hot and hard and messy. My entire body was tight with desire as pleasure and need flowed through my veins.

I loved it when a guy was aggressive and gave as good as he got. But I also loved that moment when they finally gave in and let me take over.

Matt’s mouth was hungry against mine, and the little moans falling from his lips spurred me on.

At that moment, I didn’t give a fuck that he was my best friend or he was straight. This was the only time I’d ever get to kiss him like this, and I was going to enjoy it.

I slid one hand into Matt’s hair, gripped it tight, and tugged his head back the slightest bit.

I felt the moment he gave in and surrendered control. His mouth went pliant under mine, and he sucked on my tongue.

I kissed him for a few more seconds, not wanting the moment to end.

“Jax totally won.”

Rather than pull away, I pressed one last kiss against Matt’s mouth, then let him go.

His eyes fluttered open, and he stared at me. He was breathing as heavily as I was, and his cheeks were flushed pink. But it was the glassy, faraway look in his eyes that went straight to my dick and my ego.

I’d done that.

“Jax definitely won,” one of the twins said.

Matt blinked.

“Told ya I’m better.” I grabbed the flask.

“You’ve had more practice kissing guys. But I’ll concede. No wonder you get all the ass you want.”

I grinned and unscrewed the cap. “You’re not so bad yourself.”

He rolled his eyes.

I drank down several long swallows.

“What’s in there?” Elio asked.

“Rum,” we said together.

“Careful,” Brendan said. “Otherwise, your BFF will have to carry your ass out of here.”

“Not likely.” I smirked and took one last swallow.

“He’s Canadian.” Matt took the half-empty flask back.

“So?” The twins exchanged a look.

“I’m used to Canadian beer. It’s a hell of a lot stronger than the stuff you have here.”

“He can drink anyone under the table.” Matt leaned one arm against the bean bag. His elbow brushed my leg, and the little jolt of... something that sparked between us was not only annoying but also unwelcome.

Time to go back into BFF mode and forget all about the kiss that should never have happened.

“Is Canadian rum stronger?” Aspyn asked.

“No, but my tolerance is super high. Half a flask and a few shots will barely get me tipsy.”

“Doesn’t hurt you’re a giant,” Brendan said, envy coloring his voice.

“Awww, don’t feel bad.” Paizleigh batted her lashes at him. “Some girls are into pocket-sized guys.”

He tossed an empty plastic shot glass at her. “Fuck you. I’m not pocket sized. They’re just giants.”

Matt and I grinned.

We were nearly identical when it came to our builds. Only my ass was bigger, and his arms were thicker. We both stood at six one and clocked in at around two hundred twenty pounds.

Elio was maybe five eleven, and Brendan was closer to five ten, and both were lanky. Not exactly short, but they did look tiny compared to us.

“Next round?” Aspyn asked.

“Sure,” a few voices chorused.

Matt and I both nodded.

“You and your better half can just go ahead and use your rum,” Elio said sweetly, clutching his bottle in his hand.

Matt saluted him with the flask and shot me a grin. “You got it.”

My lips still tingled from the kiss, and I cursed my treacherous dick as it twitched in my too-tight pants.

Not only was I in danger of getting a permanent zipper imprint on it, but I also needed to remind it that Matt was our friend and friends were off limits.

We might have shared the best kiss of my life, but that was where it ended.

And I was okay with that. Mostly.

Matt elbowed me in the thigh, bringing my attention back to the game.

“You’ve never posted a thirst trap?”

“Huh?”

“Have you seen your Insta? You’re thirsty as fuck.”

“Not as thirsty as you.”

“Not my fault I’m in better shape.”

“Tell that to your flat ass.”

“Pitchers don’t need big asses. And at least I can wear pants without looking like I sat on a beehive.”

“You’re jealous. Admit it.”

“You wish.” He punched me in the shoulder.

“Totally jelly.” I snatched the flask from him and took a swig.

“Do you guys even like each other?” Paizleigh asked. “You never stop arguing.”

“We’re not arguing. We’re bantering.” Matt swiped the flask out of my hand. “And I love this asshole. He’s like a brother to me.”

“Yeah, I love him almost as much as my actual brothers.”

“Almost?” He shot me fake puppy dog eyes. “You wound me.”

“Maybe I’d love you more if you didn’t steal my shit.”

“It’s pronounced *borrow*.”

“Usually, people get permission when they *borrow* stuff.”

“I have blanket permission to borrow any of your shit.” He winked. “Because you wuv me.”

“That baby talk is fucking creepy, dude.”

“Aww, is Jaxy uncomfy?” He batted his eyelashes at me.

I rolled my eyes and turned back to the group. “Who’s up?”

MATT

“**M**ove over.”

“Fuck off,” Jax grumbled sleepily.

I jammed my knee into his ass.

“Ow.” He rolled over, crushing me under his considerable bulk.

“Get off.” I tried to push him, but two hundred and twenty pounds of dead weight wasn’t easy to move.

“Go back to sleep. It’s early.”

“I would, but some asshole is on top of me.”

He flopped back onto his side of the bed. “Happy?”

“I would be if you hadn’t decided to sleep like a starfish last night.” I propped myself up on my elbow and looked down at him. “You’re a bed hog.”

“You say this like it’s news.” He flipped over so he was on his back and rubbed a hand over his face. “What time is it?”

“Seven. Time to get that fat ass up.”

“I hate you.” He pulled the pillow over his face.

“No, you hate Coach.” I yanked the pillow off him and smacked him with it. Not hard but enough to be annoying.

Jax wasn’t a morning person, which was hilarious, considering how early our team workouts started. He grumbled and pouted and took his sweet ass time any time he

had to get up before ten a.m., which was essentially every day outside of holidays.

“You’re the worst.” He made a grab for the pillow, but I tossed it to the foot of the bed.

“You love me anyway.”

“No clue why.” He closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath. “Go shower. I’ll be up by the time you’re done.”

“You say that every time I wake your ungrateful ass up.”

“And maybe one day I’ll actually do it.” He smiled sleepily, his eyes still closed.

“Fine. But I’m tossing a cup of cold water on your face if you’re not awake when I get back.”

He mumbled something unintelligible.

My bed was set up so one side was against the wall. I didn’t mind being in enclosed spaces, while Jax was claustrophobic, so when he stayed over, I always slept next to the wall.

That meant the only way for me to get out of bed was to climb over him.

“Ten minutes,” I warned and rolled over him.

“Oof.” He grunted. “You’re an asshole.”

“And you’re a sleepyhead.” I sat up and swung my legs over the side of the bed. “Ten minutes.”

“Whatever,” he mumbled and attempted to slap me. His eyes were still closed, so all he managed to do was swipe at the air.

Laughing, I got out of bed and stretched. We had a team workout at eight a.m. on Saturday and Sunday morning during the school year. Coach knew that ordering us to stay sober was futile, and he didn’t want to have to bench or toss players for breaking the rules.

The workaround was early morning workouts. It ensured that we didn’t get stupid drunk, and we paid the consequences

if we did. Nothing sucked more than going to the gym with a hangover, especially with the programs Coach had us on.

“Ten minutes.” I slapped his abs, grabbed my shower kit, and slid my feet into my slides.

One nice thing about Alex spending the weekend at his boyfriend’s was I had full reign over the bathroom. Beck and Finn shared the one on the third floor, and Eli had a private one in the attic, so I had the one on the second floor all to myself.

Whistling some stupid song that was stuck in my head, I ducked into the bathroom and started the water.

The house we lived in was nice compared to some of the shared housing around campus, but the water took forever to warm up. I busied myself with brushing my teeth, then stripped off my sleep pants and stuck my hand under the spray.

“Good enough.” I climbed into the tub and ducked my head under the water.

We’d stayed at the Kappa party until just before midnight, when the rest of the crowd had started to disperse. We’d come back to the house with every intention of getting to bed so we’d be fresh for our workout, but we’d ended up gaming for an hour on the big TV downstairs.

I squirted some body wash into my hand, my thoughts straying to the party last night. Specifically, kissing Jax.

The entire experience had been weird. More aptly, it hadn’t been weird, and that was weird. I’d thought kissing Jax would feel about as good as kissing my arm. We were buds, BFFs. Nothing more.

But those kisses had felt damn good.

I was used to kissing girls, and Jax hadn’t kissed like any girl I’d been with. Most of the girls I’d hooked up with liked it when I took charge and seduced them.

Jax had taken what he’d wanted. And he’d wanted me.

No, that wasn’t true. He’d wanted to win our bet.

I rubbed the body wash over my skin. Memories of his hot, hard mouth against mine played on a loop in my mind.

The force he'd shown, the power and strength behind his every movement, had been a bit of a turn-on. I was a big guy. Not many women could match me in height, and I'd never met any who were as strong as me.

When it came to height or body type, I didn't have a preference, but I tended to end up with girls considerably smaller than me. I was used to soft curves and gentle touches and having to watch my size and strength so I wouldn't crush or hurt them.

Jax was just as big and strong as me. I hadn't had to be careful or hold back, and he hadn't either.

I gently circled my half-hard dick with a soapy hand. Might as well take care of my morning wood while I was here.

Closing my eyes, I thought about the last porn clip I'd watched of a tiny blonde getting railed by a guy with my build and dark hair.

It had been hot as fuck, and I'd blown my load long before the guy in the video had.

The hot water ran over my skin as steam rose around me. I stroked my hand up my shaft as I remembered just how sexy that blond had sounded as she'd moaned and cried out as the guy had gone to town on her.

My dick was rock hard and aching, and I kept my strokes slow and loose. I had time, no need to rush.

My thoughts shifted to the guy in the video. He'd looked a lot like Jax. Same build and nearly black hair. He'd had brown eyes, while Jax's were green, but even their faces had been similar.

The soft moans in my mind melted into deeper, hungrier ones. The same ones I'd made while Jax had kissed me within an inch of my life.

I wasn't embarrassed that I'd enjoyed kissing him. Jax was gay. He knew how to kiss guys and how to turn them on. Not

my fault I'd enjoyed it.

The visual of the blonde was harder to focus on, and the sounds I'd made last night grew in volume.

"Shit," I muttered and angled my head so the water ran over my hair and down my face.

I wasn't seeing the blonde anymore. Nope. I was seeing myself.

And the guy from the clip had been replaced by Jax.

We were kissing again, but this time we didn't have an audience. Or any clothes on.

Pleasure and need built deep inside me as I imagined how Jax's big body would feel against mine. It would be weird not to feel breasts or curves, but I couldn't deny that the hard planes of his muscles would probably feel good.

The little bit of him I'd been able to touch last night had felt damn good.

I sped up my hand, and tendrils of pleasure shot through me at the thought of Jax pushing me up against a wall as he kissed me.

I liked it when girls were aggressive, but I never seemed to attract the type who wanted to take control.

Jax wouldn't just take control. He'd fucking own me.

I came with a strangled cry, shooting over my fist as my orgasm ripped out of me. I grabbed the shower wall with my free hand as my legs shook.

"Holy shit," I panted and opened my eyes.

That had been one of the strongest orgasms I'd had in a long time.

And I'd been thinking about Jax. My best friend.

"Whatever." I let go of my spent dick and turned around, letting the water sluice down my back.

Jax was hot, and we'd kissed last night. It wasn't surprising that I'd be thinking about it today. Shrugging the

whole thing off, I grabbed my shampoo.



JAX WAS fast asleep on his stomach, his arms and legs splayed out, taking up most of my double bed.

“Wake up.” I slapped his ass as hard as I could. His cry of surprise drowned out the resulting *crack*.

“You’re the worst.” He rubbed his ass cheek.

“Not my fault it’s such a big target.” I grinned, pulled my towel from my waist, and spun it to create a tight line.

He narrowed his eyes. “Don’t even think about it.”

“Oh, I’m thinking about it.” I held both ends in one hand and raised it.

“Careful, I might like it.”

My hand faltered as I brought the towel down. Instead of snapping against his ass, it flopped onto it.

“Didn’t realize you were that kinky.” I unrolled the towel and rubbed it against my wet hair.

“You’re more vanilla than I thought if you think a spank is kinky.” He rolled onto his back and sat up.

“I was going for more of a whip effect.”

“Maybe I’d like that too.” He waggled his eyebrows and stretched his arms above his head.

I trailed my eyes down his tight pecs and washboard abs. His waist was narrower than mine, and his sleep pants had slid down enough his Adonis belt peeked out. The deep rivets were strangely hot.

“You done checking me out?” He stood, not bothering to pull his sleep pants up.

“Your new routine is working.” I tossed the towel aside and went to my dresser to grab some sweats. “You’re getting an eight-pack.”

He patted his stomach. “These babies are my bread and butter after all.”

“I thought that would be your throwing arm.”

“That too, but a tight core takes the pressure off my thighs.”

“The left one still bugging you?” I kicked off my slides and pulled on a pair of briefs.

“Sometimes.” He slid his feet into my discarded shoes. “Chase is lucky he didn’t break my hip.”

“And lucky Coach didn’t bench him for the year.”

Chase, who happened to be Jax’s backup, had a bad habit of letting go of his bat after a hit. The dude was a power hitter, so the force behind his swings made every at bat where he didn’t keep control dangerous.

Our first scrimmage of the season, he’d gone all out and tried to hit one over the fence. He’d swung too low and had popped it, and either in anger or habit, he’d let go of the bat while he’d still been swinging.

The end of the bat had hit Jax in the upper thigh, inches from his hip joint. The only thing that had saved him from a broken leg was that he’d been midmotion to try and catch the foul, and his glove had deflected the bat away.

The impact had been hard enough to bruise his entire thigh, though, and he’d had to sit out for over a week before the team doctor had cleared him.

“I could still hit him with a pitch,” I said as Jax headed toward my door.

“Then you’d get in shit.”

“It wouldn’t be a hard one. And just in the ass. Give him a bit of pain to match his personality.”

Jax paused, his hand on the doorknob. “He’s not worth it.”

Chase was an asshole but a sneaky one.

He made sure he kept his comments and jabs quiet so only the people they were directed at heard them. And he covered up the public ones as jokes and was quick to play the free speech card when someone called him out on it.

Chase made no secret that he didn't like having a gay player on the team, and Jax had been dealing with his bullshit since hell week.

“But it would be so satisfying.”

He smirked. “He'll get his. I have faith in karma.”

“Your call. But the offer is always there.”

His smirk melted into one of those smiles that made my stomach feel funny.

“Meet me in the kitchen when you're done. I'm going to get our shakes made.”

He nodded and disappeared into the hallway.



I'D JUST FINISHED MIXING his shake when Jax came into the kitchen, his hair wet and a flush on his cheeks.

“You know you don't have to scald yourself with the water to get clean.”

“I like it hot.” He grabbed the shake I held out to him and took a long swallow. “Ugh, this tastes worse than the last one.”

“Yeah. It's supposed to be French vanilla, but they lied.”

“Any word on when our usual stuff will be back in stock?” He took another drink and grimaced as he swallowed.

“A few weeks.” I took a swig of my half-empty drink.

The overly chemical taste exploded on my tongue, and I nearly gagged as I swallowed it as quickly as I could.

Finding a good protein shake that didn't taste like ass wasn't easy. We'd been using the same brand for the past three

years, but they'd had supply chain issues, and no one had it in stock.

We'd tried a few the guys on the team had recommended, but we hadn't found one we liked.

"We should head out." He adjusted the strap of his gym bag on his shoulder. "Coop is going to ride our asses if we're not there at least ten minutes early."

I took another drink of the disgusting shake and followed him out of the kitchen and through the main floor.

A few weeks ago, we'd been ten minutes late to a workout because Jax had overslept. He hadn't even been hungover, just his usual morning grump, and had ignored his alarms. When I'd come to get him, I'd had to wake his ass up, and we'd gotten on our captain's radar.

That little incident was the reason Jax stayed over on the weekends now. It was infinitely easier to keep his ass in line when we slept in the same bed.

"What was that thing last night about your virginity?" I asked as I pulled out of our driveway.

"Huh? I'm gonna need some context this early in the morning."

"During the game. You said you lied about being a virgin."

"Oh, that." He shrugged and took another drag off his shake. "It's nothing scandalous. I just didn't tell the first guy I fucked that I was a virgin."

"Why not? It's hot when you're the first to fuck someone. Don't gay guys like that too?"

"Most do." He ran his finger over the rim of his tumbler. "But my first time wasn't typical."

"What do you mean?"

"He was older and experienced. I was young and dumb and wanted to impress him."

"Did it work?"

“Fuck no.” He snort-laughed. “I was a fumbling, awkward mess, and he had to coach me through it. The whole thing was embarrassing as fuck, but he was a good sport about it.”

“Huh.”

“What?”

“Nothing. I guess taking something up the butt for the first time would be weird.”

“Yeah, that’s not really my thing.”

“No?”

“I already told you I’m a top.”

“I just thought that meant you like to *be* on top. Like riding guys or whatever.”

He snickered. “Your innocence when it comes to gay sex is adorable. Being a top means I’m the one who does the fucking.”

“Have you ever been on the bottom? Or bottomed? How would you say that?”

“Bottomed works. I tried it, but I don’t see the appeal. It’s a lot of work for something that doesn’t really feel good for me, so I don’t bother.”

“Huh.”

“You’re saying that a lot this morning.”

“I just figured that all gay dudes were into it.”

“People have preferences. Some like it. Some don’t. I’ve known a few guys who didn’t like doing it in either position and stick to hands and mouths.”

“Huh.”

“And don’t forget bi and straight dudes. Gays aren’t the only ones who like butt stuff.”

“I suppose it would feel different.”

“Especially when you’re the one with a dick up your ass.”

“Straight dudes wouldn’t know about that.”

“Really?” He shot me an incredulous look. “You’ve never heard of pegging?”

“Pegging?”

“How are you so innocent?”

“Not all of us are kinky fuckers.” My cheeks flushed hot as Jax laughed.

“Some guys like it when a girl wears a strap-on and fucks them.”

I tried to picture myself bending over for some girl to fuck, but the image wasn’t sexy at all. If I were going to take something up my ass, I’d rather a guy do it. They’d know what they were doing.

Not that I was planning on having anyone fuck me. The entire concept was a little too weird and intimidating.

“Yeah, no thanks to that.”

“What about a finger? No girl has ever stuck one up the backdoor while blowing you?”

“Girls do that?”

“Some do. I mean, I wouldn’t know from personal experience, but I’ve heard from other guys that they like it.”

I braked at a red light. No girl I’d ever been with had wanted to play with my butt, but then again, I’d never asked.

I knew what the prostate was thanks to the tales of Jax’s sexcapades over the years, but I hadn’t ever considered that it could feel good to have it played with by a girl.

“Huh.”

“Are you stroking out?” Jax pinched my thigh. “Use your big boy words.”

“Nah, just curious.”

“Ask the next girl who plays with your dick to do it, and maybe you’ll get your mind blown.”

“I don’t know about that. Asking some random to stick her finger up my butt would be weird. What if she says no or is

grossed out? Total mood killer.”

“So do it yourself the next time you jerk.”

“Huh.”

“Okay, now you’re doing it on purpose.”

I grinned and flicked on my signal light to turn into the stadium parking lot. “Maybe.”

He punched me in the arm. “I’m not saying you’re going to see stars or get your world rocked, but maybe you will. You’ll never know unless you try.”

You’ll never know unless you try.

As I pulled into an empty space, the words echoed in my head, but I pushed all thoughts of sex and prostates out of my mind and turned off the car.

Thinking about it would give me a boner, and the last thing anyone wanted was to pop wood during a team workout. Not only would I have to deal with the ribbing, but Chase would never let me live it down either.

I wasn’t as Zen as Jax about that kind of shit. I couldn’t afford to get benched because I punched a teammate in the face.

JAX

“**Y**ou look like death.”

“Thanks, sweetheart.” I blew my teammate Logan a kiss.

“Not spotting your better half today?” He lay down on the weight bench and gripped the bar.

“Nah. He’s working with Coach Henderson.”

“Hmmm.” Logan lifted the bar and slowly lowered it to his chest.

I kept my eyes on his arms, my hands at the ready.

“Eight, nine, ten,” I counted as he slowed his pace. “Five more.”

He grunted, his face a mask of concentration, and lowered the bar again.

“Eleven, twelve, thirteen. Come on, dude. You’ve got this. Dig deep.”

Logan’s arms shook as he lowered the bar until it was just an inch above his chest.

“You’ve got this. One more,” I encouraged when he faltered.

With a loud groan, he shoved the bar up. I helped him hook it.

“Fuck. I think I went a little too ambitious this morning.”

“We’ll take ten off for your next set.”

He nodded and sat up. “Why’s he working with Coach H?”

“No clue.”

Logan was also a pitcher, but he was the reliever. He came in when Matt needed a break. Of course he’d wonder why he wasn’t working with Coach this morning too.

He stood and stretched out his arms. “How much do you want me to add?”

“Ten to start.”

We loaded up the bar with the extra weights.

“Spotting you isn’t exactly awesome for my self-esteem.” Logan got into place behind the bar as I lay down.

“You’re benching more than most guys your size.” I gripped the bar. “Besides, you need to protect that golden arm.”

“More like bronze arm,” he grumbled.

The team had five pitchers, but only three saw game time: Matt as the starter, Logan as the reliever, and Benson as clean-up. The other two were freshmen. They’d be great in a few years but weren’t at the level to play yet.

“You’re a sophomore. You’ll get your turn to shine soon enough.”

Logan kept quiet as I pushed the bar up and steadied it.

When I was set, I slowly lowered it, counting in my head to make sure I hit my reps the right way.

“Awesome job.” Logan helped me replace the bar.

“Thanks.” I sat up and wiped my forehead with the bottom of my shirt. Lifting made me sweat like a motherfucker.

As we took some plates off for Logan’s turn, I glanced around the weight room. My gaze collided with Chase’s, and the sneer on his face told me everything I needed to know.

Yup. The fucker was still an asshole.

“Ready?” I asked as Logan placed his hands on the bar.

He adjusted his grip and nodded.

I kept my attention on him as he lifted the bar, then started his reps.

The lower weight worked, and he finished strong.

Morning workouts were my least favorite part of being on the team. I wasn't a morning person, never had been. I didn't exactly have insomnia but falling asleep wasn't easy for me. I usually stayed awake for at least an hour after going to bed, and I was a light sleeper.

The only time I got a good night's sleep was when I was at Matt's.

It was fucking weird. Any other time I'd shared a bed with someone, I'd been hyperaware of them and woken up constantly. Which was why I never stayed the night after hooking up. But I slept like the dead with Matt next to me. So much so, I usually ended up taking over the bed and waking his ass up a few times.

Maybe it was because I trusted him.

Whatever it was, I kinda missed it during the week when I was at my place.

The last half hour of the workout crawled by, and I was pleasantly sore and finally awake when it was time to hit the showers.

The team knew I was gay, and while most of them were fine with it, I always got some side-eye in the locker room.

What they didn't realize was that no queer guy was going to scope out other dudes in the shower or locker room. Their fears of us watching them for jerk-off fodder didn't happen in real life. The last thing we wanted was to pop wood around other naked dudes who didn't have boners.

Our locker rooms had been remodeled over the summer thanks to some generous donations from team alums. The showers had individual stalls, but the walls and doors separating them only went from knee to midchest. The old

showers had been completely open, so the semi-privacy was nice.

The actual locker room was in a typical U-shape, and the old lockers had been replaced with large wooden cubicles with multiple shelves for our equipment. Before, we'd marked our lockers by writing our names on a strip of athletic tape. Now we had little dry-erase boards people could write messages on. A padded bench ran in front of the cubicles, which was a nice bonus.

They'd also redone the weight and cardio rooms, as well as the room where we watched tapes and had strategy meetings. Everything was top of the line.

"All done?" Matt bumped me with his hip as I bent to put on my shoe.

"Fucker." I grabbed the bench in front of me so I didn't go sprawling.

His face was the picture of innocence.

I tugged my shoe on, then grabbed my bag. "Yeah. All good."

We headed out of the locker room, shouting and waving our good-byes, and made our way out to the parking lot.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"Starved."

Neither of us liked to eat before a workout. We had our shakes but waited to eat breakfast until we were done.

"The usual, or are you wanting something different?"

"The usual is good. Did you ever write that paper you were putting off?" I asked as we came up to his car.

"Ugh, no," he grumbled. "I should do that this afternoon."

"You should."

We got into his car, and he started the engine.

"Come over when I'm done?" He pulled out of the lot. "It's your turn to cook."

“Did you pick up the stuff on my list?”

“Yup.”

“What’s my share?”

He waved dismissively as he headed toward one of the student lots. “Don’t worry about it. You can pay next time.”

Matt always said that, but he never let me pay. I appreciated it but felt like a giant knob for always relying on him.

“What did Coach want to work on?” I asked.

Matt launched into a detailed account of all the exercises he and Coach had worked on. I interjected answers here and there but mostly listened. He was a verbal learner and retained info better after explaining it. I spent a lot of time listening to him talk about his courses and what he worked on with the coaches, but I didn’t mind. I liked that I could help him.

MATT

You'll never know unless you try.

Jax's words echoed in my head as I stood under the warm water.

I had to be at a frat meeting in less than half an hour and was finding it hard to muster up not only the motivation to go but also to care about what would happen if I didn't show up.

Being a student-athlete was the equivalent of having a part-time job. Between practices, meetings, and the work we put in on our own time, that didn't leave a lot of time for anything else. Especially not any sort of meaningful downtime.

The few hours I did have free a week were taken up by my frat responsibilities. I got a pass on committees because of baseball, but that still left meetings and parties and other random shit I had to do.

I liked being an athlete and didn't begrudge the time I dedicated to the team. Too bad I couldn't say the same about Lambda Chi.

The water pressure changed, and the fluctuation in temperature startled me back to reality.

Heaving a deep sigh, I went to turn off the water but paused before I touched the dial. Might as well get a jerk in while I was in here.

I turned my back to the water and grabbed my body wash off the ledge. I squirted some into my hand and put the bottle

back, then loosely stroked my cock a few times.

Tightening my grip, I closed my eyes and let my mind wander. The slick slide of my hand over my shaft felt amazing, and I went from soft to rock hard in only a few strokes.

I pictured a chick on her knees for me. No one I knew, just a faceless dark-haired woman with a banging bod and lots of enthusiasm.

I let my head fall back as my fantasy woman worked me over with her mouth, but I couldn't shake Jax's words out of my head.

You'll never know unless you try.

Maybe I should see what all the fuss was about.

I reached behind me and slid one finger through my crease.

The unfamiliar sensations knocked me right out of my fantasy.

Huh. Not exactly a great start.

Spreading my legs, I kept my strokes even and hard and pressed against my hole.

It was... different. Not bad but not great either.

Maybe I needed to do more than just poke it for it to feel good.

The angle was off, and it was beyond weird, but I gently circled my fingertip over my hole. A flare of pleasure shot through me.

"Shit," I muttered.

Okay, that was better.

I rubbed harder, moving in time with my hand as I worked my dick. A zing of heat and something like electricity skittered up my spine.

"Holy fuck." I stroked faster, chasing the pleasure.

The dual sensations were amazing, but not enough.

Carefully, I slipped the tip of my finger inside myself. That was... strange, but I focused on the undercurrent of something pleasant that rippled through me.

I pushed in deeper, then a little bit more. Half my finger was in, but now what?

Gently, I pulled it out, then pushed back in. That felt better, but still not the mind-blowing pleasure I'd hoped for.

Maybe I was thinking about it too hard. Time to go back to my fantasy.

Clearing my mind, I pictured the dark-haired woman on her knees again. This time she had one hand between my legs and was fingering me as she blew me.

More pleasure swirled inside me, and I relaxed, sinking into the fantasy and letting it take me away.

A jolt of something amazing shot through me. Fuck, what was that?

As I sped up my hands, moving faster and pushing in deeper, the chick in front of me melted away. Jax was in front of me now, on his knees and staring up at me, his big green eyes full of challenge.

Rather than question why the hell I was picturing my BFF with my dick in his mouth, I ran with it and snapped my hips so I was fucking both my fist and my finger.

“Fuck!”

My orgasm tore out of me fast and hard. My ass clenched as my cock pulsed, then I came so hard most of my load landed on the tile wall.

Holy shit. Jax had been right.

Dazedly, I pulled my finger out of my ass and splashed some water onto the tiles to get rid of the evidence.

If my fumbling attempts had felt that good, then having someone else do it would probably be next level. Maybe I should ask the next chick I picked up if she'd mind doing a little backdoor play.



“WHAT DID you get for number eleven?” Jax asked from his place on my dorm couch.

“Existentialism?”

Jax smirked. “Are you asking or telling?”

“Guessing.” I snapped my textbook closed and tossed it aside. “I’m bored.”

“We’ve been studying for less than twenty minutes.”

“And I’ve been bored for fifteen of them.” I stretched out on the bed and let out a loud sigh. “Entertain me.”

“Entertain yourself and keep studying.”

“That’s not entertaining.”

Jax looked up from his textbook, a gleam in his eyes. “Tell you what. If you can ace the quiz I give you in twenty minutes, we’ll take a break and play some Enforcers.”

“Ugh. You’re making me work for a video game break?”

“Yup.” He looked back down at his textbook. “Twenty minutes.”

Being as dramatic as possible, I pulled my textbook in front of me and flipped to the chapter I’d been attempting to read.

“Keep sighing like that, and you’re going to make yourself light-headed.” He didn’t bother looking up.

“Worth it if it annoys you.”

“I have three siblings. Sighing is about the least annoying thing you can do.”

“How about this?” I drummed a beat on the textbook.

“This is why you can’t dance. Your rhythm sucks.”

I stopped drumming. “Never had any complaints before.”

“Not to your face. Eighteen more minutes.”

I pursed my lips and whistled, which I knew for a fact drove Jax crazy.

“Now you’re officially annoying.” He finally looked up from his textbook. “You’re like a child sometimes.”

“You love me anyway.”

“No clue why.” He smirked.

“Because I’m awesome, and being my bestie is amazing.”

“That must be it,” he said dryly.

“Don’t hate the player. Hate the game.”

“You’re ridiculous.” He shot me one of those fond smiles that made my insides feel funny. “Fine. Since studying is obviously not going to happen, what do you want to do?”

I sat up and shoved my textbook aside. “You promised me virtual hockey.”

“Are your roomies home?”

I opened my mouth to tell him I wasn’t sure when a rhythmic thumping rang out in the room.

“Beck and Finn are busy.” He closed his textbook and put it beside him on the couch. “Want to see if the TV is free?”

We stood and made our way down to the main floor.

The living room was empty. I went to the front door as Jax turned on the TV and set it up to play.

“Alex’s car is gone. Looks like we have the place to ourselves, at least until Beck and Finn stop boning.” I flopped onto the couch next to him and knocked my knee against his.

He handed me a controller. “Don’t worry. I let you be the Pens.”

“You know I play better with my boy, Sid.”

“The man crush you have on him is adorable.”

“I appreciate his athletic greatness.”

“Sure you do.”

“The Oilers again?” I bumped him with my shoulder, and we set up for the face-off.

“You have your boy. I have mine.”

“And it has nothing to do with you having a thing for McDavid?”

“Like you, I can appreciate his athletic greatness.”

I snickered as the screen ref dropped the puck, and all thoughts of ribbing Jax flew from my mind as we worked the controllers, each trying to get the upper hand.

“Denied!” I shouted as my goalie blocked a shot.

“Rebound!” Jax jumped up and whooped as the goal siren blared on-screen. He sat down again with enough force I bounced on the cushion.

“Lucky,” I grumbled.

“It’s pronounced *talent*.”

“Lucky.”

Jax laughed and leaned forward, his eyes on the screen.

“It’s adorable that you guys are baseball players, yet you battle it out in a hockey game.”

I looked up from the TV. Alex stood on the other side of the loveseat, spinning his keys around his finger. When had he gotten home?

“Baseball is a strategy game.” Jax shot him a grin. “And I’m Canadian. Hockey is in my blood.”

“What’s your excuse?” Alex smirked at me. “Last I checked, they didn’t play a lot of hockey in Arizona.”

“Not a lot,” I agreed. “I started playing because this asshole wouldn’t shut up about it. Now I dominate.”

“You’ve lost the last four games we’ve played.”

“But I won the five before that.” I elbowed him in the ribs.

“Five out of nine isn’t exactly dominating,” Alex said.

The change in him since he'd started dating Kai was startling. Alex used to be a ball of energy. Like he'd been a step away from having the best night of his life or breaking down and losing his shit on any given day.

Now he smiled and laughed and seemed genuinely relaxed most of the time. Maybe it was getting some O's on the regular because Beck and Finn had that relaxed vibe going on too.

I could use some of that calming energy in my life.

"Semantics." I brushed Alex's comment aside. "Want to play winner?"

"I'm headed to bed. Maybe next time."

"Night," Jax and I chorused together.

We resumed the game, but the laser-focused attention from before was gone. As was our usual barrage of trash talk.

"You good?" He broke the silence.

"I tried what you said."

"What did I say?"

"About not knowing until I try."

"Gonna need more context than that."

"About doing some backdoor play while I jerked."

Jax's hands stilled on the controller, and I took the opportunity to score.

"What did you think?" he asked, his voice measured and his eyes on the TV as the game resumed.

"It was... good?"

"That's not exactly convincing."

"I liked it, but I don't think I did it right. What's the correct technique?"

Jax turned to me, his eyes wide. "Are you asking me how to finger yourself?"

"Yeah." I punched him in the arm. "Why are you being so weird? I've asked way stranger questions than this."

“Pretty sure this ranks in the top ten, but yeah, you do ask a lot of weird shit.” He put the controller on the coffee table, the game forgotten. “Did you think to look this up online?”

“Why use the Internet when I have you?”

“There’s no real science to it. Find the prostate, stimulate it while jerking, and voilà, prostate orgasm.”

“But what does stimulate mean? Rub it? Poke it? How do gay guys do it?”

“The same as anyone else who does butt stuff.” Jax’s eyes glittered with laughter. “But I don’t recommend poking it. Rub, circle, stroke. Just do what feels best.”

“How do I find it?”

“It feels different.”

“I know that, but I mean, how do I find the actual spot?”

“It *feels* different. Like the texture is different.”

“Huh.” I pursed my lips. Had I felt anything different in the shower? “What’s the best way to do it? Standing or maybe sitting? What about lying down?”

“Again, it all depends on what feels good for you.” He shrugged. “I’m not exactly the best person to ask. That’s not really my thing.”

“But you do it for other people, right?”

“Yeah.”

“So, what’s the best way?”

“Doing it on yourself and doing it on someone else are completely different. The angles, positions, it really can’t compare.” He grabbed his phone off the coffee table and unlocked it.

“What are you doing?”

“Just a sec.”

I tried to look over his shoulder, but he angled his phone away.

“There.” He grinned and put his phone down. “You’ll get a little something in a few days that should help you discover what you like.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll see.” He winked and leaned back against the couch.

“You ordered me one of those weird-looking dildos, didn’t you? Like it’s a tentacle or something that looks like it should be hanging off an alien.”

He snickered. “I didn’t, but thanks for the idea.”

“What is it?”

“Not telling.”

“You’re annoying.”

“I know.” He grinned. “I need to get laid.”

I blinked at the sudden shift in conversation.

“I haven’t hooked up since the summer,” he continued.

“Same. Looks like we’re both doing no nut November by default.”

He chuckled. “Sure, we’ll pretend this was totally on purpose.”

“Is anything going on this weekend?”

“You’re asking me? Aren’t you the frat brother? You’re supposed to be dialed into what’s happening on Greek Row.”

“I’m sick of Greek parties.”

Jax didn’t say anything, but his expression was soft and encouraging.

“They stopped being fun a long-ass time ago. I mean, I go because I have to, not because I want to.”

“What would you do if you didn’t have to go to them?”

“I don’t know. Find something, *anything*, that’s different.”

“I still don’t understand why you went through all that trouble to get special permission to pledge when it’s obvious you don’t like it.”

Rutherford was a D1 school, and most of the athletic teams forbade their players from joining frats. Coach’s policy was strict. Only legacies could pledge and only after they obtained written documentation that their frat duties wouldn’t interfere with their team responsibilities. Most frats didn’t want to deal with the red tape and didn’t accept athletes. Unfortunately for me, I was a legacy, and the frat president my freshman year had been all about legacies. I was the only person on the team who was stupid enough to do both.

“I don’t hate it, but I have so much other shit going on it’s just one more thing.”

Jax bit his lip. I knew that move. He was physically stopping himself from saying something.

“What?”

“I just don’t get why you didn’t say no when your dad told you to join.”

I snorted. “I said no a million times, but he wouldn’t let it go. I told you how he contacted Felix on his own and greased the wheels for me before I even showed up on campus. You think I could say no to that? I would have looked like an asshole if I’d declined after all the paperwork Felix did to get permission for me.”

“Doesn’t he understand how much extra pressure this puts on you?”

“He doesn’t care.” I toyed with the sleeve of my hoodie. “All he cares about is bragging rights. Me being a D1 player isn’t enough for him. Now he gets to tell anyone who’ll listen about how I’m a ball player *and* how I’m following in his footsteps at the frat.”

“I still don’t really get frat culture, but from all the movies and shit I’ve seen, they’re supposed to be fun. Brotherhood and teamwork and all that jazz.”

“It is for other guys. You remember the shit I told you about hell week? You thought the team was bad. It had *nothing* on the hazing we went through.”

“Another thing I don’t understand. How is torturing someone supposed to build brotherhood? Like being part of it isn’t enough, and you have to abuse new members and put yourself through literal hell for that to happen?”

“I don’t get it either. But no one goes through that just for shits and giggles. Most of the guys in the house live, eat and breathe the frat. It’s their entire life.”

“Which makes it harder for you, since you’re already disconnected from them and have never lived in the house.”

“Thank fuck I wasn’t allowed. I could barely handle constantly being around the team in jock hall. I would have lost my mind if I’d lived in the house and been surrounded by that shit day in and day out.”

“So, what are you going to do?”

“What do you mean?”

“You have one season left. This is the year you need to put everything into the game if you want to even have a hope of being scouted.”

“I know.” My chest tightened, and I gripped the material of my sleeve hard. “Everything I’ve spent my life working toward is happening now.”

A low *whoosh*, like the ocean, filled my ears as my vision went white. My chest tightened to the point I couldn’t pull in a breath, and a surge of terror shot through me.

Fuck. Not now. Why was this happening now? It had been weeks since my last attack.

“Matt, look at me.”

Jax’s commanding tone seeped into my panic. I flicked my eyes to his.

He put his hand on my chest and pressed lightly. “Lift my hand with your breaths. Nice and slow, okay?”

I tried to do as he said, but my chest wouldn't loosen, and my breaths were stuttered and sharp.

My lungs burned, sending another wave of terror through me.

Fuck, I couldn't breathe.

"It's okay." Jax slid off the couch and knelt between my knees. "Look at me."

I did, still struggling to pull in a full breath.

"Take my hands." He held his hands up. I grabbed them and squeezed tight. "There you go," he soothed. "Now just keep looking at me. Watch my chest and breathe with me. You're okay. I've got you."

Using the last of my mental faculties, I focused on Jax and tried to mimic him.

"Good. Now relax your muscles for me. Start at your neck and shoulders. Just let the tension go. Good. Now your arms. You're doing amazing. Last one. Your hands. Relax them for me."

Jax's voice soothed the last of the panic away, and I was finally able to pull in a deep breath.

"That's it." Jax rubbed his thumbs over my knuckles. "Now do that a few times."

I did, each breath easing the fear and tension until I was an exhausted, boneless lump.

"Fuck," I croaked. "That was a bad one."

"Yeah." Jax slid back onto the couch and wrapped his arm over my shoulder. "Just lean on me for a few minutes while everything settles."

"I hate them," I whispered as shame washed over me.

"I know. But it's over. You'll feel better soon."

Pulling in a deep breath, I closed my eyes and leaned into Jax's touch.

Something about his big, strong body was beyond comforting. Knowing he was there and feeling his warm skin against mine, hearing his steady heartbeat, grounded me.

“Can you stay tonight?” I asked softly.

“Yeah.” He squeezed me tight. “Ready to go upstairs?”

I nodded.

Jax let go of me and shut down the TV and system. He stood and hauled me up, catching me around the waist and holding me close. I leaned on him as he half carried me up the stairs to my room.

I stripped down to my underwear and climbed into bed while Jax plugged in our phones and shut off the lights. When everything was done, he stripped and slid into bed next to me.

“Sorry.” I rolled toward him and gripped his arm, hugging it like a teddy bear, and put my chin on his shoulder.

“Nothing to be sorry about.” He patted my arm with his free hand. “Wake me up if you need me.”

“Kay.”

I snuggled closer to him and pressed my nose against his skin. His familiar scent wrapped around me like a blanket, and a ripple of calm moved through me as exhaustion took over.



BEEP, beep, beep, beep.

“Ugh.” I snuggled into my pillow. “Too early.”

“You sound like me.”

I blinked my eyes open, but instead of my pillow, all I saw was miles of sun-kissed skin and muscles.

During the night, I’d shifted so I was half lying on him, my head tucked under his arm, using his broad chest as a pillow. One leg was thrown over his, and his leg hair scratched my skin.

It should have been weird. Jax and I had shared a bed more times than I could count, but I'd never snuggled him like this before. Not even after any of my previous panic attacks.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Wiped." I leaned more heavily against him. Panic attacks always took a lot out of me and left me exhausted the next day.

"Do you need to stay in bed a while longer?"

"I have class." I groaned. "And of course it's statistics. I hate statistics."

"How about you rest while I take a shower and make breakfast?"

"Yeah, thanks."

"You're gonna have to let me up if you want to eat." His voice was filled with humor.

"You're comfy."

"You seem to think so. I could barely breathe last night."

"Sorry."

"It's fine." He patted my hip. "But I need to get up before I fall back asleep."

Grumbling, I rolled onto my back.

Jax sat up, slipped out of bed, and stretched. My gaze was drawn to his strong back. Something about the wide set of his shoulders and narrow waist was strangely fascinating, and the rippling muscles under his smooth skin reminded me of how he'd used his strength on me when we'd kissed.

"Can I borrow some clothes?" He dropped his arms and looked over his shoulder at me.

"Yeah, grab whatever you want." I hugged the pillow he'd used against me like a teddy bear. It smelled like him, earthy and fresh.

He rooted in my drawers and pulled out a hoodie, a pair of sweats, and a tee. His ass was too big for any of my pants to fit, even my cargos, but I liked my sweats loose so he could

squeeze into them without looking like he was wearing leggings.

He tossed the clothes onto my desk and grabbed my phone.

“I set an alarm for thirty minutes. Will that give you enough time to shower and get downstairs?”

“Yeah, as long as breakfast is portable.”

“Do you have the stuff to make wraps?”

“I should.”

“See you in thirty.” He grabbed the clothes, my shower kit, and one of my towels, leaving his big fluffy one for me. My chest tightened at his thoughtfulness.

The door clicked shut behind him, and I closed my eyes and snuggled into his pillow.



PRACTICE WAS BRUTAL. Coach had us running drills for the first two hours. Usually, we pitchers got a break from the sprints and leg work while we focused on pitching, but not today.

I'd grown up in the desert, and the Pacific Northwest was a huge change, even after three years. By the time we were setting up to scrimmage, I was sweating like a bitch, but the damp air seeping into my skin and down to my bones made me shiver. It wasn't especially cold, but I'd never managed to acclimate to the change.

Jax donned his catcher pads, fresh as a daisy. He was used to this weather, having spent his high school years in Victoria, British Columbia. He joked it was like being in the tropics compared to some of the other provinces he'd lived in when he'd been growing up.

The first inning of the scrimmage was a disaster, at least for me. More than half my pitches didn't drop on time, and after Chase managed to get a triple off a slider that went right

into his hit zone, Jax took pity on me and called for basic curves and fastballs.

As a first-string pitcher, basic wasn't acceptable, and the longer the inning went on, the more frustrated I got. Which meant I was throwing beach balls by the time we finally got the third out.

"Landry."

I groaned as Coach came to stand next to me in the dugout. I was in for a rightly deserved dress-down. "What's up, Coach?"

"What's going on? That was the kind of thing I'd expect from a freshman, not my star pitcher."

"Just having an off day." I tried to keep my tone neutral. It wasn't Coach's fault I was playing like dogshit.

He nodded, his eyes on the second-string players getting into position. "You're dropping your shoulder early, and your footwork was off."

My face flushed hot. He wasn't wrong, but those were rookie mistakes.

"I'm going to get you and Crawford to work together for the rest of practice. He's making the right calls, but you're not delivering."

Hopefully, my cheeks weren't as red as they felt.

"Everyone has off days, but that shoulder drop can put extra strain on your rotator cuff. You need to fix that so you don't hurt yourself."

"Yes, Coach."

He patted my back and headed to the other side of the dugout to talk to Coach H.

"You okay?" Jax walked over to me, concern on his face. "Is your arm twinging?"

"Nah. Just can't seem to get in the rhythm today."

"Are you sure?"

I nodded, gritting my teeth so I didn't snap at him. It wasn't his fault I was pissed.

When I was a kid, I'd dislocated my shoulder in a stupid accident. It had healed up fine, but every once in a while, it would bug me, and the telltale sign was that fucking shoulder drop I couldn't seem to control today.

"We'll work on your curve and maybe play around with a few eephus pitches for funsies."

I nodded and punched my fist into my glove. Curveballs didn't put much strain on my shoulder, at least not the way I threw them. And an eephus pitch wasn't really something I'd use in a game but was a handy tool to keep in my back pocket. They were notoriously hard to both throw and hit, especially since I was a lefty.

"Matt."

I turned and faced Jax. Concern was etched into his handsome features.

Wait. What?

Jax was a good-looking guy. Anyone with eyes could see that, but I'd never just randomly thought about how good looking he was. Especially not in the middle of practice when I was playing like shit.

"Everyone has off days. You've been under a ton of stress, and last night was rough. Be kind to yourself. The more you beat yourself up, the worse it'll get."

He was right. I was my own worst enemy, and no one could throw me off my game better than my stupid brain when it went into these spirals of self-loathing. But knowing he was right and actually letting shit go and not being a dick to myself were two different things.

"Let's get to it," I said tightly.

Two more hours of this. I could hold it together until then.

JAX

Matt: I fucking hate you
I snickered and leaned back against my headboard.

Jax: no you don't

Matt: yeah I do this was on the coffee table when I got home

A photo loaded in the text thread, and I burst out laughing. The package was wrapped in a white mailer, but the item didn't appear to be in a box, so the packaging was tight around a very obvious dick shape with an impressive set of balls.

Jax: sorry not sorry

Matt: you're an asshole

Jax: did you open it?

Matt: you're lucky I didn't drive over there and beat you with it

Jax: I didn't know they wouldn't ship it in a box

Matt: you said you didn't order me a dildo

Jax: I said I didn't order you a giant alien dildo. That's a starter dildo

Matt: starter dildo???? It's massive

Jax: massive? You really are a dick virgin if you think that's big. Open it. I swear it's smaller than you think

My screen went dark. I put the phone down, still chuckling.

I honestly hadn't realized it wouldn't come in discreet packaging, but that was one way to ensure it wouldn't be stolen by porch pirates. I laughed again as I imagined his roommates' reactions to seeing it on display on their coffee table.

Who'd put it there? Alex was the obvious choice; he had a fucked-up sense of humor and would have most likely busted a gut if he'd found it on their front porch. Finn was too sweet. He would have either left it there or discreetly given it to Matt. Beck was another contender. I could see him putting it on display to fuck with him. Eli was tough to get a read on, but he could be the culprit too.

My phone screen lit up, and I unlocked it and read Matt's text.

Matt: this thing is... confusing

Jax: confusing? It's a dildo, pretty self-explanatory. Did it at least come wrapped?

Matt: yeah, the casing was sealed

Jax: so what's confusing about it?

Matt: why does it have a battery compartment?

Jax: ...for batteries...

Matt: but why?

Chuckling, I hit the Call option. Matt picked up mid-ring.

"You sweet summer child," I said before he could greet me with another expletive. "Did you read the packaging?"

"It said it vibrates. But why would I want a vibrating dick?"

"Because it'll make your spot feel good."

"Really?"

"I can't believe I need to explain this to you, but yeah. Put it in, turn it on, and jerk off. It does the work, so you don't

have to.”

He was silent.

“Or toss it. Doesn’t matter to me. You wanted to know how to *stimulate* your spot. This’ll do it.”

“It’s kind of intimidating.”

I could see where he was coming from. The thing was smaller than a real dick but bigger than a plug and rather lifelike in design.

“Like I said, use it or don’t. It’s just an option. You can get a vibrating plug if you want something smaller to ease into it.”

“Yeah, I’m so not searching for a butt plug.” He snorted. “Can you imagine what my suggested buy section would look like?”

“Yeah, because mine is full of fake dicks now.”

“Serves you right,” he grumbled. “You know I’m getting you back for this, right?”

“Sure you will.”

“I will!”

“Do your worst.”

“You’re going to regret that.”

“What? The dildo or the challenge?”

“Both.”

I snickered. “Sure I will.”

“Ugh. You suck.”

“Yeah, I do.” Silence fell over the line. I’d figured he’d laugh. It wouldn’t be the first time today I’d made a joke about sucking dick. “Matt?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m sorry if I went too far,” I said. “I only meant to give you an option if you wanted to explore things. I didn’t know it would arrive like that.”

“I’m not actually mad.” He sighed. “It was pretty fucking hilarious to find a wrapped dick on the table, even if I’m never going to hear the end of it.”

“Do you know who put it there?”

“Eli.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Poor kid was so confused when I stuffed it under my sweater to hide it. He was, like, ‘sex is natural, so is experimenting. Nothing to be ashamed of.’” He snickered. “He’s not wrong, but that doesn’t mean I want my roommates to know I’ve been thinking about getting fucked and seeing a dick with my name on it.”

My brain stuttered. The hell? He wanted to get fucked? I’d thought all this was because he was curious about the wonders of the prostate.

“But whatever. It’s not like we’re shy in this house. You should have heard the shit coming out of Alex’s room last night. Kai has a mouth on him, that’s for damn sure.”

“Really?” I pressed the heel of my hand against my growing erection as the image of Matt on his knees getting railed merged with one of Kai spewing some dirty talk as he fucked Alex.

Voyeurism was one of my kinks, as was listening to people fuck. Both Alex and Kai were gorgeous, like ridiculously so, and picturing them together was hot.

Nowhere near as hot as the mental image of my best friend getting nailed, but that wasn’t something I could allow myself to think about. Matt was straight, and him wondering about having a dick in his ass didn’t change that.

“Oh yeah. Like porn-level dirty talk. Actually, he’s way better. I always laugh when guys in porn do it. It sounds so forced and fake, and they say the most ridiculous things. But Kai’s got a talent for it. And Alex definitely likes it. The two of them went at it for over an hour. I’m kinda shocked Alex wasn’t walking funny when I saw him today, to be honest.”

“Archie’s been seeing a chick who hoots like an owl when they get it on.”

Matt burst out laughing. “The fuck?”

“Like an actual owl. *Who who who*,” I pitched my voice higher and tried to imitate what I’d been subjected to. “And he shouts ‘yabba dabba doo’ every time he comes. Imagine hearing *that* through the walls in the middle of the night.”

Matt howled. “No fucking way.”

“I’m traumatized.”

“I swear not all straights are like that. I’ve never channeled Fred Flintstone during sex.”

“Oh, it’s not just the straights. When I was at a club the summer after freshman year, this guy hit on me and deadass said, ‘You must be Fred Flintstone because you could make my bed rock.’”

“Oh my fucking god. What did you do?” he managed between peals of laughter.

“I just kind of stared at him, then made an excuse to bail. Something about needing to find my cat.”

“You don’t have a cat.”

“I panicked.”

He snorted. “The weirdest thing a chick has ever said to me was ‘do you like monkeys’ and when I said ‘sure,’ she answered with ‘great ’cause I want to climb you like a tree.’”

A bubble of laughter escaped my throat. “Tell me you didn’t hook up with her.”

“Not a chance. All I could picture was her scaling some giant dude while making monkey noises. Another chick proudly told me she was an accomplished equestrian and compared riding dick to riding an ornery horse. Another mental image I could have done without.”

“I once had a dude say ‘what are the odds of me getting some head if I flip this’ and wave a coin at me.”

“Were the odds in his favor?”

“Nope. He wasn’t my type, so it wasn’t happening, even without the cheesy line.”

Matt chuckled. “Do you remember that chick Big D hooked up with for a few months last year?”

“I’ll never forget that.” I snorted.

Big D had lived in the room next to Matt’s, and we’d been subjected to one of his hookups screeching like a banshee during sex on multiple occasions.

“Or how he’d say ‘get ready for the D train’ right before the bed would start hitting the wall,” I said.

“Thank fuck he dropped that when the next girl laughed at him. I mean, I felt bad, but what did he expect when he shouted ‘woo woo’ like a fucking train midboning?”

“I’m pretty sure he was wasted that night. At least I hope he was.”

“I’m just glad my roommates aren’t ridiculous like that. If I have to keep hearing people fucking, I’d rather it be hot and not make me bust a gut laughing.”

Matt thought listening to his roommates getting it on with their male partners was hot? I liked listening more than the average guy but hearing a girl moaning or dirty talking was a sure-fire way to make my dick deflate. I had nothing against straight sex. It just didn’t turn me on.

“Too bad I can’t say the same. Between Archie Flintstone next door and Ren playing his porn so loud I can hear the dialogue across the hall, my room is not a sexy place to be.”

“Shit. I gotta go.” He heaved a big sigh. “Frat meeting starts in twenty.”

“You’d better haul ass.”

“Yeah. Later.”

“Bye.”

He disconnected the call, and I tossed my phone onto the bed, still internally snickering at the pic of the wrapped dildo on the coffee table. He'd try to get me back, no question, but when it came to pranks, Matt was nowhere near my level. As one of four kids, pranks were a way of life. Add being a military brat and constantly finding myself having to break into new baseball teams and deal with hazing every time we'd moved, and Matt didn't stand a chance at outdoing me.

I shifted down on my bed so I was lying against my pillows and stared up at the ceiling. My dick was still half-hard from our conversation, and I breathed deeply, trying to force it down.

The last time I'd had sex was back in June, and it hadn't been all that great. A guy I'd hooked up with a few times had contacted me and wanted to meet up to fuck. He was hot, but we'd never had much chemistry. The sex had been impersonal and brief, and I'd struggled to keep my head in the moment. We'd both come, but the orgasm hadn't been satisfying, and I'd left his place feeling empty and antsy.

I'd never been one of those guys who needed to hook up. Some of my teammates acted like they'd die if they didn't fuck a different girl every weekend. I liked sex as much as the next person, but I didn't go out of my way to find it. Being a gay man on a D1 team also limited my choices, unlike my straight teammates.

I was out and had been since high school. My teammates knew, and so did the coaches and my friends. Most people in my life were cool with my sexuality on the surface, but sports culture still wasn't completely accepting.

Chase was the only guy who was openly disgusted I liked dick, but more than a few of my teammates preferred I keep my sex life on the DL. They could talk about chicks in graphic detail, which they did constantly, but out of a team of thirty-five players, only a handful was cool with me talking about guys. And even fewer were okay with seeing it.

The biggest hurdle was that while Rutherford was a decently liberal school and my sexuality was tolerated, that

didn't translate into the rest of the baseball world. Like everyone else on the team, I had dreams of being scouted, and no pro team wanted a player who made headlines for who he fucked.

That meant I had to be careful with who I hooked up with. No strangers, no regular fuck buddies, and no boyfriends. Being on a winning team put me in the spotlight, and I had to be extra careful not to get mixed up with someone who'd use our time together to try and cash in on my status.

All of my hookups over the years had been with other athletes, and most of them were closeted. That didn't leave a lot of room for connections, just chances to get my rocks off with another person and not my hand.

Matt and I had zero secrets, and we talked about sex all the time. Until recently, that hadn't been an issue because picturing my best friend and whatever girl he decided to hook up with did nothing for me. Hearing that he was interested in getting fucked and enjoyed listening to guys boning pushed him out of the friend zone, and that was dangerous.

I'd always been attracted to him, but he was straight and my best friend, so I'd never allowed myself to think about him in a sexual way. I'd even made it a rule never to hook up with a blond because I knew my brain would replace them with Matt.

My dick pulsed as an image of Matt on his hands and knees and using the dildo flashed behind my closed eyes. Fuck. I pressed the heel of my hand against my erection.

He'd look so hot pushing it into himself, his dick hard and hanging between his legs. I knew what his cock looked like soft, but I'd never allowed myself to picture it hard. He was thick and long with full, low-hanging balls and a thatch of blond curls. Was he a grower or a shower? Did he let go and allow himself to be vocal when he was enjoying sex, or was he one of those guys who preferred to be quiet?

The moan he'd let out when we'd kissed echoed in my mind as the sensation of his mouth ghosted over my lips. That

had been the best kiss of my life, but it hadn't been anything other than a dare. Another fucked-up competition between us.

The memory of his hard body under my hands, his hot skin as he'd held me close, and the way he'd given in and let me take control swirled in my head.

Fuck.

Gritting my teeth, I slipped my hand under the waistband of my sweats and gripped my cock. Clearing my mind of all thoughts, I stroked hard and fast, my grip punishing as I worked my dick. This wasn't about feeling good. I needed to come so I could switch my thoughts to homework or baseball or anything other than Matt and how much I wanted to kiss him again.

My orgasm hit hard and fast, tearing out of me. Cum shot onto the inside of my pants. My balls ached, and my shaft felt raw. Good. I deserved that little bit of pain for breaking my rule and perving on my best friend.

MATT

My new dildo and I were in a stare-off. Or at least that was what it felt like.

The thing was both realistic and weirdly fake. Flesh-colored silicone with prominent veins, a flared head, and wrinkled balls made it look like a real dick, but the feel was off. The outside was soft, but the shaft was inflexible and rigid, and the black twist cap under the balls for the batteries looked strange.

Jax had been right. The dildo was smaller than the average dick at four and a half inches tall, and slender, about the girth of two of my fingers.

I'd put batteries in it and turned it on to see how it worked, and the fucker was loud. It barely wiggled on the lowest speed, and the highest one made the entire thing bounce on my desk comically. I wanted to try it, but the sound and extremes in the speed made me wary.

The frat meeting had ended just over an hour ago, and I'd spent the entire time sitting in the corner, bored out of my mind and trying not to think about the toy waiting for me at home. Thank fuck the only responsibility I had at meetings was as a seat warmer because I couldn't remember a single thing that had been brought up.

I poked at the toy, the cold silicone both soft and hard under my skin.

Would it feel good? The rigidity of it freaked me out. My finger had hurt a bit when I'd tried again in the shower this

morning. I'd managed to find my prostate, but the angle had been off, and as I'd rubbed it, I'd only felt the briefest spark of pleasure.

Maybe I needed to try it another way.

Leaving the dildo on my desk, I grabbed my phone and stood. A quick check of the door reassured me I'd locked it, and I lay on my bed.

I unlocked my phone, went to my hidden folder, and opened the Internet. I scrolled through the dozen or so browsers I'd left open so I didn't have to bookmark whatever porn clip I wanted to revisit later.

None of them interested me. I'd looked up pegging porn the other day, but it hadn't done anything for me. Maybe I should watch some solo guy stuff. See how they got themselves off.

I opened a new browser, then went to my favorite clip site. I typed "fingering" into the search bar, and page after page of straight and lesbian clips filled my screen.

Trying again, I added "gay" to the search. That was better. I scrolled through the thumbnails. Most were solo videos, but a few had partners in them.

My gaze landed on one that had "compilation" in the title. I usually watched those over full clips. I got bored when a video went on for more than a few minutes. I didn't particularly like watching the sex part of porn; it was the orgasms I enjoyed.

And not just women coming. Seeing a guy nut all over a girl was hot, and more than once, I'd found myself focusing on the male model and not the girl he was fucking. But all guys did that, right?

I tapped the clip and waited for the prompt to skip the ad. The opening scene was a buff guy lying on a bed, his legs spread wide as another guy roughly slammed his fingers inside his ass. It looked like it should have been painful, but the guy wasn't hating life. His moans and the way his abs flexed were weirdly sexy.

Maybe it was his build. Fitness was a huge part of my life, and I could appreciate the hard work that went into achieving that physique.

My stomach swooped as the guy raised his legs, opening himself up to his partner. Maybe it was the taboo aspect of what I was seeing? Guys were supposed to be the aggressors, not lie back and let someone else pleasure them. I'd never seen a guy in this position before. Was it weird? Did he feel vulnerable and exposed?

His partner gripped his dick and stroked it as he fingered him, moving in tandem. That probably felt good. A guy would know exactly how to grip it, how to stroke, the little details most girls didn't quite understand.

I'd always preferred a strong grip and rough strokes but had never found a girl who'd been able to match what I craved, even when I'd tried to coach them.

How would it feel to just lie back and let someone go to town on me like that? The concept was strange, but my cock chubbed up as I focused on the clip. The guy who was doing the fingering was hard and leaking almost as much as the one he was pleasuring.

I'd never really thought about it before, but I was a visual person by nature, and the idea of being able to see my partner's arousal was interesting. Would feeling a hard dick against my thigh or stomach be as hot as seeing one?

The guy arched his back, his legs high and spread wide. His face was twisted up in what looked like pain, his neck muscles corded, and his skin flushed red as he let out a hoarse cry, his deep voice hitting me right in the chest.

He came hard, his hips bucking and twisting as he shot all over his stomach and chest. His partner jerked him through it, praising him and telling him all sorts of sexy things like how hot he looked and how good he felt.

My cock throbbed. The clip switched to another video. A guy about my age and my build was on his knees, a strange-looking contraption behind him. A dildo was fixed on the end

of a rod that was pistoning it in and out of him. A fucking machine?

I stared in fascination as the guy moaned and cried out, pushing back on the toy. His dick was rock hard and slapped against his stomach, a trail of precum dripping from the tip.

Shit. Maybe a toy could feel good. I slipped my hand under the waistband of my sleep pants and gripped my cock. I was hard and leaking, my skin hot and tacky with precum. My balls tingled and drew up. God damn. I hadn't even stroked, and I was already close.

What the fuck?

I squeezed my base, not done with my experiment. The guy on the screen shuddered and came without touching his dick.

Holy shit. That was possible?

I slid my hand up my length and bit my lip hard, using the pain to distract myself.

A new clip loaded. A guy about my age was on his hands and knees, his ass toward the camera as the person filming slid two fingers in and out of his ass. The angle showed everything, including the bright yellow G-string underwear he was wearing.

The material looked soft and had a slight texture to it, almost like lace but not quite. I'd never seen a guy wear anything like it, and something about the sight made my breath quicken.

They made lingerie for guys?

The material had been pushed aside, and as much as I wanted to keep looking at it, I zeroed in on his hole and how it swallowed those thick fingers.

I'd never really thought about a dude's asshole before, but it was weirdly appealing. The guy was slender but blond like me. His balls were high and tight, his dick hanging down as he jerked it. He was grunting in pleasure, the low, masculine

sounds so damn sexy I had to let go of my dick so I didn't come.

The guy behind him stopped moving his hand, and the other guy pushed back on them, fucking himself as he jerked off. My dick throbbed and blood rushed south.

Fuck, I needed to come.

I grabbed my dick and stroked hard and fast, my eyes glued to my phone. The guy in the video let out a strangled scream and came hard.

My breathing hitched, and my lower body tightened, my orgasm right there under the surface. He dropped his chest to the bed, showing off a matching bralette. The sight of his cum dripping down the pretty material was too much. I slammed my eyes closed as my orgasm tore out of me, my mind flickering in and out of reality as pleasure consumed every part of my being.

The muffled sounds of someone grunting brought me back to reality, and I blinked at the ceiling. Still holding my spent cock with one hand, I grabbed my phone with the other and clumsily hit the power button to turn it off.

I'd just had one of the strongest orgasms of my life from jerking off to gay porn. And more than that, to a guy in lingerie.

What the actual fuck?

I'd started this experiment to hopefully get some tips on technique and figure out how to use the damn dildo Jax had ordered for me, but the toy had been the furthest thing from my mind, and I sure as shit hadn't been paying attention to technique or taking notes.

What the fuck did any of this mean?

JAX

“**W**hat’s up with you?” I bumped Matt’s shoulder with mine. We’d just finished playing Enforcers, and I’d dominated all three periods.

“Nothing,” he mumbled and flopped back against the couch, his eyes downcast and his features tight.

“Are you worried about something?”

I could usually tell when he was on the verge of a panic attack, but this was different. He was distracted, but he didn’t seem anxious or like he was trapped in a spiral of worry.

“No.” He tossed his controller onto the coffee table and scrubbed a hand over his face.

I bit the inside of my cheek to stop myself from pressing him. Matt didn’t respond well to being confronted. He would shut down and ruminate as he got stuck in his head.

He’d been off all week, which was why we were gaming on a Friday night while the rest of the team was at Red’s, a local bar we frequented.

At least we had the house to ourselves. All his roommates were gone for the weekend, and the quiet was nice.

He ran the tip of his finger over the material of his sweatpants, his movements slow and distracted.

“Matt.”

He flicked his gaze to mine.

“What’s going on?”

He pursed his lips.

I knocked my knee against his. “You’re kinda freaking me out.”

It wasn’t like him not to talk to me when something was bothering him.

“I…”

“What?”

“I watched porn the other day.” He blew out a breath. “Gay porn.”

The flicker of surprise hit fast, but I forced my expression to stay neutral.

“What I saw… confused me.” He scrubbed his palm over his thigh.

“How so?”

“It was… hot?”

“Is that the first time you watched porn with only guys in it?”

He nodded.

“And you enjoyed it?”

“I blew my load like I’d never touched my dick before.” He rolled his eyes. “I’d say I enjoyed it.”

“Is it what you saw that’s confusing you or your reaction?” I asked carefully.

“Both?” He grunted. “It’s your fault.”

“How is it my fault?”

“You’ve got me all confused!” he burst out. “First that kiss, then telling me *I won’t know until I try*, then the dildo. I’d never once thought about messing around with a guy or playing with my butt, and now that’s all I can think about.”

I pulled in a slow breath, digesting his words. He wanted to mess around with a guy?

He crossed his arms. “I’m not weirded out that I got off when some guy nudded all over his lingerie or that my dick enjoyed watching guys getting it on. But what the fuck? How could I go twenty-one years without realizing that guys can get me hot?”

Lingerie? What kind of porn had he watched? Shaking my head, I focused on the fact that he was confused and not on the dozens of images of him jerking off swirling in my head.

“Does the thought of doing that stuff with a guy turn you on?” I projected as much calm as I could into my voice so he didn’t get even more worked up and shut down.

“Sort of. Yes? I don’t know.” He raked a hand through his hair. “The idea of it is hot, but the thought of going out and picking up a guy isn’t. What if I don’t like it? What if I’m so nervous I can’t get hard? What if he starts and I have to stop things? What if I’m bad or I mess up? There’s just so much pressure.” He groaned and slumped forward, his head in his hands.

I put my hand on his knee and squeezed. “It’s normal to be confused. I’d be thinking the same things as you if I suddenly woke up and wondered what it would feel like to mess around with a girl.”

He parted the fingers of one hand and peeked at me. “I’m so confused,” he whispered.

“I get it.” I rubbed his thigh. “What do you need from me?”

He dropped his hands and stared at my mouth.

Fuck.

I’d meant the question to mean what role he needed me to fall into. Did he want advice, someone to listen, or was this one of those situations where he wanted to talk things out?

“Do you think I’m hot?”

My jaw dropped, and blood rushed south. “What?” I croaked.

“Do you think I’m hot?” He licked his bottom lip.

I cleared my throat. “Um, yeah.”

“That kiss. Did it turn you on?”

What the fuck should I say to that? *Yeah, it was the best kiss of my life, and I've been thinking about it nonstop since it happened.*

“It did,” I managed, my throat tight and my mouth dry.

He dragged his teeth over his bottom lip and dropped his eyes to my lap. My sweats did nothing to hide my dick tenting the thin material.

He pressed the heel of his hand against his cock as it did the same.

What the actual fuck was happening?

“Do you maybe want to do more?” he asked breathlessly.

Warning bells went off in the tiny part of my brain that was still thinking logically. This was Matt. My best friend. I wanted to touch him more than I wanted my next breath, but this was a dangerous line we were skirting.

What if this fucked up our friendship? What if we couldn't come back from this? Was it worth the risk?

“Jax.” He pushed his knee against mine, his eyes glazing over. “You're the only guy I can imagine doing any of the things I've been thinking about with.”

Fuck. I was going to do it. I was going to cross the line I'd sworn I'd never cross and touch my best friend.

“What do you want?” I asked, my voice cracking on the last word pathetically.

“I just want to know if it feels as good as I think it will.”

“If what will feel good?”

“Touching you. You touching me.”

He angled his body toward mine, and adrenaline poured into my system.

“I don't want this to mess up our friendship,” I said in a rush.

“It won’t. We’re rock solid.” The corner of his mouth tilted in a smile. “You want me. I want you. Why not go with it?”

“We need to set boundaries,” I said hoarsely. “I need to know exactly what you want me to do.”

“I want...” He dropped his eyes to my lips. “Your mouth.”

Holy fucking shit. My best friend was asking me to blow him.

I swallowed hard and forced myself to stay in my seat and not dive between his legs. “You want me to suck you?”

He nodded, a blush high on his cheekbones.

I slid off the couch and shoved the coffee table back with one hand, then pushed his knees apart and settled between them. His breathing hitched. “Promise me you’ll stop this if you don’t like it or if it’s weird.”

He nodded.

“Say it.”

“I promise,” he rasped, his eyes locked on mine.

I licked my dry lips and rubbed my palm over his bulge. He was hot and hard, and my entire body clenched when he let out the softest moan.

I kept looking at him, searching for any sign he was uncomfortable. My cock was rock hard, my balls tight and aching.

Matt leaned back against the couch and pushed his hips up, forcing his dick into my hand.

I gripped it through the material of his sweats and bit back a groan. Fuck, he was thick.

“Jax,” he whispered.

“Relax.” I stroked my hand up and down his length. “I’ve got you.”

He sighed. A surge of desire tore through me, so strong it nearly stole my breath. He was beautiful, fucking beautiful. And at that moment, he was all mine.

I lowered my head and dragged my tongue over the material of his sweats, teasing his shaft, then dropped an open-mouthed kiss on his tip.

“Fuck,” he whispered. His hips twitched like he was stopping himself from bucking up into my mouth.

I sucked on the head for a few seconds, my eyes glued on his face. His expression shifted from arousal to wonder.

“Feel good?” I rasped.

He nodded.

“You want more?”

He swallowed hard. “Yeah.”

“Lift your hips.”

I gripped the waistband of his pants and tugged them down as he obeyed.

I’d always liked it when my partners let me take the lead, but most of the guys I’d hooked up with had been as dominant as I was. Matt was the perfect combination of needy and pliant, and I had to remind myself that this was nothing more than an experiment. A way for him to figure out if he was bi-curious or whatever.

His cock was perfect. Thick and long with a sexy vein running down the length and a flared head that made my mouth water. Precum bubbled up from his slit, and his balls were full and round.

He didn’t have a lot of hair outside of the thatch at the base of his dick. Was that because he manscaped or because he was blond? His thick thighs were dusted with white-blond hair. I sifted my fingers through the soft strands and gently cupped his balls with my other hand.

“Jax,” he whined softly.

“It’s okay. I’ve got you.” I bounced those perfect balls with the tips of my fingers and trailed my other hand over his inner thigh. “Just relax and let me make you feel good.”

He lifted one hand, paused in midair, then dropped it back to his side.

“You can hold my hair if you want.” I loosely circled his shaft. “I like it.”

“Fuck.” He let out a panting breath and slid his fingers through my hair.

Holy goddamn fucking shit.

My best friend was not only letting me touch him, but he was enjoying it too. What universe was this?

Clearing every thought from my mind, I lowered my mouth and sucked his weeping cockhead between my lips. I drew him as far down my throat as I could, past the point that was comfortable.

“Fuck!” His other hand fisted my hair.

I’d never been one for deepthroating, but I was feeling greedy. I wanted to not only blow his mind but also to forever brand the sensation of my mouth on his cock into his consciousness. So it was my face he’d see when he closed his eyes and touched himself.

“Jax,” he panted.

I swallowed around his cockhead, then pulled off him. His grip on my hair was so tight it hurt, but I welcomed the sting. It stopped me from blowing in my pants like some newb.

I let some spit fall from my mouth and dribble down his shaft, getting him nice and slick. Flicking my gaze to his, I ran the flat of my tongue over the underside of his length.

His eyes were wide and glazed, his mouth slack, and his cheeks pink as he stared at me. I dipped my tongue into his slit, then slid it down and licked the seam of his sac.

“Fuck.” He gritted out. “I’m... it’s too good.”

I gripped his balls in one hand, holding them loosely and away from his body, then swallowed his cock.

This time I gave up all pretenses of teasing and bobbed over him, hollowing my cheeks as I sucked him hard and fast.

He let out a bellow of pleasure and snapped his hips up. The head of his cock bumped the back of my throat, and I choked.

“Fuck, sorry.” His hands loosened in my hair.

“It’s fine. Fuck my face. I like it rough.”

His groan was loud and pained. He grabbed my hair and drove his perfect dick deep down my throat.

Now that I was prepared for it, I relaxed and let him face fuck me, sucking as hard as I could and squeezing his sac.

His gasps and groans and bitten-off words echoing in the silent room were the most beautiful sounds I’d ever heard. I ran my tongue over his shaft, swallowing the steady stream of precum leaking from his tip.

“Jax, I’m gonna—” He pulled my face down.

I sucked hard and looked at him. His eyes were glassy and bright. His lips were parted, and his chest heaved as he stared at me, his expression an intoxicating mix of aroused and incredulous.

I swallowed around his cockhead. His length pulsed in my mouth, his thighs squeezed my shoulders, and he was coming, shooting down my throat, and I swallowed every drop.

His cries went straight to my aching dick, and I steeled myself as I sucked him through his release.

He hissed, and I slowly drew off him, never taking my eyes off his face.

“Jax,” he panted. “Holy... fuck. I... *Jesus*.”

I pressed my hand against my cock and sat back on my heels. “I need to come too,” I gritted out and shoved my hand into my sweats.

“Can I...” He reached toward me.

“You want to jerk me off?”

He nodded, his eyes blazing.

I let go of my dick and stood in front of him.

Matt reached into my sweats and gripped my shaft with his big, hot hand.

“You’re huge.” He stroked me once, twice.

“About the same size as you,” I choked out.

“Let me see it.”

I shoved my sweats down so they sat under my ass. He gave me a long, firm stroke.

“Fuck, that’s it. Just like that.” I grunted. He sped up, his grip tight and perfect.

I focused on a point on the far wall, my thighs tense, and steeled myself against my orgasm.

I’d wanted this for so long but had never allowed myself to think about it, to even hope it could happen. Now that it was, I didn’t want it to end.

What if this was the only time we did this? That would be the smart thing. Obviously, Matt could get off with a guy’s mouth around him, and he wasn’t grossed out by my cock. The experiment was a success. We needed to pull the plug and go back to being besties who didn’t play with each other’s dicks. Otherwise, we might fuck our friendship up even more than we already had.

The swipe of something wet and hot on my tip startled me. I jerked my hips and looked down. Matt was licking his lips, his expression curious.

Had he just tasted me?

His eyes flicked to mine, and the hungry look in them was my undoing.

I pulled out of his hand, grabbed my shaft, angled my dick down, and stroked fast.

A full-body shudder ripped through me, and my legs shook hard enough that I wobbled on my feet. My entire being zeroed in on my best friend, who stared at my dick in rapt fascination.

“Fuck.” I shot hard and used my other hand to catch my cum.

Matt slapped my hand away, and the next spurt landed on his shoulder. As the last rope hit him in the chest, he didn’t even blink.

“Holy shit.” I stepped back and sank down on the coffee table, the wood cold under my bare ass.

“That was hot.” Matt licked his lips and glanced down at his lap.

He was half-hard.

“Holy shit,” I mumbled again and wiped my cum-covered palm on my shirt.

He lifted his eyes to mine. Neither of us moved as if we were caught in a sort of feedback loop of sensory overload and confusion. At least that was what went on inside me. Matt’s eyes were eerily blank, but the panic and fear I’d expected were absent.

Was he okay with what had happened? Was this the calm before the shit storm that would end the best friendship I’d ever had?

“I want to come again.”

I blinked as his words knocked me out of my head. He dropped his eyes to my spent dick, which gave a little twitch under his attention, and stroked himself.

Fuck. That.

I fell to my knees and swallowed him down. Logically, I knew I should have asked his permission. Him letting me blow him once wasn’t an open invitation.

I went to pull off, angry at myself for jumping my best friend, but he grabbed the back of my head and shoved my face down.

“That’s it.” He held my hair and rolled his hips. “Make me nice and hard for you. Make me come again, Jax.”

Holy shit, his dirty talk was going to kill me, and the use of my name meant he was fully present. That was almost as hot as him pushing his dick down my throat.

I pulled off him and sat back on my heels. “Fuck my face.”

A wicked grin slid over his perfect lips as he stood, his legs wide and his dick shining and so damn hard. He thrust his hips forward and slid his cock into my waiting mouth.

I held on to his thighs, more to ground myself than to guide him, and let him go to town on me.

Gone was the shy, pliant guy who’d sat there and let me work him over. His eyes blazed, his grip on my hair was so tight it hurt, and his hips snapped hard and fast.

If anyone else had done this to me, I would have pulled the plug. I liked it rough, but I didn’t let guys have this kind of control over me or force me to take them deep.

But this was Matt, and seeing this side of him, feeling not only his desire but also knowing it was because of *me*, that *I’d* done this, was so fucking heady I sank into the sensations and stared up at him, committing every second to memory.

“You look so fucking hot down there.” Matt grunted and pulled out of my mouth, his cock hard and red and slick. “Feel so good.”

I dragged my tongue over his slit and lapped up his precum.

He groaned and pumped his big hand over his shaft. “Can I come on your face?”

“Yeah.” I gripped my cock, which was hard and leaking again.

I wasn’t a fan of facials, but there was literally nothing Matt could ask for that I wouldn’t give him.

He stroked his dick. “Come at the same time as me? I want to see you come again.”

“I’ll try to hold out.” I choked out a laugh. “I’m close.”

“Me too.” He licked his lips and flicked his gaze between my face and my hand.

I timed my strokes with his. Our breaths came out in ragged pants as we jerked off together. I desperately wanted to touch him, to be the one to get him off, but watching him pleasure himself above me was so damn sexy I knew I’d be replaying it in my fantasies for years.

“I’m coming.” He angled his dick down.

I closed my eyes and opened my mouth.

Matt cried out, and ropes of his hot cum splashed down on me. Most landed in my mouth, but some fell on my cheek and one eyelid.

His taste, so salty and perfect, exploded on my tongue, and I was *done*.

I came hard, grunting and shaking as I swallowed.

A hot hand ran over my cheek, then swiped over my eyelid. The movement was sweet and soft. I looked up. Matt was smiling down at me.

“I’m definitely into dicks.”

He flopped down on the couch, his cock still out and a satisfied glow about him. He grabbed my arm and yanked me so I fell next to him, my chest hitting his shoulder hard enough to push the air from my lungs.

He laughed, and I flipped so I was on my ass and not faceplanted on the back of the couch.

“So you like dicks?” I asked, my entire body buzzing from the afterglow.

“I like yours.” He patted my leg. “I got some in your hair. Sorry.”

“It happens.” I sighed and looked down at my shirt, then at his. “We’re a mess.”

“Want to take a shower? I’ll find us some clothes to change into.”

“Yeah.” I grabbed his thigh. “Are we cool?”

He shot me a lazy grin. “Definitely.”

We stood and tucked ourselves away. A niggle of unease penetrated my happy glow. Had this been a mistake? He might be fine now, but what would happen in a few hours or a few days? Had we just ruined our friendship?

I followed him upstairs, my eyes on his ass. He didn't have the typical flat and square ass most ball players did. It wasn't big and bouncy, but it was firm and round.

Nope. Not going there. This had been a one-time thing. A chance for my straight bestie to figure out if he could get off with a guy. I was his safe gay buddy, nothing more.

MATT

Jax and I lay in my bed, our backs to each other as we pretended to sleep.

We'd slept together enough times that I knew how he breathed when he was sleeping, how his body relaxed, and he slowly spread out until he took over the bed.

Was he freaking out? Did he regret what we'd done?

I still couldn't believe it had happened. That Jax had sucked me off, and I'd come down his throat. That he'd let me jerk off on his face.

The memories of seeing my best friend on his knees for me, his green eyes dark with lust and his full lips stretched wide around my cock, made said cock chub up until I was rocking a boner.

Fuck.

I'd had more than a few BJ's in my life, and most of them had been good. None could compare to Jax's. He'd been rough and commanding and confident as fuck as he'd worked me over and made me come in only minutes. At least that first time.

That second time had been incredible. The way he'd knelt for me, encouraged me to fuck his face, and let me come on him. Seeing him hard and hot for me, watching him nut at the same time, was one of the hottest things I'd ever witnessed.

One thing I'd never told anyone, not even Jax, was that I wasn't a confident lover. I liked sex as much as the next guy,

but the pressure to perform got to me. The girls I hooked up with expected me to be perfect. To seduce and pleasure them and have the technique and stamina of a pornstar.

When I was with women, I'd never faked it, never pretended to like it or forced myself to touch them. I was attracted to women. I enjoyed their soft curves and sinking into them when they were hot and ready for me. I liked the way they smelled and the cute sounds they made when I did something they liked.

But something had always been missing. Small hands and gentle touches could get me up, but they didn't get me off. I preferred it when they took a more active role and showed their enthusiasm, but I didn't usually end up with women like that.

Jax's dominance had turned me on almost as much as his tight grip and the rough way he'd handled me. Then he'd flipped roles and let me do the same for him. Why had it felt so good when he'd been the one on his knees? Was it the way he'd looked at me?

Jax had incredibly expressive eyes. The color was unusual too. Mine were plain, boring blue. His were bright green with a ring of gold around the pupils. He'd told me it was a genetic condition called central heterochromia. It made his eyes magnetic.

I was used to seeing them smile or laugh or fill with challenge. I'd never seen them darken with lust or blaze with hunger. Even when I'd watched him get his flirt on over the years, he always maintained this cool air about him, one that hugged the line between cocky and lazy.

No one had ever looked at me like he had. Like I was their entire world and their only thoughts were on how much they wanted to be there in that moment with me.

I'd always been a selfish asshole when it came to people's attention. Maybe it was the whole only child thing and growing up without much contact with other kids that had shaped my pathological need to be someone's entire focus.

Sex and relationships had never been easy for me to navigate. I'd spent my entire life preparing for my future. Every spare moment of my childhood had been filled with training, camps, and playing for the most prestigious teams that would accept me.

My only friends had been my teammates, and I'd been isolated from other kids. When I'd been little, no one had invited me to their birthday parties because I hadn't been allowed to have them. My parents had never organized playdates or sleepovers because they would interfere with my focus on baseball.

Things hadn't gotten better in high school, and baseball had been my entire life. My father had discouraged me from dating, saying that a girlfriend would pull my attention away from my future and what was important. That now was the time to fuck around and enjoy my status and all the perks that came with it.

He'd been a ball player too, but not a very good one. He'd played on his high school team but hadn't been recruited to play in college. Instead, he'd thrown himself into Greek life and shaped his entire identity around being in a frat.

I loved my dad, I did, but most days, I resented him.

He'd put all his failed dreams on me, and the only time he ever showed any sort of pride in me was when I did something he could brag about. Failure was unacceptable, and I had to be everything he'd wanted for himself.

I loved baseball, but if I was being honest with myself, I didn't love it the same way my teammates did. The way Jax did. He lived the game. Everything from training to studying reels and working out strategies energized him.

My favorite moments were scrimmages and games. I loved playing, but I hated the lifestyle that went along with being an elite athlete. The rigorous training, strict diets, packed schedules, and constant pressure to be the best were all I'd known since I was five years old and my dad had convinced the local little league to let me play with the older kids because I'd always been physically big for my age. For sixteen years,

my life had revolved around the game, and I had no idea who or what I was without it.

Jax glowed when he talked about his future, and his dreams of playing in the pros motivated him to push himself to be the best player he could be.

The thought of staying on this hamster wheel for another five or ten years filled me with dread and tightened my chest.

Pitchers, like catchers, didn't have the same longevity in the game as other positions because of how hard we pushed ourselves and how physically taxing the game was on our bodies.

The main reason pitchers retired was that they got injured. Our arms were our entire worth in the game. The second we stopped being able to throw or became inconsistent, we got sacked or were benched until our contracts ran out.

Every play started with us. We could make or break a game, and because of that, we were replaceable. Major league teams carried, on average, a dozen pitchers on their roster. That meant competing against eleven of your teammates just to see any game time.

The pressure to perform was constant and started young. If you wanted to make it in pro sports, you had to be the best of the best. The game was your life, and anything less than perfection could destroy a career before it began.

My chest squeezed, and my breathing hitched as another wave of dread washed over me.

Jax rolled over and put his hand on my hip, his skin warm and soothing.

"Matt?" he whispered.

"I'm fine," I croaked.

He pulled his hand off me, and the dread doubled.

Another burst of panic exploded in my chest. I closed my eyes and scooted back, needing to feel his big body.

Jax slipped his arm around my middle and tugged me against him, wrapping himself around me as he spooned me.

“Are you okay?” he whispered in my ear.

“No.”

He hugged me tighter. “It’s okay. Just breathe with me, okay? I’m here, and you’re safe.”

I concentrated on his chest and how it moved against my back, mirroring him so I didn’t start hyperventilating.

Fuck. I squeezed my eyes closed and did what the team therapist had suggested when I’d confessed I sometimes had panic attacks. I focused on what I could feel. On Jax behind me, his heavy arm around me. His hot breath fanning over my skin, the soft mattress underneath me.

“That’s it,” he murmured when I managed to pull in a deep breath. “You’re doing so good.”

I was a slut for praise, but Jax’s had always affected me on a level no one else’s had. It soothed and grounded me, like a tether when I was rudderless and spinning.

“Better?” he asked, his voice a low rumble, and rubbed his hand over my stomach.

“Yeah.” I cleared my throat.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“I was just thinking about stuff.”

How the fuck could I tell him I’d started panicking while thinking about the future I was supposed to want more than anything?

He started to pull his arm off me, but I grabbed his wrist and held it tight, not ready to let him go. “Stay like this? Just for another minute?”

“As long as you need.” He hesitated. “Is this because of what we did?”

“No.” I pushed my ass against him, needing him closer.

He groaned and shifted his hips away from me as his hard dick poked my ass. “Sorry.”

I wiggled back. Something about his arousal, whether it was because of me or just a nighttime boner, settled the last of the noise in my head.

“Matt,” he rasped. “Are you trying to drive me crazy?”

“No,” I said honestly. “I just like feeling it.”

“Keep moving like that, and you’re going to feel a lot more,” he warned.

My dick chubbed up as warmth spread through my chest. “It feels good?”

He choked out a laugh. “Um, yeah. It feels good.”

I pushed his wrist down until his palm pressed against my matching hard-on. “For me too.”

“What do you want?” he asked, his voice strangely blank and measured.

“I don’t know.” I sighed and closed my eyes. “I just want to feel you.”

“Do you want to come?”

“I want you to. Want to feel it.”

He groaned and rolled his hips so his cock rubbed against my ass. “Like this?”

Not thinking too hard about what I was doing, I pushed my sleep pants down, then reached behind me to tug his down too. His hard cock, hot and thick, pressed against the skin of my ass.

“Matt,” he rasped and hugged me closer.

“Make yourself feel good,” I whispered, shifting until his dick settled between my cheeks.

The sensation of his length was strange but, at the same time, not. Being wrapped up in his arms, having him surround me, sent little zings of pleasure through my system, but it had nothing on the feel of his skin against my sensitive hole.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.” I gave a little test thrust, and a jolt of electricity shot up my spine and tightened my balls. “Oh.”

“Fuck.” He crushed me against his body and moved that perfect length through my crack. Another of those incredible jolts pulsed through me with each slide of his hot skin over my hole. I rocked with him as he used my ass to get off.

Knowing that I was turning him on, that my body was getting him off, sent my arousal into a tailspin. Nerves deep in my body ignited and reacted.

The ridge of his head snagged on my hole, and I bit my lip so hard I tasted blood to stop the cry that bubbled up in my chest.

“Can I jerk you off?” He nuzzled into the back of my neck.

“Yeah.”

I’d started this experiment wanting to feel him, to get him off, but now I wanted more.

He gripped me hard and tight. My precum created a slick passage as he stroked in time with the movements of his hips.

His rough hand around me, his soft voice in my ear as he told me how hot I was, how good I felt, hit me right in the chest.

“That’s it. Fuck my hand while I fuck your crack,” he rumbled. I both pushed back on his cock and thrust into his hand.

“Jax.” My voice was a whine, my entire body tightened, and my balls drew up.

“That’s right.” He tightened his grip and thrust hard.

The head of his dick breached me. Not deep and only for a second. Ribbons of white-hot pleasure snaked through me as I opened to him, at the knowledge that he’d been inside me, even if it was just his tip.

I came hard, shuddering and shaking in his arms. I didn’t just hit my orgasm, I crashed into it. He jerked me through my

release, and warm wetness pooled on my skin.

His cum.

He grunted and groaned in my ear, the vibrations against the sensitive skin setting off another tsunami of pleasure.

We lay there, spent and panting for the longest time. My entire body buzzed as I floated on the afterglow.

I liked dick. Or at least I liked Jax's dick. I was bi.

The reality didn't freak me out. It confused me.

The past few days, I'd tried to picture myself with a guy. Watching them in porn got me hot. Imagining myself with one of the models didn't. Thinking about a faceless random as I fantasized about how good it would feel to have a guy play with my hole or dick didn't really do anything for me.

Was it because of my performance anxiety? Or because it was new and unknown?

Thinking about Jax touching me made me want to try it. Picturing Jax on his knees for me or bent over me made my dick hard. I'd spent days trying to push those thoughts out of my head, but now that I knew reality was so much better than any fantasy I'd managed to cook up, I wasn't sure I could.

Jax was my best friend. The person I trusted more than anyone in the world. It made sense that I'd feel safe exploring this with him, right?

"Are you okay?"

I startled at his whispered question. "Yeah. Just thinking."

"Do you regret it?"

"No." I swallowed hard. "Not at all. Do you?"

Shit. What if it hadn't been good for him? Was Jax merely placating me? He'd come, and he'd seemed into it, but we'd just talked about how sex starved we were. Messing around with anyone would feel good in his position, right?

"No."

He gave me a little squeeze, then sat up. He pulled off his shirt and used it to clean my back and ass.

“Need it?” He wiped his hand off.

“I’m fine.” Most of my mess had landed on the sheets.

He tossed the shirt over the side of the bed and lay back down.

I tamped down a flare of disappointment when he rolled onto his side and put his back to me again.

Right. Best friends didn’t cuddle, not even after rubbing off on each other.

“Will you be able to sleep now?”

“Yeah.” I stared at the wall. “Night.”

“Night.”

A few moments later, his breathing evened out. Then his foot pressed against my calf and pushed my leg back as he started his nightly sprawl.

I smiled into the darkness. My sexuality might have done a one-eighty, but whatever. I knew he was worried about fucking up our friendship, but sex between bros wasn’t a big deal, right?

I’d never had a bromance before, especially with a teammate, but we were rock solid, and I’d never wanted anyone the way I wanted him.

JAX

“I’m dead.” Matt flopped onto my bed dramatically, his limbs spread out like a starfish.

“Shove over.” I slapped his thigh.

“Can’t. I’m dead.”

“You big baby.” I sat next to him and shoved my hands under his hip to roll him over.

“Asshole,” he grumbled as he landed on his stomach.

I lay next to him and folded my hands on my chest. Matt flipped over and settled next to me.

We’d just finished practice and come back to my room, which was closer to the field than his house. Coach had been in a mood, and we’d spent the entire four-hour practice running drills. I was exhausted too.

“I’m not moving. I live here now.” Matt sighed heavily.

I snickered. “What about dinner?”

“Door Dash something from my phone.” He wiggled his hips, his way of telling me to get his phone out of his pocket. “Something with lots of carbs and cheese.”

“Pizza?”

“Yeah. Add in some cheesy garlic bread, wings, and extra dipping sauce.”

“Vegetarian okay, to offset all the extras?” I slipped my hand into his pocket and pulled out his phone.

He shot me a scandalized look. “Fuck no. It’s a cheat day, and we’re going all out. Sausage, pepperoni, bacon, ham, and that fancy sausage that starts with a *c*.”

I used my fingerprint to unlock his phone. We’d both added each other’s biometrics to our security because of how often we used each other’s phones.

“Chorizo?”

“Yup. I want all the meat tonight.”

I chuckled at his dreamy tone. “Pineapple and hot peppers too?”

“Fine. But no mushrooms.”

When the order was paid for and processing, I exited out of the app and put his phone on his stomach.

A week had passed since Matt and I had gotten off together.

We’d woken up the next day and gone to the morning workout like nothing had happened, and had gone out with the team like always.

We hadn’t talked about what we’d done, but that was probably for the best. Matt had his answers, and I’d helped my bro out. No biggie.

“I told my parents I’m not coming home for Christmas break.”

I turned to him. “What?”

He shrugged, his eyes closed and his face relaxed. “You’re not going home. I figured I’d stay here and keep you company. Besides, it’s not like going home is any fun.”

My parents made okay money, but we weren’t rich by any stretch of the imagination. My father was in the air force and planned to retire in a few years. My mother had followed my father around as he’d been posted to various bases and worked whatever jobs she could to help make ends meet.

Traveling between the United States and Canada was expensive, especially with the exchange rate and with me

having limited time during holidays thanks to my baseball schedule. Things had been easier when they'd lived in BC and I could take the ferry to visit them, but my dad had been transferred to the East Coast my sophomore year, so I only got to see them during the summer, and it fucking sucked. We were a tight-knit family, and I missed them.

“What did they say?”

“Not much.” He cracked one eye open. “I told them Coach had scheduled some extra practices this year, and it didn't make sense to drive down and have to drive back after only a few days. Especially since they won't be around. Mom's going... somewhere. I can't remember. And Dad just told me to make sure I didn't lose my starting spot. And watch what I ate so I didn't get fat.”

I didn't understand Matt's family. His parents were together in the sense that they shared a house and were married, but they lived their own lives. His mom was a trust fund baby and was always jetting off to some vacation spot or another. She also sat on a bunch of committees that did charity work for various things, so she was never around when she was home.

His dad had inherited a fleet of car dealerships from his father. From what I gathered, he had other people run the business and spent most of his time networking and schmoozing with other rich guys.

The only time his dad seemed interested in his life was when he pestered Matt about baseball or the frat. His mother seemed to forget he existed at all.

Matt played it off, but I knew it bothered him. And the little comments his dad would drop, like telling him to watch what he ate so he didn't gain weight, boiled my blood. Parents weren't supposed to talk to their kids like that. It was no wonder Matt was so hard on himself and had a constant loop of self-criticism running through his head when that was all he'd heard growing up.

I had no clue what his parents' stance on the LGBT community was, but Matt had always been a loud and proud

ally. Or was he one of us?

Had our little experiment satisfied his curiosity? Was my straight-as-a-bat buddy actually straight, or was he bi-curious? Or maybe bi?

He'd initiated everything, and he'd been the one to up the ante in his bed. He'd wanted it, and he'd gotten off.

Matt was a fascinating mix of casual and intense. He was laid back and went with the flow, but he felt things deeply, was a chronic overthinker, and was empathetic to a fault. He was also a people pleaser, which meant he went along with things rather than rock the boat.

During our first year on the team, a few of the seniors had ragged on Matt for how close we were and made jokes about how him being gay for me. He'd laughed it off and told them to stop being homophobic assholes, which was ballsy as fuck for a freshman.

He'd told me more than once he didn't care if people thought we were fucking or couldn't get past their own hang-ups and assumed that a gay and straight guy couldn't be close.

Only one other guy had ever stood up for me like that. Damon, my best friend in high school, had been the same way. He'd played ball too, center field, and had been the one to encourage me to be open about my sexuality when we'd met after Dad had been transferred to Victoria the summer before freshman year.

I'd taken the leap and come out the next year. Most people hadn't cared, a few had been surprised, and a couple hadn't been all that happy to have a gay on the team.

Damon had stuck by me through the innuendos and teasing and told everyone who would listen that he would throw hands if anyone fucked with me for liking dick. He'd brushed off the comments about him being gay or being my bottom or whatever. To him, being gay wasn't an insult or a bad thing, so he didn't give a flying fuck if people thought he was.

A wave of nostalgia washed over me. I hadn't spoken to Damon in a few weeks because I'd been stressed about finals.

He'd torn his ACL our senior year and had to give up playing competitively. He was studying chemical engineering at the University of Toronto. It wasn't the life he'd dreamed of, but he was happy.

"What are you thinking about?"

I startled at Matt's voice. "Just making a mental note to message Damon this weekend."

"Have you heard from him lately?"

"A few weeks ago. He was stressed about finals and shit too."

Matt made a soft sound I couldn't interpret.

"Do you want to go to Red's tonight?" I asked.

He sighed. "We probably should. Cooper's in one of his team-building moods, and we're already on his shit list for bailing last week."

I chuckled softly. Our team captain was a great guy, and he took his role seriously. When he invited you to go out with the team, it wasn't a request.

At least tonight was just supposed to be us. I didn't mind when the girlfriends were invited along, but sitting in a crowd of couples was a not-so-fun reminder I wasn't allowed to have that. It also meant that things would break up early, and no one would be getting sloppy drunk because of our team workout in the morning.

"How long until the food gets here?" he asked.

"Check your phone."

"That's work. You do it."

"It's on top of you." I hit my knee against his. "How is it less work for me?"

"Didn't say it was." He shot me a grin. "Just that it was too much work for me."

"You're ridiculous." I grabbed the phone and unlocked it. "How are you going to eat if you're too tired to look at your

phone?”

“You’re going to feed me, obvs.”

I snorted. “Unless you want me to shove boneless wings down your gullet, that’s not gonna happen.”

He swiped his phone out of my hand. “You *did not* get *boneless* wings.”

I laughed as he checked our order. Matt had an irrational hatred for boneless wings. I’d ordered them once as a joke, and he’d complained about it for weeks.

“I hate you,” he grumbled and put his phone back on his chest.

“No, you don’t.”

Silence stretched.

“Did you and Damon ever have a thing?”

“What?” I turned to him. “I already told you he’s straight.”

“Yeah, but so was I until a few weeks ago.”

I opened my mouth to say something, but the words died in my throat. Was Matt... not straight?

“Nothing ever happened between us,” I said slowly.

“Did you have a thing for him?”

“He was my best friend.”

“Yeah, but I’ve seen his pics. He’s hot.”

“He is. But I didn’t think about him like that. We’re *friends*.”

“So are we, but you’ve had my dick in your mouth.”

“Because you asked me to put it there.”

“I’m just pointing out that being friends doesn’t mean you didn’t have a thing for him.”

“I didn’t,” I said honestly. Where the fuck was this coming from? Matt had never shown any sort of jealousy when I’d talked about Damon before. Was this his anxiety talking?

“He’s attractive, but I’m not attracted to him. He’s my friend, and he’ll always be my friend. But that’s as far as it goes between us.”

He hummed. “Would you have messed around with him if he’d asked?”

“I... I don’t know how to answer that. Maybe?”

“What about now? What if he called and said, ‘hey, I think I like dick. Can I play with yours?’”

I snickered. “He’d never say that.”

“Fine, replace that with whatever he *would* say.” His tone was dark and tinged with anger.

“*If* he did say something like that to me, I’d tell him no. For one, he lives in Ontario. That’s fucking far, dude. And two, I wouldn’t risk our friendship.”

“But you’d risk ours?”

I blinked at him, quelling my irritation. “I thought I made it very clear that I *didn’t* want to risk our friendship. That I thought it was a bad idea.” A chill passed through me. “Do you regret it? Is this what all this is about?”

“No.” He huffed. “I’m being stupid.”

I was tempted to agree with him, but I kept my mouth shut so he could either tell me what the hell had gotten into him or drop it.

“I just... I don’t know. I’m fucking jealous, okay?” He covered his eyes with his hands and let out a low groan. “I never gave a shit when you hooked up with randoms or guys you didn’t care about, but it bothers me that you might still want him.”

“Matt,” I said softly. “I never wanted him. Not like that. I think of him as a brother, always have.”

He sighed and sat up, catching his phone as it slid off his chest. “I’m going to go wait for our food.”

I lay there in stunned silence as he strode out of my room.

Fuck. I should never have given in. The difference between Matt and Damon was that I did want Matt. Always had. The best orgasms of my life weren't worth messing up his life.

I sat up and stared at the closed door. We needed to talk about this to get it all out in the open so we could work through it. Whatever this thing between us was needed to end now, and we both had to be on the same page.

Matt was the person who mattered most to me. He wasn't just my best friend; he was *the* best friend I'd ever had. Anxiety squeezed my chest. I couldn't lose him.

Sex between bros might not be a big deal, but sex between best friends was. Maybe Matt was bi, maybe not. I'd be there for him as a friend, but I wasn't the one who could help him with this.

The thought of another man touching him, getting to see his face when it was slack with pleasure, or hearing those little moans I loved drove me fucking crazy, but it was what it was.

I could still be his safe bestie and help him figure out who he was and what he liked, but I couldn't be the one to give it to him. It would kill me, but I honestly didn't know if I'd recover from losing him. Matt was... everything. The person who not only mattered the most but who also made my life brighter. As soon as I'd met him, I'd known we'd be in each other's lives forever. I refused to fuck that up because I couldn't keep it in my pants.

MATT

Adams dropped into the seat next to me and put a pint glass in front of me. “You look like you need another one of these.”

I curled my fingers around the sweaty glass and smirked. Or at least tried to. “Thanks.”

“What’s going on with you and Crawford?”

“What? Nothing? Why?” Did he know we’d messed around?

He shot me a strange look. “We usually need a crowbar to pry you two away from each other, but you’ve hardly said a word to him all night.” He waved his hand at the booth where Jax sat with some of our teammates.

We tended to take over the back section of Red’s. The booths were big and comfy, but you could only cram so many ball players into them before someone inevitably fell out. Thankfully the teams at Rutherford had a long-standing tradition of which bar they called their own, so we didn’t have to worry about the place being overrun by athletes.

Red’s was a weird cross between a sports bar and a dive bar. The carpeted floors were worn and always felt sticky. The wood paneling had probably looked great when it had been installed in the ’80s, but it had seen so many coats of paint it was in a sad state of disarray. The booths and chairs had decent padding, but the tabletops were worn and scratched to shit.

I liked it. The staff knew us, and the crowds were usually on the lighter side. Mostly students, but since it was a little bit away from campus and student housing, it didn't draw the same numbers as the closer, trendier places downtown.

It wasn't pretty, but they had cheap beer, greasy food, and weren't strict with IDs, so none of us complained.

"You've barely looked at each other all night. You fighting?"

I relaxed. So he didn't know about us.

My relief made me pause. I'd never given a shit if people thought we were boning before. Why did I suddenly care now that we'd hooked up?

"We don't do everything together."

He shot me a *the fuck you don't* look.

"We don't *have* to do everything together," I amended.

"We get worried when you're not attached at the hip."

"We?" I took a sip of the beer.

After my first drink, I'd switched to water when no one was looking. It was early enough I could have had a few and been fine for the workout, but I wasn't feeling it.

"The team. Your bromance is the reason we're going to dominate again this year." He downed a third of his drink in one go.

I quirked an eyebrow at him.

"Don't pretend like you don't know this." He smirked. "You two work like you have ESPN or something."

"You mean ESP?" I stifled a grin.

"Whatever." He waved dismissively. "You may have a golden arm, but even you gotta agree that Crawford brings you to the next level."

The sip of beer I'd taken went sour in my stomach.

Adams wasn't wrong. I was a good pitcher, great even. I'd gotten over a dozen offers at graduation for full-ride

scholarships all over the country. I'd chosen Rutherford because it was a small school with a damn good team and a solid academic reputation. And it was far enough from home I didn't have to visit unless I had to, but not so far that it made traveling annoying when I did.

Jax was an incredible catcher, and his instincts were spot on. He'd also gotten a crap ton of offers, but Rutherford was the only D1 school that had made it worth his while to commit to them. It was messed up, but if you wanted to be scouted for the pros, a D1 school was your best choice.

The real difference between us was that Jax could catch for anyone. He owned the plate, and it didn't matter who Coach put in. Jax called the right pitches, knew exactly when to use our plays, and had a Zen-like calm around him that kept his pitchers in the zone when they struggled.

The few times Jax had to sit a game out and Chase had stepped in proved I was a one-trick pony. My stats nosedived when I wasn't teamed up with Jax. Thanks to my years of training, I did well enough that Coach let me stay in, but it was a struggle.

"I'm just saying that if you two are having a fight or a rough patch or whatever, you need to get over that shit before the season starts."

I gritted my teeth and let go of the glass so I didn't squeeze it. "We're fine. We're just not sitting at the same table for a few hours. No reason to get your panties in a bunch."

Adams laughed and slapped my shoulder hard enough to sting. "Good to know."

A burst of laughter from a table to our left drew our attention. Hayes was sitting on the floor with Petey standing behind him, howling and holding a chair.

"Yeah, Coop's about to cut them off." Adams chuckled as our captain jumped up from his seat and strode over to our drunk teammates, looking less than amused.

"Glad that's not me. I'm already on his shit list."

“I’m sure he’ll let that go... eventually.” Adams snickered into his glass.

Hayes stood next to Petey, both looking at the ground sheepishly as Cooper lectured them like naughty toddlers.

“Now that’s what I’m talking about.” Adams nudged my arm hard and nodded to where a crowd of girls stood near the door.

“Better check their IDs if you’re interested.” I grimaced. “They look young.”

He squinted. “Yeah. Guess I’d better go investigate.” He nudged me again. “You coming?”

“Nah.”

“Shove over.” Big D knocked his hip against mine. “It looks like some freshmen are in need of some senior guidance.”

Rolling my eyes, I slid out of the booth, then slapped his ass as he came out after me. “Check IDs, dude.”

“Yes, Dad.” He motioned for the other guys at the table to slide out too.

The five of them walked away, leaving me with a table of half-eaten fries, nachos, and empty beer bottles.

“You okay?”

“Fuck!”

Jax snickered as I shot him a glare.

“How are you so stealthy with such a big ass?”

“I don’t walk on my ass.” He pursed his lips, clearly still amused. “They bail on you?”

I pointed to where our teammates were crowding around the group of girls.

“Yikes. Is it just me, or do they look young?”

“It’s not just you.” I sighed.

“Want to bail?”

“You done?”

“Been done for a while. Just putting in the face time.”

Not with me.

Ugh. I needed to stop being weird. First that whole jealous outbreak when Jax mentioned Damon. Then I’d spent the whole time he’d sat at the other table pouting like a big baby. No wonder he’d wanted some space.

Or maybe he was giving me space because of what had happened and he didn’t want the team to know? Or did he think *I* didn’t want the team to know?

“Want to stay?” he asked.

“No, let’s head out.” I caught Cooper’s eye and motioned to the door. He waved.

We waved back and walked to the exit, Jax falling into step beside me.

“The house or my room?” he asked.

“Your room. I think everyone except Alex is home tonight.”

He pushed the door open, then followed me through it.

The chilled air hit me like an anvil. I shivered and shoved my hands into my hoodie pocket.

We walked in silence for a few blocks.

Did I care if the team knew Jax and I had hooked up?

I’d already come to terms with the fact that I was bi. I hadn’t wrapped my head around how I couldn’t have known until now, but it didn’t bother me or anything. Not anymore.

I liked dick, or at least I liked my best friend’s dick. What we’d done had felt good, and I wanted more. But Jax hadn’t made a move, hadn’t brought it up, and hadn’t offered more.

The past week, I’d tried to figure out a casual way to tell him I did, but for the first time since I’d known him, I was feeling shy.

He'd also put a fuck ton of effort into making me know I was firmly in the friend zone. He'd insisted we hang out at the house with my roommates and not in his dorm room, and he'd gone home every night. He also didn't touch me like before. No hands on my back or casual arms over my shoulder, not even a playful slap on the ass like all ball players did.

He didn't even sit close to me anymore, making sure to keep space between us when we studied or hung out.

Was this his way of telling me it was a mistake? Was he pulling away from me? Had I fucked up the best friendship I'd ever had because I'd been impulsive and goaded my best friend into blowing me?

"What's going on with you?" Jax asked softly.

"Nothing," I mumbled and walked faster.

He hummed and kept pace with me.

We needed to talk about this, but not here. Not outside. I'd grow a set when we got back to his room. Decision made, I slowed to a normal walking pace. I needed to stop being so weird around him.

"Did you hear about the bet Hayes and Petey have going?" I asked.

"Which one." He snorted. "The last one I heard was about who could eat more hot wings tonight."

I chuckled. Hayes and Petey always had some ridiculous bet going between them. "Petey's going to regret winning that one in a few hours. They're doing a double or nothing to see who can out-press the other tomorrow."

"Those idiots are going to hurt themselves one of these days." I didn't have to look at him to know Jax was rolling his eyes.

We chatted about stupid stuff as we made our way to jock hall. Jax used his ID to open the door and held it open for me, and I slipped in.

A group of guys from the hockey team was in the lounge and waved to us. We called our hellos. Rather than bother with

the elevator, we took the stairs to the fifth floor, then made our way to the other end of the hall to Jax's room.

When we were inside, we shrugged off our jackets and tossed them onto his desk chair. I perched on the edge of the bed, and Jax sank onto the mattress a few feet from me. "What's going on with you?"

"I..." I licked my dry lips and dropped my eyes to his mouth.

His nostrils flared. "Matt." A hint of warning.

"I'm bi."

He froze. Then his expression melted into one of understanding. "You are?"

I nodded. "It's kind of obvious now."

"How do you feel about that?"

"Fine. Feel a bit like a moron for not realizing it sooner, but whatever." I shrugged. "I'm not exactly great with introspection. I shouldn't be all that shocked my dumbass didn't realize it."

"Don't be so hard on yourself. Figuring out who you are and what you like is a process."

"You've known you like guys for years."

"Yeah, but I *only* like guys. It's easier for those of us who are on one end of the spectrum or the other to figure it out."

"I always thought being bi meant you liked both equally." I sighed and leaned back on my hands. "But everything I read said it's not like that. Some people do, but most lean toward one over the other. I like girls, and I'm pretty sure I like girls more, but I like guys too." I blew out a breath. "Or at least I think I like guys."

"What do you mean?" he asked carefully.

I snorted. "Watching guys get it on gets me hot, no question. Thinking about doing that stuff doesn't."

He pursed his lips, a telltale sign he was stopping himself from saying what he was thinking.

“I want to try all this stuff because it looks like it feels good, but the thought of actually doing it freaks me out.”

“Is it what we talked about?”

I nodded and lowered my gaze to the plaid bedspread. “Hooking up with girls is enough pressure. At least I know what I’m doing with them. With a guy... I just can’t see myself being able to relax enough to enjoy it. You know me. I’d spend the entire time in my head. Then I’d suck *because* I was in my head.” I bit my lip. Should I tell him what had happened the other night?

“What is it?” he asked softly. “You know you can tell me anything.”

“I tried to use the toy you got me.” My cheeks prickled with heat as I traced the squares on the bedspread with my finger.

“Tried to?” he prompted when the words got stuck in my throat. “You didn’t like it?”

“I don’t know.” I blew out my breath. “I felt so awkward and couldn’t relax. I... I couldn’t stay hard while I was... inserting it.” I glanced up. Jax’s face was neutral, but his eyes were soft and encouraging. “If I can’t even keep it up when I’m alone and doing something I *want* to do, how the fuck am I supposed to be with someone else?”

He nodded slowly. “And I’m guessing the more you struggled, the more you got stuck in your head and berated yourself?”

“Yup.” I sighed.

“You didn’t have any trouble when we... did what we did.”

“Because it’s you.” I swallowed hard. It was now or never. Time to buck up and tell him what I wanted. “I trust you. I’m comfortable with you. I know that if I make a weird face or do

something wrong or even go soft, you won't judge me. You... you make me feel safe."

Jax's eyes darkened, his pupils dilating until the green was nearly swallowed up.

"I know you probably don't want to deal with my shit." I looked back down at the bedspread. "I'm a mess, but you're the only person who gets my dick up." I laughed, the sound hollow to my ears. "You're the only person I can think about."

"Matt." His voice was a low rasp.

"I get it," I said quickly. "We're friends, and you probably didn't like what we did anyway. I know you don't want more, but I just need to tell you why I'm acting so weird. I'll get over this. I will. Just don't leave me." My lip trembled as my voice cracked.

Strong arms yanked me against a warm and solid chest. His scent, spicy and sweet with an undertone of something musky, enveloped me. A ripple of calm broke through my building panic.

"Shhhhh," he whispered in my ear. He hugged me so tight I couldn't pull in a full breath. "I've got you, babe."

I closed my eyes and breathed him in, sinking into his warmth. A sense of rightness and home settled over me.

"I'm not going anywhere," he murmured, rocking us slightly. Warm lips pressed against the side of my neck. "No matter what happens, I'll always be here for you, okay? I promise."

I squeezed my eyes shut and crushed him against me. He'd pulled me so I was practically on his lap and there wasn't an inch of space between us.

"I'm sorry," I mumbled into his shoulder.

"Nothing to be sorry for." He kissed my neck again. His hot breath tickled my skin, and a shiver of desire spread through my chest. "I was trying to protect our friendship. You mean the world to me. I wasn't pulling away, and I'm so sorry I made you think I was."

“I’m so confused,” I whispered.

“I know. But we’ll figure this out. Tell me what you need. You know I’d do anything for you, right?”

“Are you attracted to me?”

Fuck, could I sound any more pathetic?

“Yes.” He pulled away just enough that he could look at my face and I could see his eyes. “I am. That’s another reason I pulled away. I didn’t want to fuck things up between us. I thought what we’d done had messed you up and that’s why you’ve been different. It never occurred to me you were struggling for other reasons.”

“I didn’t tell you.” I dropped my gaze to his mouth. To those full lips and strong jaw and the tiny cleft in his chin. I’d always thought Jax was handsome, and it wouldn’t be a lie to say my world was a bit brighter when he was around.

Now that I knew what he tasted like, how those lips felt against mine, he wasn’t just handsome. He was fucking sexy.

Impulsively, I leaned in and kissed the cleft, just a quick little peck. The scrape of his stubble tickled my lips. A pulse of heat spread through my junk.

“Matt, babe,” he rasped.

His heavy-lidded eyes were filled with desire and something dark and possessive.

“I like when you call me that,” I whispered. “I know I shouldn’t, but I do.”

He swallowed. “Tell me what you need from me. What do you want?”

“I want you.”

His nostrils flared, and his grip around me bordered on painful. “You want to fool around more?”

“Yeah. I know you’re worried that sex will mess up our friendship, but what if we both promise it won’t? I want you, and you seem to want me—”

“Oh, I want you.” He dropped his gaze to my mouth. “That’s never been an issue.”

“Then what’s stopping us? We know what this is going into it.”

Jax’s gaze closed off for a second, just a quick shuttering I wouldn’t have seen if we weren’t so close and literally staring into each other’s eyes.

He let go of me and sat back. A shockwave of cold moved through me at the loss of his body. I tried to keep my expression blank and not show I was so turned on it felt like my skin was two sizes too small.

“We need to set ground rules, and I can’t think when you’re that close.”

My dick was so hard I ached. I took a quick look at his lap. A thrill shot through me when I saw his answering bulge.

“Okay.” I pressed my hand against my dick and concentrated on the pressure and not on how turned on I was.

He groaned. “Not. Helping.”

I grinned despite myself as he did the same.

“Rule one is that we need to be completely honest with each other. If you want something, tell me. If you don’t or something doesn’t feel good, you *have* to tell me in the moment so we can stop.”

I nodded. “Yeah. I will. But the same goes for you. I don’t want this to be one-sided or for you to go into this thinking I’m using you as some sort of gay sex-ed lesson. I want us both to enjoy it. I trust you, and I don’t want you to treat me like I’m made of glass or feel like you need to check in with me for every little thing.”

He let out a shaky breath, his eyes boring into mine like he was trying to search out the answers to whatever questions were in his head.

“Okay.” He raked a hand through his dark hair. “Rule two is that this ends the second it complicates our friendship.”

“Okay. Rule three is that we don’t mess around with other people for however long this goes on for.”

Jax didn’t hook up often, but the thought of him being with another guy while we were messing around made me feel physically ill.

“Deal.” His lips tilted up in a smirking smile. “That was my next rule too.”

“Do you have a rule four?”

He paused. “I don’t think so. Other than we can add more rules if they come up.”

“Yeah, that makes sense.”

“What about around other people?” he asked, his voice hesitant. That smirky smile faded.

“What do you mean?”

“Like, do you want to keep this on the DL?”

“Do you?”

“I think we should from the team.” He chewed on his lip. “There’s enough pressure on us. We don’t need people scrutinizing every conversation we have or being all up in our business like that.”

Adams’s questions came back to me, and I nodded. “Yeah, that’s probably best. Maybe we should just hide it from everyone. Shit gets around fast here.”

“What about your parents?”

“What about them?” My dick deflated in record time.

“What would they say if they knew you were bi?”

“No clue. I’m sure Mom would be fine with it. She’s got a ton of gay friends. Dad would probably be pissed because of baseball. He’d tell me to hide it so I didn’t fuck up my chances at the pros or screw up my career, but I can’t see him disowning me or anything. Not because I liked dick.” I snort-laughed. “But I’d be out of the will so fast if being bi fucked up baseball.”

“I thought of a fourth rule.”

“What’s that?”

“This ends as soon as it interferes with baseball.”

“You think it will?”

“No clue. I’ve never messed around with a teammate before. But *if* it does, then we go back to how we were before. We’ve worked way too hard to let sex mess up our plans.”

My stomach clenched as unease curled through my chest. “Sure. Rule four.”

“I need some of that honesty you promised me.” He leveled his gaze at me. “What are you ready for?”

“Pretty much everything except anal. I’m not there yet.”

His gaze darkened, and his breathing hitched. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah. I told you I’m not made of glass, and I’m not icked out by any of this. I want it, want you.”

His iron-clad self-control slipped and his gaze went from restrained to molten. He grabbed me by the back of the neck and yanked me toward him, the touch possessive and dominating.

I caught myself on his thick thighs, squeezing the muscles tight as he covered my lips in a hot, hard kiss. I’d always liked looking at his legs, especially during a game when the muscles would pop and stretch his too-tight baseball pants to the max. I’d assumed it was because of how muscular they were compared to mine. That I’d admired his body because I wanted to look like that too.

Was it possible I’d always been attracted to him but hadn’t recognized it for what it was?

The sweet slide of his mouth on mine forced out a moan from deep in my chest. Fuck. I liked kissing him. Everything from his firm lips to the scratch of his stubble was so fucking hot my dick was rock hard again in only seconds.

I sighed against his kiss, then gasped as he took advantage of my parted lips to dip his tongue between them. He stroked it against mine teasingly, then nipped at my bottom lip with his teeth.

Shamelessly, I threw my weight back. I wanted to feel all of him on top of me, to have his big body press me into the bed as he owned my mouth.

He came with me, using his hands on the mattress to guide us down so we didn't have to stop kissing. I spread my legs and arched into him as he settled over me.

The hard ridge of his cock pressed against mine. Heat and desire spread through my balls and up my shaft. He was hard because of *me*. Because of what we were doing.

Needing more, I wrapped my legs around his thighs and locked our bodies together. He sucked on my tongue and ran one hand up and down my side while he fisted the other in my hair.

He kissed me like he never wanted to stop. My head spun with both pleasure and delight. I'd never been kissed like this, and it was everything I'd never realized I'd been missing. Confidence and desire rolled off him in waves as he owned my mouth. I sank into the bliss and ran my hands over every part of him I could reach. He rolled his hips, and his cock dragged against mine. Stars exploded behind my eyelids.

"I want to blow you," I managed. He kissed my jaw, his breathing as ragged as mine.

He froze over me.

"Please," I added before he could ask me if I was sure or some other bullshit.

He rolled onto his back, his chest heaving, and stared up at me with lust-glazed eyes.

I crawled over him and straddled his thighs. He looked so big and powerful, and a thrill shot through me when I saw the spots of color on his cheeks and the flush on his neck. He *wanted* me.

His bulge pushed against the material of his jeans. I stared at it for a few beats. Need pulsed through me as the memories of how it had felt in my hand and against my ass filled my senses.

Tentatively, I pressed my hand against it. He was hot and hard under my palm. I rubbed him, mindful that the denim might not feel that great if I used too much pressure.

He groaned and lifted his hips, pushing into my touch.

“How do you like it?” I flipped open the button of his fly.

“Just do whatever you think will feel good, and it’ll be amazing.”

“I like it when you tell me what to do.” I slid the zipper down, revealing a pair of silky black briefs. My excitement grew. “I want this to be as good for you as possible.”

“Watch your teeth, and I like it hard. You don’t have to go deep. The head is the most sensitive part for me. Pay it lots of attention, and I’ll blow like a landmine in no time.”

I rubbed him through his briefs, then gripped his shaft. His dick throbbed in my hand, and a little wet spot spread on his tip.

“Help me get these down.” I snapped the waistband of his briefs against his taut stomach with my other hand.

He laughed and lifted his hips. He shoved his jeans and underwear down so they were tucked under his balls and ass. His cock slapped his abs.

It should have been funny, especially since my fucked-up brain added a cartoon-like sound *boing* effect. But it wasn’t. Laughing was the furthest thing from my mind as I looked at his perfect dick.

I’d seen it last time, but I’d been so overwhelmed with everything I hadn’t been able to focus on it. His flared head was dusky red, his shaft thick and pink. It bulged in the center, then tapered down a bit back near his base. Fuck. How would that feel inside my mouth and pushing down my throat? Would it hit my prostate just right when he fucked me?

Wait, what? *When* he fucked me?

“Babe?”

I shook my head and gripped his base. “You have a really nice dick.”

He huffed out a laugh. “Thanks. It likes you too.”

I squeezed his shaft and smiled, the momentary shock from before gone. “Of course it would be huge. Couldn’t have a starter sized one for me, huh?”

He laughed and propped his hands behind his head. “Go big or go home. Isn’t that what athletes are all about?”

I slid my fingers under his balls and rolled them, strangely fascinated. The skin was velvety soft, warm, but not hot, and I loved the way he locked his thighs, like he was trying to keep still, as I played with them.

I leaned down and licked the seam of his sac.

“Fuck.” He grunted.

“Do you like having them played with?” I looked up the line of his perfect body. His gaze was locked on my face, his eyes dark with lust again.

“Yeah,” he rasped.

I sucked one ball into my mouth and gently tongued it. The texture was strange but nice. He smelled good, dark and heady, and that musky undertone was stronger now. He tasted like clean skin.

“Jesus, babe.” He lifted his hips. I squeezed his base tighter and sucked the other ball into my mouth.

His dick throbbed in my hand, and he groaned loudly.

I let it fall from my mouth. “Feel good?”

“Really fucking good,” he rasped.

Confidence bloomed in my chest, and I shifted so I was over his cockhead. I licked his slit. I’d tasted him the other night, but again, I’d been so overwhelmed I hadn’t been able to focus on it.

An intoxicating mix of sweet and salty exploded on my tongue, and I swallowed his head with a low moan. His girth stretched my lips as I struggled to keep my teeth covered.

Fuck, he was big. Thank fuck he'd told me I didn't have to go deep. I'd never be able to fit more than half of him into my mouth without putting way too much faith in my untrained gag reflex.

Fingers trailed over my cheek and ruffled my hair as I sucked on his head and used my hand to stroke what I couldn't reach. I opened my eyes. When had I closed them?

Jax's eyes blazed with lust. "That's it, babe. Just like that," he rasped. "You feel so good."

I preened at his praise and sucked harder.

He gently scratched his blunt nails over my scalp. Tingles exploded deep in my body, lighting me up from the inside. I moved faster, bobbing over him, stroking in time with my mouth.

The wet slurps should have embarrassed me. I was being too loud. The blow job was messy and wet and most definitely unskilled, but Jax never took his eyes off mine. His breathing picked up, and his face screwed up in pleasure.

"Fuck, babe. So good," he choked out. "Twist your hand a bit. Fuck, yeah. You're gonna make me come."

I concentrated on working him with both my mouth and hand. I wanted him to come. Wanted to taste him, to see him go over the edge and know that it was because of me.

"Matt." His entire body tightened, his muscles quaking under me. "Fuck. I'm coming."

He let go of my hair, presumably so I could pull off. I didn't. I sucked him harder and rubbed my tongue against the little notch under his head. He rewarded me by grabbing my hair in both hands, his grip gentle as he let out a strangled cry.

The first spurt hit the back of my throat and triggered my gag reflex. I fought it as his hot release flooded my mouth. The taste wasn't bad. In fact, it was damn good. Not used to

trying to coordinate the two moves, I struggled to find a rhythm so I could swallow and breathe. Jax flopped back onto the bed, shaking and shuddering as his cock pulsed and kicked with his orgasm.

“Fuck.” Strong fingers stroked through my hair.

I let his cock fall from my mouth and licked my lips. “You taste good.”

He groaned, then laughed as his spent dick twitched. “You’re trying to kill me.”

I grinned and dropped another kiss on the tip of his dick. “Maybe.”

He grabbed the front of my shirt and hauled me down. I landed on his chest hard. His mouth covered mine in another of those commanding kisses, and my cock throbbed in my jeans.

I’d been so into blowing him I hadn’t even thought about my own arousal. I rubbed against him, needing some friction.

He rolled us over and lifted his hips off me. “Too sensitive.”

I dragged him back down for another soul-searing kiss. As much as I wanted his mouth on my dick, I wanted this more.

I spread my legs wide, needing... Fuck. I didn’t know what I needed.

“Do you want my finger?” he murmured against my mouth. “I can play with your spot while I blow you.”

“Fuck, yeah.”

He pulled back and knelt over me, his eyes dark with lust.

Instead of feeling self-conscious under his scrutiny, I felt beautiful.

The word stuttered in my mind. I knew I was considered conventionally attractive, but no one had ever made me feel beautiful. Like they didn’t just want my body, but they wanted *all* of me.

Jax knew everything about me. All my quirks and weirdness and the things I hid from others. He *saw* me, and he wanted me despite everything.

“Get naked while I get the lube.” He dropped a quick kiss on my lips. “Want me to take my clothes off too?”

I nodded and tugged on the hem of my shirt. Gratitude filled my chest. He’d anticipated that being nude while he was fully clothed would have pulled me out of the moment.

He climbed off me, rooted in his nightstand, and tossed the small bottle onto the bed. I shucked off my clothes and dropped them onto the floor, then sat cross-legged and awkward, my cock so hard it peeked up from between my legs comically.

Jax’s gaze roamed over my body as he stripped down so he was naked too. His dick was half-hard again, and the last of my nerves disappeared when his eyes met mine.

“Lie down and let me make you feel good.”

I did, and a flutter of anticipation rippled through me as he settled between my legs.

“You look so hot, all spread out for me.” He pushed my knees up, then out so my hips were angled toward the ceiling and I was completely open to him. “I can’t wait to taste you again.”

I groaned. My dick pulsed, and a rivulet of precum slid down my shaft.

“I... I didn’t prep.” I fought the urge to close my eyes in embarrassment. “And I ate—”

“It’s fine.” He rubbed his big hand over my stomach. “It’s just a finger. I’ll only go deep enough to get to your spot.”

“I’m sorry.” I covered my eyes with one hand. “I want this. I just don’t want it to be gross for you.”

“I’m gay, babe.” He pulled my hand away from my face. “Dicks and asses are kinda my thing. Nothing we do could ever be gross. Just relax and trust me.”

I nodded and blew out a breath. I could do that.

“Next time I’m going to rim you.” He grinned wickedly and ran the tip of his finger up my length. “You haven’t lived until you’ve had a tongue on your hole.”

My lower body clenched as a vision of Jax with his face between my cheeks flashed in my mind. I wanted that.

“But we’ll work up to that.” He gave me a light stroke. “Tonight, I’m going to teach you the wonders of the prostate.”

Please let it feel good.

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him about how I hadn’t really felt much when I’d tried, but I bit the words back. Even if I didn’t see stars or whatever, I still wanted to try.

He flipped open the cap of the lube and slicked up one thick finger. Fuck. Everything about him was big and strong, and while it turned me the fuck on, it was intimidating as all hell too.

“Relax your body when you feel pressure. I’m not going to push in right away. Just work you open for a bit and let you get used to it.” He stroked my dick slowly, his grip way too loose to do anything more than tease. “When I do, breathe in and bear down. It’s going to feel weird, but it shouldn’t hurt. Tell me if it does, and we’ll find a different way to do it.”

I nodded.

He gripped my balls and gave them a gentle tug. “Ready?”

“Yeah,” I rasped, my throat tight and my chest heavy.

Jax bent over me and sucked my dick into his mouth, encasing it in velvet heat.

“Fuck.” I grunted and gripped the bedspread. His suction was perfect. Hard enough to feel amazing but not so much it brought me to the edge.

Something wet and blunt rubbed my hole. I clenched instinctively at the foreign sensation.

“Sorry,” I muttered.

He popped off my dick and gave me a serious look. “No apologies. However you react is exactly the right way. I’ve got you.”

I relaxed at both his words and his soothing tone.

“You can hold my hair, pull on it. Fuck my face, whatever you want. Remember, I like it rough. I want you to let go and enjoy this without worrying about anything.”

“Okay,” I whispered.

“Now, breathe deep and clear your mind. Think only about how I’m making you feel. That’s it. Sink into it and let me take control.”

He wrapped his perfect mouth around me again. I did as he said, then closed my eyes.

This is Jax.

I carded my hand through his hair, the glossy strands thick as they slipped through my fingers. He hummed around my cock, and a flurry of pulses and zings shot through my entire body.

Something blunt pushed at my hole. I breathed out and forced my lower half to relax.

This is Jax.

He worked me with both his mouth and his finger, taking his time and keeping me right on the edge as he sucked and lapped at my cock. He did this thing where he curled his tongue around my shaft and teased just the underside, and I saw stars.

The tip of his finger pressed against me, then pushed in.

“Fuck,” I croaked. He breached me, then pulled his finger away and sucked on my cockhead like a lollipop.

He kept doing that, pulsing his fingertip inside me. The tease felt incredible, but it wasn’t enough.

Gripping his hair, I spread my legs as wide as I could and moved back on his finger. He hummed appreciatively and slowly pushed inside me.

It felt... strange. Not bad, but not great either. The attention on my dick helped keep me in the moment, and I focused on that as he worked his finger deeper.

He crooked and twisted his finger, and my entire body came alive.

“Holy fuck!” I slapped my hand over my mouth.

Mindful that we were in the dorms and people were all around us, I bit down on my palm to stop the cries from bubbling up in my chest. I’d never been a loud lover, but then again, I’d never felt anything like *this*.

I rolled my hips instinctively, pushing down on his finger, then shoving my dick into his mouth. Jax ran his free hand up my stomach and cupped my pecs.

Pleasure and need coiled inside me, my mind spinning as my orgasm sliced closer. Jax pinched my nipple, and I was *done*.

I came in an explosion of pleasure. Shooting so hard he choked as my ass clenched around his finger. I was shaking and shuddering, nearly convulsing. I bit my hand so hard my jaw ached to keep me from screaming.

Jax pulled off in that millisecond before pleasure turned to pain, then gently slipped his finger out of me.

His fevered eyes met mine.

I lay on the bed, twitching and boneless, my legs spread wide and limp. My brain was broadcasting static, but I had enough wherewithal to reach for him.

He came willingly and lay next to me. Using the last of my energy, I rolled into him. He gripped me around the waist and shifted so I could press my flushed cheek against his strong chest. He kissed my hair as I panted and blinked. I threw one leg over his hips, and his hard dick poked my thigh.

“Holy goddamn fucking shit,” I muttered.

He chuckled and ran his fingers through my hair. I practically purred and leaned into the touch. “Good?”

“I think you broke me.”

“Sorry not sorry.”

“I didn’t know it could feel like that. When I tried, it was okay. But nothing like that.”

“It’s different when someone else does it for you. And it’s even better when that someone has your dick in their mouth.”

I laughed, even as my chest tightened. He’d told me he was a top and didn’t like to bottom. Did he like being fingered?

“I can practically hear the wheels grinding in your brain.”

“Do you like it?”

“Getting blown?”

“Fingered.”

A pause. “Depends.”

“On what?”

“I do it to myself when I want to feel a little something extra, but don’t let other guys do it.”

“Why not?”

“Mostly a control thing. And a trust thing. I don’t like being vulnerable in front of people I don’t have a connection with. Letting someone do any sort of ass play makes me feel vulnerable.”

“But you do it for others?”

“Sometimes. If they want it.” Another pause. “I don’t usually fuck the guys I hook up with.”

“Really?”

Jax and I didn’t keep secrets from each other, but we didn’t talk about what we did in bed. I’d always kept it vague in deference to him not being into women and assumed he’d done the same because until recently, I hadn’t been into guys.

I’d casually mentioned my performance anxiety, but that was more to explain why I didn’t hook up as much as other

guys seemed to.

“Yeah. Sometimes I do if they’re into it and have prepped, but it’s not something I enjoy when it’s spontaneous, not with randoms. Hands or mouths are just as good.”

“Would you let me?”

“Fuck me?”

“I was thinking finger you, but would you? I know you don’t like it.”

“If you wanted to, sure.” He chuckled. “There’s very little you could ask for that I wouldn’t give you.”

My chest squeezed.

“Do you want to?”

“I don’t think so.” I pressed my face into his chest. “I like the idea of doing what we just did if you’d enjoy it and actually want it, but no. Fucking you is hot as a concept, but only because it’s you. Does that make me a bottom?”

“Does that bother you?”

“No?”

“No?”

“I feel like it should. I mean, guys are supposed to be the aggressors and take what they want. We’re supposed to do the fucking. But that’s kind of a straight way to think about things. What’s that word... heteronormative?”

He hummed and sifted his fingers through the hairs at the back of my neck.

“I’m talking in circles. Ignore me.”

“You’re processing.”

“And you’re hard.” I pushed my thigh against his cock, which hadn’t gone down while we’d been talking.

“Keep doing that, and you’re going to end up with a sticky leg.”

Grinning, I circled my thigh over him. My cock chubbed up, and I pressed it against his hip.

He groaned. “You want to come again?”

“Yeah.”

“Get on top of me.” He gripped my hips and pulled me so I was lying on him, our dicks lined up. He reached between us and held our shafts together as he gripped them in his hand. “Fuck my fist so I can feel that big dick against mine.”

I buried my face in his neck and rocked my hips, finding a rhythm. He moved with me. We rutted together like animals, both of us grunting and moaning.

It was dirty and sexy and so fucking hot I came way too fast. He came too, only seconds behind me. Wetness pooled between us as I lay on him, limp and heavy from my second mind-blowing orgasm in ten minutes.

“We should clean up.” He slapped my ass playfully. “Good thing your butt isn’t as big as mine, or I wouldn’t be able to breathe.”

Disappointment clawed at my chest, but I tamped it down and climbed off him. I liked this part almost as much as the sex. He was right. Cuddling was too intimate to indulge in for long. Time to go back to bestie mode.

JAX

W *hat the fuck were we doing?*

I glanced at the back of Matt's blond head. He'd passed out about an hour ago and was sleeping soundly. I, on the other hand, was wide awake, my mind spinning.

So much for not fucking around with my best friend. I smiled derisively into the darkness and rolled onto my side. Matt scooted closer and pressed his back against mine. I might be a bed hog, but he was like a heat-seeking missile, especially lately.

I'd sucked my best friend's dick. Again. And fingered him. He'd asked to blow me, and he'd enjoyed it. A part of me was still in shock that any of this was happening, but a bigger part was worried it would eventually ruin our friendship.

Matt was like me in the sense that baseball was his main priority. Playing ball was our dream, and we'd never do anything to jeopardize our chances of being scouted.

That was the main reason neither of us dated. I had the added hurdle of having to walk a very thin line of discretion because of my sexuality, but Matt was on the same page as me. Romance and dating were complications we didn't need.

I was no stranger to fuck buddies, but the buddy part for me was usually a stretch. I'd had semi-regular hookups in the past, and I'd messed around with a few casual friends over the years, but the fact that Matt and I were so close added a layer of intimacy and comfort to the sex I wasn't used to.

Keeping emotionally detached from the people I fucked was easy when I didn't care about them beyond both of us getting off. Things with Matt were so much deeper. Knowing I was the first guy he'd ever messed around with set off some primal instincts I hadn't known I had. Making him feel good, seeing him enjoying what I was doing to him, was almost as hot as the act itself.

I closed my eyes and tried to clear my mind. I needed to stop obsessing over this and just go with it. We were both adults, we obviously had some wicked sexual chemistry, and we knew what this was and wasn't. We'd set ground rules, and we'd never had trouble communicating in the past.

We could do this. I just needed to turn off the part of my brain that loved to catastrophize and focus on all the worst-case scenarios.

I was a chill guy, but years of moving around and always having to be the new kid had affected me more than I wanted to admit. I didn't form attachments the way others did. Every time we moved to a new town, a new province, I'd gone to school with the same mentality. That it was just temporary. That we'd only be there a few years. Then we'd pack up, and the cycle would start all over again.

When I was young, it hadn't been a big deal. Making friends was easy when you could instantly bond with someone at recess because you both liked dinosaurs or watched the same cartoons.

Middle school was when things started to change. I'd learned to be the outgoing and carefree guy who could waltz into a school and make friends with everyone from the band kids to the mathletes. Confidence and a smile went a long way when every connection you had was superficial.

Damon was the first real friend I'd ever made. The only one who'd not only put an effort into staying my friend when we weren't in the same city or didn't see each other every day but who'd also managed to break down my walls and get me to share the more personal parts of myself with him. I'd felt an

instant connection to him and was closer to him than I was to my brothers.

What I felt for Matt went beyond that. From our first meeting, I'd known we were going to be the best of friends. We'd been introduced during our first team meeting at Rutherford. Him as the junior pitcher, and me as the junior catcher. Coach had told us he planned for us to take over the starting spots when the current crop had graduated, and advised us to get into a groove.

Matt had given me one of his million-watt smiles and started babbling about obscure ball trivia. When the meeting was over, he'd asked if I wanted to go grab lunch together. We'd sat in a small café near campus for nearly three hours, chatting about everything and nothing.

Within a week, we were texting day and night and hanging out whenever we didn't have practice. We'd also been each other's anchor during hell week. The seniors that year had been a bit insane and sneaky as fuck, so Coach hadn't been aware of just how bad things had been. We'd helped each other through it, and it had bonded us in a way that had cemented our relationship both on and off the field.

The bed shifted as Matt rolled over. A heavy arm circled my waist, and a leg pressed against the back of mine. He let out a soft, contented sigh, his hot breath ghosting over my neck.

Matt was a tactile person, and we were no stranger to casual intimacy. But cuddling while we slept was a new development.

He tightened his arm around me, pulling me so I was flush against his body, and brushed his nose over the back of my neck. His dick, hard and hot, pressed against my ass.

Fuck. He felt good behind me. I'd always preferred guys who were as big and strong as me, and Matt's body was a work of art. Feeling all of him like this was as comforting as it was confusing.

Fuck buddies didn't cuddle all night, and nothing about what Matt and I were doing was casual. Yes, it had an end date, but nothing between us could ever be completely casual.

Blowing out a breath, I relaxed into his embrace. We had our team workout in the morning. I needed to get some sleep.



“WAKE UP.”

I snuggled into my pillow and ignored the voice behind me.

“Come on, sleepyhead.” Matt chuckled and slapped my ass under the covers.

“Go away.” I pulled the pillow over my head.

The covers disappeared, and cold air prickled my skin. I shivered and curled up in a ball.

“Such a grump.” Matt’s hand ghosted over my hip, then trailed down my other thigh. “I know one way to wake you up.” He slid his hand to my cock and gripped my morning wood through my sleep pants.

“Fuck,” I muttered into the sheets, the pillow still over my head as nerves deep in my body zinged and woke up.

“Come on. Show me those pretty eyes, and maybe I’ll do something with my hand.”

“No fair.” I shoved the pillow off the bed and looked over my shoulder at him.

He lay behind me, propped up on his elbow. His eyes gleamed with lust, and a little smile tilted his lips.

He dropped a quick kiss on my cheek, then settled behind me, spooning me tight like he had last night. With a low groan, he slipped his hand under the waistband of my pants and fisted my hard shaft.

“Fuck.” I reached back and grabbed a handful of his ass. I loved how it felt in my hand, so tight and firm.

Matt stroked me, his grip strong. His erection bumped against my ass. I rolled my hips, fucking into his hand and rubbing against him.

“Fuck,” he muttered and pressed closer. “That feels good.”

“How much time do we have?” I rasped, my voice still hoarse from sleep.

“About thirty till we have to leave.”

“Want to try something a bit different?”

He paused his strokes. “Yeah. Sure.”

“Get on your side, and we can do a sixty-nine.”

He groaned and let go of my cock.

We sat up and shoved our sleep pants down around our asses. Matt stretched out on his side, his abs rippling and his cock jutting out, hard and inviting.

I flipped over. Big hands grabbed my ass and hauled me into position. Wet heat wrapped around my cockhead, and a tongue dipped into my slit.

“Holy fuck.” I gripped his base and swallowed him down. His taste exploded on my tongue—sweet and salty and so perfectly him.

He bucked his hips and moaned around my length. The vibrations sent a flurry of pleasure racing through my body. Fuck. I wasn't going to last if he kept that up.

We sucked each other, our paces frenzied and our hips thrusting. I was mindful not to push too deep, but Matt didn't hold back. He fucked my throat like a man possessed, grunting and groaning around me as he used my face. I fucking loved it.

Matt came hard and shoved his dick deep down my throat. The combined sensation of him coming and the vibrations on my cock were too much, and I came in an explosion, shuddering and shaking as he swallowed me down.

“Awake now?” he teased.

“You could say that.” I chuckled and sat up.

He did the same, smiling happily. “I’ll skip my shower. We don’t have time for both of us to take one.”

“Take one with me.”

“Yeah?” He perked up.

“Yeah.” I pointed to my bathroom. “It’s not like we have to worry about getting caught.”

He shuffled closer and pressed a soft kiss against my lips. I kissed him back, not letting myself get too deep into it, since we had to get to our workout. He pulled away a moment later, grinning goofily at me.

My chest clenched. I liked knowing he was smiling like that because of me.

We climbed out of bed and peeled off our clothes. Matt followed me into the bathroom and leaned against the counter as I started the water.

“Your ass is ridonculous.”

“Ridonculous?” I arched a brow at him and wiggled playfully. “You mean it’s so magnificent you need to make up a word to describe its awesomeness?”

He slapped my ass cheek hard enough that I yelped and jumped away.

“Ow.” He shook out his hand. “That thing should come with a warning label.”

“Watch the pitching hand.” I rubbed the stinging spot. “Imagine trying to explain *that* to Coach Nix.”

He snickered. “Sorry, Coach. Gotta rest the old mitt ’cause Crawford’s ass hurt it while I was smacking it.”

“Love how you twisted it so it’s *my* fault you hurt yourself slapping *me*.”

“Wouldn’t have slapped it if it wasn’t such a huge target. Totally your fault.”

“You’re just jealous.” I shoved the shower curtain back and stepped under the spray. “Get that skinny butt in here.”

“Jealous of what?” He got in behind me and gripped my hips. “Not being able to find pants that fit? Having every pair of jeans turn into skinny jeans?”

I bumped my ass back against his crotch. “Admit it. You’re totally jelly.”

He ground his half-hard cock against me. “Keep that up, and we’re going to be late again.”

“Ugh.” I reluctantly pulled away. “Damn Cooper and his cockblocking.”

Matt’s laughter was drowned out as I stuck my head under the water to wet my hair.

“We’d have more time if you didn’t pull your Sleeping Beauty routine every damn morning.” He pinched my ass. “Switch places with me. It’s fucking cold with you hogging all the hot water.”

The shower stalls in the jock dorms were generous with deep tubs that were perfect for soaking sore muscles in, but it was a tight squeeze with the two of us constantly trading places to share the water.

“I’m not sure that was any quicker than doing two separate ones.” Matt smirked and rubbed one of my towels over his wet skin.

“Probably not. But I’ll take any excuse to see you naked a bit longer.”

His eyes softened, his expression going shy. “Yeah?”

“You’re fucking hot.” I tossed my towel onto the counter and cupped his face in my hands. “And I don’t just mean your looks.”

His cheeks flushed, and his blue eyes were bright and hopeful.

“All of you is beautiful, babe.” I pressed a soft kiss against his lips. He sighed, and when I pulled back, he was smiling.

I dropped my hands and slipped back into bestie mode. “We’d better hurry.”

He nodded grimly and opened the bathroom door. “Last thing we need is to get in shit for being late again.”

MATT

K *nock knock knock.*

I nearly dropped my phone. Shaking off the daze I'd fallen into, I stood and hurried over to the front door.

"Delivery for Eliot Hawthorne." A bored-looking delivery guy held up a square box and a signing pad.

I opened my mouth to tell him he had the wrong house but stopped myself at the last second. Eli's last name was Hawthorne. Was Eliot his first name? I'd assumed it was Elijah.

"I can sign for it."

The guy looked at the box, then at me. "Are you Eliot?" His expression clearly said he wanted me to say yes so he could be on his way.

"Sure am."

He wiggled the pad at me. "Sign here."

I scribbled something on it with my fingertip. He clicked a few buttons and handed me the box.

"Thanks," I said to his back as he hurried back to his truck, which was double parked in front of the house.

I looked at the return address on the box as I closed the door. It wasn't from Amazon or any store I'd heard of. Whatever, not my business. I made my way back into the living room to put the box on the coffee table but paused. I should bring it up to his room.

Was he home? Other than us, the house was empty. Alex was spending Christmas break with Kai at his place, and Beck and Finn had left yesterday to go visit Beck's parents.

I hadn't heard him at all in the few hours I'd been awake, but that wasn't unusual.

Not thinking too hard about it, I took the stairs two at a time and made my way to the third floor, which wasn't really a floor but more of a converted attic that had been separated into a tiny-ass bedroom and an even smaller bathroom.

Tucking the box under my arm, I knocked on his bedroom door.

I hadn't noticed that it wasn't completely latched, and the force of my knocks pushed it open.

I stood frozen in the open doorway and stared into the room.

The room was unnaturally bright. Several ring lights were set up around his cot-like bed. A phone was attached to a tripod facing the bed, where Eli knelt, naked and gripping his cock as he stared at me in horror.

"Sorry!" I fumbled the box as I grabbed for the door. My fingertips snagged the knob, and I yanked it closed so hard the walls rattled.

"Shit!" Eli's muffled curse filtered through the walls.

Fuck. What should I do? Drop the box and run? Stay and wait to see what he'd do? Yell that I was sorry and tell him about the package?

While I was still trying to get my brain and body connected, the door swung open.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean for it to open," I blurted and shoved the box at him. "This came for you, and I was just knocking to see if you were home and... sorry."

He'd wrapped a towel around his waist, but instead of looking shocked or embarrassed, his face was eerily blank.

"Thanks." He took the box and glanced at the label.

What was that on his arm? Some sort of white disk?

“You’re probably wondering what that was.” He lifted his eyes to my face.

“You don’t owe me any explanations.”

“Might as well. I’m not ashamed. Come in. I’d rather not do this in the doorway.”

I followed him into the tiny room and closed the door behind me, then leaned against it awkwardly. The ceiling sloped at a sharp angle, and he had to bend over as he put the box on his desk.

“What do you think I was doing?” He adjusted the towel so it stayed snug around his narrow hips and moved to stand a few feet from his bed.

Jesus fuck, he was cut. I’d never seen Eli in anything other than long sleeves and pants. His frame was slender to the point of being thin. I’d assumed he was naturally skinny.

Nope. His muscles were lean, but he was sculpted.

“See something you like?”

I snapped my eyes up. Heat prickled my cheeks. “Sorry. I...”

“Expected me to look different?” He tilted his head, a little smirk pulled at the side of his mouth.

“Little bit, yeah.”

“Most people do. So, what do you think you saw me doing?”

“Making a video for your... someone.”

“You’re half-right.” He crossed his arms over his chest, and his biceps popped. “I *was* making a video, but for a customer.”

“Customer?” I asked dumbly.

“I sell videos online. That was a custom request from a repeat customer.”

“Like OnlyFans?”

“That’s one of the channels I use. I also cam.”

“Cam? Like do... stuff... online while people watch?”

He nodded.

“Wow.”

“You don’t approve?”

“No. I mean, yes?” I tried to find the right words. “I just mean wow. That’s cool.”

“You think?”

“Yeah. I mean, good for you. How did you get into that, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Interested in starting a channel?”

“No!” I flushed. That had been way too loud. “No. I’m way too self-conscious to do that.”

“Really?” He quirked his eyebrow. “You’d make a killing. People love the jock look. Especially blonds.”

I chuckled, and the last of my shock and nerves settled. “I can barely handle having my picture taken fully clothed.”

“Huh, guess you can’t judge a book by its cover.” He smiled, his eyes finally softening and losing that guarded blank look he’d had since he opened the door.

“I’m sorry I ruined your shoot or whatever it’s called.”

“Not your fault. I should have checked the door. I thought you were out. And no one ever comes up here, so.” He rolled one shoulder. “Live and learn. And to answer your previous question, I kind of fell into this. I needed a job that wouldn’t interfere with school, and someone my brother works with has an OnlyFans. I looked into it and discovered camming. Figured I’d give it a shot.”

“You like it?”

“I like it enough to keep doing it.”

“When did you start?”

“A few months after I turned eighteen.”

“How old are you?”

Eli had one of those faces that could look super young or extremely mature based on his mood.

“Nineteen. Almost twenty.”

“Are you a sophomore?” Jesus, he was young.

“Senior.”

“That math ain’t mathing.”

He chuckled, his expression relaxing again. “I skipped a few grades.”

“A few? Damn, you must be really smart.”

“So they tell me.”

Something in his tone told me he was done talking about that subject, and I glanced around his room. It was smaller than I’d thought. The ceiling sloped on three sides, making the room feel claustrophobic. I also had a sloped ceiling, but the angle was gentler. He had just enough room for his bed, a desk, a tiny fridge, and a dresser. He didn’t have a closet, just a small stand-up wardrobe that barely fit in the space next to the door. The room was devoid of any personal items except for a stack of books on his desk next to his laptop. Not a single picture, knickknack, or article of clothing was visible. The room was easily a third of the size of mine.

“Does this pay well?” I waved at the lights, which still illuminated the room, not sure why I was still talking. He didn’t seem embarrassed or impatient for me to leave, even in his towel with all his gear still set up.

“Sometimes. It depends on how generous people are feeling or how many videos I sell.”

“Do people know?”

“No.” His eyes shuttered.

“I promise I won’t tell anyone.”

“Not even your better half?”

“Not if you don’t want me to.”

“I’d appreciate that.”

“I’ll let you get back to... work.”

He chuckled and ran his hand through his long hair, pushing it back from his face. “Might take a bit to get back in the groove, but thanks.”

The move caused his abs to tense, and goddamn, they looked good. A perfect six-pack and sexy-as-fuck Adonis belt peeked out from where the towel had slipped low on his hips.

“I thought you were straight?” He rubbed his hand down his stomach in a move that could have been teasing but also completely benign.

“I thought I was too.” I snapped my mouth shut. Shit. I hadn’t meant to say that.

“Really?” He dropped his hand, all traces of teasing gone from his voice. “That has to be confusing.”

“You have no idea. Or maybe you do. Not asking,” I said quickly, “just not assuming.”

“I don’t broadcast it, but I’m bi.”

The matter-of-fact way he said it helped calm some of my rising panic. I didn’t know Eli well, but he’d always been nice to me. He had this air of aloofness about him, but he also radiated calm.

I needed to talk to someone about this. The only person I had was Jax, but considering he was part of my confusion, I could use an outside perspective.

I’d thought about talking to Alex. We were pretty close. We’d had plenty of conversations while gaming, and he’d helped me through a few panic attacks at the beginning of the year.

But Alex had his own issues. I didn’t know the details, but I knew Kai was a big reason he smiled and seemed genuinely happy for the first time since we’d met. He didn’t need me dumping my shit on him when he was finally in a good place.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Eli asked softly. “I know we’re not close, but sometimes that can make it easier.”

“You don’t mind?”

“Wouldn’t have offered if I did.” He moved through the room in that graceful, gliding way of his and turned off the ring lights. He reminded me of a dancer or a butterfly.

I shook my head at that strange thought.

He sat on his bed and motioned to his desk chair. “Unless you prefer to stand.”

I sat, the metal groaning under my weight. “Is this thing going to hold me?”

He chuckled. “It should. I’ve done a lot more than just sit on it.”

My brain stuttered.

“Sorry. I can be a bit glib without realizing it. I’m not great at talking to people.”

“You’re fine.” I settled on the chair. “Don’t censor yourself around me or anything. I’m sure I’ll say lots of totally random and weird shit the longer you know me.”

He smiled and leaned back on his hands.

Did he want to get dressed? He made naked content for a living, so maybe nudity didn’t bother him?

“When did you know?” I asked.

“That I’m bi?”

I nodded.

“I didn’t have some big moment where it clicked or I went ‘that explains it’ or anything like that. For the longest time, I didn’t think I was anything. All the other kids in my class were getting crushes and acting stupid around each other, and I just didn’t care.”

I kept quiet as he toyed with the terrycloth of his towel. “I was seventeen the first time I looked at a girl and felt actual attraction toward her. Before, I could recognize someone as

attractive, but I never felt any sort of physical draw to them. A few months later, I felt that tug toward a guy. I decided to test things and made out with a girl I knew. It was fun, and I could have gone further if it had been worth the effort. Then I kissed a guy my brother knows, and it was the same thing. I liked it, and my body was interested in more, but again, not worth the effort.”

“Can I ask a personal question?”

“You want to know if I’m still a broken toy who isn’t interested in sex but is a sex worker?”

“No,” I said quickly. “Nothing like that. I was just going to ask if you think that maybe your attraction to people would be stronger if you had an emotional connection to them.”

He tilted his head. “Is that how it works for you?”

“I think so?” Heat prickled my cheeks, but something about how factual and open Eli was helped me push past my embarrassment at admitting this. “I find girls attractive, have since I was a teenager. But I don’t get all hot and bothered for them the way other guys seem to. Sex is mostly meh for me. Like I can get off, but it’s an effort. I spend most of the time in my head, trying to focus on being good. But then Jax—” I snapped my mouth shut. Shit. We’d agreed to keep things quiet.

“You keep my secret, and I’ll keep yours. A little mutually assured destruction, yeah?”

I laughed. He was funny. “Yeah. Anyway, I’ve never had issues looking at a guy and thinking they were good looking or whatever, but I never thought about being with one. Not once. Never felt that same level of attraction I do for girls. Then Jax and I were dared to kiss at a party, and it was... everything.”

“Have you done more?”

I nodded.

“And it’s good? Better than when you were with girls?”

Another nod.

“Have you ever dated anyone?”

“No. Too busy with baseball.”

His expression clearly said he knew I was a liar who lied, but he didn't call me out on it. “And this thing with Jax is a friends-who-fuck thing? Or is it more?”

“A friends thing.”

He nodded, his eyes calculating, like he was doing some complex math in his head. “It makes sense it would be better with him. He's your best friend. You trust him. Attraction doesn't mean compatibility. Maybe the girls you were with could get your dick up, but they weren't what you needed. If Jax can give you something you've been missing, and you both want it, then maybe you don't need to overthink it.”

I bit my lip. What he said made sense.

“What else is there? Remember, mutually assured destruction.”

“I always thought I was a vanilla guy. Like, even the porn I watch is boring. But I saw a few things the other day that were hot...”

“But something about them makes you feel ashamed to like them?”

“Little bit.”

“Is this about the toy you bought?” He widened his eyes. “I didn't mean to embarrass you while you're... figuring stuff out.”

“It's fine. And that was funny as fuck. I'd have done the same thing if it had been for any of you. But no, this isn't about that. I saw a video where a guy was wearing lingerie, and it was hot, but I guess I can't shake years of conditioning. Of being told that guys are a certain way and should only be into certain things. I don't judge anyone else for being into whatever, but it feels wrong for *me* to be into it.”

“That makes sense, considering the world you live in. Sports culture is all about gender conformity. Guys are supposed to be big and strong and aggressive. To be so-called alpha males. Which is hilarious if you think about it because

actual alphas are all about taking care of their pack and would be the ones handing out water and snacks while making sure everyone is okay, not yelling about how tough and dominant they are while demanding people bow to them and their will. I assume you were a phenom? Good at ball from the first time you picked one up?”

The sudden topic change confused me for a second, but I nodded. He had a good point about the whole alpha thing. I made a mental note to look more into that later.

“You got shoved into a tiny box as a child, and all these expectations and demands were put on you when you were still too young to understand why. You grew up in the culture, and the only way to survive it is to keep conforming and living by their rules, their expectations. You never had a chance to become your own person because you had to become what they wanted you to be.”

“I never thought about it, but you’re right. My entire life, I’ve tried to be what everyone else wants me to be. The perfect ball player, the party boy, the one who’s always up for a laugh or a good time and doesn’t take anything seriously.”

“Sounds exhausting.”

“It is.” I sighed and leaned back in the chair.

“I don’t know much about the Greek life, but I understand pack mentality and peer pressure. I’m guessing that world is similar. That you have to fit into yet another box to feel accepted.”

A heavy weight settled in my chest. “That’s exactly how I feel. Like I’m always playing a part and being someone else. Like no one will like me if they saw the true me. Saw how messed up I am. How I’m not all the things they want me to be.”

“Do you put that front on with Jax?”

“No. He’s the only person I’ve never pretended with.”

“So wouldn’t he be the perfect person to push those boundaries with? To dip your toes into whatever it is that turns you on and see how it makes you feel in a safe environment?”

“It sounds so logical when you say it that way.”

“Emotions aren’t logical. And reprogramming yourself isn’t something that just happens. You have to push yourself outside of your comfort zone. You need to feel all those negative, icky emotions in order to get over them. But you can only do that if you feel safe and can actually *feel* them and not just notice them and pretend like you’re dealing with them.”

“Your brain is amazing.”

He flushed and plucked at his towel.

“You literally just analyzed my entire life with a few questions and explained all the shit that’s been twisting me up for weeks in a way that makes sense. I feel better than I have in a long time.”

“I’m good at seeing patterns and connecting the dots on things most people overlook.” He gave another one-shouldered shrug. Was that a tell for when he was uncomfortable? “I’m glad I could help.”

“Maybe you should extend some of that dot-connecting to yourself.”

“What do you mean?” He looked up at me, his green eyes wide.

“That comment you made about being a broken toy. Something tells me I wasn’t the only one shoved into a tiny box at a young age.”

His cheeks flushed pink, but he didn’t break eye contact.

“Maybe you’re still figuring out who you are and what you like, if anything, because you’ve been so busy being the person you think you’re supposed to be. And so what if it turns out you don’t like sex or have limited interest in it? Nothing wrong with that at all. It doesn’t make you broken or different or weird.”

“But what if I am broken?” he whispered. “I don’t see the world the same as most people. I’m different, like, really different. What if that’s the reason I’m this way?”

“Do you feel like anything is missing from your life?”

His eyes shuttered, and he looked so damn young. The urge to wrap him in a blanket and tell him it would be okay hit hard.

“Let me rephrase that. Do you feel like you’re missing anything by not wanting sex the way you think you should?”

“Sometimes.” He blinked rapidly, his eyes on the floor. “Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to be with someone. To feel that kind of connection.”

“Is it the physical or the emotional part you wonder about the most?”

“Both.” He bit his full bottom lip and looked up at me, his eyes shiny. “I don’t have a lot of people in my life. Usually, I don’t care, but sometimes it’s lonely.”

“Have you ever been with someone?”

He shook his head.

“Have you had the opportunity to?”

“I get a lot of offers in my line of work. People who want to make content together, customers who want to buy sex with me. It’s a daily occurrence at this point.”

“What about people who want you, Eli, and not your work persona?”

He shook his head.

“So maybe you just need to meet someone who wants you for you. Or maybe not. Maybe having deep friendships and emotional intimacy is what you crave. It took me twenty-one years to realize that I needed more than just a stiffy to enjoy sex. Maybe you’ll get your aha moment that will help you figure out what you need in your life soon too.”

“You’re not who I thought you’d be.” He gave me a wobbly smile. “As much as I pride myself on looking at the entire situation and not jumping to conclusions, I did that with you. I thought you were just another jock, but you’re so much more than that.”

My neck heated. No one other than Jax had ever seen me as more.

“I’m good at pretending.”

“So am I.”

Silence stretched between us.

“I should go. Sorry to bring you down when you have work to do.”

“It’s okay. You apologize a lot.”

“My bestie is Canadian. He rubbed off on me.”

Eli snickered.

I chuckled and stood. “I mean, he’s done that too. Want to hang out with us tonight?”

“Really?”

“Yeah. We’re probably going to chill and watch a movie or something.”

“Yeah, that sounds fun. I just don’t like imposing.”

“This is your house too. If we want alone time, we have my room or his. And not to be weird or anything, but I like hanging out with you. I’d say we’re friends, right?”

He nodded, his eyes so wide he had that young, innocent look again.

“So come hang out with us anytime you want. And me.” I shot him a rueful smile. “I’m so used to everyone acting like Jax and I are a single unit I do it unconsciously now too. We’re going to be here all break together. It’ll be fun to have the chance to hang out and get to know each other better without all the distractions of school and a full house.”

He smiled, and I was taken aback by how beautiful he was as his eyes lit up and his entire face glowed with happiness. Eli was gorgeous no matter what, but he was breathtaking when he smiled.

I gave him a little wave and hurried out of his room before I said something stupid or weird. As I thudded down the stairs,

I pulled my phone out of my pocket and checked the time. Jax was coming over in about twenty minutes. Just enough time to take a shower and mull over everything Eli had said.

He was right. Jax was the only choice to help me get over my mental hang-ups. I just needed to muster the courage to tell him what I wanted. I wasn't afraid he'd laugh or be grossed out or anything. Nope. My hesitation was all about me and my issues.

As much as Jax was helping me figure out my kinks and sexuality, he couldn't help me with my confidence. That was something I needed to find on my own.

JAX

“Coach is a sadist,” Matt grumbled as he pushed the door to his house open.

“He was today.”

“Why do you look like you just went for a swim?” Eli asked as we trudged into the living room.

“Coach had us running drills in the rain like a psycho.” Matt paused, and I nearly ran into his back.

I didn’t know Eli well, but I liked the kid. We’d watched a few movies together over the weekend, and he was insanely good at video games. Playing against him was like playing a computer in hard mode.

“Why?”

“No clue. But apparently, freezing our nuts off in a monsoon is part of his master plan of making us better ball players.”

“Can you tell he grew up in the desert?” I clasped Matt’s shoulders and gave him a little shake, hoping to break his bad mood. “It’s balmy out there, nowhere near freeze-your-nuts-off degrees.”

“Said the Canadian.” Matt elbowed me in the side. “And of course the hot water in the changeroom wasn’t working, so we couldn’t even take a shower after.”

“Yuck.” Eli scrunched up his face.

“We’re ordering pizza for dinner. Want some?” Matt asked. “We always get way too much.”

Eli’s face fell. “Thanks for the offer, but I can’t.”

Something niggled at the back of my mind. It wasn’t the first time he’d said he couldn’t eat something, and not that he didn’t want to. And I’d seen Eli put his phone against his arm, then look at something on the screen a few times in the past couple of weeks. My lab partner last year had done the same thing when they’d checked their blood sugar.

Did Eli have diabetes?

“I always order a salad to try and offset all the cheese and carbs, but this one”—I bumped Matt with my shoulder —“never helps me eat it.”

“Salad isn’t food. It’s what food eats.” Matt hip-checked me. His wet shoes slid on the floor, and he pitched to the side. “Shit!”

I helped him right himself. Eli laughed. “I like salad.”

“Great.” Matt slung his arm over my shoulder. “You and Mr. Giant Ass over here can be healthy, and I’ll get extra cheesy bread.”

“Garden salad with grilled chicken okay?” I asked Eli.

“Yeah.” He smiled. “That would be great.

“What kind of dressing do you like?”

“Any sort of oil and vinegar is good. Um, about what time do you think the food will get here?”

“About thirty, forty minutes okay?”

He nodded.

“Can you get the delivery if it comes before we finish cleaning up?” Matt asked. “I’ll put the order in when we get upstairs.”

“Sure.”

“See ya in a bit.” He beamed a smile at Eli, who grinned back.

“Since when do you always order a salad?” Matt asked as we came up to his door. “I mean, you do sometimes but always?”

“Do you remember a few weeks ago when we were watching *The Witcher*?”

“Yeah.” He shoved his door open and tossed his duffle inside.

“I saw Eli put his phone against his arm and check the screen. He’s done it a bunch since then too.”

“So?”

“So I think he wears a blood glucose monitor.” I threw my bag so it landed next to his.

“Like for blood sugar?”

“Yeah.”

Matt looked thoughtful. “Every time Beck’s mom sends cookies, he always says he can’t eat them. And I did see something on his arm the other day. A plastic disk or something like that.”

“That sounds like the thing my ex-lab partner wears. I forget what it’s called, but it’s for checking blood sugar.”

“Shit. Do you think he has diabetes?”

“Maybe. I didn’t want to ask because it’s not our business, but you told me he’s into clean eating and seems to eat on a regular schedule. I don’t know a lot about living with diabetes, but my lab partner told me both are super important for people with type 1.”

“Poor kid. That’s a shitty thing to have to deal with. Did you know he’s a senior and he’s only nineteen?” Matt led me into the bathroom.

“Seriously?”

“Yup.” He peeled off his wet hoodie and dropped it on the floor. It landed with a loud *splat*. “Gross.”

“Where’s your phone? I’ll put in our order while you complain about the rain some more. I swear you’re like the Wicked Witch of the West screeching about how you’re going to melt.”

Matt dug into the pocket of his sweats. “Here.” He pulled out his hand and flipped me the finger.

“Am I wrong?” I shoved my hand into his pocket and yanked out his phone.

“Totally wrong.” He grinned and tugged off his shirt.

“Start the water.” I unlocked his phone and opened the app.

Matt shoved his pants down, then turned and wiggled his ass at me.

“Keep that up, and you’re going to end up with my dick between those cheeks,” I warned and tried to focus on our dinner order and not on the sexy-as-fuck tan line that cut across Matt’s back.

“Promises, promises.” He stepped out of his sweats and sighed dramatically.

I laughed. “Now that’s a sexy look.” I motioned to his feet. He was still wearing his shoes and baseball socks.

He glanced down and chuckled. “Maybe not the best choice for trying to start stuff.”

I finished ordering our food, making sure to get the confirmation, then put the phone down on the counter.

“You feeling frisky?” I stripped off my shirt and hoodie in one go.

“Always.” He waved at his hard dick, then bent to take off his shoes and socks.

It took a bit of fumbling to get naked in the small space without knocking into each other. When I’d finally managed to peel off my wet socks, Matt was slowly stroking himself, his eyes roving over my body.

“Start the water.”

He stuck his hand into the shower and turned it on. I stepped up behind him and settled my hard dick in his crease as he fiddled with the temperature.

“Can’t think straight when you do that.” He dropped his head against my shoulder.

“There’s nothing *straight* about this.” I rocked my hips and slid my erection over his hole.

He let out a low moan.

“Is the water good?” I kissed his shoulder.

“Water?” he asked dazedly.

I chuckled and squeezed his hips. “Come on. Let’s get nice and clean. I want to try something with you.”

I loved how he didn’t even ask what it was. He just yanked back the shower curtain and stepped inside.

We’d had plenty of practice showering together since that first time in my room. I usually ended up spending most of the time waiting for my turn under the spray, but I didn’t mind. Watching the water cascade down his perfect body as he soaped up was one hundred percent worth it.

Steam rose around us as we washed the rainwater and sweat off us. When we were clean, Matt looked at me, his eyes blazing.

“What was your idea?”

“Turn around and put your hands on the wall.”

He licked his bottom lip and did as I said.

I gripped his hips and pressed my body against his. He leaned into me, his wet skin sliding against mine. “Pop that ass out for me. I’m going to show you just how amazing rimming feels.”

He widened his stance and arched his back. I ran one hand over his full cheek, squeezed, then continued down to the back of his thigh.

“Ready?” I kissed just under his ear.

“So ready.” He turned his face, his lips parted in invitation.

I kissed him hard and deep. Possessive desire rolled through me as he swiped at my tongue and nibbled at my lips. My cock pressed between his ass cheeks and settled against his slippery skin.

I slid my other hand to his dick and gave it a slow stroke. He was as hard as I was. I did it again.

“Jax.” He pulled away from our kiss. His pupils were blown, his cheeks pink from either the hot water or arousal.

“I’ve got you. Just relax and remember that I’m going to enjoy every second of this. That’s all you need to think about.”

He nodded, then faced the wall.

Hoping to help him relax, I trailed my hands down his ripped back, tracing the muscles.

“You’re so hot.” I dragged my hands over his sides, then across his chest. “So big, so strong. Everything about you turns me on.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” I kissed his shoulder. “Ready?”

“Ready.”

I traced my fingertips through his crease, pausing when I reached his hole. Gently, I circled one finger over it.

He shuddered and spread his legs a little wider.

Oh yeah, he was ready.

I trailed my lips down his spine as I slowly lowered myself to my knees. The water was hitting my upper back now, but I ignored it and kissed first his left cheek, then his right one.

Gently, I split him open and ran my tongue down his crease, the touch featherlight and teasing. Using just the tip, I circled his hole.

He moaned and pushed his hips back, pressing against my tongue.

I didn't do this often. For me, rimming was intimate. Knowing Matt had never experienced this before set off some primal instincts I hadn't realized I had. I loved that *I* was the only one who got to pleasure him like this.

Until he moves on to the next guy.

I shoved that ugly thought aside and focused on the moment, licking harder. Matt's legs shook as he pushed back against me. Needy whimpers fell from his mouth.

"Jax, need to jerk." He grunted and bent over more, completely opening himself up to me.

I reached between his legs and grasped his dick by the base. He was rock hard, his skin slick and slippery with precum.

"Fuck, yeah." He panted, moving in time with my tongue as I lapped at him. "So fucking good."

I stroked slowly, not wanting him to come yet. He shoved his hips back, and I stabbed my tongue inside him.

The bellow of pleasure he let out echoed in the bathroom. Thank fuck Eli already knew about us.

"More. Please more," he begged, rocking his hips back so he was fucking himself on my tongue.

Goddamn, he was so hot like this. I'd always liked taking charge, but I'd never gotten this turned on just from pleasuring my partner. My cock throbbed, my balls already tight and high as heat pooled in my groin.

I wrapped my free hand around myself and stroked us off at the same pace. Matt was a blubbering, panting mess, rolling his hips, his dick pulsing as I worked him over.

"Holy fuck. Jax. I'm so close." He scrabbled for purchase, his hands sliding over the wet tiles.

I sped up my strokes, making sure to time them with my tongue. As much as I wanted this to last, I was too close.

His entire body shook, and his legs trembled as I kept up my onslaught.

“Fuck!”

His ass clamped down on my tongue, and his cock throbbed in my hand.

That was enough to trigger my orgasm, and I came in a rush. Pleasure slammed into me like a brick wall.

I stroked us through it but pulled my face out of his ass so I could gulp in ragged breaths. My head spun, and my entire body pulsed.

“Holy fucking shit.”

Matt’s shaky voice brought me back to reality. He was leaning against the wall and breathing hard.

Carefully, I stood and wrapped my arms around his trembling body. He sagged against me, and I held him tight.

“You okay?” I whispered in his ear.

The water at my back cooled, and I knew from experience we had about twenty seconds before I’d be blasted with ice-cold water.

“Just a sec.” I let go of him and shut the water off. “Come here.” I pulled him back into my arms and hugged him. I’d noticed he liked to cuddle right after an orgasm, and truthfully, I liked it too.

He gripped my arms and laid his head against my shoulder.

“You definitely killed me,” he muttered. “Death by rimming. Here lies Matt Landry. Taken down by his bestie’s tongue.”

I snickered and kissed his wet hair. “I take it you’re a fan?”

“You could say that.” He chuckled. “Damn. My legs are still shaking.”

“I’ve got you. Just lean back until you’re steady.”

“What about you? I can blow you when my body stops shorting out.”

“I’m good. Came when you did.”

“Really? You liked it that much?”

“Oh yeah. Seeing you enjoy it, feeling it. I almost blacked out there for a second.”

“That’s really hot.” He shivered. “Pretty sure I did black out.”

“Cold?”

The steam had dissipated now that the water wasn’t running, and the chilled air prickled my skin.

“Little bit.”

“You good to stand?”

“Yeah.”

I carefully let go of him, stepped out of the shower, and grabbed one of the towels off the rack. I handed it to Matt, then got the other for myself and dried off.

He wrapped it around his hips.

“I think I’ve always been attracted to you. I just didn’t realize it.”

“You think so?” I went for casual. He’d been attracted to me this whole time?

“Yeah.” He stepped out of the tub. “I never really checked you out or anything, but I’ve always thought you were attractive. And I’d feel these... pulls for you. You’d smile or laugh, and I’d get these little flutters of something. Like happy little bubbles. Other times you’d move a certain way, or your quads would pop after a workout, and I’d feel something flaring up inside, like little zings of heat deep in me. I never considered it could be attraction, but I think it was.”

“Have you felt that for other guys?”

“Sort of? I’ve felt the flutters before, but those didn’t feel like happiness. More like curiosity. But I’ve never felt that heat for anyone. Just you.”

I swallowed hard and tried to keep my face neutral.

“This is such a mind fuck.” He rubbed his towel through his hair. “I feel like I should be freaking out. You just put your

tongue in my asshole. That's weird, but it was fucking amazing." He sighed and tossed his towel over the shower curtain rod. "We should hurry. Dinner will be here soon."

Feeling helpless, I watched as he opened the bathroom door and strode into the hallway, his naked body glistening with water.

How the fuck was I going to give this up?

MATT

T *hud.*

“Shit!” I jumped at the loud bang echoing in the room.

“Sorry.” Eli stood a few feet from where I was sprawled on the couch, balancing an armload of books. He tucked the stack under his chin, then slowly bent his knees. The position looked awkward as hell, and the stack shifted slightly, becoming even more precarious.

“I got it.” I hurried over to get the book that had fallen for him.

“Thanks.” He stood and smiled wryly.

I glanced at the cover of the book, then put it on top of the stack. “Doing a research project?”

“Not with these. I need to return them to the library.” He sighed. “Looks like I’ll be making two trips.”

“Need a drive?”

He blinked at me like a confused owl. “Really?”

“Sure. I’m just killing time. I don’t mind driving you if it’ll save you a trip.”

“Thanks.” He smiled, a big happy one that lit up his face. “I’ve got a list of books on reserve. It’ll only take a few minutes to check these back in and get new ones.”

“No worries.” I waved dismissively. “Let me grab my keys, and we can head out.”

A minute later I came thundering down the stairs, my keys and phone in hand. I tucked both into the jacket I’d thrown on and took half the stack from Eli’s arms.

“I really appreciate this,” he said as we headed out of the house.

“It’s no problem.” I balanced the books in one arm and locked the door. Using the key fob, I unlocked the car.

We climbed in, and I handed him the books.

“Can I ask you something?” I cranked the car and looked over my shoulder so I could back out of the driveway.

“Sure.”

“If I wanted to make a video for someone, what should I do to make it look good?”

“Like the technical aspects of filming? Or are you looking for pointers on how to pose and stuff like that.”

“Both.”

“If you’re not going to be holding the phone, put it on something stationary. Nothing ruins a video faster than a shaky screen. Lighting is big. Phones make things look darker, so you want the room to be bright, but make sure you’re not backlit. And straight on or looking slightly down is best for showing off your body and face. Low and angled up is good if you’re doing dick or ass shots.”

“Okay.” I focused on the road. “That’s not intimidating at all.”

“I’m no expert, but I have a feeling that... whoever you send it to will appreciate it no matter what the lighting looks like or which angles you use. Don’t stress about the technical stuff and just make sure you’re relaxed and try to have fun. It’s easy to fake it when whoever is watching it doesn’t know you. It’s not so easy when the person can read you.”

“True.” I bit my lip. “I’ve never done anything like this before. I mean, I’ve snapped pics of my dick before. Pretty sure every dude with a phone has done that. But I’ve never shown them to anyone. And I’ve never even considered making a video.”

“Sometimes stepping outside your comfort zone is scary. But you’ll never know if you like something until you try it.”

I snickered.

“What?”

“Jax said something like that to me. You’ll never know until you try. That’s what started me on this whole thing. I tried it, and I liked it. Liked it even more when he was involved.”

Eli clutched his books against his chest and looked out the window. “I’m glad you have that. A safe person to explore things with,” he said softly.

“Can I ask you another question?”

“Sure.” He didn’t turn to look at me.

“Do you have diabetes? It’s none of my business, but I was just wondering because of some stuff you’ve said, and...”

“Yeah. Type 1.” He sighed heavily. “I told Finn, but I should have told all of you. I’ve got a handle on it, but there’s always the chance that something could happen and I might need help.” Another deep sigh. “But I don’t really want to talk about that now.”

“That’s fine,” I said quickly.

We lapsed into silence. I felt like an asshole for asking, but it felt like an important thing to know, especially since we’d be in the house together for the rest of the break.

I turned into the student lot closest to the library and found a spot near the front. With the break in full swing, most of the campus was deserted.

Eli was subdued as we made our way inside. He went right to the desk and started chatting with one of the librarians. I

leaned against the wall near the entrance and thought about what we'd talked about in the car.

Jax was my safe person. If I was going to step outside my comfort zone and explore things, he was the only choice.



I LOOKED AROUND MY ROOM, a flutter of nerves exploding deep in my stomach. The last time I'd tried to use the dildo Jax had ordered for me had been a lesson in humiliation. I hadn't had the balls to try again, but I wanted to now. The thought of sharing this moment with Jax, letting him see me use it for the first time while he wasn't here, was exciting. Did I have a performance kink? Or maybe I just liked the idea of performing for him?

Jax had told me he had a bit of a voyeur kink, and a video was the ultimate form of voyeurism, right?

I'd just spent the last twenty minutes testing different phone angles to see which would work best. I didn't have a tripod or anything, and I felt a bit weird asking if I could borrow one from Eli, so leaning it against a stack of books on my desk was as good as it was going to get.

My entire bed was in the frame. I zoomed the camera in a bit. That should be good.

I'd turned the main light on, as well as my desk and bedside lamps. The harsh light did nothing to calm my nerves, but I pushed through them. I wanted to do this; I'd feel better once I started. Hopefully.

I set the timer for ten seconds, then sat on my bed. The camera began recording, and I drew in a deep breath. I'd gone back and forth on whether I should say something or just start. My mind was completely blank as I stared at the tiny phone screen. Guess I wasn't going to be saying anything.

I'd already taken off my shirt, and I rubbed one hand over the leg of my jeans and lifted the other to gently stroke my chest. I'd noticed that Jax had a thing for both my hands and

my pecs. The contact felt good, and as I dragged my fingers over the left one, my nipple pebbled.

Closing my eyes, I ran my hands over my chest and torso, pretending they were Jax's hands. He always seemed to know exactly how to touch me, and his strong, firm grip never failed to drive me wild with desire.

We'd been hooking up for a few weeks now, and it was like we couldn't get enough of each other. I'd never been as horny as I was when he was close. My body buzzed with expectation every time his hot gaze roved over me, and every touch made me burn hotter for him.

I'd also discovered that I loved sucking dick. Feeling him press down my throat, hearing his dirty commands or low grunts as he used my face, got me hot. Even just jerking him while he kissed me like he never wanted to stop was enough to get me close. And Jax seemed to love it as much as I did. The looks he'd give me as he sucked my dick were so dark and primal, possessive, even. And the reverent way he touched me made me feel not only wanted but needed.

I'd never had this kind of hunger for anyone. We were insatiable. I fucking loved it.

Moaning softly, I rubbed one hand over my bulge and opened my eyes. The screen on my phone was too small to see any details, but that was probably for the best. This way I could check to make sure I was in the frame without getting distracted.

Awareness prickled at my skin as I stood and slowly undid my jeans. The nerves were still there, but there was something exhilarating about knowing I was being recorded. That Jax would be seeing this later, maybe jerking off while he watched.

My dick tented the front of my boxers comically, and I pushed them and my jeans down, letting them rest midthigh. With my erection free, I gripped it by the base and gave myself a few lazy strokes. The contact felt good, and I focused on that as I worked myself over.

I closed my eyes and thought about last night. Jax had pushed my knees up around my armpits, holding me open with his hands as he'd gone to town on my ass. The position had been weird at first, but my reservations had quickly melted away as he'd switched between blowing and rimming me, keeping me right on the edge until I'd come so hard I'd seen stars.

When he'd climbed onto my chest and fed me his dick, I'd still been in a post-orgasmic daze. Watching his big body flex as he held himself over me had gotten me half-hard again, and the possessive way he'd held my hair and whispered all sorts of filth about how hot I looked and how hard I was going to make him come had only prolonged my afterglow.

“Fuck.” I squeezed my dick and opened my eyes. A thin stream of precum dripped from my tip. I swiped it up with one finger, then slipped that finger into my mouth and sucked it clean.

Needing more, I turned so my back was to the camera. I did a quick over-the-shoulder check to make sure I was in the frame, then picked up the lube I'd set out.

I slicked up two fingers, held myself open with one hand, and traced my slippery fingers over my hole. Little zings of pleasure crackled under the surface of the sensitive spot, and I slowly pressed one finger inside.

I didn't particularly like this part, but I pushed through the initial resistance until my finger slid halfway in.

Keeping my eyes closed, I pretended it was Jax's finger prepping me. Only he wasn't prepping me for more fingers. Nope, in my fantasy, he was prepping me for his cock.

My lower half relaxed, and I slipped a second finger inside. The stretch felt amazing, and now that I knew what to do, I angled my fingers so they dragged over my prostate. Shivers of need flickered through me as I finger fucked myself. I wasn't being gentle or going slow as I worked myself open. I wanted it hard and deep. I wanted to feel it, to feel him.

I hit my spot in just the right way, and my cock throbbed. I pulled my fingers free. Time for the big guns.

I grabbed the dildo off my bed. I took my time lubing it up, then did one last check to make sure I was still in the frame.

Breathing out, I spread myself open and teased the tip of the dildo over my hole. The soft silicone felt amazing, and the last of my nerves disappeared. I hadn't even touched my dick, and I was still rock hard.

I imagined Jax sitting at my desk, watching me in real time. He'd be staring at me with lust-drenched eyes. Maybe he'd have his dick out or would he settle for rubbing it through his pants?

I pushed the tip of the toy against my hole and bore down. The head breached me.

"Oh!" I gasped. Slowly, I kept working it inside, breathing deeply. When it was all the way in, I gave a little test thrust. The toy slid over my spot.

"Fuck." I grunted.

Ready for more, I gently tugged the toy almost all the way out, then pushed it back in. The slick slide felt amazing, and I did it again. And again.

Moaning up a storm, I fucked myself with the dildo. Jesus, if a toy felt this good, then I could only imagine how incredible the real thing would be.

My cock leaked and pulsed as pleasure moved through me, pinging between my ass and my dick. It lit me up inside, and I gave in to the overwhelming need for more.

Bending over at the waist, I caught myself on the bed with my free hand. I couldn't spread my legs any wider because of my jeans, and the sensation of being trapped did funny things to my insides. Maybe I wasn't as vanilla as I'd thought.

Using the last of my brain power, I searched for the little button on the base of the toy and pushed it.

"Holy shit!" I bit my lip so hard I tasted metal, and another cry bubbled up in my chest.

The vibrations pulsed inside me, low and perfect, teasing my inner walls and my spot. Jesus fuck, Jax was right. It felt fan-fucking-tastic.

Greedily, I pushed the button to set it to the middle speed. My knees nearly buckled. Hot breaths sawed out of me as the vibrations hit my spot just right. My legs shook, and my inner walls clenched around the toy.

“Holy shit. Fuck. God damn. Jesus *fuck*,” I muttered, or maybe shouted. I was so far gone I had no idea if I was being loud or not, and I didn’t care. All I cared about was how good the toy felt and how much I wished it was Jax’s cock.

I fucked myself on the toy, babbling nonsensically. My entire body reacted and pulsed, pressure built deep in my balls, and my ass tingled in a way I’d never felt before. Holy shit. Was I about to come?

I twisted the toy and angled it down. A crack of pleasure, like lightning, shot through me, and I was *done*.

My balls drew up, and my dick throbbed. I was coming, shooting onto the bed, my ass clenched around the still buzzing toy.

I fought to stay upright, but my knees were weak, and my thighs quaked. I collapsed onto the bed. My orgasm didn’t just hit. It tore through me, and I lost myself to the pleasure and gave myself over to the moment.

A twinge of pain brought me back to reality, and I blinked dazedly.

I’d ended up with my chest on the bed and my ass on my heels. The toy was still buried deep inside me, and the vibrations hurt my overly sensitive prostate.

Wincing, I pulled the toy out and fumbled to turn it off. I tossed the thing aside, then shakily got to my feet. I stumbled over to my desk, my wobbly legs and the jeans still around my thighs making an already difficult task even harder, and I grabbed my phone. When I had it, I lumbered back to my bed and fell on the mattress in a tangled heap. I angled the phone so my face filled the screen.

I looked not only fucked out but blissed out as well. “You were right. Again.” I sighed contentedly and rolled onto my back. “I imagined it was you. That the toy was your dick. I want that. I want you to fuck me.”

A niggle of self-consciousness filtered through the haze of my orgasm. I should stop talking before I said something really embarrassing. I ended the recording, then opened my text thread with Jax.

He was chilling in his room, waiting for his family to call.

Matt: still waiting?

Jax: yeah, what’s up?

Matt: I’m going to send you something

A flutter of nerves tickled my stomach. Was I really going to do this?

Jax: something like a dick pic?

Matt: kind of

Matt: more like video

Jax: really? That’s so hot

Matt: you haven’t even seen it yet

Jax: doesn’t matter what’s on it. The fact that it’s you will make it the hottest thing I’ve ever seen

His words helped me push through the last of my trepidation, and I sent the video to him. It took a long-ass time to load. When it was done, I shut off my phone screen and hid my face in my hands.

Was he going to watch it right away? How long was it? A few minutes, maybe more? I’d lost track of time and had no idea. I could always check my gallery but couldn’t bring myself to look.

After what felt like an eternity, my phone pinged. I unlocked it and opened our texts. A picture loaded.

His dick, spent and soft, lay against his stomach. Cum streaked his abs and chest.

Jax: I came before you did

Matt: yeah?

Jax: oh yeah, so fucking hot. Every second of it

Jax: did you mean it?

Matt: that I want you to fuck me?

Jax: yeah. We haven't talked about it since that first night

Matt: I meant it. I'm ready and want it. Want you

Jax: the only thing stopping me from getting hard again is the fact that I have about three minutes until my family FaceTimes me. Instant boner killer

Matt: sorry not sorry

Jax: I need to clean up. See you when I'm done?

Matt: sounds good. What do you want for dinner?

Jax: whatever as long as there are least 2 vegetables

Matt: ugh. Can't it be cheat day? We're on vacation

Jax: one vegetable, final offer

Matt: you suck

Jax: I will when I get over there

Matt: now I'm going to be hard waiting for you

Jax: sorry not sorry

Jax: be there in a bit

My screen went dark, and I tossed the phone onto my bed. I should clean up too.

I glanced at the box with the lingerie I'd bought on my desk. My first attempt at stepping outside my comfort zone had gone better than I'd hoped. Maybe the next time would be even better.

JAX

The locker room echoed with the excited chatter of thirty-five ball players who'd just finished their last practice before the holidays. It was the twenty-first, which gave the team from now until the twenty-seventh to go home. We had to be back for the twenty-eighth and had practices scheduled right through the rest of the break. Then we'd be buckling down and working our asses off until the season started mid-February.

I couldn't fucking wait. The team was in a rare position where we'd only lost two starters at the end of last year. That meant the starting line-up was stacked with veteran players who'd had the better part of two years to get into a groove.

"Anyone driving to the airport today?" Adams shouted.

"When you gotta be there?" Petey asked.

I tuned out their conversation as they worked out details. As far as I could tell, everyone had plans to go home.

A twinge of longing ricocheted through my chest. It sucked not to be able to go home, but my gaze snagged on a familiar blond head, and the loneliness faded. A smile tilted my lips.

Matt was deep in conversation with Logan about something, probably pitcher talk. As much as I'd miss my family, I was pumped that we were spending the break together.

One thing I hadn't let myself think too closely about was how this was the beginning of the end. One more semester, one more season, and nothing would ever be the same. Some of us might get recruited, but for others, this was the end of baseball.

The thought was sobering. After spending the last ten years working toward this, putting my blood, sweat, and tears into the game, this was it.

"You good?" Matt bumped me with his shoulder.

I shook my head. "Yeah. Fine. Just thinking."

"A dangerous pastime." He grinned. "Ready to go?"

I shouldered my duffle and nodded.

We shouted our good-byes to the players still chattering away and headed to the parking lot.

"I still don't understand why you parked here," I grumbled. He'd chosen one of the furthest spots from the entrance, and when I'd asked him about it, he'd just shrugged and said he had his reasons.

He shot me a grin and spun his keys around his finger. "Because I knew it would turn you into a grumpy baby."

I rolled my eyes and slung my arm over his big shoulders. He froze.

Shit. This kind of casual affection between us wasn't unusual, but we were still in full view of the stadium, even if we weren't anywhere near our teammates.

I moved to pull my arm away, but Matt leaned into the touch and pressed closer.

"You're a cuddle bug, you know that, right?" The heat from his body seeped into my side, and a deep sense of calm settled in my chest.

"Said the guy who was lying on top of me like a cape when I woke up this morning." He chuckled, the sound soft and affectionate. "I could barely breathe."

"Payback for you kneeling me in the balls the other night."

“Not my fault your big ass got in the way when I was trying to get on top of you.”

“How is *my* ass responsible for *you* digging your knee into my balls?”

“Because it’s distracting!”

“I thought my dick was distracting?”

“All of you is distracting.” He used the button on his key fob to unlock the doors. “You get naked, and my brain short circuits. I can’t be held responsible for my actions.”

I let go of him before I did something stupid, like kiss his cheek. “Yeah, well, I can’t be held responsible for my actions when you get naked either. Thank fuck athletes like it rough.”

He grinned and tossed his bag into the backseat. I did the same, and we climbed into the car. Matt looked around the lot.

“Cars tend to work better if you start them,” I said.

He turned to me, a lusty gleam in his eyes.

“I want to suck you.” He rubbed my bulge.

“Here?”

“Yeah. Right here.”

A small part of my brain, the part that was still thinking logically, was throwing up red flags at how reckless this was. But another part of me was digging how out in the open we were. Adrenaline and need flowed through me as Matt licked his lips.

With shaking hands, I pulled open my pants and fished my cock out of my boxers. I was already hard and ready.

“Fuck, yeah.” He gripped my base. “I was thinking about this the whole last hour of practice.”

He sucked me into his mouth, wet heat enveloping my cockhead.

“Fuck, babe. That’s it. Just like that.” I ran my fingers through his soft, damp hair as he eagerly worked me over.

Keeping one eye on our surroundings, I sank into my seat, melting into the leather as my best friend slurped and licked my cockhead. His car was roomy but not exactly big enough for two horny-as-fuck ball players to be giving road head. He was curled over the center console, his ass up and one leg on the seat to balance him while the other was awkwardly jammed under the steering wheel.

“So good.” I ran my hand down his spine, then over the swell of his ass. “You feel so fucking good. You’re going to make me come so hard.”

He groaned around my cock, and I slid my fingers down the back of his jeans. They were too tight to do more than tease the top of his crease, but he didn’t seem to mind.

Matt hollowed his cheeks and held still, his sign he wanted me to take over and fuck his mouth. My thighs screamed from exertion, but I ignored them and thrust up into his willing mouth.

The thrill of being outside, right in view of the stadium, and the fact that Matt had initiated this, fueled my desire, and I rushed toward my release before I was ready.

“That’s it, babe. Take that cock. You want my load?” I panted and squeezed his ass over his jeans.

He moaned low and deep, the sound needy and so fucking hot my balls tightened and my thighs tingled.

“Yeah, you do. So fucking hungry for it.” I grunted and shoved up into his mouth. He swallowed around my cockhead and rubbed his tongue against the underside of my shaft. “Fuck, babe. I’m coming.”

I emptied down his throat, and he swallowed greedily, bobbing over my spurting dick. My head spun, and my entire body flushed hot as I rode the waves of pleasure.

“Too sensitive.” I guided him off my cock. He sat back in his seat, grinning goofily, his eyes bright and his cheeks flushed.

“Give it to me.” I motioned to his dick.

He settled in his seat and pulled out his cock. I tucked myself away, then gripped him tight.

“Look at me,” I rasped and stroked him hard and fast, twisting at the head the way I knew he loved. “That’s it. I want you to remember who makes you feel good. Who gets you off.”

He whimpered and clutched the car door so tight his knuckles went white.

“You’re so hard for me.” I rubbed the pad of my thumb over his slit.

“Jax,” he gasped, his eyes wide and bright with desire.

“That’s it, babe. Let go and trust me. I’ve got you.”

His eyes rolled back in his head as his entire body shuddered. I glanced around one more time to make sure no one was close enough to see us, then bent over the center console and swallowed his cock, taking as much of him as I could.

He jerked and grabbed my hair, holding me in place as he came hard. I swallowed every drop he gave me. He babbled nonsensically. I loved that he was able to let go and be vocal with me. That he trusted me enough to stop overthinking every little thing and just feel.

“Holy shit,” he panted as I pulled off him. “We’re so doing that again.”

I chuckled and rubbed my side where the console had dug into my ribs. “Maybe next time we can try the backseat so we don’t end up on the injured list.”

He snorted and tucked himself away. “Imagine explaining that to Coach? Sorry, Coach. Crawford’s gotta sit out the next few weeks ’cause he bruised a rib blowing me in my tiny-ass car.”

“I’d definitely be coming up with a cover story if that was the case.”

Matt glanced around, then leaned in and gave me a quick kiss. “It’s your turn to cook.”

“I cooked yesterday.”

“And?” He quirked an eyebrow and cranked the car. “You’re better at it than me. And you know you’ll eat healthier if you’re the one who makes it.”

“That’s called weaponized incompetence. You know that, right?”

“It’s not weaponized incompetence. It’s flat-out manipulation.”

“Did you pick up the stuff on my list?” I asked as he pulled out of the parking spot.

“I had it delivered yesterday.”

“You’re so lazy.”

“I’m helping the local economy.”

“Right,” I said dryly. “By sitting on your butt and making someone else do your shopping.”

“The store is getting my business, the delivery person is getting work, and I tip well. So really, I’m doing everyone a favor.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

He winked at me. “You love it.”

“No clue why.”

“I asked Eli what his plans are for Christmas.”

“Isn’t he local? Wouldn’t he be going home?”

“He’s local, but he said he’s not doing anything. He mentioned something about seeing his brother on Christmas Eve but said he’d be around otherwise.”

“That’s really sad. Does he have other family?”

“No clue. He doesn’t talk about anything personal. I invited him to have dinner with us on Christmas Day. That okay?”

“Of course. No one should be alone on Christmas. I guess that means I’m cooking again?”

He batted his eyelashes at me. “Pretty please with a blow job on top.”

I snickered. “You think my culinary skills can be bought with blow jobs?”

He shot me a *duh* look.

“Fine. But I want you on your knees while I’m cooking.”

“Wouldn’t that be a bit dangerous? Maybe we should save the sexy stuff for when there are no knives or heat sources around.”

“Good point.”



“TAKE THAT, SUCKER!” Matt shouted as his on-screen forward darted around my D-man.

“Oh, you think that’s gonna work,” I growled and leaned forward, all my attention on the TV in front of us.

“You’re as slow as my grandma,” Matt’s fingers flew over the controller. “And about as coordinated as her too.”

“I’m sorry, but who’s up by one?” I elbowed him as he shifted into my space in an attempt to throw off my concentration.

“Only because you’re a cheater cheater pumpkin eater.”

“You need to up your trash talk.” I laughed. “Pumpkin eater?”

“Fuck, yeah!” Matt jumped up, his arms raised in a victory pose. The lamp over my goal lit up. Shit. His stupid pun had distracted me. “How’s that pumpkin taste now?”

“This is the weirdest analogy ever.” I yanked him back down by his belt loop. “Prepare to be decimated.”

He snort-laughed. “Yeah, right. You and your slow reflexes are totally going to win. Not.”

I managed to intercept one of his passes and whooped as he shouted a curse. The clock on the game countdown read forty-five seconds.

“Get ready to lose, Landry.”

“In your dreams, Crawford.”

The next thirty seconds were a blur of trash talk and flying fingers as we battled it out. The room faded away as my entire being zeroed in on the game and beating Matt.

I took a shot, going for the upper left corner. Matt’s weakness was the upper right. He tried to overcorrect, but the damage was done.

The puck flew into the net, the lamp lit, and the faux crowd went wild.

“Fuck, yeah!” I jumped up and did a stupid little victory dance just to rub it in. “Who’s the winner now, Landry?”

“You haven’t won yet.” He gritted his teeth and glared at the screen.

The fake clock had less than ten seconds on it. Anyone else would have admitted defeat, but Matt was a competitive fucker and wouldn’t rest until the clock ran down.

The ref dropped the puck, and eight seconds later, the game was over, and I was the official winner.

“Thank you, thank you.” I stood and pretended to hold up a trophy. “I’d like to thank my family for believing in me. My teammates for all their hard work in making this victory possible. And to my opponent. Thanks for sucking donkey balls, sucka.”

Matt grabbed the pocket of my hoodie and yanked me down so my ass landed on the couch. He tossed his controller aside, then lunged at me.

Taken by surprise, I froze.

He used my hesitation against me. His big body landed on mine, pinning me back against the couch, which groaned under our combined weight. He scrambled on top of me and

straddled my hips. He circled my wrists and held them above my head.

“You were saying?” He grinned down at me, his chest heaving, his hard dick scraping against mine.

We’d tussled around before, but never like this.

“I was saying thanks for sucking, sucka.” I shifted my hips and tensed my muscles.

“Who has the upper hand now, huh?”

“That would be me.” I twisted my arms and ripped them out of his grasp. Grabbing him in a bear hug, I rolled us over so he was under me.

“How the fuck did you manage that?” He blinked up at me.

“I have three brothers. Now, you were saying something about having the upper hand? How’s that going for ya?”

“Better than it is for you.” He did this full-body log roll move. The next thing I knew, I was on the floor and staring up at the ceiling with him looming over me.

“The fuck?”

“Did I ever tell you I was on the wrestling team in junior high?” He shifted so his legs were frogged out and pinning mine to the floor. “Won most of my matches.” He lay on my chest and gripped my wrists. “Only stopped because my baseball coach was worried I’d get hurt.”

“Fine. So you’ve got me. What are you going to do with me?”

Having him over me like this set my nerve endings on fire. The adrenaline from our wrestling buzzed under the surface of my skin, and my dick throbbed.

“Do you have supplies on you?”

My brain stuttered. “Supplies?”

“Lube.” He grinned wickedly. “And a condom if you think you should wear one.”

“You want to *now*? Here?”

“Why not?” He dropped his gaze to my mouth. “You seem like you’re *up* for it.” He rolled his hips and scraped his dick against mine.

“Is Eli around?”

As much as I wanted to be inside him, I didn’t want to scar his roommate by doing it in the living room if there was a chance he’d walk in.

“Nope.” He leaned down and brushed his lips over mine. “He said he won’t be home for a few hours.”

“Fuck,” I breathed.

He swiped his tongue over my bottom lip, then gently tugged on it with his teeth.

Lifting my head, I fit our mouths together. He kissed me eagerly, delving his tongue between my lips, while he rocked his hips over mine.

I couldn’t move any part of me other than my head, and my stomach swooped. I’d always liked when things got a bit rough, but I’d never been with someone I trusted enough to let them manhandle me.

Matt kissed me hard and deep, rubbing off on me like I was his personal sex doll. His needy whimpers made my already rock-hard dick ache.

He let go of my hands, and I pushed up so I was sitting on the floor with him straddling my lap. He buried his hands in my hair, gripping tight, and ravished my mouth with deep, hungry kisses.

I managed to get our shirts up under our armpits, but he wouldn’t stop kissing me long enough to let me yank them off. I ran my hands over every part of him I could reach, rubbing and squeezing his muscles. I loved how big he was. We didn’t have to be careful with each other, and his strength was a huge turn-on.

He pulled away from the kiss and dragged in several gulping breaths. I took the opportunity to rid us of our

sweaters and T-shirts.

“Get that fine ass on the couch.” I slapped his asscheek as hard as I dared. “On your knees with your pants around your thighs.”

He groaned and scrambled off me to do as I said, and yanked his pants down.

“Hands on the back of the couch.” I ripped my pants open and shoved them so they rested under my ass. “Look at you.” I gave myself a few lazy strokes. “So hot, all spread out and waiting for me.”

“Jax,” he whined and arched his hips.

“What do you want?”

“Fuck me.” He looked over his shoulder at me, his eyes wild with desperate arousal. “Need it. Need you.”

Jesus fuck. I wasn't going to survive this.

“Stay just like that, and let me get you ready.” I nudged his crease with my dick and rubbed my hand down his back.

“Kay.” He crossed his arms on the back of the couch and rested his cheek on them. The movement popped his ass out even more, and the sight was so damn sexy I had to draw in a deep breath to try and center myself.

I pulled my wallet out of my pocket and thumbed out the packet of lube I kept in there. “Do you want me to wear a condom?”

“Not unless you want to. I'm negative.”

“Me too.” I dropped my wallet on the floor, where it landed with a *smack*. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah. Want to feel all of you.”

With a low growl, I knelt behind him and split him open with my hands. Not giving him a chance to brace himself, I swiped my tongue over his hole.

“Oh fuck,” he moaned. “Yes, so good.”

All thoughts of going slow flew from my mind as he pressed back against my tongue. Giving in to the overwhelming lust rolling around inside me, I went to town on him. I licked and sucked and stabbed at his hole, taint, and balls. All the while, he pushed back against my face and begged for more.

My arousal was threatening to take over, and I pulled my face from between his cheeks and grabbed the lube.

“Ready for my fingers?”

“So fucking ready.”

His voice was wrecked and thready. *I'd* done that. *I'd* made him feel good.

I ripped the packet of lube open with my teeth, then slicked up three fingers. I was a big guy, and the last thing I wanted was to hurt him. I rubbed the rest of the lube onto my cock, then smeared what was left on my fingers over his hole.

“There you go. Relax and let me prep you, babe.” I pressed the tip of one finger against his waiting hole. “Stroke yourself, but don't come. Not until I'm inside you.”

He sighed and gripped his leaking cock. Then he opened up to me.

Carefully, I worked first one, then two fingers inside him. I made sure to stay away from his spot so I didn't overwhelm him.

“Do you want three?” I rubbed his ass cheek with my free hand.

“Yeah.”

Taking my time, I gently pushed a third finger inside him, moving in little pulses so the stretch would be gradual.

“Fuck,” he muttered.

“You okay?”

“Yeah, you just have big-ass fingers.”

“I have a big-ass dick too.”

“And a big ass.” I twisted my fingers inside him, and his chuckle turned into a moan. “Oh, there.”

“Here?” I teased and rubbed his spot.

“Shit yeah.”

I stood and pressed against his ass, still rubbing his spot. He wriggled and clenched around me.

“Fuck. I’m going to come if you don’t quit that.”

“Ready for my cock?”

“Yes!”

Slowly, I pulled my fingers out of him. His hole was shiny and relaxed and so damn inviting. Gripping the base of my cock, I slowly rubbed the head over him.

“Stop fucking teasing and start fucking fucking me,” he grumbled and tried to push back on my dick.

“So eager.” I chuckled. “Maybe I like teasing.”

“You’re a sadist.”

“And you’re impatient.” I lined myself up with his hole. “Breathe out and bear down. It’s going to feel weird and awkward. Tell me if it hurts.”

“Athletes don’t complain about pain.”

“We’re not on the field, babe. This is just you and me, and I want us both to enjoy this.”

“Okay.” He looked over his shoulder at me. “I promise I’ll tell you.”

“Good boy.” I stroked his back. “I’ll go slow so you can get used to it. Just relax and let me take care of you.”

His eyes flashed with vulnerability. Then he nodded, arched his back the slightest bit more, and looked over the back of the couch.

Holding his hip with one hand, I slowly pushed into him and popped through his outer ring.

“Holy shit,” he gasped. “Jesus Christ, you’re huge.”

I paused, my cockhead holding him open. “Is it okay?”

“Yeah. It’s weird but good. Give me more.”

Chuckling, I rolled my hips, pushing in another half inch.

Having him bent over the couch wouldn’t have been my choice for our first time. The view of his strong back and incredible ass was amazing, but I wished I could see his face. I missed the sensation of his skin against mine, of his arms and legs wrapped around me.

Most of the sex I’d had was in this position, and it felt wrong to be doing it with Matt like this. With the other guys, I’d wanted it impersonal. I hadn’t wanted the extra intimacy of seeing their faces, but Matt wasn’t some random. We might just be fucking around, but he was my best friend. He deserved to feel wanted and seen and not like he was just an ass I was fucking.

“Let’s try it a different way.”

“What?” He looked at me sharply. “It feels good.”

“I want you to ride me. That way you can control the speed and how deep I go.”

He opened his mouth like he was going to protest but closed it. “Okay.”

I pulled my cock out of him and stepped back. He climbed off the couch on shaky legs, his cock half-hard.

“Take your pants off and get on top of me.” I shoved my jeans and boxers down, then kicked off my shoes so I could tug them off.

I sat on the couch, my legs spread wide and my ass on the edge of the cushion. Matt tugged off his shoes and pulled off his pants but paused, his hands in front of his crotch.

He’d gone soft.

“Come here.” I shifted my legs to make room for him to stand beside me.

He blushed bright red and shook his head, his eyes on the floor.

“Babe. Look at me.”

He lifted his head and peeked at me from under his lashes.

“It’s natural for you to be nervous, and I’m sure the break in the action isn’t helping. But I’m going to tell you something that isn’t exactly a widely known fact about sex between men.”

He swallowed but didn’t look away.

“Not all guys can stay hard during sex. Not when they’re bottoming. It doesn’t mean there’s something wrong or that they’re not enjoying it. It’s perfectly normal. Do you want to keep going?”

He nodded.

“Then you have two choices. You can bring that gorgeous dick over here and let me suck it for a while, or you can jerk off over me and see if that helps you relax. You don’t have to be hard for me to fuck you. You just have to want it.”

“I want it,” he whispered.

“That’s all that matters to me.”

He came to stand beside me but angled his hips away so I couldn’t take him into my mouth.

“What if I can’t come while you’re in me?”

“Then we’ll find another way to get you there. Fingers, my mouth. Whatever you want. And if you’re uncomfortable or this doesn’t work for you, that’s fine too. We’ll stop and try something else.”

He let out a frustrated grunt. “I hate that I’m ruining this.”

“You’re not ruining anything.” I rubbed my fingers through the soft hairs on his thigh. “You’re perfect just the way you are.”

Slowly, he shifted his hips so his cock was in front of my face.

Soft or hard, he had a beautiful dick. I ran my tongue down his shaft and gently teased the tip into his slit.

He sighed and ran his fingers through my hair.

I took my time licking and worshipping him with my mouth. I loved going down on him, and I made sure to show him with my movements just how much I was enjoying this.

I rolled his balls in my palm, teasing the globes as I sucked him. He chubbed up a bit, then slowly grew until he was pressing down my throat.

He pulled out of my mouth. "I'm ready."

Holding his hips, I guided him down so he was straddling my lap.

"Reach behind you and hold my cock in place. That's it. Now line yourself up."

He shifted his hips around. The tip of my cock slipped inside him, and we both moaned.

"Hold on to me and sink down." I gripped his cock and gave him a few slow strokes. "Take your time."

He lowered himself, and I slid in another inch. "Jax," he whispered.

"That's it, babe. You're doing so good."

He sank down a bit more, his gaze on my lips.

I wrapped my hand around the back of his neck and tugged him down. His mouth met mine with a soft sigh. I sucked on his bottom lip as he sat the rest of the way down so his ass rested on my thighs.

He whimpered against my mouth. I let go of his hip and focused on stroking and kissing him as he rocked over me.

His dick was hard and slick in my hand. Hopefully, he'd gotten out of his head and could relax enough to fully enjoy this.

Even if he couldn't, I'd meant what I'd said. We'd find another way to get him off if he couldn't come this way.

I loved feeling his skin as he wrapped his big arms around me and tugged me close. His mouth moved over mine at the

same speed as his hips shifted over my dick. He was taking me in short, quick thrusts. He clenched around my cock and moaned into our kisses. Tendrils of pleasure coiled deep in my body.

He moved faster, lifting further off me as he rode me in earnest. I gripped his ass and tried to help him while I focused on stroking and kissing him.

This was what I'd wanted. To feel all of him. To be able to kiss and hold him as we came together for the first time. I felt bad for pumping the brakes and causing him to lose focus, but I knew deep in my soul that this was what we both needed.

Matt rode me like a man possessed, his dick pulsing in my hand. We were moving so fast and breathing so hard we couldn't even kiss.

Heat and awareness pooled in my junk, and my entire body tightened. Fuck. I was close. I stroked him faster and changed the angle of my hips so I'd hopefully hit his prostate better.

“Jax.”

A pulse of need shot through me at his lust-drenched tone, nearly triggering my impending release.

“That's it, babe. Make yourself feel good on my cock,” I rasped. “Fuck, you're gorgeous. You're going to make me come so hard. You want that? To feel me fill you?”

He jerked like he'd been electrocuted. A strangled cry tore from his lips as wetness shot over my hand. His walls rippled around my dick, squeezing and pulling me in as he ground down on my lap.

I opened my eyes. He was staring at me, his blue eyes bright and filled with aroused wonder. I came with a loud grunt, shaking and shuddering under him as he clutched me tight.

Being able to see his pleasure, knowing he was seeing mine was so hot, and another mini orgasm rocked through me. Matt covered my mouth with his and kissed me, swallowing my cries.

We kept on kissing through the haze of pleasure that descended on us. Slow, languid kisses that came from a place of deep satisfaction.

I ran my hands up and down his strong back, letting myself get swept away. My cock softened, then slipped out of him.

He winced and pulled away from our kiss. “That felt weird.”

Some of my load fell out of him, forming a wet pool on my leg.

“Sorry,” he mumbled and tensed.

“None of that,” I assured him. “Knowing my cum is in you is fucking hot. Feeling it is even hotter. Nothing about what we do together could ever be anything other than a turn-on.”

“I saw that going differently in my head.” He sat back on my thighs and smiled wryly, his arms still draped over my shoulders.

“Did it feel good?”

My heart clenched. He’d come, and it had *felt* like he’d enjoyed it. But had that only been a physical reaction? Had he gotten stuck in his head?

“Really good.” He smiled shyly. “It’s a lot messier than I thought it would be. But I really liked it.”

“Me too.” I glanced around the living room. “We should get dressed. Eli’s chill, but he doesn’t need to see this.”

Matt chuckled and climbed off my lap, wobbling a bit. I steadied him with a hand on his hip. “I feel like a baby deer. Who knew riding dick was that much of a workout?”

I snickered and stood. “At least we have an alternative for leg day if we can’t get to the gym.”

“*I* do.” He gave me a pointed look as he tugged on his boxers. “What are you going to do? You’re the one who *needs* leg day.”

“Maybe crouch over your face while you lick me?” His jaw dropped, and I grinned. “I bet I can hold my stance while

you put your tongue in me.”

Challenge flashed in his eyes as he grabbed his jeans. “You think?”

“Definitely.”

“I bet I could have you on the floor and begging to come in five minutes.”

“You sure you want to make that bet?” I did up my jeans and swiped my shirt up off the couch.

“Fuck, yeah.” He put on his hoodie. “Would you let me?”

“If you wanted to.”

“Do *you* want me to?”

I pulled on my hoodie, then flopped onto the couch. “Yeah. I’ve never let someone do that to me, but I want to try it with you.”

He looked down at me, his expression calculating.

“What?”

Slam.

The front door closed.

Matt whirled around just as Eli strode into the living room, looking as perfect and nonchalant as always. Did he ever have a bad hair day?

“Hey.” Matt flushed.

“Hi.” He paused. “I’m just grabbing something. I’ll be out until late.”

“Oh, okay.” Matt glanced at me. “Have a good night.”

“You too.” He smiled and gave us a little wave, then swept out of the room.

“Want to go upstairs?” Matt asked.

“Sure.” I stood and followed Matt up the stairs.

We made a quick stop in the bathroom to clean up, then went to his room.

“Lie down.” He pointed to his bed and closed the door.

“Okay.” I climbed onto his bed and lay back.

“On your stomach.”

Chuckling at his tone, I flipped over.

“Move up so you’re on the pillows.”

“Someone’s in a bossy mood.” I wiggled up the bed and grinned at him.

“I want to try something.”

He got on the bed and knee-walked over to me. He straddled my legs, then lay down and nestled his cheek against my ass, letting out a sigh.

My cock pulsed and chubbed up.

“Comfy?” Hopefully, that came out breezy and casual and not like I was popping wood.

“Don’t like the jeans.” He sat up and moved off my legs. “Take them off.”

Sitting up, I did as he said. He took my jeans and tossed them onto the floor.

“Are you going to give me something to wear?” I flipped over to lie back down.

“Nope.” He slapped my ass.

“It’s December.”

“Suck it up, princess.” He grinned and shoved my legs apart. “Besides, aren’t you the hearty Canadian? You’re used to blizzards and freezing your nuts off. I thought the winters here were balmy?” He lay down and rubbed his cheek against my ass. “That’s better.”

“They are balmy.” I ignored my dick, which was ready for round two. “But I usually wear pants.”

“Too bad. You’re my new pillow. Deal.”

“You know you’re driving me crazy, right?”

“Yup.” He lifted his head and squeezed my ass in his big hands. “But that sounds like a you problem.”

“So this is how it’s going to be from now on, eh?”

“It is.” He jiggled my cheeks playfully. “Your fault for having such a big ass. I’ve been holding back for *weeks*.”

“Such a martyr.” I popped my hips a few times, bumping his chin.

“Behave, pillow.” He slapped my ass, then rested his cheek on it again. “You put your dick in mine. The least you can do is let me cuddle yours.”

“You can cuddle it anytime you want,” I said, my tone serious. “This feels really nice.”

“A bottom who’s obsessed with asses. Is that a thing?”

“Apparently, it is.” I chuckled and rested my head on his pillow. “You can fuck me, you know. You just have to ask.”

“I know. But I don’t think I want to. Not anytime soon at least.” He nuzzled his cheek against me. “I want to rim you. That would be hot. And I’d like to finger you too, give you a little taste of what you give me. But I don’t think I want to fuck you. I... I like when you take care of me.”

“I like it too.” My voice cracked, and I cleared my throat. “What do you think of the tapes we watched before practice?”

“I wasn’t impressed.”

“No?”

Coach had shown the team some highlights from UW, the first team we’d be playing when the season started.

“Nah. Coach is all worried about number fourteen, that Greely kid, but I don’t think he’s going to be as much of a threat as Coach thinks.”

“What makes you say that?”

The kid in question was a sophomore power hitter. We’d watched reel after reel of him smashing every type of pitch under the sun into the back wall of their stadium. He’d gotten

injured in the preseason last year and had sat out until the playoffs, which his team hadn't made. This would be the first time we'd be up against him.

"He's got power, no doubt. But their starting pitcher has a major tell. Did you notice how he does that little half step every time he pitches?"

"Yeah." I had noticed that. It wasn't exactly a half step, more of a quick slide of his foot, but it was a tell.

"The kid hasn't hit off anyone other than his own pitchers and the machines in a year. He's learned to time his swing based on that tell, and we both know how easy it is to hit off the machines."

He had a point. Pitching machines could be set to different speeds and pitch types, but they were easy because they were always perfect.

"I doubt he's going to have that same kind of precision when he starts facing off against other teams. Especially me." Matt's voice was matter-of-fact without a hint of boasting or pride. "Guys like him are notorious for favoring inside pitches. That's how they get the power. That's fine for righties, but we lefties like to throw to the outside corners. They don't have a lefty on their pitching roster, and the machines are too perfect to recreate a southpaw pitch."

"I never thought about that," I mused. "Your slider would blow right past him. Your curve too."

"Yup." I could hear the smile in his voice now. "Like I said, not worried."

"What about that pitcher from Rainier?" I asked.

Matt made an unimpressed sound and launched into a breakdown of how he needed to get better control of his releases and ball spins.

Talking shop with Matt was one of my favorite pastimes. Doing it while cuddled up like this made it a million times better.

Too bad it couldn't last. This season was the beginning of the end for a lot of things, and our arrangement was just one more thing to add to the ever-growing list.

MATT

“Oh good, I was hoping you’d be home.”

“Dude!” I bobbed my phone at Alex’s voice. I’d been so engrossed in what I was looking at I hadn’t heard him come into the living room.

“Sorry.” His grin told me he wasn’t the least bit sorry.

“What’s up?” I jammed my phone into my hoodie pocket.

“Is Eli around?”

“He’s in his room.”

“Good.” He pulled out a brightly wrapped box out of his backpack.

“For me? You shouldn’t have,” I teased. “But wouldn’t Christmas wrapping be more appropriate at this time of year?”

“It’s for Eli.” He shot me a sugary-sweet smile. “My Christmas gift to you is the continuation of my friendship.”

I laughed. “Works for me. That’s what I got you too. But you got Eli something? I didn’t realize you were so close.”

“He and Kai grew up together. They go way back.” Alex jiggled the box. “But this isn’t for Christmas. It’s for his birthday.”

“His birthday?”

“Yeah, it’s tomorrow.”

“His birthday is *Christmas Eve*?”

Alex nodded grimly. “Did he mention if he was going to be around? We invited him over, but he said he had plans.”

“You don’t think he does?”

“Kai doesn’t. He said Eli always gets squirrely at Christmas. He didn’t go into much detail, but apparently, he has good reasons.”

“He said he was going to be out with his brother or maybe finding his brother? He worded it weirdly, so I’m not exactly sure. But other than that, he said he’d be here.”

“Can you give him this when you see him? We wanted to make sure he gets it on his actual birthday but didn’t want to risk missing him.”

“Yeah, of course.” I stood and took the box from him.

“It’s an e-reader,” Alex said. “As far as we know, he doesn’t have one. And he reads a lot, like *a lot*. Hopefully, he likes it.”

I thought back to our trip to the library and his giant stack of books. “I’ll be sure to give it to him. You can tell Kai he’s having Christmas dinner with us, so he won’t be alone.”

“That’s good.” His features tightened. “Has he talked to you about the kinds of foods he eats?” he asked slowly, obviously choosing his words carefully.

“He did.”

“Good.” Alex blew out a breath.

“He also told me why he eats the way he does,” I added, hoping to ease both his and Kai’s minds.

Alex’s expression relaxed. “I didn’t want to say anything because it’s not my place, but I’m glad he did.”

“I should put this in my room so he doesn’t see it.” I wiggled the gift.

“I need to head out too.” He shouldered his bag. “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas.”

I hurried up to my room and put the gift on my desk. Then I glanced at the stack of stuff I'd shoved into the corner of my room. An idea popped into my head, and I pulled out my phone to text Jax.

Matt: I have to go out for a bit

Jax: okay, dare I ask why?

Matt: I need to pick up a few things. I'll explain later.

Jax: k let me know when you want me to come over

Matt: I'll pick you up on my way home

Jax: see you then

Matt: see ya

I shrugged into my jacket and grabbed my wallet off my desk. I had some shopping to do.



“YOU'RE A CRAZY FUCKER,” Jax said as he climbed into my car.

“Why?” I waited as he closed the door and put on his seat belt, then pulled away from the curb.

“Going shopping two days before Christmas.” He hooked his thumb at the bags in the back of the car.

“The stores weren't bad, but the traffic into the city was rough.”

“I bet. Are you going to tell me who they're for?”

“I found out that tomorrow is Eli's birthday.”

“Tomorrow?” He shot me an alarmed look. “Really?”

“Alex told me. Apparently, Eli and Kai are friends from way back.”

“Small world.”

“Yeah. I figured that since he was going to be at the house for not only his birthday but also for Christmas, it might be

nice to get him some gifts.”

“That’s really thoughtful of you.”

“I got him one from you too.”

“How much do I owe you?”

I waved him off. “Nothing. I figured he’d feel more comfortable accepting them if they came from all of us. I texted Beck and Finn and got him something from them too.”

“You’re a good friend.” Jax squeezed my thigh.

I flushed. “I like the kid. He’s been a good friend to me. And everyone deserves to feel special on their birthday. Can you imagine having your birthday so close to a major holiday? I can only imagine how many times it was overshadowed or people just didn’t bother celebrating it.”

“One of the guys on my high school ball team’s birthday is the twenty-sixth. He said he grew up having his birthday and Christmas gifts combined and that he never got a party or any sort of celebration, not even as a kid. I bet it’s even worse if your birthday is Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.”

“Probably. How’s the fam?”

Jax launched into a story about how his niece had learned to open the baby gate around the Christmas tree at his sister’s place and had let the cat in and encouraged it to climb in the tree.

He was smiling, but sadness clouded his eyes. Jax was close with his family, and I knew that not going home was hard for him. Hopefully, my surprise helped lift his spirits.

When we got to the house, he checked to make sure the coast was clear, then helped me carry the bags inside.

“What’s that?” Jax nodded to the corner of my room and put his shopping bags on my bed.

“Christmas.” I tossed my jacket onto my desk chair. “Time to get to work.”

“I’m confused.”

Grinning, I made my way over to the corner and grabbed two of the bags.

He took them from me and peeked inside. “Decorations?” He beamed.

“Yup.” I motioned to the other two bags. “You get those, and I’ll get the tree.”

“Tree?” he asked excitedly.

“It’s just a small one.” I picked up the box I’d leaned against the wall. “Nothing fancy or anything. But I figured we should have an actual Christmas since we’re here.”

We carried the stuff down to the living room, where we laid everything out.

Most of what I’d picked up was cheesy and campy. I was clueless when it came to decorating, but Jax’s enthusiasm soothed any nerves I might have had that this was a dumb idea or that I’d messed up.

We spent the next hour putting the small tree together and haphazardly draping and hanging decorations on it. The rest of the stuff found homes around the living room.

“It looks good.” Jax came to stand beside me. “Not bad for a couple of dumb jocks.”

“Not bad at all.” I leaned against his shoulder. “Want to light the tree and see what it looks like?”

“Hell, yeah.” He got down on his stomach and wiggled under the tree to plug it in.

“Probably should have gotten an extension cord or something,” I mused.

“Probably,” he agreed, his voice muffled.

The prelit tree sparked to life, bathing the room in a soft glow. I took in our handiwork, my chest warm and my heart full.

Jax came out from under the tree and stood beside me, one arm draped over my shoulders.

“Thanks, babe.” He kissed my temple.

I turned my face toward him, wanting a real kiss. He obliged, and warmth flooded through me at the soft slide of his lips on mine.

Christmas at my parents’ house was a lonely and somber affair. My mother was usually away, and my father wasn’t one to bother with decorating or taking time off work. I always spent the break alone and killing time until I went back to school.

Jax’s family went all out for Christmas. They had a big family dinner on Christmas Day and had a tradition of opening one gift together on Christmas Eve while they sat around, having a few drinks and eating cookies his mother baked. They had bins of decorations they put out and even wore silly Christmas sweaters for their cookie and gift party.

I couldn’t replace his family, but hopefully, I could make the holiday a little brighter for him.

“Sorry.”

We pulled apart at Eli’s soft voice.

“Wait.”

“I didn’t mean to interrupt.” He was halfway up the stairs but turned to us, his gaze on the floor. “I just need to eat.”

“You weren’t interrupting anything.” Jax smiled brightly at him. “What do you think?”

Eli looked around the room, his expression guarded. “Very festive.”

“That’s a polite way of saying not bad for a couple of dumb jocks.”

He smiled at my joke. “It looks nice.”

“The kitchen is all yours.”

“Thanks.”

I turned to Jax. “What do you want to do tonight?”

“Watch a movie?”

“Sounds good. Here or in my room?”

“Well, here means we can enjoy the tree and cuddle. In your room means we can do the cuddling naked.” He lifted one eyebrow suggestively.

“My room.” I grabbed his hand and tugged him toward the stairs.

He followed, his low laugh tickling my insides as anticipation filled my chest. Hopefully, naked cuddling involved his dick in my ass again.

JAX

We ended up missing the movie and spent the entire time making out like a couple of horny teenagers who had the house to themselves. When that hadn't been enough, we'd stripped down and had sex again.

We'd done it missionary because I'd wanted to be able to kiss him, and he'd stayed completely relaxed and in the moment.

After, he'd used my ass as a pillow while we'd talked about random stuff, just shooting the shit the way we always did. We'd gotten horny again and had another round of making out that had finished with an explosive sixty-nine. We'd taken a break from the sexy times, and I'd wrapped Eli's gifts while Matt had lain on his bed and watched. He was terrible at wrapping things, so I didn't mind doing it while he supervised.

Then we'd fallen asleep wrapped up in each other's arms.

I'd woken up with him spooning me and his morning wood poking my ass. We'd jerked each other off. Then I'd gotten out of bed and put Eli's gifts in front of his door. We hadn't wanted to make a big deal out of it and put him on the spot, and this was the most low-stress way we could come up with to give them to him.

When they were delivered, Matt had demanded that I get back into bed, and we'd done another sixty-nine. Finally, our need for food had driven us out of bed, and I'd made us lunch.

We were just finishing when Eli came downstairs, his expression unreadable.

“Hi.” Matt glanced at me as Eli stopped a few feet away.

He bit his lip and stayed silent.

“You okay?” Matt asked.

“How did you know it was my birthday?” he asked softly.

“Kai told us.” Matt’s voice was hesitant. “Well, Alex did. But Kai told him.”

“Did he ask you to get me stuff?”

“No. Not at all.” He shot me a worried look. “I’m sorry if we overstepped.”

“Is this a thing you do for each other?”

“What do you mean?”

“Give each other birthday gifts?”

“Well, yours is the first one since we moved in. Finn’s is in a few weeks, and I got him something. I’m not sure it’s an official house thing, but it’s something I like to do for my friends.”

“I’m sorry I’m being weird.” Eli looked away. “I’m just not used to people being nice to me without an ulterior motive.”

My heart clenched. What had he been through that he couldn’t even accept a few birthday gifts from his roommates without him being suspicious?

“No ulterior motives here,” Matt said. “Just doing what I do for all my friends.”

“Thanks. I liked it.” The corners of his mouth tilted up in a shy smile. “And thanks, Jax.”

“You’re welcome.”

Matt had gotten him a fancy tripod for taking videos. It was marketed to people who made content for TikTok. I had no idea if that was Eli’s thing, but Matt had just grinned mysteriously when I’d asked. He’d also picked up a few pairs of fuzzy socks for me to give him.

“Do you have plans today?” Matt asked.

“I’m going out in a bit.”

“Want to help me cook dinner tomorrow?” I asked. “It’s best if we keep this one”—I elbowed Matt in the side—“away from the kitchen. He’s a bit of a disaster when it comes to all things culinary.”

“Yeah, sure.” His smile widened, and his eyes brightened. “I should go shower so I can head out. Thanks again for the gifts.”

“Happy Birthday.”

He flushed and hurried toward the stairs.

“Back to my room?” Matt asked when Eli was out of earshot.

“Maybe we can actually watch a movie this time.”

He snorted. “Yeah, not happening.”

“Are you sore?” I picked up our plates and took them into the kitchen.

I’d tried to be gentle last night, but Matt had begged me to go hard, and I hadn’t been able to hold back.

“Not really. It’s a bit tender back there, but nothing I can’t handle.” He followed me into the kitchen, our coffee cups in his hands.

“Maybe we should wait on doing it again until you’ve had a chance to recover.”

“You don’t want to?”

I turned to him, hating the self-conscious look that had fallen over his features. “Oh, I want to. I just don’t want to hurt you.”

“I’m not made of glass.” He rolled his eyes and put the cups in the dishwasher. “Besides, I kind of like it. It reminds me of how good it felt to have you in me.”

“You’re trying to kill me, aren’t you?”

“Maybe.” He grinned. “Is it working?”

“Get your ass upstairs, and we’ll find out.”

Laughing, he rushed out of the kitchen. I followed, my eyes on his ass as I fake-chased him up the stairs. Too bad we couldn't wrestle around in his room. His bed wouldn't survive it, and his landlord would be less than pleased if we busted through the floor.

We'd have to find a place where we could really let go and have some fun.



“CAN I OPEN MY EYES NOW?”

“Not yet.” Matt led me through the living room.

“Are you pranking me? I'd better not end up on my face or walking into a wall.”

“Would I do that to you?”

“Yes.”

“Yeah, I would.” He snickered. “But not tonight.”

I ran into him, his big body warm and hard. He grabbed me around the waist, and my eyes flew open.

“Sorry!” He laughed and righted us. “I honestly didn't mean to do that. I forgot to say stop.”

“Sure you did.” I hugged him close. “Not like I'm mad about ending up like this.”

“Maybe it was my plan all along.” He kissed my neck. “Look under the tree.”

I gasped at the small stack of gifts and a familiar cookie tin.

“How?”

He let go of me and stepped back, a huge grin on his face. “Since you can't do your Christmas Eve tradition at home, we're doing it here.”

“But...” I knelt and picked up the tin. It was identical to the set my mother used to store her Christmas baking. “How

did you get this?”

The set had been discontinued years ago and, as far as I knew, had only been available in Canada.

“Your mom overnighted it, along with all the goodies inside and the gifts they got you.”

“Really?” I pulled open the tin. Bite-sized shortbreads and frosted sugar cookies, along with pieces of white chocolate candy cane bark, sat nestled in little paper baking cups. She’d packed all my favorites.

When everyone had arrived for the party, I’d FaceTimed with the whole crew, and no one had mentioned any of this.

My chest filled with warmth and happiness at the scent of home. “Babe.” I turned to Matt. “This is... thank you.”

I put the lid back on the tin and gently placed it under the tree. Standing, I tugged him into a hug.

He held me tight as I buried my face in his neck. Tears prickled my eyes. Goddamn it. I wasn’t going to cry. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to cry in front of Matt or any bullshit like that. He’d seen me cry before, but I didn’t want to focus on anything other than how happy I was and how much I appreciated all the effort he’d put into making this possible.

We stood for a long time, hugging in front of the tree as it illuminated the room with its soft light.

“I’ll go get us something to drink while you open that one on top. The red one.” He kissed my cheek and stepped back.

“Okay.” I blew out a breath, still a bit overwhelmed with everything.

Matt winked and headed into the kitchen. I knelt next to the tree. The gift was wrapped in bright red paper with cartoon reindeer on it. I tore into it, then pulled open the box.

Inside sat a woolen sweater that had “Nakatomi Plaza Christmas Party, 1988” and a rendition of the famous building from *Die Hard* stitched on it. I pulled it out. Underneath was a sweatshirt with “Now I have a Machine Gun, Ho Ho Ho” and Bruce Willis’s face printed on it.

“Thought you’d like those.” Matt put two steaming cups on the table. “It’s not the mint beer your brother always buys, but I figured some old-fashioned hot chocolate and marshmallows would remind you of those cold Canadian winters.”

“Want to know a secret?” I tugged him next to me and planted a kiss on his lips. “My brother is the only one who likes that stuff. The rest of us just drink it to be polite.”

“I’m glad because it sounds... like an acquired taste.”

“It is. And really, *Die Hard*?”

“It’s a Christmas movie. End of story.”

“It’s a movie that takes place *at* Christmas. Even Bruce himself said it’s not a Christmas movie.”

“What does he know?” Matt grabbed the sweatshirt from my lap. “I call this one.”

“He’s kind of the star, and why am I not shocked you want that one?”

“Cause it’s awesome. And he might be the star, but that doesn’t mean he can erase the movie’s place in Christmas pop culture. This is a hill I’m willing to die on.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

“And you’re stubborn. Now put your awesome Christmas sweater on and open your gifts so I can see what you got.”

Laughing, we tugged on our sweaters. Then I tore into my gifts.

My parents had gotten me a few pairs of batting gloves, a special brand from a Canadian sports store I liked. My sister and her family had sent me framed photos of my niece and nephew dressed in baseball jerseys with my number on them. They must have had them specially made because they were even in the school’s colors. My older brother had given me a box of vintage baseball cards and a note saying he’d already looked for valuable ones and I was shit out of luck. My younger brother had broken the baseball theme and sent me a pack of socks with giant cartoon dicks.

With the four-hour time difference, it was after midnight at home, so rather than call, I texted everyone a thank-you.

Matt and I demolished most of the cookies while sitting on the couch and chatting. By the time we finished our fourth hot chocolate, we were both sleepy and a little jittery from all the sugar.

“Ready for bed?” Matt asked.

“Yeah.”

“As much as I want to fool around, I’m way too full for any sexy times.” He stood and reached down to help me up.

“Same. Maybe we can just stick to cuddling.”

“Good plan. But first I need some pillow time.”

“As much as I like it when you cuddle my butt, I don’t think I can sleep like that.”

“Only for a few minutes.” He led me to the stairs, holding my hand.

“You said that earlier and ended up napping on me. My legs fell asleep.”

“Again, that sounds like a you problem.”

When we’d stripped down, Matt did cuddle my ass, and like I’d predicted, he fell asleep. I stayed still until my eyes were too heavy to keep open, then gently shook him awake. Grumbling, he crawled up my body and flopped onto his side, his back to me. I rolled over and pulled him close, spooning him from behind.

As I pulled the covers up over us, he let out a happy sigh and was fast asleep when I kissed his cheek and said goodnight.



I WAS HAVING the most amazing dream. I was on a beach, the sun warm against my skin. The weird part was that most of the

heat was concentrated on my dick. And somehow, the heat was wet.

A low groan escaped my throat as I broke out of my sleep state. I blinked my eyes open and looked down.

We'd fallen asleep naked. Matt knelt between my legs, my dick in his mouth, and slowly moved up and down my length.

"Fuck," I rasped, my throat gravelly from sleep. "Babe."

He moaned and tickled my balls with his fingertips.

I reached down with one hand and sifted my fingers through his soft hair. The pale blond strands shone in the morning light, and the contrast between his angelic good looks and the way he was devouring my dick sent a rush of desire through my already lust-hazy brain.

He trailed one finger down the seam of my sac, then gently pressed it against my taint.

A pulse of pleasure shot through me. "Shit." I jerked.

Still sucking me like he had all the time in the world, he slid that naughty finger down and pushed it between my ass cheeks.

I usually didn't let anyone touch my ass. It wasn't that I'd had a bad experience or anything. It just wasn't something I was comfortable with.

But this was Matt. I wanted everything he was willing to give me. More than that, I wanted to give him a part of me that no one had ever had. Every time he let me touch him, fuck him, he shared the most intimate pieces of himself with me. He gave himself over to me, trusted me, and I wanted to share that with him too.

I spread my legs and lifted my knees, opening to him.

He moaned around my dick and gave me a hard suck. I saw stars, and those stars exploded into a supernova as he dragged his finger over my hole.

"Fuck, babe." I pulled my knees up higher, keeping myself as spread open as I could.

He popped off my dick and stared down at his hand. "Jesus, you're flexible."

"Catcher's hips."

He rubbed my hole with a little more pressure. "Does this feel good?"

Little zings of pleasure crackled over my skin, and I arched into his touch. "Yeah, really good."

"Can I use my tongue?" His familiar blue eyes met mine.

"Yeah."

He lay down on the bed and shimmied closer, gripped my ass cheeks and pulled them apart. His hot breath fanned over my sensitive hole, and I shuddered.

He swiped his tongue over me, and I nearly rocketed off the bed as pleasure exploded deep in my body. Holy shit. I'd been missing out.

Or had I? Would this have felt as good with someone else? Was I able to enjoy it because it was Matt and I trusted him?

The stab of his tongue brought me back to reality. "*Jesus.*"

He chuckled. The heat of his breath tickled my skin. My dick was rock hard, the head flushed, and precum slowly gathered on my tip.

I looked down the line of my body. My stomach clenched at the sight of Matt between my spread legs. I dropped my head back down and breathed deep, sinking into the sensations while my best friend ate me out.

He licked and sucked and stabbed at my hole. I'd never felt anything like it. Need and desire pooled inside me. My body tightened, and my breathing went ragged.

As he brought me higher and higher, my orgasm built, simmering under the surface.

"Jerk me," I begged dazedly, my lower body tingling and pulsing with need.

He pulled his tongue out of my hole. "Nope."

“You’re killing me.”

He nuzzled my balls with his nose, and I groaned.

“Can I use my fingers?” he asked huskily.

“Yeah. Go ahead.”

I was so turned on I would have agreed to anything.

He got up on his knees and leaned over my body to reach into the night table. His hard cock dragged over my stomach, leaving a damp trail in its wake.

As he fished the lube out of the drawer, I grabbed him around the waist and tried to yank him down for a kiss. He resisted, a wicked grin on his lips.

“I like you like this. All spread out for me.” His tone was dark, possessive, even.

Usually, Matt was the one who was a needy begging mess when we fooled around. The role reversal was bending my mind.

“I’m going to make you come so hard.” He scraped his teeth over his bottom lip seductively.

“Yeah, you will,” I managed, my brain still short-circuiting at the change in pace.

He sat back on his heels and slicked up two fingers.

I drew in a gasping breath, trying to clear my head.

“I want to watch you come.” He tossed the lube aside and lay back over me. “Want to see all of it.”

“Fuck,” I muttered, my brain still a few seconds behind reality. The world was out of sync, and my entire being was focused on the man above me. I fucking loved it.

I was so used to being the aggressor, of keeping a tight lid on my control. Even with Matt. I’d let go with him more than anyone else, but I’d still held a piece of myself back from him.

Matt was special to me, and I didn’t take for granted how much he trusted me every time we were together. He’d told me

not to treat him like glass, but a part of me was still in awe that he wanted me. That he enjoyed being with me.

Then there was the competitive, possessive side of me that demanded I make every encounter as amazing as possible for him. It was true that getting him off and watching him enjoy sex got me hot, but it was more than that.

I was his first guy, and while the thought of someone else touching him made me stabby, that little part of me that had claimed him wanted to make sure *I* was the one he remembered. That he thought about *me* whenever he found pleasure with someone else.

I wanted to brand myself on him so it would be me he dreamed about. I wanted to be the only one who mattered.

“That’s it,” he whispered, his eyes boring into mine, and slicked his finger over my hole. “You want me?”

I grunted, too overcome with need and emotion to be more eloquent.

“There you go.” He sank the tip of his finger inside me. “Jesus, you’re tight. Is it okay?”

I swallowed around my dry throat. “It’s good. Keep going.”

Using more pressure, he pushed through the initial resistance, gently working his finger inside me.

“Fuck,” I whispered.

The moment was almost too much. Feeling his big body over mine, having him stare into my eyes like he was memorizing my every reaction and expression was beyond intimate.

“Matt,” I rasped.

“I’ve got you.” He pushed his finger all the way inside me. “You’re so tight, so hot.” He twisted his finger around and brushed it over my prostate.

“Shit!” I jerked beneath him, my body lighting up like a Christmas tree.

“There it is.” He grinned, his expression intense as he moved his finger inside me. “What will make you come?”

“This is definitely helping.”

“Can you take another?”

“Yeah.”

He pushed a second finger inside me. The stretch burned, and an unnatural feeling of fullness dulled the pleasure.

He must have seen my discomfort and rocked his hips, dragging his hard dick over mine.

“Oh fuck,” I mumbled. Sparks of pleasure ignited deep inside me. “That’s it. Like that.”

“You’re so beautiful,” he said thickly. “Make yourself feel good while I finger you. I want to see you come. Want to feel it.”

Moaning, I rolled my hips, scraping my dick against his as he sped up his fingers. The burn was gone, and the fullness had shifted into something amazing. The twin sensations of having my prostate and dick worked over sent my body and mind into a tailspin.

“Fuck.” I grunted, held his hips tight, and thrust against him.

“That’s it, Jax. Fuck yourself on my fingers and use me to get off. Let me see it.”

My orgasm hit hard and fast, coming out of left field. It stole not only my breath but also my sanity.

Matt never took his eyes off mine as I rode the waves, shooting between our bodies, clenching around his fingers, and shuddering under him.

His mouth fell open in a silent cry. Then he jerked over me and came too, his load joining mine.

Seeing him tip over, watching the moment the pleasure took over was too much. I closed my eyes, afraid of what he’d see in them.

He buried his face in my neck, sucking on my skin as he thrust against me. The contact was rough, and my spent cock twinged, but I welcomed the pain, using it to ground myself. I wrapped my arms around him and held him tight.

I had no idea how long we lay there. It could have been minutes; it could have been more. All I knew was that we'd crossed the one line I'd sworn I'd never cross with him.

Fucking my best friend was a dangerous game; making love with him was a guaranteed disaster.

"Merry Christmas," he whispered into my neck.

"Merry Christmas," I croaked, desperately trying to rein in my spinning thoughts. "That's a hell of a way to wake up."

He chuckled and rested his cheek on my shoulder. "Was that okay? I know I should have asked first, but you looked so hot, and I wanted you so bad."

"I give you blanket consent to blow me anytime you want." I shoved the last of my trepidation away and focused on the moment.

Just because I was freaking out and reading too much into what had happened didn't mean Matt was. He'd wanted to try something new, and he'd enjoyed it. End of story. I needed to stop projecting my fears and issues onto him. If I didn't, any demise in our friendship would be my fault.

"Same for you. Blow me, fuck me. I'm ready and willing whenever you are."

"Careful what you agree too. Otherwise, you're going to spend hours with my dick in you."

"Yes, please." He lifted his head. "Flip over. I need some cuddle time with my pillow before we do presents."

"Presents? Plural? We agreed on one."

"No." He climbed off me and made a "flip over" motion with his hand. "We agreed on a budget. Totally different."

I rolled onto my stomach and spread my legs wide. Matt settled between them, but rather than resting his head on my

ass, he grabbed one cheek in each hand and wiggled them.

“That feels really weird.”

“It’s hot, seeing it jiggle like that, showing me your hole.” He stopped and gently patted them with the palms of his hands.

“Are you playing bongos on my ass?”

“Yup. Guess the song.”

“I have no idea.”

“Pay attention. It’s an easy one.” He tapped out a random beat, then paused. “And?”

“No clue.”

“Maybe you need to hear the tune too,” he mused.

“Don’t you dare make my ass look like it’s singing,” I warned.

He barked out a laugh. “How did you know I was about to do that!”

“Because you’re you.”

“Come on, it’ll be hilarious.”

“Could you maybe leave me a shred of dignity?”

“Ugh, you’re no fun.”

“The cum we’re smearing into the covers begs to differ.”

Crack. He slapped one cheek hard.

“Ow. That thing is attached to me, you know.”

“Just making sure it remembers who it belongs to.”

“I thought that was me,” I said dryly.

“Nope. It’s mine. Claimed.” He dragged his tongue over my cheek. “There. Now you have my handprint, and I licked it. Double claimed.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

“You love it.” He bent his head and nipped at my other cheek with his teeth.

I jumped. “You done?” I tried to sound stern, but the effect was ruined when I laughed at his impish expression.

“Almost.” He kissed the spot he’d bitten. “There. All better. Time for presents.”

My brain had trouble keeping up with the sudden shift in conversation.

“How about we clean the cum off us, then do the presents?” I suggested as he got up on his knees.

“Fine, but we’re opening them naked.”

I sat up, smiling at how happy he was this morning. “Naked Christmas? Now that’s a tradition I can get behind.”

Grinning, he rolled off the bed. “Last one in the bathroom has to change the sheets.” He darted toward the door, threw it open, and ran into the hall.

“Hey,” I scrambled out of the bed. “Cheater!”

His heavy footsteps and laughter filtered into the room as I chased after him. He was going to win this round, but I’d get him back. I always got him back.



THE REST of the day was relatively low key. Matt and I exchanged our gifts. He’d gotten me a pair of those leggings that were popular from TikTok that were supposed to make anyone’s ass look amazing, and a giant box of ketchup-flavored chips that you could only get in Canada. I loved them. Matt had tried them and didn’t get the appeal.

I’d gotten him a weighted blanket for the nights I wasn’t around to act as his teddy bear. The blanket weighed twenty pounds, and I’d hidden it in Alex’s room. He’d given me his key so I could get it while he was away. When I’d handed it to him, Matt had underestimated how heavy it was and had nearly fallen over. Mind you, I hadn’t warned him, and

watching him struggle with the box had made dragging that thing over worth it.

I'd put on my new leggings, which made my ass look incredible, and Matt had spent the afternoon either staring at it or touching it. His obsession was hilarious, and I didn't hate the attention.

Eli had come down to hang out with us and had been quieter than usual. He'd also been distracted by my leggings. I had no idea what his sexuality was, so I couldn't be sure if it was because of my ass or the fact that I was wearing leggings.

Matt and I had FaceTimed with my family. They loved Matt, and they'd spent more time talking with him than me. Then Eli and I made dinner. Matt might be a disaster in the kitchen, but I enjoyed cooking and trying new recipes. Neither of us was a fan of turkey, and instead of making a carb-filled chicken meal with all the trimmings, we'd agreed on vegetarian lasagna with zucchini noodles.

Well, agreed wasn't exactly accurate. I'd bribed him with blow jobs and butt cuddles to let me replace half the noodles with zucchini strips and use low-fat cheese.

The three of us had sat around chatting while our dinner was baking. Then we'd eaten at the dining room table like adults, rather than in front of the TV.

Matt had cleaned up the table while Eli and I tackled what was left in the kitchen. Both of us preferred to clean as we cooked, so it hadn't taken long to get everything done.

I'd expected Eli to escape to his room after cleaning up, but he hadn't been in a hurry to leave. Matt had insisted we watch *Die Hard*, saying it was his Christmas tradition. Eli had never seen it, so the three of us settled in the living room and watched it on the big TV.

"So, what did you think?" Matt asked as the closing credits rolled.

"I can see why it has such a cult following," Eli mused. "I counted thirty-eight continuity errors and fourteen factual errors. Not horrible for a movie of that era."

“What?” Matt blinked at him. “This movie is a classic.”

“Classic just means that it’s beloved, not that it’s perfect.” Eli shrugged. “But it was entertaining. I enjoyed it.”

“And you agree it’s a Christmas movie,” Matt pressed.

“It’s a movie that takes place at Christmas.”

“Ha!” I knocked my knee against Matt’s. “Told you.”

“But it’s about a Christmas party. The whole thing takes place on Christmas Eve. Ergo, it’s a Christmas movie.”

Eli grinned. “That’s all true. But it’s an action story. The plot doesn’t move beyond the action. That makes it an action movie that takes place at Christmas.”

“Pshhhhh.” Matt grabbed the remote and turned the movie off. “You might be smarter than both of us combined, but you’re wrong.”

“Don’t listen to him.” I slung my arm over Matt’s shoulder and ruffled his hair. “He’s just salty that he’s wrong and refuses to admit it.”

He shoved my hand away from his head. “You’re the one who’s wrong. The entire world agrees with me.”

“The entire world also believes that dropping a penny off the Empire State Building can kill and that goldfish have a three-second memory. Doesn’t mean it’s true.”

“Wait, what?” Matt gaped at Eli. “Those *aren’t* true?”

“The terminal velocity of a penny is between thirty to fifty miles per hour. Fast enough to sting but not enough to kill or even bruise. And goldfish have a three-month memory. They can even be trained.”

“People train goldfish?” I asked. “Like, to do tricks?”

“Simple ones. Goldfish are part of the carp family, which makes them food motivated. That makes them trainable.”

“Huh. I must be part carp because I’m also food motivated.” Matt grinned.

Eli laughed, his green eyes sparkling. “Most animals are food motivated. Especially domesticated dogs.”

“Did you just call me a dog? Or are you saying that I’m loveable and awesome like a dog?” Matt asked, his tone light.

“I think he’s saying you have major golden retriever energy going on, blondie,” I said.

“No way. I’m tough and scary like a pit bull.”

“Pit bulls aren’t actually a breed. It’s an umbrella term for any dog that has Staffordshire bull terrier, American Staffordshire bull terrier, or American pit bull terrier in them. Some definitions also include the American Bully,” Eli said. “They also consistently achieve excellent temperament scores and make great service animals or family pets with proper training, so the big scary pit bull myth is just that, a myth.”

“Huh.” Matt chewed on his lip. “Now I feel like an asshole for saying that. Guess it’s true there are no bad dogs, just bad owners.”

“Golden retrievers are great dogs if that makes you feel better,” Eli said. “They’re friendly and smart and gentle while still being loyal and devoted. People love them for a reason. If you’re going to be compared to a dog, that’s a good one.”

“I like that.” Matt grinned. “I’m a golden retriever.”

I laughed at his proud tone. “You definitely are.”

Eli pulled his phone out of his pocket and tapped it against the back of his arm. He glanced at the screen and sighed.

“Everything okay?” Matt asked, worry creeping into his tone.

“What? Oh, yeah. Fine. Just the time.” He looked at me, then at Matt. “Need to get to work.”

Matt nodded, a smile on his lips. “Have fun.”

“I’ll try.” He stood, a wry grin on his full lips. “You can tell Jax what I do if you want. Night.” Eli swept out of the room in that floaty walk he’d perfected.

“I’m confused.” I glanced at Matt, who’d pulled out his phone and was unlocking it. “He’s working on Christmas?”

“He cams,” Matt said distractedly. “I imagine there are lots of lonely people who would be happy for the distraction today.”

“Cams?” My brain was not quite computing what Matt was saying.

“Like online. Sells content too.”

“Like TikTok?”

Matt snorted. “More like OnlyFans.”

“OnlyFa... holy shit.”

“Right?”

“And by cams, you mean like those ads on porn sites? ‘Watch hot guys online?’ He’s one of those hot guys?”

“Yup.”

“Wow.”

I would never have expected quiet, quirky Eli to be in the adult industry. Showed you really couldn’t judge a book by its cover.

“Exactly what I said when I found out.”

“And he told you about this? How the fuck did that come up in casual conversation?”

“I walked in on him making a video, and he kind of had to tell me.” He looked up from his phone. “Dude is fucking ripped.”

“Really?”

“Oh yeah. He’s hiding the goods under those baggy clothes.”

A twinge of jealousy shot through me at Matt’s tone, and I wanted to roll my eyes at myself. He was free to think anyone he wanted was hot, and I had zero right to be jealous. “Who would have guessed.”

“Goddamn it. He was right.” Matt dropped his phone into his lap with a dramatic sigh.

“What?”

“There *are* thirty-eight continuity errors in *Die Hard*, and I found multiple lists that said it has fourteen factual errors. How the hell did he catch them all and also keep track of the numbers?”

“His brain must be an interesting place,” I mused.

“He’d kick ass at trivia. We should convince him to come out with us one night. I heard The Blue Door has decent prizes for their trivia nights, and they do tournaments every few months. I remember someone saying fifty bucks per person for regular nights and five hundred for the winning team during tournaments.”

“He’s twenty,” I pointed out.

“We’ll get him an ID,” Matt waved dismissively. “Fifty bucks is fifty bucks.”

“So many jokes in there.”

“I don’t get it.”

“Never mind. Another movie?”

“*Die Hard 2*?” He grinned wickedly. “Keeping up with the Christmas tradition of course.”

“You’re incorrigible.”

“If that means awesome and loveable, then yes, I am.”

“Sure, we’ll pretend that’s what it means.” I smirked.

“Can you get us a couple of beers? I have some on my shelf in the fridge.”

“Why do I have to get them? You’re closer to the kitchen.”

“Because I want to ogle your ass as you walk away. And if you could come in backward when you’ve got them, that would be great.”

“You know I’m going to wear these leggings around you all the time.”

“Duh. Why do you think I got them? They might have had your name on them, but they’re really a gift to me.”

“They’re surprisingly comfortable, even with a seam that goes right up your butt crack.”

Matt laughed. “I wondered about that.”

In a teasing mood, I stood and popped my ass out. “I think I should wear these to our first team workout. Give the guys something to talk about.”

“Fuck no.” He slapped my butt cheek hard. “This is mine. Basketball shorts or baseball pants around the team only. Hell, I’m going to burn all your pants and make you wear sweats from now on so you stop showing it off every time you leave the house.”

I wiggled my ass. “You don’t think you should share the magnificence with the world? It seems selfish to keep something this amazing to yourself.”

“Selfish smelfish.”

“Smell fish?” I chuckled and looked over my shoulder at him.

His gaze was firmly fixed on my ass. I arched my back the tiniest bit more.

“Go get the beers before I tackle you and do bad things to both you and your ass.”

“Careful, I might like it.”

His lustful gaze met mine. “I bet I can blow you and get you off before the opening credits of the movie end.”

“You think?”

He licked his bottom lip. “Yup.”

“You’re on. But if you lose, then I get to suck you for as long as I want while you watch your action movie that takes place *at* Christmas. No complaining or begging me to hurry up and make you come.”

“Deal. But if I win, then you have to blow me in sixty-nine so I can play with your butt while you make me come.”

“Thank fuck Eli’s going to be busy for the next little bit.” I turned so he could see the bulge in the leggings. “These leave nothing to the imagination.”

Matt waved at the tent in his sweats. “Hard same.”

I snickered. “It’s definitely hard.”

“Fuck the beers. We’ll get them later.” He slid onto the floor. “Time to win our bet.”

“You wish, Landry.”

“Prepare to lose, Crawford.”

My dick pulsed. I shoved the leggings down and sat on the couch. Matt grabbed the waistband and tugged them around my ankles so I could spread my knees for him. He fit his big body between my legs and gripped my base.

“Start the movie,” he rasped.

I grabbed the remote, my dick hard and aching.

This was one bet we’d both win, no matter what the outcome was.

MATT

Christmas break ended too soon. Coach was brutal when we started practice again, making us run drills until the sweat dripped off us and we were so exhausted we barely chatted in the locker room.

New Year's came and went. Cooper had organized a team party at Red's, and attendance was mandatory. He'd said it was for team building after the break, but I suspected it was his and Coach's way of making sure no one got blackout drunk or did anything stupid.

Watching my teammates and their dates drinking and having a great time wasn't anything new, but being in a crowd of couples and not being able to kiss Jax at midnight had sucked ass.

We'd cheered and hugged and toasted our drinks like bros did, but the ache in my chest hadn't eased until we'd excused ourselves. Jax had held my hand the entire way home. It had been risky as fuck, but I'd loved every second of being able to be open with him. To not have to hold back and worry about who might see us or what they might think.

When we'd gotten back to my room, things had been different too. We'd had sex, but it had been gentle and quiet, with lots of eye contact and kissing. The build-up to our orgasms had been slow and sweet, and the desperate and needy energy between us had been absent. I'd loved every second of it, and falling asleep wrapped up in his arms as he'd

pressed sleepy kisses against my neck had meant as much to me as the sex.

Things between us had always been easy, but they were shifting, and I didn't know what to do about it.

Jax was my best friend, but what I felt for him was all-encompassing. It went beyond friendship. Was it because of the sex? Did the intimacy of sleeping together add layers to our friendship that I didn't understand because I'd never had a consistent lover before?

Sex with Jax had opened my eyes to just how amazing being with someone could be. But it went beyond the physical. Every time with him left me satisfied and eager for more, but I didn't just crave his dick or mouth.

I loved our easy banter, and the way he always knew exactly what to say or what to do when I got stuck in my head or needed some reassurance meant everything to me.

He meant everything.

But it couldn't last. Eventually, this thing between us would end, and we'd go back to being best friends and nothing more. The thought of losing this part of him made my chest ache, but we'd agreed on the rules for a reason.

Baseball was Jax's priority, and he'd have no choice but to go back into the closet if he was recruited.

The world of professional sports was getting better when it came to inclusivity, but that didn't extend to queer players. Being out wasn't an option. Too many players and fans would have issues with a gay man playing pro ball, and no team wanted a player who made headlines that didn't have to do with their stats or put the club under a microscope.

The situation might change in a few years, but Jax couldn't afford any scandals, especially not in his rookie year. He'd worked too hard to lose everything because he happened to be gay.

Keeping my own sexuality a secret wasn't going to be difficult. I might be bi, but Jax was the only guy, the only

person, who'd made me want more. Going back to being alone would suck, but it was what I was used to.

It wasn't fair, but we weren't the only queer athletes who had to give up a part of ourselves in order to play the game we loved.

The fact that Jax was out now only proved he had balls of steel. I admired his bravery, but we both knew he could lose his chance at the future he'd spent half his life working toward because of a choice he'd made as a teenager.

Jax loved baseball more than anyone I'd ever met, and the thought that *I* could put his dreams in jeopardy scared the piss out of me. The whole gay aspect of our arrangement was bad enough, but we were teammates. That shifted our relationship into taboo territory.

Teams ran on a delicate balance of talent and trust. If your teammates didn't trust each other, the entire system broke down.

People knowing about us would also hurt our chances at a future in the game, but the difference between Jax and me was that it wouldn't destroy me. It would suck to be everyone's gossip fodder, and the thought of people talking about my sex life like it was the weather was enough to send me into a panic attack, but not playing after college wouldn't be the end of the world.

I was one injury away from losing it all. One bad throw or accident would be the end of my ability to play, and I'd come to terms with that years ago. I had no idea who the fuck I was without the game, but I understood that nothing in life was a guarantee, especially not when it came to sports.

Knowing and understanding just how precarious things were for us was the only reason I wasn't a complete mess at the thought of our time as lovers ending. I hated it and wished it could be different, but Jax's happiness meant more to me than my own.

When the time came for us to only be friends, I'd suck it up and put my feelings aside and support him in any way I

could. Jax had always been there for me. It was my turn to be there for him.

The only good part about getting back to reality was that Jax and I fucked like crazed bunnies whenever we could, and not just in my room. We blew each other in the car after practice and sometimes before too. We met up in his dorm room to get off together between classes. I'd learned that the best way to get him up and moving in the mornings was either to wake him up with a blow job or to jerk him until he inevitably manhandled me into sixty-nine so we could finish that way.

“Sup?”

“Shit!”

Alex laughed and sat next to me on the couch.

“Jesus.” I put my hand over my racing heart. “You trying to kill me?”

“Not my fault you were in your own little world.” He smirked.

“Did you want something, or was the entire purpose of this to give me a heart attack?”

“Both.” His smirk melted away and was replaced by a look of concern. “Are you okay?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve been... different since break ended.”

“I have?”

He nodded. “I’m trying to think of a tactful way of asking if your anxiety is getting bad, but I’m drawing a blank.”

“It’s no worse than usual,” I mumbled.

The lie tasted bitter in my mouth. My anxiety had been getting worse since classes started again. The only time I felt settled was when Jax and I were alone and I didn’t have to spend half my mental energy keeping myself in check and pretending we were just best bros.

“Is there something else bothering you?”

I opened my mouth to tell him I was fine but closed it. I wasn't fine, and I was tired of pretending like I was.

“What's going on?” he asked softly. “You know I'd never judge you, right?”

“I know.” I blew out a breath.

Alex and I weren't especially close, but we were friends, and I liked him. More than that, I trusted him. He was good people, and he never shied away from talking about real stuff. Not when it was about other people at least. Since he started dating Kai, he'd opened up more but was still a bit tight-lipped when it came to his own struggles.

“I've kind of been dealing with something,” I said slowly.

“Like what?”

Could I tell him about being bi? Alex was too, but I had no idea if he was like me and hadn't known until recently.

He also wasn't stupid. He'd know I was talking about Jax as soon as I told him I was messing around with a guy.

“You know how we figured out that Beck and Finn were together because of how loud they are?” he said carefully and awkwardly crossed his arms.

A wave of cold washed over me.

Fuck. He already knew.

I wasn't sure why I was so surprised. Jax and I tried to be quiet, but my roommates weren't idiots. Not only was the loud music a dead giveaway, but the creaking bed pretty much screamed that we were getting it on.

“I'm just saying that what people do in their rooms is none of my business,” he said. “And that if someone needed to talk about the stuff they do in their rooms, then I'm here for them. And I know how to keep a secret,” he added quickly. “So... yeah.”

“I guess I don't need to tell you that I'm part of the bi club too.” I sighed. All the tension and stress of the past few weeks

came crashing down on me.

“No, but I get that it’s not always an easy thing to say.”

“How long did you know before you... before we found out?”

I’d been about to ask how long he’d known before he came out, but Alex had been accidentally outed. He’d taken it in stride, but I’d wondered if he’d just been putting up a front.

“I knew pretty early on.” He bit his lip. “I developed a crush on my best friend when I was fifteen. I knew I liked girls, but I also liked him.”

“Were you out in high school?”

“No. No one except him knew. And my grandmother. She’d already figured it out when I finally did tell her.”

“Can I ask why you kept it a secret?”

“At first, it wasn’t by choice. My... the guy I liked wasn’t a good person. I thought we were friends, and I also thought I was in love with him, but he was just using me because I was willing to put up with his shit. He made me keep it quiet as a condition of us being together.” He snorted. “And by being together, I mean him fucking me in secret and acting like a total dick to me in public while he made his way through half the girls at school.”

My jaw dropped. “Shit. That’s... I’m so sorry.”

“It messed me up for a long time. Still does, if I’m being honest. I like to think I would have been more open about my sexuality if he hadn’t forced me to keep it secret and fucked with my head. That I wouldn’t have lied to everyone or tried to protect myself by denying my attraction to men for years.” He looked up, his dark eyes meeting mine. “How long have you known?”

“Not long.” I snorted. “Someone dared Jax and me to kiss at a party a few months ago. At first, I didn’t think anything of it. Then it was all I could think about. *He* was all I could think about.”

He smiled encouragingly.

“I was so confused because I didn’t understand how I could go so long without realizing that guys did it for me too. But Jax isn’t just a guy, you know? I think I’ve always had a thing for him. I just didn’t see it for what it was because he’s my bro. But when we started fooling around, it just felt... right.”

“How long have you been dating?”

“We’re not dating,” I said quickly. “It’s just a friends-with-benefits thing.”

Alex pursed his lips. “Really?”

“Yeah. At first, we started messing around so I could figure shit out. Get used to being bi, I guess.”

He drew his lower lip into his mouth and bit it.

“Yeah, I know that sounds horrible,” I said. “Like I’m using him for sex because he’s convenient. But it’s not like that.”

“I didn’t say it was.”

“But you thought it.”

“Not at all. You said ‘at first,’ and I was wondering what it’s evolved into. What it is now.”

“I have no idea.” I clenched my fists, and my chest tightened.

“Breathe, Matt.” Alex’s warm hand covered mine where it rested on my knee. “We don’t have to talk about this if it’s making you anxious, but I promise you I’m not judging. I get it.”

“You do?”

“I do. He’s your safe space. You trust him. You’re obviously attracted to each other. It would be weird if you weren’t hooking up.”

“You think?”

“I do. Don’t take this the wrong way, but I’m kind of shocked this has only been going on for a few months. You

two are so in sync and so close I thought you were hooking up this whole time. Well, that's not exactly true. I wondered if you were but didn't assume anything until it was obvious."

"You're not the only one who's wondered about us."

"Is there a reason you guys are keeping it casual?"

"Baseball."

He nodded thoughtfully. "Yeah, that definitely complicates things. Do you think things would be different if you were just two regular college guys?"

"I like to think so. I mean, he's out, and I'd have no reason to hide it. I don't give a fuck what people think of me. Hell, no one actually knows me anyway, so if they stopped liking me because I was with a guy, then whatever. Don't let the door hit ya where the good lord split ya."

Alex snickered. "Colorful analogy."

"It gets the point across." I grinned, feeling lighter than I had all day.

"You don't think people know you?" A strange look came over his eyes, one I couldn't read.

"Not at all. I'm so used to being what people expect me to be that *I* have no idea who I am."

"I can relate to that." He gave me a wry grin. "I'm a chameleon. I used to only show people what I thought they wanted to see, and be who I thought they wanted me to be. It was a way to protect myself. I've been working on it, but it's a tough habit to break."

"It is. I'm not exactly a chameleon. It's more that I've spent my entire life being told who I am, so I've always just fallen in line. I'm the ball player. The fun-loving goofball who's always down for a good time. The fuckboy frat guy who loves to party and sleep around."

"None of that sounds like the Matt I know."

"None of it feels like it's me." I leaned back against the cushions, the words flowing out of me like steam from boiling

water. “All my life, I’ve been told there’s only one way to be. That I have to be the best at everything I do, that failure isn’t an option. I never had a chance to figure out what I like or who I really am because I was too busy trying to be who everyone told me I was. It’s like I’ve been wearing a mask, and I don’t know who I am when I take it off.”

“We all wear masks. Every day we get up and put on a mask. The terrifying part is what happens when we take it off and show people our true selves.”

“Ain’t that the fucking truth.”

“Kai is one of the few people I was never able to keep that mask up around. He and Beck. I showed them my true self without even realizing that I was doing it. I think it’s because I intrinsically trusted them. I *felt* that they were safe, even when I was so busy hating Kai for stupid shit that wasn’t his fault.”

I’d never heard the story of how Alex and Kai had gotten together, but he’d hinted that they’d had a rough go at first. I hadn’t met Kai until they’d started dating, but it was obvious to anyone with eyes that they were perfect for each other.

“And I’m guessing that Jax is that person for you?”

I nodded, looking at my hands. “Yeah. I swear he knows me better than I know myself. He’s the only person I’ve never felt the need to put up that front with. He’s...”

“You love him.”

My chest tightened, and my vision went white.

I was in love with Jax and had been forever. Even before we’d started this thing, he’d always been my person. He wasn’t just my best friend; he was my other half. I just hadn’t been able to recognize it because I’d never been in love before. Never seen healthy examples of love or felt loved.

“Matt?”

“I do,” I croaked.

“If it’s any consolation, I think he loves you too.”

I glanced up, some of the building panic calming in my chest. “You think so?”

“I don’t know him as well as I know you, but I’ve seen the way he looks at you. Even back when you first moved in, I saw it.”

“How does he look at me?”

“Like you’re the only thing in focus and the rest of the world is just background noise.”

“Fuck.” I raked my hand through my hair. “Why does it have to be so fucking complicated?”

“I wish I knew. Obviously, I have no idea what it’s like to be you, to live in your world, but love isn’t easy. Loving someone isn’t all sunshine and rainbows. Sometimes it sucks. Sometimes it hurts, and sometimes it can tear you apart. But if you truly love someone, then all that pain and turmoil and bullshit is worth it.”

“I know he’s worth it.” I laughed to cover up the tears pricking my eyes, but the sound was hollow and empty. “That’s never been a question. But I can’t ask him to give up his dreams for me. I love him too much to be the reason he loses baseball.”

“What about your dreams?” he asked softly. “Would you give up your dreams for him?”

“I don’t even know what my dreams are,” I blew out a breath and lifted my gaze to the ceiling. “I don’t even remember deciding that I wanted to play ball professionally. I love the game, don’t get me wrong, but I’ve never sat around dreaming about my rookie debut or getting to put on my first pro uniform. Or how it would feel to step into Wrigley field and get to stand on the same mound as Babe Ruth.”

“I thought Babe Ruth was a Yankee?”

“He was, but he started his career as a pitcher for the Red Sox. He was a lefty, like me.”

“Huh, I didn’t know that. Sorry, didn’t mean to interrupt. My brain sometimes gets distracted by interesting facts.”

“You’d have a field day with Eli. That kid is a fountain of random facts and knowledge.”

“Right? It’s so crazy. I was talking to him about this bakery in town that Kai is obsessed with, and ten minutes later, I resurfaced into reality, and we were geeking out over fantasy books we’ve read. FYI, if you’re a reader, don’t talk to him about books on your TBR because holy spoilers Batman. I don’t even think he realized what he was doing. He was just so excited to be talking books that he told me the entire plot of a ten-book series I’ve been wanting to start for years. I didn’t have the heart to tell him and just let him go.”

I laughed. That sounded like something Eli would do. “Not much of a reader, not unless it’s sports related.”

“Circling back to what we were talking about, does Jax have those dreams?”

I sighed, my light mood gone. “Yeah. He does. Did you know his parents didn’t even want him to play baseball when he was a kid? They put him in hockey because apparently, that’s what Canadian parents do. He played one season, then begged them to let him switch to baseball. Unlike my father, who put me in ball before I was even eligible to play. Jax worked his ass off to get to the level he is, while my dad paid for me to get here.”

“I’m nowhere near your level, but I played varsity sports. You can’t buy talent.”

“No, but you can buy specialized coaching, camps, and the fees to play for the best and most competitive teams. I’ve got raw talent, but my skills were bought and paid for by my father.”

“But you were able to utilize what you were taught. You might have had advantages, but those advantages only enhance the work you put in, the talent you have.”

“Maybe.” I bit my lip as my stomach flipped over. “But talent isn’t the same as heart. Jax and most of the guys on my team love the game. It’s their passion. It’s what they love most in the world. For me, it’s just a thing. I like playing, but I don’t

love it. If Jax got hurt and couldn't play again, it would destroy him. He'd be lost. If I woke up tomorrow and couldn't play, I think I'd be relieved."

Alex kept quiet, and that encouraged me to keep talking. This was the one thing I could never talk to Jax about.

"The game stopped being fun a long time ago. The only time I enjoy being a ball player is when we're actually *playing* the game. I like analyzing games and figuring out strategy, but the only time it doesn't feel like a job is during game time or when we're scrimmaging or just fucking around and playing a pickup game."

"Have you thought about what you'd want to do if you didn't go pro?" Alex asked softly.

"Nope. I was never allowed to think like that. Visualize the W. Manifest the future you want and forget everything else."

"It can be tough to break years of conditioning and shift your thought patterns, but it's not impossible. Maybe it's time for you to focus inward and think about what will make you happy. You only get one life, and it sounds like you've been living for other people."

"Not other people. My dad." I grunted. Frustration built in my chest. "All the pressure in my life comes from him. My mother doesn't give a shit about me or what I do. She's so busy with her own life that she probably wouldn't even notice if I quit playing. My dad is the one who's been pushing me my entire life. He never made it, so I have to. I have the talent he wishes he did, so it's my responsibility to live his dream so he can live it through me."

"I'm the last person to know what a good parental relationship is supposed to look like, but you're the kid. It's not your responsibility to make him happy."

"I know you're right, but they're all I have." My voice cracked, and I cleared my throat.

"There's no easy answer here." He patted my knee. "And you're in a shitty position because of baseball. But my grandmother once told me something that stuck with me. She

said that the luckiest people in the world are the ones who find love with their best friends. That no matter what they go through, what hardships they face, they always have that deep, soul-connecting love to fall back on. It sounds like you're lucky enough to be one of those few."

Silence descended on us as Alex's words reverberated in my mind. Jax was worth waiting for. Hopefully, he felt the same about me.

MATT

“W assuuuuuuup!”
“Jesus *fuck!*”

Jax came into my room, laughing like a maniac. “You should see your face.”

“Asshole.” I shot him a glare, which only made him laugh harder. “Did I know you were coming over now?”

“Nope. Class was canceled. Can you believe we’re two weeks away from our season opener?” He flopped down onto the bed and put his head in my lap.

I ran my fingers through his hair. “Considering I’m on the team, and you’ve been giving me a daily countdown, yes, I can believe it.”

“Harder.” He closed his eyes and let out a deep sigh.

Using two hands, I gently sifted my fingers through his hair and rubbed his scalp.

“I’m feeling good about this season.”

“Yeah?” I gently scratched my nails over the back of his head.

He moaned. “Yeah. But I can’t think about baseball when you do that.”

“Then don’t think about baseball.”

“What’s baseball?” He let out another low moan, and my dick, which had chubbed up, was hard enough to pound nails

in only seconds.

“Someone’s liking this as much as I am.” He opened his eyes and playfully nudged my bulge with his head.

“Not my fault. It has a mind of its own when you’re close to it.”

He turned his head and rubbed the tip of his nose against my length. “You could always pull it out and let me suck it for a bit.”

I let out a shuddering breath, and he nuzzled my shaft with his cheek.

Shit.

I jerked away from him, my chest tight and my vision swimming. *Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit.*

“Matt?” Jax sat up, concern etched into his handsome features. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. I just... I...” Fuck. I couldn’t breathe. Why couldn’t I breathe?

“Babe?” He knelt on the bed next to me and tipped my face toward his. “Deep breath in. You’re okay. I’m here.”

“Sorry,” I gasped.

“None of that. Just pull in a deep breath for me.”

I did, my chest burning like I’d just finished wind sprints.

“There you go. Another,” he said softly. “Good. You’re doing so good.”

The tightness lessened, then faded as we breathed in tandem.

“What happened?” He sat back on his heels. “What triggered that?” He widened his eyes and blanched. “Was it me? When I touched you?”

“No,” I lied. Well, half lied. Him touching me *had* triggered the panic, but it wasn’t the reason I’d freaked out.

He cocked his head to the side, his eyes serious. “What’s going on? I can tell there’s something.”

“I...” I swallowed hard. “Can you look up what time that Chinese place opens?” I dug my phone out of my hoodie pocket and tossed it to him.

He caught it, his expression shifting to confusion.

“I’m kinda feeling some fried rice and crab Rangoon for dinner tonight. I need to go check something.” I scrambled off the bed and raced toward the door. “Be right back.”

I closed the heavy wooden door and leaned against it, my heart racing as I tried to calm the fuck down.

“Matt?”

Back and Alex stepped onto the landing, their gym bags over their shoulders.

“Hey.” I pushed off the door and tried to act casual. “Just get back from the gym?”

“Yeah.” Alex exchanged a look with Beck. “You okay?”

“Fine.”

“We’re going to watch the game and order pizza in a bit. The Pens are playing. You guys want in?” Beck asked as Alex unlocked his door.

“Um, maybe. I’ll ask Jax.”

“I’ll toss my bag into my room and meet you downstairs?” Beck turned his attention to Alex.

“Sure.” He nodded and shoved his door open.

Beck shot me one last strange look, then disappeared up the stairs. The door to Alex’s room closed behind him, and I was once again alone in the hall.

What the fuck had I done?

The door opened, and I pitched backward, another wave of panic surging through me.

“*Shit!*”

“Jesus!”

I hit a solid body, and a warm arm wrapped around my middle.

“Matt?”

“I’m fine.”

He let go of me, and I straightened up. Fear lanced through me, and my feet were rooted to the spot.

“Look at me,” he said softly.

I turned, afraid of what I’d see.

“Did you ask me to look up the restaurant because you want Chinese, or so I’d see this?” He held up my phone.

“The second one,” I croaked.

He stepped aside. I walked into my room, my body wooden and my mind stuck in that place between panic and hysteria when everything is going too fast and too slow and the world doesn’t track.

“Babe.”

His gentle voice soothed some of my turmoil, and I turned around so I was facing him.

“Do you like this kind of thing?” He wiggled the phone at me.

“Yeah,” I rasped.

“For you or for me?”

“Me,” I whispered.

Jax licked his bottom lip, his eyes darkening with lust. “That’s hot as fuck.”

“Really?”

“Fuck, yeah. I had no idea I’d be into it, but goddamn. Picturing you in something like that?” He waved at his semi. “Kink unlocked.”

I’d left my internet browser open to a photo of a guy with our build and my coloring wearing a lacy green thong and sports bra set. I’d planned to show it to him and gauge his

reaction, but apparently, my brain had decided that panicking and running out of the room was the better choice.

“Is that what freaked you out?” He put my phone on the desk. “Are you wearing something like that now?”

I nodded, not trusting my voice.

He raked his gaze down my body like he was trying to see through my clothes.

“Do you want to show me?” The open hunger in his eyes calmed the last of my fear.

This was Jax. Even if he hadn’t found the photo sexy, he’d never mock me or make fun of a kink he didn’t share.

“You don’t have to. But I’d love to see it,” he said huskily.

“I want to.”

He stepped into my space, grabbed me around the waist, and pulled me against him. His kiss was hot and hard, his lips punishing and desperate.

I sank into the kiss, giving myself over to the moment, to him.

Strong hands ran down my back, gripping and tugging at my sweater. His dick, so hard and hot, pressed against mine. He walked me backward, his hips bumping mine, and stopped when my legs bumped my mattress.

He broke the kiss so we could tear off our sweaters, but when I went to yank off my shirt, he stopped me.

“Let me.”

I dropped my hands and stood still.

Jax slowly lifted the hem of my shirt, his eyes tracking the movement as my abs were revealed.

He tugged the shirt up a little more. Cold air hit my skin, but the surge of fear I’d been bracing for never came.

“Holy fuck,” he rasped. “Matt...”

The purple sports bra and matching underwear had been sitting in a box in the back of my closet since I’d ordered

them. They were made for men, so the cups of the bra lay flat against my pecs, and the underwear had a dick pouch and fit snugly around my natural waist. The lacy material of the bra showed my skin beneath it, including my nipples. The silky lining of the underwear cradled my dick. I loved how it felt against my skin, how that softness was like a little secret only I knew.

Today was the first time I'd put them on. I'd thought I'd have a few hours to get used to them and had fully intended to change before Jax had been due to come over.

A part of me felt stupid for not telling him about them earlier, but I hadn't been ready.

Jax pulled off my shirt, letting out a low growl. His eyes were glued to my chest, and the lust in them was unmistakable.

He was as into this as I was.

"You look beautiful."

My body flushed hot, and zings of happiness shot through me. I *felt* beautiful, and it meant the world that he thought so too.

"This color looks amazing against your skin. All soft and pretty next to your tan." He dragged his fingertip over my nipple, which was already hard and pebbled. "And the lace is so fucking sexy." He shuddered. "Jesus, I might come before I see the rest of it."

"You like it?" I couldn't keep the hope out of my voice.

"I like you in it." He looked into my eyes, his expression soft but serious. "I know how hard it must have been for you to be this vulnerable in front of me. Thank you for trusting me."

"It wasn't a trust thing. I've always trusted you with everything. A lot of the fear and stuff about this was me trying to get over all that toxic masculinity that's been beaten into me since I was a kid."

He trailed his fingertips down my cheek. “It’s hard to break years of conditioning.”

“It is.” I swallowed. “But I realized something earlier.”

“What’s that?”

“Being with you doesn’t threaten my masculinity. Sucking your dick, you putting your cock in me, none of that makes me feel emasculated or like I’m not your equal. But wearing something that’s traditionally for women did.”

“Do you still feel like that?”

“No. Because it’s you. I wouldn’t have been able to show anyone else this side of me.”

He leaned in and pressed a soft kiss to my lips. “I’m so fucking proud of you. It’s not easy to step outside what makes us comfortable.”

He kissed the line of my jaw, down my neck, and over my collarbone. He tongued the strap of the bra where it met my shoulder, then dragged the flat of his tongue down the material.

I let out a shuddering breath as he peppered my chest with kisses, holding me in place with his big hands circling my waist. He rubbed his cheek against the lace and looked up at me.

“Can I see more?”

I nodded, not trusting my voice.

He straightened up and tugged my shirt the rest of the way off. A shiver of unease shot through me. I was half-naked and he was still fully clothed.

Jax must have sensed the shift, and he quickly yanked off his sweater and shirt in one go. He tossed them aside, his eyes roving up and down my body.

“Holy fuck,” he rasped and gently trailed one finger over the waistband of my jeans. His eyes flared, dark and possessive.

I glanced down. The waistband of the underwear peeked out over the top of my jeans. The contrast between the light purple elastic and the worn denim of the jeans was hot, and it seemed Jax thought so too.

Jax had probably never paid attention to lingerie. I didn't imagine a lot of dudes on campus were into pretty undies. And if they were, they wouldn't wear them for a hookup with a near stranger.

Lingerie hadn't been a kink of mine until I'd learned they also made it for men. Seeing a pretty, matching set on a girl was nice, but her revealing a utility bra or some comfy granny panties didn't dampen my mood. It wasn't so much *what* a girl wore but how she felt in them that mattered to me.

The thought of Jax in a set like mine was intriguing, but it didn't have the same appeal as me wearing it. I'd never say no to him in some sexy briefs or a jock, but this was something that made me feel good. That I did for me.

"Matt. Babe." He dropped to his knees and nuzzled his cheek against my bulge.

"Shit," I breathed and ran my fingers through his soft hair.

He pressed wet, open-mouthed kisses against the jeans, his eyes closed and his cheeks flushed pink. Fuck. He was really into this.

Still kissing my dick through my jeans, he carefully worked the button free with nimble fingers.

I loved his hands. I had pitchers' hands. Long, slender fingers and a narrow palm. Perfect for controlling spirals but not exactly sexy. I'd had trainers and coaches call them *dainty* in the past. The word didn't bother me because they were, especially compared to Jax's.

His hands were big and strong, with thick fingers and a wide palm, and his callused skin felt incredible against mine. I loved how rough they were. How they could touch me so tenderly one minute and manhandle me the next. He also had big, sexy veins running down the back of them, and his thick

wrists gave way to muscle-corded forearms dusted with dark hair.

“What are you thinking about?” Jax ran his finger down the zipper. Goosebumps erupted on my skin at the rough sensation of the teeth pressing into the soft underwear.

“Just waxing poetic about your hands and arms in my head.” I chuckled and carded my hands through his hair.

“You like my hands, eh?”

“I like everything about you. But your hands and arms are right up there. So are your quads. And your back.”

He gripped the slider of my zipper and slowly tugged it down.

“And your shoulders and abs.”

He stopped pulling on the zipper and looked up at me, a playful grin on his lips. “I thought my ass was your favorite?”

“It is.” I chuckled, the levity of the moment chasing away the last of the tension I’d been holding in my shoulders. “But all of you is so damn sexy I can never pick just one part of you.”

“You know what my favorite part of you is?” He stood and cupped my face in his hands.

“What?” I whispered.

“Your soul.” He brushed a kiss against my lips, the contact so fleeting it was barely even a kiss. “You’re gorgeous, no question, but it’s your soul I love the most. You’re beautiful, babe. Inside and out.”

He swiped his tongue over my bottom lip, then gently nipped it.

Curling my arms around him, I pulled him close and deepened the kiss. He moaned into my mouth, holding me just as tight. The kiss was slow and deep and so damn perfect my chest ached.

When he eventually pulled away, he was glassy-eyed and breathless. I imagined I looked the same. He stared at me for a

few beats, his expression both intense and strangely blank.

Fear crept into the haze of lust that had descended over us.
“Jax?”

He shook his head, just a quick jerk, and his eyes cleared.
“Nothing.”

I bit my tongue. That hadn't looked like nothing, but I let it go.

He pressed a quick kiss to my lips, then dropped to his knees again. Wordlessly, he gripped the slider of my zipper and tugged it down.

His eyes never left my crotch as he slowly revealed the light purple lace of my underwear. His expression shifted from anticipation to wonder, then to hunger.

He pulled the V of the fly open and pressed his cheek against my dick.

“Shit.” I jerked as the soft inner layer slid over my skin.

“So fucking sexy.” He kissed my shaft. “I need to see the rest.”

Slowly, reverently, he slid my jeans down my hips.

“Jesus,” he croaked when they were around my upper thighs and the front of the underwear was in full view. “Damn, babe. Wow.”

The front was my favorite part of the underwear. They were high-waisted, and the lacy material cut up my abs, covering my junk but showing off wide triangles of skin. The inner layer made the lace opaque, and a slight sheen shimmered under the peek-a-boo parts of the lace.

Jax brushed his thumbs over my Adonis belt and licked his lips. Confidence rushed through my chest, and my skin went hot with arousal at the open hunger on his face.

Jax busied himself with tugging my jeans the rest of the way down my legs. I stepped out of them, and he threw them aside and gripped my hips.

“I need to see the back,” he rasped.

The pressure on my hips was gentle, and I let him turn me.

The underwear was thong-style, and when I'd put them on, I'd spent more than a few minutes checking out the view from behind. I loved the way they highlighted the fullness of my cheeks and how the waistband hugged my waist, framing my ass and making it pop.

“Do you want me to be gentle?” Jax’s voice was gruff. “Because I’m about five seconds away from throwing you down and doing all sorts of dirty things to you.”

“Don’t be gentle.”

JAX

D *on't be gentle.*

Matt's rough voice echoed in my head.

Lingerie wasn't something I'd ever thought twice about. I'd seen it in porn a few times but never on someone who looked like Matt. The contrast between his big, strong body and the soft, pretty lingerie was as arousing as it was entrancing. I loved how the lace teased at what was underneath, and the cut was perfect on him. It hugged all the right places, creating the most alluring curves and highlighting his muscles.

"On the bed." Gripping his hips, I gave him a little push toward the mattress.

He went down on his hands and knees willingly. A deep groan rumbled out of his chest, and he spread his legs wide.

"Hold right there." I dropped a kiss on the swell of his ass. "Forgot the music."

He looked over his shoulder at me as I fumbled with my phone, my attention still on him and not on the task at hand.

"Having trouble?" he asked sweetly, a playful grin on his lips. He did this thing where he popped his hips, and his ass jiggled exactly how it did when I fucked him.

Forgetting about my phone, I stepped closer and ground my hard-on against his ass. "Behave."

“You’re no fun.” He pouted and did that hip-pop move again. His ass rubbed against my cock, and I saw stars.

“Fuck.” It came out as a half groan, half laugh. “Where did you learn to do that?”

“You like?” He pushed up on his knees and leaned back against me. He slung one thick arm over his shoulder and gripped my back, anchoring him to me.

He swirled his hips, rubbing my dick in the most perfect way.

“I can’t think straight when you do that,” I rasped.

“Well, this is pretty gay, so…” He bumped his ass back.

I laughed through another groan and pressed my phone into his free hand. “Let’s see how well you can multitask.”

He took the phone, and I wrapped my arms around his middle so he could let go of my back without the risk of falling.

Not to be outdone, I slowly rocked my hips, sliding my clothed cock through his crease.

“No fair,” he panted.

“Totally fair.” I swiped my tongue against the side of his neck.

“Fuck it.” He tossed my phone onto the mattress and gripped my arms where they were still wrapped around him. “No one else tries to cover up their sex noises with music.”

“Pretty sure they’ll figure out what we’re doing if we don’t put something on.” I rubbed one hand over his incredible abs.

I’d spent a lot of time with my tongue on his abs, tracing the muscles and teasing the dips and bumps.

“They already know.”

His words penetrated my lust-filled haze, and I stopped my hand. “They do?”

“Yeah.” He snort-laughed and leaned his head back against my shoulder. “I mean, Eli knew. Alex figured it out, and Beck

and Finn aren't stupid."

"How do you feel about that?" I asked carefully.

"Don't care." He reached behind him and gripped my ass in his hand. "I'm kind of relieved, actually."

"You are?"

"Yeah. Are you okay with them knowing?"

I hesitated. I had nothing against his roommates and liked all of them. But a niggling of unease moved through me. It wasn't so much them knowing that was messing with me; it was the fact that *anyone* knew. Our entire arrangement hinged on keeping things quiet. I trusted his roommates to keep our secret, but the fear that this was the beginning of the end of us hit me deep in my chest.

"Jax?" Worry crept into his tone.

"Yeah, I'm okay with it." I kissed his cheek. "Guess it's time for some payback because something tells me we're about to get really loud."

He chuckled and turned his face to kiss me. "I know *I* am."

I gave him one last kiss. The sweet slide of his lips against mine calmed the last of my fear, and I lost myself in the moment.

In him.

When I slowly eased back from the kiss, Matt let out a breathy little moan. "On your hands and knees," I whispered gruffly.

He dropped down and spread his legs wider. He arched his back, popping his ass up.

I ran my hand over the curve of his lower back. "This back arch is so fucking hot."

He shuddered and stayed still, letting me have my fun.

"And this." I traced a finger over the waistband of his underwear. "So damn sexy."

I played with the elastic for a second, then ran my hand over the lace of his sports bra. It was racerback style, and the way the material fit between his shoulder blades was perfect.

“Jax,” he whimpered.

“So beautiful.” I dropped to the floor, ignoring the way the hardwood cut into my knees. Slowly, I dragged my tongue down the strip of material between his plump cheeks.

He shuddered and put his chest on the bed, fully opening himself up for me.

As much as I wanted to tease every part of him, I was way too close. “Ready for my tongue?”

“So ready,” he moaned and bumped his ass back.

“What about my cock? You want me to fuck this tight ass after I eat you out?”

“God, yes.” He slid his hands up the sheets and gripped them tight. “Do it. Wanna feel you.”

Swallowing hard, I pushed the material of the thong to the side and lowered my mouth to him.

The shout of pleasure he let out at the first swipe of my tongue was so loud it echoed in the room. Rather than freak out about others hearing us, I gave in to the overwhelming need inside me and went to town on him.

Matt was mine, and that primal part of me loved that everyone in the house could hear me claiming him.

I ate him out like a man possessed, driven by instinct and with zero finesse. I lapped and licked and stabbed at his hole with my tongue. I used my other hand to stroke his balls and dick, still encased in the pretty material. The lace was rough under my fingers, and little prickles of awareness shot through me and gathered low in my belly.

Matt was mumbling and moaning up a storm. He shifted his hips, popping and bouncing that perfect ass against my face as he tried to force me to go faster and deeper.

His enthusiasm and confidence were almost as hot as the sensation of his softening hole under my tongue.

The pressure in my dick was nearing flash point. I let go of his balls and grabbed my junk, squeezing tight, my lower body throbbing.

As much as I wanted to keep rimming him, I needed more. Pulling my tongue out of him, I stood.

“Holy fucking shit,” he panted.

I tore my jeans open and shoved them down. I cursed the tight pants as I worked them down my legs. “I think you were onto something when you said sweatpants only. They’re a hell of a lot easier to take off than jeans.”

“Told ya.” A lazy, satisfied smile played on his lips. “Now get those off and fuck me.”

“Bossy bottom.”

“Slow top.”

I gave his ass a playful tap, not quite a spank but close. “You done sassing me?”

“Don’t know. Are you done lollygagging?”

“Lollygagging?” I couldn’t stop my bark of laughter.

“What? It’s a good word.” He pushed up on his hands and wiggled his ass. “Fine, what about dawdle? Meander? Or tootle.” He grinned triumphantly.

“Tootle? Now I know you’re making shit up.”

“It’s a word! It means to take your sweet-ass time.”

“I’m calling bullshit.” I toed out of my shoes, then tugged one leg free of my jeans.

“It’s a real word. Eli taught it to me.”

“I have no doubt it’s a real word. I just call bullshit that it means to take your sweet-ass time.”

“Maybe not that *exactly*. It was something about moving leisurely, traveling slow, something like that.”

I finally freed my other foot from my jeans and tossed them aside.

“You were saying?” I fit my length between his cheeks and dragged it over his hole.

“Fuuuuuuck,” he moaned and dropped his head. “More.”

“So bossy.” I gripped my shaft and rubbed my cockhead over his hole again, using my precum to slick it up.

“Fuck me,” he demanded.

“I haven’t prepped you yet.” I pushed the tip of my head inside him, opening him up the tiniest bit.

“Don’t care,” he panted. “Want it.”

“You’ll get it. But I’m not going to hurt you.” I pulled my dick back, then pushed in a little bit more. Not enough to fully breach him. Just enough to tease what was going to happen.

“Hurt me. I can take it.”

I paused. “Are you sure?”

He was used to my size thanks to weeks of fucking like crazed bunnies in heat, but we’d never fucked without prep. I knew some guys enjoyed the stretch of taking a dick dry. Was Matt into that?

“Yeah. Want to feel you.” He looked over his shoulder at me. His eyes were bright and a bit dazed, but he was fully present. He knew what he was asking for. “I’ll tell you if it’s too much. I promise.”

“If you’re sure.” I swiped the lube off his night table and pumped some into my hand. “Do you want me to push some into you so it’s a bit easier to get in?”

“Yeah. But don’t play around in there. I might come before you get your dick in me.”

“Can’t have that.” I slicked up my dick, then used some more of the cool liquid to coat my finger. “Ready?” I pressed the tip to his waiting hole.

“So ready.”

I pushed in. He was soft from my teasing, and I slid in to the first knuckle.

“That’s it.” He panted and rocked his hips, driving back on my finger. “Now your dick.”

I pulled my finger out of him and held the base of my cock with two fingers. With my free hand, I gripped his thong and pulled it aside.

The visual of my thick cock between his luscious cheeks nearly sent me over the edge. Breathing deeply to center myself, I rubbed my tip over his hole a few times.

“Jax, *please*.”

“I’ve got you,” I said softly and rocked my hips so my head breached him. “Fuck.”

“Yesssssss,” he hissed.

When my cockhead was fully in him, I let go of my dick and stared between us as I slowly sank into him.

Matt on his hands and knees was a beautiful sight on a normal day, but something about holding his pretty underwear aside as I watched him take me brought things to the next level. I’d be seeing this moment in my dreams and fantasies for years to come.

“You okay?” I asked when I was halfway in.

He clenched around my length and moaned. “More.”

The wet heat of him was incredible. So tight and hot as he wrapped around my cock like velvet. I pushed the rest of the way in, making sure to move as slowly as possible.

When my thighs brushed his, Matt let out a hoarse cry.

“You okay? Does it hurt?”

“No.” He rubbed his cheek against the bed and gripped the sheets tight. “Feels so good.”

Gritting my teeth, I pulled almost all the way out of him, then slid back in.

“Harder,” he ordered. “Fuck me hard.”

“What if I don’t want to? What if I want to take my time and fuck you nice and slow?”

My words were one hundred percent a tease. I was way too close to drag this out.

He growled and rocked on his knees, fucking himself on my dick.

“Holy fuck.” I gripped his hip with my free hand and yanked him back at the same time I snapped my hips forward.

The echoing crack of skin meeting skin was nearly drowned out by our combined cries.

“Yes. Like that,” Matt begged, rocking in time with my thrusts so each one hit deep and hard.

A roar filled my ears, and my world narrowed down until nothing existed besides Matt and how good he felt.

I drove into him, putting as much power behind each thrust as I dared. Matt took it like a champ, begging and pleading, and slammed back, forcing my cock as deep inside him as it could go.

We were too loud, the bed creaked, and the side of the frame hit the wall, the pattern frantic and as desperate as we were.

Pleasure spread through my body, followed by white-hot need that tightened my balls and drew them up against my body.

“Fuck, I’m gonna come,” I rasped.

“Come on my back,” he begged.

“Oh god!”

I pulled out of him and closed my hand around my shaft as the pressure in my dick coiled tight, like a spring about to snap. Less than a dozen strokes and I was coming, crying out in ecstasy as my cum rained down onto his skin.

Miraculously, I was still hard, even after that mind-bending orgasm. Dazedly, I slid back inside him. A flare of

discomfort shot through me as my oversensitive dick was once again encased in his tight heat.

This time I gripped him with two hands and angled my dick so it dragged over his prostate with every thrust.

“Get yourself there,” I gritted out. “Wanna feel you come on me.”

He grunted something unintelligible but didn’t jerk off.

I let go of his hips, but before I could reach under him, a full-body shudder racked him. He jerked and shook on the bed. His ass rippled around my dick, pulling me deep inside him.

“Holy fuck!” I gasped.

Had he just come hands-free?

My dick pulsed inside him, and a second, smaller orgasm rocked through me.

I collapsed onto him, my weight sending us crashing to the bed. The frame cracked, and the floor groaned at the impact.

“Can you breathe?” I managed to ask as we lay in a sweaty, panting pile.

“Barely.” He grunted.

I rolled us over so we were on our sides and held him against my chest big-spoon style.

“I think you killed me,” I mumbled.

“I think I killed me too.” He chuckled softly.

“Did you come without touching yourself?”

He gripped my wrist and dragged my hand down to cover his junk. He was soft, and I groaned at the telltale wet spot on the underwear.

“That’s so hot.” I gently worried the skin of his neck between my teeth.

“Careful. That’ll leave a mark.”

Shit. I’d lost my head for a second there.

I pulled my mouth from his neck and pressed a kiss to his shoulder. “So, how many pairs of those do you have?”

He chuckled and scooted back, his body flush against mine. “This is the only set. But I have a bunch in my cart on the site I bought them from. I have a feeling I’m going to be giving my credit card a workout later.”

“Do they have rush delivery?”

“Two to three business days.”

“Too long.” I kissed his neck. “We need to either move up on the bed or go shower. This half-on, half-off position is fucking up my back.”

“Thank fuck you said something because I was just about to. Shower first. Then I want butt cuddles.”

“The rest of me doesn’t get cuddles?” I let go of him and sat up. “Shit!”

Matt grabbed me as I slipped off the edge of the mattress. “You good?” he asked, his eyes twinkling with laughter.

“Fine. Your bed isn’t big enough for my ass at this angle.”

“Not my bed’s fault your giant ass needs more space.” He looked down at my chest and abs, which were smeared with cum. “The rest of you can get some shower cuddles. Then I want butt cuddles.”

“I can live with that.”

“Don’t pretend you don’t love them.” He stood and grinned down at me. “You think you can hide your boner when I’m that close to your junk?”

“And I suppose you randomly humping the bed while you snuggle my ass has nothing to do with your boner?” I stood and stretched out my back.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he said primly.

“Sure you don’t.” Grinning, I dropped a kiss on his lips. “Need some help taking those off?”

“I’ll never say no to you putting your hands on me. Oh, Beck and Alex asked if we wanted to watch the Pens with them. They’re ordering pizza.”

I hooked my thumbs into the waistband of his underwear and slid them over his hips. “Yeah, sure. Unless you actually wanted Chinese tonight.”

“No lecture about eating healthy and vegetable servings?” He quirked an eyebrow at me.

“Nah. You earned a cheat day.” I knelt and dragged the underwear down his legs. “Someone likes me down here.” I pressed a kiss against his semi.

“Someone likes being down there.” He waved at my dick, which was also rocking a semi.

He stepped out of the underwear, and I stood.

“Now look what you did.” He moved his hips so his hard dick slashed through the air.

I dropped the underwear onto his dick and laughed as it draped over his length.

“I was trying to be sexy.” He rolled his eyes dramatically. “You’re the ruiner of all good things.” He plucked the underwear off his dick and tossed it onto his bed.

“Am I, though?” I lifted my hands to help him with the bra.

“Totally are.” He stepped closer and poked me in the hip with his dick.

I turned so my shaft smacked against his. Then we were sword-fighting and laughing so hard I could barely breathe.

“No more.” Matt clutched his stomach and made a weird snorting sound.

I laughed harder.

“Ow.” He punched me in the arm. “Stop laughing. It hurts.”

My stomach ached, and my muscles burned. I tried to swallow my laughter, but a little snort slipped out.

“No.” He wagged a finger at me. “Not doing that again.”

I cleared my throat, still grinning like an idiot. “Did we ever decide what we’re having for dinner?”

“Pizza. We can have Chinese tomorrow.” He whipped the sports bra off and tossed it onto the bed with his underwear.

“We can’t do takeout two nights in a row.”

“Sure we can.” He went to his dresser and yanked open one of the drawers. “All we have to do is put an order in, then eat it when they deliver it. Easy peasy lemon squeezy.”

“Is that really how that saying goes.” I caught the pair of sweats he tossed me. “Lemon squeezy?”

“No clue.” He used his thigh to close the drawer. “But I’ve been saying it for years, so I kinda hope it is.”

“What was that thing you kept saying last year? People with glass rocks shouldn’t have houses?”

“Better than you always saying ‘yeah no.’” He grabbed his shower stuff. “How are Canadians not always confused? You literally say yes and no. Which is it?”

“It’s whatever it needs to be.”

“Don’t even get me started on ‘yeah no, for sure.’” He put on a ridiculous caricature of a Canadian accent. “There’s no doot about it.”

“You know that no Canadian says ‘no doubt about it’ that way.” I slapped his ass as he walked in front of me.

“Pop culture told me they did, so I believe it.”

“Right, because American pop culture knows more about being Canadian than an actual Canadian.”

“You’re only half Canadian.” He waved over his shoulder as he walked out of his room, me on his heels. “Your mom is American, so really, what do you know.”

“Well, hello.”

We both froze in the middle of the hallway.

“Shit,” Matt muttered and covered his ass with the sweats still clutched in his hand. “We’re not wearing pants.”

“No, we’re not.” Covering my dick with my own sweats, I looked over my shoulder. Eli was grinning at us from the landing. He had one foot on the step above him like he’d stopped midstride. “So this doesn’t usually happen.”

“It doesn’t.” He rolled his lips inward as if he was trying to stop himself from laughing. “I’m not complaining, though. The view is spectacular.”

“How about we mosey into the bathroom while you ogle Jax’s ass?” Matt’s voice held a note of laughter. “As fun as this is, my dick is currently trying to turtle back into my body.”

Eli laughed, the sound hearty and loud and so unlike his usual soft, melodic one. “Deal. But I’m ogling both of you, FYI.”

“Yup. Totally not awkward at all.” Matt chuckled.

“I mean, you did see me naked. Seems fair is fair.”

“I didn’t see you naked.” I laughed as Matt scurried into the bathroom.

“You could. All you need is Google.” He winked. Then he was gone and hurrying up the stairs.

“Do you know Eli’s performer name?” I asked Matt as I joined him in the bathroom.

“No. Why?” He narrowed his eyes adorably. “You want to look him up?”

“You don’t?”

“I’ve already seen enough of him.” He shrugged and turned the water on. “He’s hot, but he’s so young.”

“Only two years younger than us.”

“Maybe. But he seems younger. Like, he’s mature and obviously has his shit together, but I look at him and want to protect him like a little brother.”

“I get that.” I stepped up behind him and rubbed his ass. “That’s why I’d never actually look him up. It’s cool he does what he does. All the power to him, but I don’t need to be picturing that the next time we’re hanging out.”

“Exactly.” He grinned. “That was pretty funny now that the shock has worn off.”

“Hilarious. Kinda glad it was him and not Beck or Alex.”

“Oh god, can you imagine? They’d never let us live it down.”

“And poor Finn would have fainted from embarrassment.”

Matt snorted. “Probably. Guess if we were going to flash anyone, this was the best-case scenario.”

“At least it’ll be a good reminder not to forget to put pants or towels on when we leave your room. I blame you.”

“Me?” He stuck his hand under the spray. “How is this *my* fault?”

“You distracted me with your sexy undies, and I didn’t even realize we were naked.”

“Sounds like a you problem.”

“So what’s your excuse? You’re the one who walked out of there first.”

“The promise of butt cuddles distracted me. I can’t be held responsible for a momentary lapse in judgment when I’m thinking about ass cuddles.”

He whipped the shower curtain back and stepped into the shower. I laughed at his theatrics and stepped in after him.

“I was promised shower cuddles.” I wrapped my arms around him and tugged him against my body.

“Then you’d better take them.” He leaned against me and let out a contented sigh. “While leaving me in the hot water of course.”

“Of course.” I kissed his neck. “Water hog.”

“Bed hog.” He reached behind me and pinched my ass. “You nearly starfished me into the wall last night. I legit woke up with my nose on the plaster.”

“Pretty sure there are a few coats of paint over the plaster.”

“Semantics.” He pulled my arms around him tighter.

I looked at the mirror directly across from us, and my stomach swooped at the sight of being wrapped around Matt as he leaned on me, a happy smile on his lips.

I was so fucked.

JAX

The hot water soothed my aching muscles. Our season opener was in three days. Coach had run us into the ground today, but the team was in high spirits as we showered off the remnants of the four-hour practice.

Not only did we have the next two days off, but our first game was a home game. Getting to start the season on our field, with our fans, was a huge morale booster.

A burst of laughter drowned out the rushing water. I cracked one eye open and looked down the line of shower stalls.

Petey and Hayes were in stalls next to each other, and it looked like they were in the middle of a soap fight.

“Children!” Cooper barked from the other end of the showers. “Do I need to put you in separate corners?”

I looked at our disgruntled captain, and my eyes met a pair of dark brown ones.

“Like what you see?” Chase sneered, his face dark with anger.

“Not especially.” I focused on the wall in front of me.

“Wonder what the rest of the guys would think if they knew you were creeping on them in here?” he asked. His tone was conversational, but his words were heavy with threat.

“Wasn’t creeping on anyone. Just looking to see what the commotion was about.”

“Sure you were.”

“If you’re so scared of me checking you out, why did you get in the stall beside me?”

I should have kept my mouth shut and let him either burn himself out or start talking smack about me to the team.

Chase had been upping his bullshit lately. Most of his comments were relatively benign. He’d been careful not to say anything overtly homophobic or use slurs. Nope. His style was to allude and try and trick me into engaging.

Matt had pointed out that Chase seemed to want me to lose my shit on him. That he was using his words to try and bait me into snapping or putting hands on him. Considering what a coward he was, that tracked.

Normally, I could just ignore him. I’d learned long ago that I needed to pick my battles. Chase was annoying as fuck, but he technically hadn’t broken any rules.

“You saying I *shouldn’t* have?” he asked darkly.

“Not saying that at all. Just pointing out that it’s a bit weird you’d shower next to me when you’re so scared I’m going to check you out.”

“You did check me out.”

I snorted and flicked my gaze to his. The walls of the shower stalls offered enough privacy that everyone other than your direct neighbors wouldn’t be able to see the goods, but a quick glance downward would be enough for the person next to you to see everything.

“How many times have you checked out my dick?” His face twisted into a sneer. “Are you actually a catcher, or do you prefer to pitch? How worried do we need to be about dropping the soap?”

“You seem very interested in what sex with me is like. If you’re curious, you just have to ask.” I batted my eyelashes at him, purposefully keeping my eyes locked on his so he couldn’t accuse me of scoping out his junk.

“Watch it, Crawford.” The warning in his voice was loud and clear.

“Don’t worry, Ballsac. You’re not my type.”

Chase’s last name was Balzac. I didn’t usually stoop to the level of making fun of his name, but I was stressed, and my grip on my self-control was precarious.

His glare intensified. “Watch your mouth.”

Anger rushed through me, and my vision shimmered around the edges. Between the stress of the season starting, the shit going on between Matt and me, and just dealing with life, I wasn’t in the mood to put up with Chase’s passive-aggressive shit and thinly veiled homophobia.

“But I bet you’d look pretty all bent over for someone,” I muttered and turned off the water.

“The fuck did you say to me?” Chase’s voice echoed against the tiled walls, and the entire area went silent.

“Guys.” Cooper’s warning voice cut through the silence.

“I didn’t say anything.” I grabbed my towel from the bar on the outside of the little door to my stall.

“I fucking heard what you said. You want me to repeat it so everyone knows exactly what you think about in here?”

“Chase, enough.”

“Really, Coop? Jumping to Crawford’s defense? I guess affirmative action helps you off the field too.” He practically spat the words at me, his handsome face ugly and distorted with rage.

“Chase!” Cooper barked.

“Affirmative action?” I laughed and wrapped my towel around my waist. “You think that’s why I’m the starter and you’re my backup?”

“Can’t make the queer feel like he’s being picked on.”

“Balzac!” Cooper appeared in front of our stalls. “Shut it down, now.”

“Why, afraid he’s going to get the school lawyers after us? Oh no, the poor baby can’t handle a few words. Where’s your safe space now, fa—”

“Hey!” Cooper’s loud voice echoed in the room like the crack of a whip. “Do NOT finish that sentence.”

“The fuck is going on?” Matt came stalking down the space between the rows of showers, a towel around his waist and his face red with rage.

“Awww, how cute. Your boyfriend is coming to your defense.”

Matt’s face went white, which was alarming, considering how flushed he’d just been.

“That’s it.” Cooper smacked his hand against Chase’s stall. “Get the fuck out of there, put on some clothes, and get your ass into Coach’s office.”

“Why? For making a few jokes?” He turned his rage on Cooper.

“We don’t joke about that shit in here.”

“Only because we can’t. Why do the rest of us have to tiptoe around *his* feelings?”

“Nah, man.” Adams piped up from Chase’s other side. “We don’t joke about that shit because it’s fucked up.”

“Just a bunch of fucking woke liberals.” He turned off his water and yanked his towel off the other side of the door.

“Okay, boomer.” Matt gave him a sugary sweet smile, his earlier panic gone. “Got any more buzzwords you’d like to toss at us?”

Chase turned on Matt and opened his mouth.

“Not one more word.” Cooper hit the stall door again. “Get out, get dressed, and get your ass into Coach’s office. Don’t make me say it again.”

Chase leveled a murderous stare at him, then shoved the door open with enough force that it bounced off Cooper’s arm, which he’d thankfully been able to raise in time to deflect the

door. The bar on the outside of it could have seriously hurt him if he hadn't.

"Show's over, kids. Finish up and get out. Enjoy your days off." Cooper clutched his towel around his waist and stalked toward the changing room, muttering something about overgrown children and herding cats.

"You manage to finish?" I asked Matt. Everyone turned back to their showers. The sound of faucets being turned on created a nice background of white noise. I'd been so angry I hadn't even noticed most of the guys had turned the water off during that whole thing.

"Yeah. All done." He pointed to the shower kit in my stall.

I swiped it off the single-seat bench and followed Matt to one of the showers closest to the changing room. He grabbed his own kit, and we made our way toward my locker.

Chase was yanking his shirt over his wet head while Cooper stood a few feet in front of him, still in his towel, glaring and silently daring Chase to start more shit.

Chase flicked his gaze between Matt and me, his expression going from angry to disgusted.

"Don't look at him." Matt stepped between us, his back to Chase. "Don't give him the satisfaction."

"I lost my cool," I muttered.

"What happened?"

"I accidentally made eye contact with him. Cooper yelled at Petey and Hayes. I turned toward his voice, and *bam* Chase was staring at me."

"He was staring at you?" Matt bit his lip.

"Yeah."

"Then what?"

"He said some shit about me checking him out. I made a crack about how he seems to really want to know what sex with me is like and told him he wasn't my type. I should have stopped there, but he just got under my skin."

“What did you say?”

“That he’d look pretty bent over for someone.”

Matt snickered. “Oh my fucking god.”

“He didn’t like that.” I smirked, my anger gone and replaced with amusement.

“He would look good bent over. Maybe with a ball gag,” Matt said thoughtfully.

“Didn’t realize you were so kinky, Landry.” I dropped my voice so only he could hear it. “Is there something you’ve been meaning to tell me?”

“It’s not the ball gag that’s hot. It’s that it would make him shut up that’s doing it for me.”

I snort-laughed, trying to keep my composure as more guys trickled into the changing area.

“Imagine the hate fuck you could give him? He’d walk funny for a month by the time you were done with him.”

“If I could get it up.” I opened my locker. “I’d have to put a bag over his head and pretend he was someone else. Hate fuck or not, his face makes me want to punch something.”

“Hard same.” Matt chewed his lip.

“What?” I asked.

He glanced around. “Let’s change and get out of here.”

I turned my back to the rest of the room as Matt walked off.

“You okay?”

I jumped at Big D’s voice. His locker was next to mine. He’d never had issues changing when I was around, but we didn’t talk while we were naked.

“Fine.” I made sure to keep my eyes on my locker as he pulled off his towel and rubbed it over his chest.

“Chase is a dick.”

“He is,” I agreed.

“He doesn’t speak for all of us. You know that, right?”

“Yeah.” I cleared my throat. “I get that.”

“This is super awkward, but I just wanted you to know that you being gay isn’t a thing. Not to me.”

I blinked, not quite sure what he was saying. “Um, thanks?”

“I’m not good at this kind of stuff,” he said gruffly. “I just mean that we’re bros. I think about you being gay like Landry is blond. It’s just one part of you, not what you are.”

“Thanks, that means a lot.” I took a chance and looked at him.

He didn’t flinch, didn’t even react.

“My brother came out to us over Christmas. He plays ball too.”

“Yeah?” Where was he going with this?

“He’s sixteen. We had no idea. He said he’s known since he was little but couldn’t tell us until now.” He sighed. “He’s terrified of what will happen when people find out.”

“Like, in general or because of baseball?”

“Both. We don’t live in the most liberal town,” he drawled.

Big D was from the South, Alabama, if I remembered correctly. I’d noticed he only drawled when he was excited or drunk. Otherwise, he’d adopted a sort of blank accent that sounded like he was from everywhere and nowhere.

“Anyway,” he said, “what I was trying to say is that I thought about a lot over the break. All the jokes I made to him. The way I let my friends talk around him. I never thought I was homophobic. I *thought* I was a good ally. But my little brother kept his secret from me for years because he was afraid. I just wanted you to know that if I ever said anything stupid or made you feel like I have an issue with anything, I’m sorry.”

“I appreciate it, but you’ve got nothing to apologize for. A few jokes don’t bother me because I know there’s no malice

behind them.” I pulled on my shirt as he did up his jeans. “When it comes to allyship, you’re solid. And he’s a kid. Remember how things were at sixteen? How much pressure was on us and how every little thing felt like the end of the world?”

“Sure do.” He snorted.

“It sounds like you really love him, and I’m sure he knows that. I didn’t tell my family until I was fifteen. Not because I was afraid of how they’d react, but because I wasn’t ready to admit it out loud.”

“I hope that’s all it is and that he didn’t think I’d have a problem with it. But yeah, I just wanted to let you know we’re cool, and I think Chase is a dick.”

“Thanks, man.” I slapped his shoulder like bros do.

“Ready?” Matt came up behind us and slung his bag over his shoulder.

“Almost.” I sat on the bench, pulled on my socks, and stepped into my shoes. When I was done, I grabbed my coat and bag.

“Take her easy.” Big D gave us a big grin.

“And if she’s easy, take her twice,” Petey quipped from his locker a few feet away.

A wet towel smacked into the back of Petey’s head. “Hayes!” he bellowed, not bothering to look over his shoulder.

“Wasn’t me,” Hayes said, his face the picture of innocence.

“You’re so dead.” Petey grabbed the towel off the floor and wadded it up in his hands.

“For the love of...” Cooper shouted from the other side of the room. “Save it for when you’re outside and no longer my responsibility.”

“But we’re always your responsibility, Captain,” Petey called back.

Matt grabbed my arm and yanked me toward the door.

“That was exciting,” he said when the door to the locker room banged shut behind us.

“Definitely eventful.”

“Crawford.”

I stopped dead at Coach’s voice.

“Fuck,” I muttered under my breath.

“Come here a minute.”

Matt leaned against the wall, his intention to wait clear. I turned and walked over to where Coach stood in front of his office.

“Yeah, Coach?”

“You can wipe that look off your face.” He smirked. “I didn’t make a huge thing of that scene in the showers. Just made it known that he’s on my radar and that I don’t put up with that shit on my team.”

“Thanks.”

“Now get out of here so I can go home.”

“All good?” Matt asked as he fell into step beside me.

“Yeah. Coach handled it.”

“I have a theory.” Matt pushed the door to the outside open.

“What’s that?”

“I think Chase is gay, or at least curious.”

I snorted. “Yeah. That whole ‘the homophobic bully is secretly gay’ stereotype isn’t usually true. Not outside romance novels and movies.”

“I think in this case he is. I mean, he showered next to you, and he was looking at you when you turned and caught his eye. The whole room was looking behind him, but he was staring at you. Seems a bit sus.”

“More like he was glaring at me and making sure I didn’t peep his dick.”

“Or maybe he was checking yours out.”

“Doubtful. Chase is one of those guys who’s genuinely grossed out by gay sex. It comes from a place deep within him. He can’t look at me and not see a gay man. I’m sure when he’s thinking about me boning another guy, it’s not because he secretly wants it. It’s because it disgusts him. You can’t fake that kind of repulsion.”

“Maybe not, but it’s weird how obsessed with you he is.”

“Again, it’s not me but the fact that I’m gay. He watches me so he can *catch* me doing all the things he’s afraid of. He’s not checking out my dick or secretly pining over my body. He’s on some sort of personal mission to catch the queer predator and prove to everyone that he’s right. That guys like me are disgusting and perverted and don’t belong on the team.”

“Do you think it’s all the gay thing or partly because you’re his direct competition?”

I snorted and shifted my bag to the other shoulder. “We’re both seniors, and I get eighty percent of our game time. I’m positive that one just compounds another. Not only am I better than him, but a gay man is better than him. I’m sure he’d dial the hate back a few notches if I was just the better player. In his mind, the fact that I like dick makes me inferior. Less of a man. But this dick-loving gay boy is better at ball than him. It has to twist him up.”

“You sound like you’re making excuses for him.”

“I’m not.” I leaned against the car as Matt used his key fob to unlock the doors. “I’ve been gay a long time, dealt with my share of assholes and bigots. I learned early on that people who hate me because of my sexuality will always hate me, and it’s not worth wasting the little mental energy I have left at the end of the day worrying about it or trying to change their minds. Guys like Chase really and truly are homophobic, as in afraid of gay people. He has his reasons, and I can choose to let his hatred control my life, or I can just brush it off and focus on what’s important.”

“Where’s Jax?” Matt slammed the car door shut and looked at me over the roof of his car. “That was some insightful shit. Where’s the guy who asked if I thought penguins have knees when we were driving over here?”

“I am a multifaceted gem with many sides.”

He snorted. “More like a turd someone polished up.”

“I’m not sure which is worse. You calling me a turd or the idea that somewhere, someone probably has polished one.”

“And now I’ll never say that again,” Matt slid into the car. “Did you ever look up if they have knees?”

I dropped into the passenger’s seat, pulled my phone out of my pocket, and did a quick search. “Got distracted.”

Matt cranked the car.

“They have knees.” I hit the power button to shut the phone down.

“Then why do they waddle?”

“I don’t know. The first search option just said ‘yes, they have knees.’”

“Do any animals not have knees?”

“I’d imagine ones without legs like snakes don’t have knees.”

“But what about animals with legs? Do you think they all have knees?”

“We’ve said the word *knees* so many times it doesn’t sound like a real word anymore.”

“I’m going to ask Eli next time I see him. This is something he’d probably know.”

“Did you ever ask him if they made a decision about Pluto being a planet?”

“I did. But I made the mistake of asking when Finn was around. Beck and I spent the next ten minutes sitting there and nodding while they went full space nerd and started talking about stuff I couldn’t even begin to understand.”

“So, is it?”

“No clue.”

“Can you drop me off at the dorms?” I asked as we came up on College street.

“Yeah, sure.” He signaled to take a left, shooting me a strange look. “You going to come over later?”

“Not tonight. I have a test I need to cram for.”

“Okay. No problem.”

The drive to my building was silent, and I didn’t like the tight-lipped smile Matt gave me when I climbed out of the car.

I did have a big test in the morning, but that wasn’t the reason I wanted a night alone.

Matt and I had spent nearly every night together since Christmas break. I loved it, and not just because of the sex. I slept better when Matt was beside me, and I loved that he was the first thing I saw when I woke up. It made every day just a little bit brighter.

The lines between bromance and dating were dangerously blurred and had been for a long time.

The season started on Friday. We’d agreed that this would end when it got in the way of baseball. I’d assumed that meant when the season started. That way we could get our focus back and put it where it belonged: on the game.

But now that the time had come, I wasn’t ready to let it go.

Or rather, I wasn’t ready to let *him* go.

Distractedly I swiped my ID and made my way through the building. When I was finally in my room, I collapsed onto my bed and pulled my cap down over my eyes.

The opening bars of “Summer of ’69” blasted out of my phone speaker. I grinned and dug it out of my pocket.

“Yo,” I answered.

“Yo?” Damon laughed. “Is that how they talk at your fancy school?”

“Says the guy who got a full ride to U of T.”

“What can I say? I’m brilliant.”

“And so humble.”

“Why be humble when I can be honest?”

I chuckled and settled on my bed. “It’s good to hear from you.”

“You’ve been a bit distant lately. Figured I’d call to check in.”

“Yeah.” I winced. “Lots going on.”

“Is it the season?”

“No. Not really. I feel good about the team and our chances.”

“But...”

“Just some stupid drama.”

“Someone on your team being a douche canoe?”

“Yeah. Same guy I told you about. We got into it in the showers—”

“Imma need you to clarify that because my brain is going places.”

I snort-laughed. “He said something stupid. I said something back. It escalated to him being a dick, and our captain marched him out of there like a toddler and made him go to Coach for a time-out.”

“Damn, sorry, my man. I know how much you hate when that happens.”

“I sound so ungrateful, but yeah, I do hate it. I’m lucky as fuck that I have a captain and a coach who are so willing to go to bat for me—”

He snickered.

“Shut up,” I said, my voice heavy with affection and fondness. “I’m just saying I’m lucky, and it makes me feel like an ungrateful bitch that it bothers me.”

“Being singled out for who you’re attracted to sucks. You’re a private person. You don’t like talking about yourself or people knowing about you. Not beyond what you choose to share. Having your sexuality brought to the forefront like that triggers all those repressed emotions.”

“You need to lay off the psych classes.”

“Am I wrong?”

“You’re not completely right.”

“But I’m not completely wrong either.”

“No.”

“So what else is bothering you?”

“That’s all.”

“Liar.”

“Not lying.”

“Fibber.”

“Not doing that either.”

“Denier.”

“How many more synonyms you got?”

“Enough to outlast you.”

“Ugh, you’re annoying.”

“Only because I’m right,” he singsonged.

“What about you?” I asked, hoping to distract him. “How’s T dot?”

“Nobody calls Toronto that.”

“I do.”

“Nobody else does.”

“Well, they’re missing out. But names aside, how’re things?”

“Good.” He made a sound like he was getting comfortable.

“Are you still thinking about staying in Ontario after grad?”

“Depends. I miss living in paradise. I like Toronto, but the winters here suck ass. And the fall and spring aren’t all that awesome. And the summers are too hot.”

“So you basically hate it all year?”

“There are about three weeks in the fall that are nice.” He laughed. “But cost-wise, the city is on par with Van. If I’m making a choice based on that, then why would I stay where the air hurts my face all winter?”

“So you’d move to Vancouver and not back to Victoria?”

“Not a lot of jobs in Vic. Not good ones at least. And the housing market is just as nuts as it is in Van. Plus, the ferry makes it easy to visit.”

“Makes sense. You gotta go where your future is.”

“So, what else is bothering you?”

“How’s your sister?”

“Stop changing the subject.”

Damon was the only person on the planet I could talk to about this. Not only was he one of my best friends, but he also understood baseball and just how much of a clusterfuck this entire situation was.

“Matt and I have been messing around.”

“Wow. I was *not* expecting that. So he bats for your team, or is he a switch hitter?”

I snickered at the analogy. “He’s a switch hitter. But then again, technically, so am I.”

“Stop bragging, you braggart,” he grumbled.

Back in our junior year, Damon and I had made a bet to see who could get better stats batting left-handed. We’d both learned to switch hit when we were kids, but he didn’t have my level of coordination, and my stats had blown his out of the water.

“You’re just salty I kicked your ass.”

“You’re changing the subject again.”

“Things are just messed up. We started this as a way to blow off steam.” My stomach clenched at the lie.

“That’s not your style. You’d never jeopardize your friendship or baseball just to blow off steam.”

“Matt only recently figured out that guys did it for him.” The tightness in my chest intensified until my ribs ached, and I couldn’t pull in a full breath.

“Okay,” he said softly, encouraging me to keep talking if I wanted to.

“Someone dared us to kiss at a party. I guess that was the catalyst for his bi awakening or whatever.”

“That’s usually the best way to tell. If you lock lips with a dude and like it, then you like guys.”

“You speak like you know from experience.”

“I experimented.”

“Say what? You never told me this.”

“Yeah, I did. I told you I kissed Jesse at a party and wasn’t into it.”

“You never told me Jesse was a dude! I thought it was short for Jessica.”

“That’s what you get for assuming.” He snickered. “Jesse was a bust, but there might have been potential with Myron.”

“Myron? Who the fuck is Myron?”

“A guy from my program. We made out and touched each other’s dicks one night after studying. The kissing wasn’t bad, but his dick did nothing for me. Like playing with a squishy stick.”

“I have so many questions... but really? A squishy stick?”

“That’s what it felt like.”

“I would have remembered if you’d told me that.”

“I think I was going to but forgot to actually do it.”

“That sounds like you.”

“Stop distracting me! Back to you and Matt.”

“It’s just gotten complicated. I mean, we’re just buds having a bromance.”

“A bromance?” he asked skeptically.

“Yeah, like two bros who mess around, but it doesn’t mean anything.”

“How many times have you two had sex?”

“I don’t know. Lots?”

“How long have you been sleeping together?”

“A few months. Why?”

“Because what you’re describing isn’t a bromance. Not anymore.”

“That’s all it is. All it can be.”

“You said it’s complicated. Why? Because of the season starting?”

“Yeah. We’ve been keeping it quiet because our team is full of gossipmongers, but also because we work so closely together. People already treat us like a single unit, and if we fuck up the team dynamic, then the whole season could be a bust.”

“That’s a lot of pressure to put on yourself.”

“What do you mean?”

“You single-handedly decided that your entire season rests on your shoulders. That you and Matt and your-not-a-bromance have the power to destroy the team.”

“How would you have reacted if you’d found out two guys on our team were fucking?”

“I wouldn’t have cared as long as they kept their drama off the field.”

“Fine. But that’s you. What do you think guys like Chase will think?”

“Probably a whole lot of homophobic bullshit.”

“Exactly.”

“But Chase is only one guy. What about the rest of your team? You’ve never mentioned anyone else being a dick.”

“They accept it. Some of them genuinely don’t care. But it’s different. They might be cool with me hooking up with guys, but they’d never be okay with me hooking up with Matt.”

“So you’re a mind reader?” he asked.

“What?”

“Again, you’ve just decided that everyone will think that way when you don’t actually know.”

“You really need to lay off the psych classes.”

“Am I wrong?”

“No. But you’re not right.”

“Why not?”

“Because there’s no way everyone on the team would be cool with us if they found out.”

“No, but some of them might.”

“Some might,” I conceded.

“What about the other starters? Not to be a dick, but who gives a fuck if some rookie fielder has issues with you. It’s not like you’re buds or need to work together. Worry about your friends and the guys you’re on the field with. They’re the ones who matter.”

“I just don’t like making waves.”

“I know. But you’re also a self-sacrificing champ, and it sounds like you’re doing it again.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve given up a lot in your life, all for the sake of baseball. I’m not saying you had a choice. I feel for the position you’re in, and I know I could never truly understand what it’s like to be you. But there are things in life that matter more than ball.”

“I’m so close to it finally happening,” I rasped, my throat dry and tight. “I’ve spent the last ten years working toward this season.”

“I know. But what about your life off the field? Are you happy?”

“Sure.”

“When are you happy?”

“When I’m with...”

“Exactly,” he said softly.

“I get what you’re saying, but loving him doesn’t change the fact that we’re teammates.”

“Maybe not. But if you’re going to fall in love with someone, isn’t your best friend the perfect person?”

“Maybe in the real world. But not in ours.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know. Going public isn’t an option. I can’t end things. Not yet. But we also can’t keep going like this. It’s getting harder and harder to switch from boyfriend to bestie mode. Every time we’re out together, I have to be hyperaware of how I’m looking at him, how I touch him. It fucking sucks, and it’s stressing both of us out to the point where I’m worried it’ll fuck up our dynamic on the field.”

“Did you hear yourself call him your boyfriend?”

I raked my hand down my face. “Yeah. We slipped into that a long-ass time ago.”

“Does he think of you that way?”

“No clue. We fuck, but we don’t talk about it.”

“Maybe you need to have that conversation.”

“It wouldn’t matter if we did. It wouldn’t change a thing.”

“I was reading about the phenom at UW.” He seamlessly switched to talking about baseball. Damon could always tell when I was shutting down. “Is Matt worried?”

I recounted Matt’s theory to him.

“That boy is smart. I would never have thought of that, but he’s right.”

“It’ll be interesting to see just how right he is. It’s the kid’s first game back after injury, and he’s going to be facing a lefty pitcher on our turf for at least six innings.”

Damon hummed thoughtfully, and I settled back on my pillow. Now that we were talking ball and not about Matt, I could relax and focus on catching up with my friend.

MATT

I pulled into a parking spot outside the Lambda Chi house and turned off my car.

The last twenty minutes, I'd driven around aimlessly, dreading the chapter meeting scheduled for later that evening. The text had come in while I'd been changing, and now that we had a break from practice, I didn't have a valid reason not to go.

An idea had popped into my head, but I hadn't given it much thought until I'd dropped Jax off at his dorm.

It shouldn't bother me. We'd spent plenty of nights apart. In fact, it was probably good we put some distance between us. It was getting harder and harder to pretend we were just friends, and the last thing I wanted to do was mess up and out us.

I'd promised him that us messing around wouldn't fuck up our friendship or baseball. People finding out about us would do both.

That part of my life was out of my control. I couldn't change the fact that we were teammates or that we needed to keep things quiet.

Baseball was another thing I couldn't control. I could put my all into every game, but I wasn't the only guy out there.

Two of the biggest stressors in my life were things I couldn't change.

The third was something I could.

“Yo.” Owen upnodded me as I came into the main foyer of the house. “You’re early.”

“Have you seen Austin?”

“I think he’s in his room.”

“Thanks.”

Owen waved and walked into the living room, where it sounded like a bunch of the guys were playing some sort of shooter game.

I made my way through the house, waving to people as I passed them. When I was in front of Austin’s door, I drew in a deep breath and knocked.

“It’s open!”

With a shaking hand, I pushed it open and peeked inside.

“Matt.” Austin grinned from where he was sprawled out on his couch. “Been a while since I’ve seen your ugly mug.”

I chuckled, but it was strained. “Been busy.”

“What’s going on?” He put his tablet aside and sat up.

“Do you have a minute to talk?”

“Of course.” He waved around his room. “Pick a place to park it.”

I sat on the edge of his desk chair and rubbed my hands on my thighs. “I think I want to quit the frat.”

“You think? Like this is all hypothetical? Or you think like you’re wondering if it can be done?”

“Wondering if it can be done,” I mumbled.

He tilted his head. “Anyone can quit whenever they want. Being a member is a choice.”

“So, how would one do that?”

“First you tell the frat president that you want out.” He grinned. “Step one down. Then I make it happen if that’s what you really want.”

“It’s not that I don’t like being a brother,” I said quickly.

Austin and I had pledged together, and he was a good guy. He'd been a great president this year, and I didn't want him to think me quitting had anything to do with him.

"But joining was never your choice," he said knowingly.

"No. And with our season starting, I just don't have time."

"And you're not happy. You don't like frat life."

I dropped my gaze.

"I've known you for almost four years. You're good at pretending, but you've never been happy here."

"No. I haven't."

"Put your request in writing, and I'll do my part. We can handle this as quietly as you want. I can tell the guys when it's done, or you can."

"Maybe you could tell them."

I didn't have any close friends who would be sad to see me go. And none of the other brothers would care if they heard it from Austin and not me.

"I can do that." He gave me a serious look. "I'm going to miss seeing you around, but I'm glad you're doing this. Life's too short to suffer through shit we don't enjoy, especially when it's for someone else."

"You haven't met my dad."

"Not in person, but he's... active within the alum community."

I laughed. "That's a polite way of saying he's a nosy asshole who bugs you for updates so he can feel like he's still living his glory days."

Austin grinned. "I mean, I didn't want to say it, but..."

"I apologize in advance if he's an asshole once he finds out I quit."

"Wouldn't be the first disgruntled alum I've dealt with. Won't be the last. Take care of yourself. And good luck with the season."

“Thanks.” I stood, then paused. “For the writing thing. Is an email or text better?”

“Email. Use my official one so we have a paper trail. Always a good idea to CYA.”

“C.Y.A?”

“Cover your ass.” He grinned.

“Smart man.”

“Later, Matt.”

“Later.”

I left his room, feeling lighter than I had in months. Years, if I were being honest.

Quitting the frat wouldn't magically solve all my issues, but the relief that washed over me at the knowledge that I'd never have to go to another meeting or party was so strong it was euphoric.

I might not know who I was, but I knew who I wasn't. And I was done pretending. It was time to reclaim my life and figure out who I would have become if my future hadn't been decided for me when I was five years old.



I FLOPPED down onto the couch next to Eli. “Why do penguins waddle?”

He looked up from the book in his lap and shot me a confused look.

“Penguins have knees, but they waddle. Why?”

“He's not Google,” Beck said as he and Finn came down the stairs. “No one would know that off the top of their head.”

“Never say never.” Alex looked up from his phone. “Did you bring them down?”

“I'm confused.” I looked between Alex and Beck.

“You know it.” Beck held up a package.

“Cookies?” I asked excitedly.

Beck’s mom made the *best* cookies. It was such a foreign concept to me, a mom taking the time to not only bake for her adult son but to package them up and make enough for a whole house of guys to gorge on.

Guess that was what good moms did. Or at least ones who weren’t so busy with their own lives that they forgot they had a kid.

“I made the mistake of telling her you liked the cinnamon swirl ones.” He reached into the box and pulled out a container. “Looks like these are for you.”

I took the container, which had a sticky note with “For Matt” in her flowy script and a big heart taped to the lid. A happy flush moved through me.

“And she sent these for you to try.” Beck put the box on the coffee table and pulled two smaller containers out.

“For me?” Eli took them, his eyes wide and his face a bit slack from shock.

“Yup.” He grinned.

She’d written “For Eli” with more hearts on his sticky notes. One was labeled “Sugar-free, gluten-free chocolate chip,” and the other said “Gluten-free, sugar-free oatmeal.”

“She sent these too.” He dug a few sheets of folded paper out of the box. “The recipes, so you can check them out and make sure they’re safe.”

“That... that was really nice of her.” His voice cracked as he stared down at the containers.

“No special ones for me?” Alex teased, kicking his feet up on the coffee table.

Beck tossed a container at Alex, who bobbled it before managing to catch it and keep hold of his phone.

“Sweet.” He tossed his phone aside and yanked off the top of his container. “I love these.” He shoved a cookie into his mouth and chewed, a blissed-out look on his face.

Beck snickered and tugged Finn down so they were sitting on the couch next to Alex. “And she sent Finn some too.”

“I already ate, like, half of them.” He patted his stomach and leaned his head against Beck’s shoulder. “Had him hide the rest so I didn’t make myself sick.”

“All you assholes, and you, babe.” He kissed Finn’s temple. “Get your own cookies, and I got a container with all the broken and burned ones from your batches.”

“Seriously?” Alex laughed.

Beck kicked the box closer to Alex, who pulled out a container. “Oh my god, she did.” He flipped the container around so we could see the mess of busted and different colored cookies in it.

“Not our fault she likes us more.” I shoved a cookie into my mouth. “Jesus, these are good.”

“Do you have your phone? We should take a few pics of us and send them to your mom as a thank-you.”

Beck perked up at Alex’s suggestion. “She’ll love that.”

“I can take it if you want to go over there,” Eli poked me in the thigh.

“You need to be in the picture too.” Beck pulled out his phone and unlocked it. “We’ll do a couple of selfies.”

He held the phone up, and Alex and Finn leaned in, holding up their containers and grinning wide while Beck shot the camera an unimpressed look.

“Here.” He tossed his phone over the table to me.

“Brave man, throwing your phone like that,” Alex said.

“Figured it was safe, since he’s a star baseball player.”

“But he’s a pitcher,” Finn said. “So wouldn’t his talent be throwing and not catching?”

“I’m awesome at both.” I held the phone up. “Get closer and pretend you like me.”

Eli slid over so he was right next to me, and I framed us in the shot. We held up our containers and grinned. I took a few pics, then tossed the phone back to Beck.

“Did we ever find out why penguins waddle when they have knees?” Alex winked at Eli and took a bite of a cookie.

“No, we didn’t.” I turned to him. “Why do penguins waddle?”

Eli smiled shyly. “Penguins expend more energy than any other animal their size when they walk. Their bodies are streamlined for swimming but not efficient for traveling over land. Waddling cuts down the amount of energy they need for each step. The side-to-side motion raises their center of mass and creates a pendulum effect so they can use their momentum to help fuel each step and not have to rely on their muscles to do extra work.”

“So it has nothing to do with their knees and everything to do with how fat they are?” I asked.

Eli snickered. “That’s part of it. But they also have short legs and giant feet that make walking difficult.”

“It’s amazing the stuff you know off the top of your head like that.” Beck dug around in his cookie container. “I can barely remember what I had for dinner three days ago.”

Eli flushed. “I have good recall.”

“Says the guy who remembers the most obscure hockey stats.” Finn elbowed his boyfriend in the side. “Who was the first goaltender to score a goal on an opposing team?”

“Ron Hextall,” Beck said without hesitating. “He was the first goalie to score a goal by shooting the puck into the opposing team’s net.”

“When?” Finn grinned at us.

“December 8, 1987.”

“Is that true?” Alex asked Finn, who shrugged.

“No clue. But considering the source, I’d say it is.”

“That name... why is it so familiar?” Something niggled at the back of my mind.

Beck grinned. “Because he’s one of only two goalies who’ve managed to score twice, and the second time was during a playoff game.”

“That’s where I heard it before.” I shoved another cookie into my mouth.

“Is Kai coming over?” Beck asked Alex.

He shook his head and swallowed a bite of cookie. “He has a huge test he needs to study for.”

“What about your other half?” Beck turned to me.

“Not today. Same, big test in the a.m.”

“Want to do a movie night? Just us roomies?” Beck asked.

“Yeah?” I perked up.

“Or a gaming night, whatever. I just thought it would be fun to all hang out together.”

“I’m in.” I put the top on my cookie container so I didn’t finish them all in one sitting.

“Sounds fun.” Alex stretched his arms over his head.

“Yeah. Okay.” Eli smiled shyly when Beck gave him a questioning look.

“Awesome. Want to do dinner too?”

“Sure, if you’re paying.” Alex shot Beck an innocent smile.

“I’ve got it.” I pulled my phone out of my pocket. “What do you guys want? You can just put in your orders, and we’ll get it delivered.”

“I was just kidding. I’ve got my share.”

“It’s fine.” I waved the phone at them. “We can work out details later.”

Beck and Alex started discussing what they wanted to eat. Eli flipped open one of the recipes and closed it about five

seconds later.

“Chinese?” Alex asked. “That place down near the public library is pretty good.”

Eli opened one of the containers, the chocolate chip one, and pulled out a cookie.

“Fine with me.” I unlocked my phone and opened my delivery app. “Here. Order whatever you want.”

“Are you sure?” Finn asked as Beck took the phone. “These guys eat as much as you do.”

“Athletes need fuel.” Beck scrolled through the menu.

“Especially with the gymnastics you two get up to.” Alex waggled his eyebrows at Finn, who blushed bright pink.

“No gymnastics here.” Beck didn’t even look up. “Just enthusiasm and skill.”

Alex snorted.

“And you’re one to talk. You and Kai are like gladiators sometimes. I swear you almost came through the wall the other day.”

“Jealous?” Alex grinned.

“More like worried about my security deposit.”

Alex snorted. “Worry about those two.” He waved his hand at me. “You made the ceiling shake down here last time you and Jax went at it. I legit thought the dining room light was going to shatter and come crashing down.”

“We’re big guys.” I shrugged. “Ask Eli.”

“What?” Eli squeaked.

“Wait, what?” Alex leaned forward, his hands on his knees. “You saw them going at it?”

“I saw them *after* they went at it.”

“We forgot to put pants on, and Eli got a front-row seat to the gun show when we ran into him in the hallway.” I flexed dramatically.

“More like the bum show.” Beck looked around like he was waiting for accolades for his pun.

“Not your best one, babe.” Finn patted his knee. “But B plus for effort.”

“Pick your dinner.” He shoved the phone at Finn playfully. “B plus, my ass.”

“That would be an A plus.” Finn focused on the phone’s screen.

Eli nibbled on one of the cookies, a small smile on his full lips. Had he managed to read the recipe in less than five seconds? Or was he just trusting that they were safe?

“Damn straight my ass is an A plus,” Beck said. “Do you know how many squats I do?”

“Static or jumping?” I asked.

“Both. Depends on the day. What’s your ass routine?”

I let out a bark of laughter. “My ass routine?”

“Every bi boy who goes to the gym has an ass routine,” Alex said. “Don’t deny it.”

“Not denying it.” I held up my hands in mock submission. “I just never called it my ass routine. It’s my booty builder.”

Eli snickered, and Alex threw his head back and laughed. “Oh my god,” he choked out. “I’m so stealing that.”

“Please do.”

“Yeah, totally stealing it too.” Beck grinned.

“You want in on my brilliance?” I poked Eli in the thigh. “Join in on the newest and coolest workout catchphrase.”

“You go to the gym?” Beck perked up.

“Not exactly.” Eli glanced around. “I do a lot of my working out at home. Calisthenics, floor work, that sort of thing. And I run. I don’t really like the gym. Too crowded.”

“Here.” Finn handed Alex my phone. “Your turn.”

“I wish I had the discipline to work out at home,” I said. “But if I have the choice to sit on my butt and eat snacks and not work out, then I’m doing that.”

“Hard same.” Beck chuckled.

“Done.” Alex stood and extended the phone to Eli over the table.

“That was fast,” Beck commented.

“You know me. I always order the same thing.” He flopped back down onto the couch.

“Is there stuff on the menu you can eat?” I leaned closer and dropped my voice.

“This place is pretty good. They allow modifications so it makes it easier.” He smiled shyly.

Jesus, he looked young. He might be twenty, but something about him triggered my protective instincts, and I wanted to wrap him in a blanket burrito.

“You know you’re my unofficial little brother, right?”

He looked up from my phone, his eyes wide. “I am?”

“Yup. I know you have an actual brother. But I’m appointing myself as your other big bro.”

“Step in line. Kai and I are ahead of you,” Alex said loudly. “Especially Kai.”

“I only have sisters.” Beck winked. “Looks like you have four big brothers now.”

“Five. Jax,” I said by way of explanation.

“I don’t get to be one?” Finn asked, a huge grin on his face. “I may not be a giant like these guys, but I think I’d make a good big brother.”

“Guess that makes six.” I bit back a chuckle at Eli’s stunned expression.

“Isn’t it fun being the youngest in the house?” Alex teased.

“Loads.” Eli’s voice cracked. “Um, thanks. I know that was just joking around, but it means a lot that you guys have

accepted me.”

“We weren’t joking,” Beck said before I could.

“Nope.” I ruffled his hair. “You’re the little bro. Deal.”

He ducked his head and focused on my phone again, which had gone dark, a grin stretched over his lips and rounding out his cheeks.

“Here.” I leaned over him and pressed the home button, then used my fingerprint to unlock the phone for him.

Alex and Beck launched into an animated discussion about their booty-building routines, and I leaned back against the couch, feeling happier than I had in months.

This was the kind of night I liked. Just chilling with friends, eating takeout, and watching movies. No drinking, no crowds, and no bullshit.

The only thing that would have made the night perfect was if Jax were here.

A flash of sadness penetrated my happy haze. I might as well get used to nights like this. My time of having Jax all to myself was over, and there was nothing I could do to get it back.

JAX

The energy in the stadium was electric. I could *feel* it buzzing in the air as I got into my stance. It was the first game of the season, and we were killing it.

It was the top of the sixth, and we were ahead by one. Time to kick things into high gear.

I glanced at the UW player sauntering up to the plate, then looked at both Coach Nix on first and Coach H on third. Neither of them gave me a signal.

At this point in the game, I'd seen enough at bats to have a good feel for what each player could do. This guy was their leadoff hitter, and he favored pitches that teased the top of the batter's box.

The player took a couple of leisurely swings a few feet from the plate, a cocky grin on his lips.

Whatever. We'd struck him out twice, and I'd gotten his ass out on a bad steal to second. His mind games wouldn't work on me.

The umpire made a warning sound, and the player stepped into the box and took his stance.

“Play!”

Matt got into his ready position, his eyes on me.

I used our system to call the pitch. Matt nodded. He only did that before the first pitch of an inning as part of his ritual. Otherwise, my man was rock solid and steady.

What? No. Not my man. I couldn't think of him like that during a game.

Snap.

The sting of the ball hitting my glove knocked me back into reality, and I closed my hand instinctively.

Shit. I'd completely zoned out. I'd have missed that pitch if Matt didn't have such deadly accuracy.

The UW player grunted in frustration, and I threw the ball back to Matt.

Focus, Crawford. You're in the middle of a fucking game.

Matt managed another strike before the guy got lucky on a slider and grounded it to third. By the time Adams had scooped it up and beamed it to Cooper on first, the fucker was safe on base.

"We'll get it back," I called when Matt gave me a grim look.

The next batter swung wide on the first pitch. The runner on first took off for second as soon as Matt let go of the ball, but I held back from picking him off. He was quick, and I wasn't about to risk a wild throw if I wasn't sure I'd get him.

The next pitch was a perfect fastball, and the guy didn't even attempt to swing.

"Strike!"

"Fuck," he muttered under his breath.

Matt caught my throw, giving me a little smile. *We got this*, it said.

I nodded, since my mask made it impossible to see my face from the mound. We had this.

The guy got lucky on the next pitch and grounded one between second and shortstop. Petey managed to scoop it up from his position in left field, but with the lead runner already safe on second, he couldn't get the ball to Cooper quick enough to get the out at first.

“You’ve got this, Landry,” Cooper shouted from first base and threw the ball to him.

Matt nodded and got back into position.

The next batter stepped up to the plate. He was their only lefty batter, and Matt had managed to strike his ass out three times by switching up his curve and slider.

A curve from a southpaw pitcher could fuck up the best right-handed batter because they hugged the outside corner until they broke over the plate. For another lefty, they hugged the inside, making it seem like the pitch was gunning straight for them. Matt’s curve had an incredibly late break, something to do with how he gripped the ball and a wrist motion he’d learned from one of his private coaches. He’d made more than one lefty, including this kid, scamper away from perfect pitches out of fear that they were about to get clocked.

Matt’s first pitch came in blazing fast and snapped into my glove without me having to move it. A perfect strike.

“Ball.”

Matt’s mouth dropped open.

Ball? That had been a textbook curve. No fucking way was it a ball. Gritting my teeth, I threw the ball back to Matt.

Umpires were human, and they made mistakes. This ump had been fair so far. Time to dial back the adrenaline and focus on the game.

This time I called for a slider. Lefty to lefty, the pitch would come in hot and break down and to the outside.

Matt glanced at first, then released the pitch.

The batter swung but pulled back before making contact with the ball, and it dropped into my waiting glove.

The ball had been too low to be a strike, but a swing was a swing. The bat crossed the plate. Strike one.

“Did he go?”

I looked behind me. The plate ump was pointing at his colleague behind first.

“No.” The other ump made the safe sign. “He did not go.”

My jaw dropped. The fuck? He’d broken the plate.

Matt caught the ball, his face pink. He was getting worked up. Bad calls happened in sports, and we learned to put them behind us, but two back-to-back would get in anybody’s head.

His next pitch was outside, which gave the batter his third ball.

Slow down, I coached silently as Matt checked the bases.

His last pitch, a fastball, was textbook perfect. It came in hot and high and steamed right past the batter just above his beltline.

“Take your base.”

“What?” Matt exclaimed.

The batter tossed his bat with a chuckle and jogged over to first while the other two runners advanced.

The bases were full, and Matt had his first walk of the game on four bullshit calls.

“Time?” I asked the ump.

“Time is called!” He made the signal. “Thirty seconds,” he said so soft only I could hear.

I nodded and jogged over to the pitcher’s mound, tugging off my mask and helmet.

“That was fucking bullshit,” Matt growled, his eyes flashing.

“I know.” I shoved my headgear under my arm and put the ball in his glove. “Take a few deep breaths. What’s done is done.”

“Yeah. Okay.”

“You good?”

He nodded.

“You’ve got this.” I smacked his shoulder with my glove, then slowly made my way back to home plate, fiddling with

my headgear to give Matt some extra time to center himself.

Their cleanup batter was up, the phenom Matt had managed to strike out twice, and who'd popped out on his last at bat.

Having the bases loaded with this kid at the plate could be a disaster, but I had faith Matt could keep his cool.

I got into position and nodded over my shoulder at the ump.

“Play.” He ended the time out.

Not pulling any punches, I called for a high curve. If he did manage to get ahold of it, the angle and spin should drive it into the ground, and our infield could work their magic.

Crack.

The echo of the bat connecting with the ball sent a rush of adrenaline through me. I jumped up and tracked the ball, which bounced over third base. Shit, that was close. It could go either way.

“Foul!”

Thank fuck. Strike one.

We got ready, and the ump called for play to resume.

We tried another curve, only this one high. I wasn't taking any chances with this kid.

He swung early, and this time the ball zipped down the first baseline.

“Foul!”

Strike two.

The ump put the ball back in play, and this time I called for a low inside curve.

Matt's delivery was off, and he dropped his shoulder in that split second before he released the ball.

The pitch came in hot and high with almost no spin.

Crack.

The players all sprang into action at the hit, but my attention was on Matt. The ball flew at him at breakneck speed.

My breath caught in my throat. I jumped up and ripped off my headgear, my mouth open in a silent shout.

The impact was lightning-fast. One second Matt was raising his arms, and the next he crumpled to the ground in a heap, the ball rolling toward third as his cap fluttered to the ground behind him.

“Matt?” I took a step toward him, but Adams sprinted to the ball.

Fuck. The ball was still in play. Matt wasn’t moving, but the ump wasn’t calling time.

Fuck!

Adams scooped up the ball and pivoted midair.

Instinctively, I caught it, my foot already on the plate.

“Out!”

Before the ump had even finished his call, I threw the ball to Cooper.

“Out!”

His throw to second wasn’t fast enough, and the runner was safely on the base when it fell into Hayes’s waiting glove.

Now that the play was dead, all eyes turned to the mound, where Matt lay still.

I didn’t remember making the decision to run to him. One second I was in front of the plate, and the next I was sliding across the sand and coming to a stop next to my fallen boyfriend.

“Babe?” I lifted one hand to touch him but pulled back at the last second. I had no idea where he was hurt. Touching him could make it worse.

“Fine,” he croaked and rolled onto his back.

His eyes were wide, his face chalky white, and his lips had a blueish tinge to them. A pink spot stained his forehead.

Fuck! What did that mean? Had he gotten hit in the head?

People were shouting. The crowd was deadly quiet, but all I could focus on was Matt.

“Deflected,” he gasped. “Stunned.”

“Fuck.” I gripped his shoulder and soaked in the fact that he was conscious and talking.

“Move back, Crawford.”

All three of our coaches and two trainers swarmed the mound, closing in on Matt.

His eyes darted around at all the people crowding him, the building panic clear as day.

Fuck. He was on the verge of a panic attack. He needed me.

“Back off, Jax.”

Strong hands gripped my shoulders and hauled me away from the chaos around the mound.

My fear melted into rage, and I spun away from whoever the fuck had taken me away from Matt when he needed me.

“Calm the fuck down.” Cooper got right in my face, his eyes filled with sympathy.

“I need to—”

“You need to back the fuck off and let them take care of him.” He grabbed my arm and yanked me toward home plate.

I shook him off, my rage flaring into something all-consuming.

Fuck him. Fuck the game. Fuck everyone.

He grabbed me around the middle and hauled me into a sort of bear hug. The move startled me, but it also locked my arms down so I couldn't do something stupid like take a swing at him.

“Stop and think about what you’re doing,” he said in my ear. “You do not want to out yourselves like this. Not in the middle of a game.”

The rage turned ice cold in my veins as his words registered.

He knew about us?

“I know you’re scared.” He let go of me and took a half step back so we wouldn’t look suspicious while they tended to Matt.

I flicked my gaze to the mound. Fuck. He wasn’t getting up. Why wasn’t he getting up?

“Look at me,” he said sharply.

I did, my head spinning with all the worst-case scenarios flashing in my mind.

“Take a knee.”

I wanted to tell him to go fuck himself but dropped down. Every other player on the field and most of the guys in the dugout had taken a knee to show respect to Matt while they tended to him.

“I don’t think it hit him. Not directly.”

“No?” I held my breath. Cooper shook his head.

“No. He got his glove up. I’m almost positive I saw it deflect off his glove. But it was close.”

With Matt being a lefty, he ended each pitch facing first base. Cooper would have had an unobstructed view of the impact.

“He said that. Said he was just stunned.”

I turned my attention to first base and the batter who’d hit him. A hit from a line drive wasn’t common, but they happened. The odds that the kid had timed it or had aimed to hit him were low, and the chances of him succeeding if he had were insanely low. But that didn’t mean he hadn’t gotten a bit of a thrill at getting Matt back for ruining what was supposed to be his breakout game.

The kid looked horrified, one hand over his mouth, the other on his stomach, as he stared at the mound.

“They’re calling us.” Cooper grabbed my arms and dragged me to my feet.

We ran over to where Matt was sitting up, flanked by two trainers.

“What’s going on?” Cooper and I asked together.

“I’m pulling Landry and sending him off on concussion protocol.”

“Concussion?” My stomach roiled.

“I’m fine.” Matt rolled his eyes as the trainers helped him to his feet. “I deflected it.”

“Your glove still hit your forehead,” Coach said, his voice gruff and tinged with worry. “I don’t care what the school says. Every head injury is treated as a possible concussion.”

“It’s not an injury, just a little bump,” Matt protested. “And I can stand up on my own.” He glared at the trainers still holding his arms.

“A bump is an injury. I refuse to put any of you boys at risk for a game. You’ll go see the team doc, and she’ll determine if you’re okay. That’s why she gets paid the big bucks.”

Matt gave Coach a grumpy look but didn’t protest. He gave me a small smile. “I’m fine.”

I nodded woodenly.

Coach was a stickler for safety. He’d told us that he’d seen some horrible outcomes when players were forced to play through injuries in his twenty-five years of coaching and that he’d always err on the side of caution when one of us got hurt.

I’d never appreciated his policy more than I did at that moment. Getting pulled from a game sucked, but athletes were competitive fuckers, taught from day one that the win was everything. That you sacrificed whatever you had to in order to get that W and pain was just something you dealt with.

Head injuries weren't something you fucked with. People died from concussions.

Nope. Not thinking about that. Matt was standing and smiling and seemed okay. He was fine. He had to be fine.

"Take care of yourself, Matt," Cooper said as the trainers led Matt away.

"Take care," I said gruffly, choking back the words I wanted to say. The crowd and players cheered, their screams so loud they reverberated in my chest.

Matt raised his hand to them in a wave, telling them he was fine. They cheered until he was off the field. Logan was trotting on, looking like a deer in headlights.

"Nine pitches, then it's game."

The plate ump's voice startled me. When had he come up behind me?

"Got it." I looked around for the ball. Everyone dispersed and went back to their positions.

The ump pulled a new one out of his pouch and handed it to me.

"Nine," I repeated to Logan.

He took the ball and nodded grimly.

Somehow, we won the game. The last batter had struck out on three easy pitches, showing just how rattled everyone was.

The next three and a half innings went by in a blur. I moved on autopilot, half my attention on the game and the other half on Matt and praying he really was fine.

When the game was finally called, we shook hands, then filed into the changing room, somber and quiet despite the win.

We showered and changed, everyone talking in low voices as we waited for Coach to come in and give us news.

"Listen up."

We all turned toward the door.

“I talked to the team doc and to Landry. He’s going to be fine.”

The relief that washed over me stole my breath, and I sank down on the bench in front of my locker as my knees gave out.

“He’s going to sit out from workouts over the weekend as an extra precaution, but Doc is confident he’ll be good to play next week.”

A low murmur rose in the room.

“I know you’re all freaked out by what happened. I am too.” Coach blew out a breath.

Baseball wasn’t a contact sport, especially not at college level. Players didn’t get hurt often, and it rattled everyone when someone did.

“But it’s time to put it behind us and focus on the next game. What happened was a freak accident. But Landry is okay, and we won. That’s what you need to think about. Nothing else.”

Several players made sounds of agreement, and others nodded.

“Now get changed and go have a well-deserved night off.”

“Come on.” Cooper appeared next to me as Coach left the locker room.

I followed him into Coach’s office.

“Doc released Landry, and Bryant took him home.”

I nodded. Awesome. Now I just needed Coach to stop talking so I could go make sure Matt was fine.

“But there’s something we need to talk about,” he continued.

“What?” My stomach lurched.

“How do you want to handle things with the team?” Coach asked.

“I don’t understand.”

Holy shit. Did he know about us?

“You and Landry.”

“What?” I gaped at him.

“Pick your chin up off my floor, Crawford.” He chuckled. “The way I see it, you can either keep it quiet, or you can tell the team. We’ll support whatever you choose. When I asked Landry, he just said, ‘ask Jax. I’ll do whatever he wants.’”

“I...”

“There’re no rules against teammates being in a relationship. I know it’s a tricky spot to be in, but if you and Landry want to be open about things, you have my full support. If you think hiding is better, then we’ll do that.”

“I... what do you think?”

I couldn’t make this decision right now. Not when I was hopped up on adrenaline and my head was spinning.

Who else knew about us? How had they figured it out?

“I think you’d be surprised by how supportive people will be,” Cooper said, his tone careful.

“What do you mean? Who else knows?”

He put up his hands. “No clue. I haven’t talked to anyone about this because it’s not my business. I’m just saying that you two being together makes sense. It probably won’t be the shocking announcement you think it is.”

“But what if it makes waves on the team? Then what?” I turned to Coach. “I get benched for my senior season?”

“Who the fuck is talking about benching you?” Coach blinked.

“If the team isn’t okay with things, then you’ll have to play Matt and sit me out.”

“Why would I do that?” He quirked an eyebrow.

“Because...”

“I play the best players for the position. You and Landry have been making magic behind the plate for three years. If

someone has issues with you two, then they can sit their ass on my bench and watch someone else be a team player.”

“Really?” I stammered.

“I do what’s best for my team, and egos be damned. That’s the beauty of being head coach. *I* make the decisions, and no one questions me as long as I keep bringing home the wins. You and Landry get me wins. Anything else?”

“You’re not freaked out?”

He smirked. “Kid, I’ve been a coach for a long time. Was a player long before that. You really think you’re the first guys to have a relationship on a team?”

I gaped at him, and he chuckled. “The difference is that now you have the choice to be open about it. I’m not saying it’ll be easy, but we’ll stand behind you if that’s what you choose.”

“I... I need to talk to Matt before I decide anything. This isn’t just about me.”

“Go.” Coach dismissed. “But I expect to see your ass at workouts this weekend.”

“Of course.”

“Come on. I’ll drive you.” Cooper motioned for me to follow him.

“How did you know?” I asked when we were in his car and he was pulling out of the lot. “About us.”

“Well, you calling him *babe* when he was down was a pretty obvious tip-off.”

“Shit.” I hadn’t even realized I’d said it.

“But I figured it out a while ago. There wasn’t some moment where it clicked or anything. I just had a feeling.”

“And Coach? Did you tell him?”

“I went to get an update on Matt, and he told me to bring you into his office so he could talk to you after his

announcement. The way he said it made me realize that he knew too.”

“What do you think about it?” I looked at my hands.

“Not my business to think anything. You and Landry are tight. I always thought Matt was straight, but whatever.” He shrugged. “The only thing I care about is how you work together on the field. I don’t give a shit what you do on your own time.”

“So you’d be cool with us not hiding things? Being affectionate around each other?”

“I might have an issue if you guys get a little too into it.” He grinned. “Then you’d just remind my sorry ass that I’m single.”

I blew out a breath at his joke. He really seemed like he was okay with it. How the fuck was that possible?

“But do what you want. Why should you have to hide your affection just because you’re dudes? And I’ll happily shut down anyone who does have an issue. Captain’s privilege.”

“You like the power of being captain. Admit it.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” He chuckled.

“Thanks, Coop. For earlier. I lost my head and—”

“Don’t even think twice about it. I would have reacted the same way watching someone I love go down like that.”

“Can I ask why you’re cool with Matt and me?”

He shot me a sidelong look. “My sister is bi, and two of my best friends from high school just got engaged. Two of my best *guy* friends,” he said. “Gay, straight, bi, whatever. Love is love, and I’ll always stand up to anyone who thinks otherwise.”

My throat and chest constricted as a wave of emotion hit. Relief, exhaustion, delayed happiness that we won, and the adrenaline drop from the game and seeing Matt get hurt. But also from coming clean and learning that both my coach and captain have my back and that maybe my team would too.

“Text me later and give me an update on Landry.” Cooper pulled in front of Matt’s house. “And you don’t have to decide anything now. Figure it out, and we’ll talk at workouts.”

“Thanks.”

MATT

“Matt?” Jax’s voice boomed through the first floor. He came into the living room.

“I’m fine,” I said.

“Is he fine?” Jax asked Beck, who was sitting next to me.

“Doc gave him the all clear, and he’s been good since he got here.” Beck patted my arm. “I think he’s fine.”

I rolled my eyes as Jax nodded, some of the tension bleeding out of his shoulders. Of course he’d listen to Beck and not me, the guy they were talking about.

“I’ve seen head injuries.” Beck stood. “I’m no doctor or expert, but I really do think he’s fine. Just a bump.”

Beck had played elite-level hockey in high school, so if anyone understood sports injuries, it was him.

Beck headed toward the stairs, and Jax took his vacated spot.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” His green eyes searched mine.

“I’m sure.”

“You fucking scared me.” He wrapped his big arms around me and yanked me toward him.

I sank into the hug and pressed my face against his warm neck. “I scared myself,” I whispered. “But I’m okay. I promise.”

“Don’t ever get hit with a line drive again.”

“I’ll try not to.” I chuckled against his skin. “Did we win?”

“Yeah.” He hugged me tighter. “Fuck, babe.”

He trembled against me, shaking in my arms as he clung to me.

“It’s okay.” I leaned into him, making sure as much of our bodies were touching as possible. “I’m okay.”

He made a choked sound and breathed in deep, his nose in my hair.

Was this leftover adrenaline from my accident? Or was something else causing this?

“Jax?”

“It’s just all hitting me. The game. The fact that Cooper and Coach know about us.”

I winced, remembering my conversation with Coach after talking with the doctor. That had been an uncomfortable few minutes. He’d been supportive and said all the right things in his gruff, Coach way. But our secret was out.

The last hour, I’d talked with Beck about everything, and not just our relationship. I’d spilled about how I felt lost and like I didn’t know who I was. I’d told him about my father and the pressure he put on me, how much it hurt that my mother didn’t give a shit about me. I’d been so frazzled from the hit and learning that our secret was out that the words had poured out of me, including a detailed accounting of how this whole thing between us started. He’d listened to everything in his calm, judgment-free way, and when I was finally done with my info and trauma dumping, he’d asked pointed questions that had served to not only help me talk out the messy jumble of thoughts in my head but also gave him enough info to offer some advice.

Beck had given up hockey because he didn’t have the talent to play at college level, and he was toying with the idea of becoming a coach.

He'd said that just because he didn't play competitively anymore didn't mean he was ready to give it up. He loved hockey, and now that he wasn't playing, he was able to focus on the parts of the game he'd fallen in love with. He wanted to be the coach he'd had when he was first learning the game and hopefully inspire another kid like his coach had inspired him.

"I'm not going pro."

Jax stopped breathing, his body going tense.

Probably could have found a better segue for that. Oops.

"Don't freak out." I slowly let go of him and dropped my arms. As much as I wanted hugs, we needed to have this conversation while we weren't touching.

"I'm not freaking out." Jax's face was eerily blank. "But I don't understand where this is coming from."

"I don't want to play pro ball."

He gaped at me. "But it's your dream."

"No, it's not."

"It—"

"Let me finish."

He closed his mouth, his eyes wide and his cheeks flushed.

"It's never been my dream. Baseball was never my choice. I love the game, and I like playing, but the game stopped being fun for me a long time ago."

"That's because you put too much pressure on yourself—"

"It has nothing to do with that. You're right. I do. But that's only because I don't like disappointing people. Because it's been drilled into my head that winning is the only option. That being the best is the only way anyone could ever love me."

"Matt..." His eyes softened.

"My family is fucked up. You know this. We don't need to go over all the reasons why." Mostly because I'd already done that with Beck and didn't have it in me to do it again, but also

because we'd had this conversation hundreds of times. "But did you know that most of my panic attacks this year happened while I was thinking about ball? Either about the season or what life would be like if I did get scouted. It fucking terrifies me to think that *this* could be my entire life for years."

"I... I had no idea."

"Because I didn't tell you."

"Why didn't you?" Hurt crept into his voice.

"Because baseball *is* your dream. Because you love everything about the game. Because all the shit that scares the piss out of me is stuff you're looking forward to."

"I just... I can't believe I didn't see it. All this time I thought it was your dream too. That you wanted this as much as I did."

"I've never wanted it." I sighed and leaned back against the couch. "The game stopped being fun for me a long time ago. If this is going to be my last season, then I want to enjoy it again. Play without the pressure of who might be watching or what my stats are."

"What happens if you do get scouted?"

"I'll politely decline." He shrugged. "I have a whole season to come up with excuses."

"You really mean it, don't you?"

I nodded. "I thought about sitting out this year—"

"You can't!"

"But I'm not going to." I grinned. "Logan is a sophomore, so he's got lots of time to shine. And I hate to be a dick, but we both know Benson doesn't have a chance in hell of being picked up. Me playing won't hurt anyone."

"You not playing will hurt me."

My gut twisted. "I'm sorry," I said softly.

"Not like that. I don't mean you not playing in the pros is going to hurt me. I mean not getting one last season together

would destroy me. We're the dream team."

I laughed, the sound loud and nearly hysterical as the last of my fear melted away.

"Get over here." He slung his arm over my shoulder and tugged me against him. "I'm sorry that I ever made it seem like you couldn't talk to me about this."

"It took me a long time to get to the point where I *could* talk about it."

He kissed my temple. "Still. I should have seen the signs. What are you thinking about doing instead?"

"Coaching."

His chest rumbled with a low chuckle. "I'm glad you said that because you'd make an awesome coach."

"You think?"

"Fuck, yeah. You'd be a natural. Pitching coach, or do you want to branch out?"

I snuggled closer to him. "Pitching. I have a lot of expensive knowledge to share. And it'll piss my dad off to no end that I went the coaching route."

He rubbed my arm. "Do you want to keep this quiet? About this being your final season?"

"I'm going to tell Coach, just to be transparent. But the other guys don't need to know." A wave of cold washed over me. "What about us?" I asked.

He blew out a breath and slowly slid his arm from around my shoulder.

"I'm not ready for this to be over," I blurted out.

He blinked, but I rushed on. I needed to say this now.

"I'm never going to be ready for it to be over. I love you."

His eyes bugged out in a way that would have been comical if my heart rate wasn't impersonating a galloping horse.

“I love you, and I’ll do anything to be with you. We can keep things secret for as long as we need to.”

“But it’s not a secret. Not with Cooper and Coach in the know.”

“So what? They’re just two guys. And they told me that they’d keep it between the four of us if that’s what we wanted.”

“Matt—”

“You’re the only person I’ve ever felt this kind of connection with. You’re my best friend, but you’re so much more than that.” My voice cracked, but I powered through. “You’re my other half, and I’m not willing to give that up because I know I’ll never feel this way about anyone else.”

His green eyes shimmered, and my heart dropped into my stomach.

“I love you too,” he rasped. “I can’t choose between you and ball. I never could. That’s why I can’t let you go either.”

“Really?”

He grabbed me by the back of the neck and tugged me close so our foreheads touched. “Really. I love you, babe. You’re it for me.”

“You’re it for me too,” I croaked. A second adrenaline drop hit, leaving me dizzy and a bit light-headed.

“What do you want to do about the team?”

“I want to tell them,” I whispered. “I know it’ll make things so much more complicated. But I can’t spend our last year together second-guessing my every move and every word that comes out of my mouth. The stress is already too much.”

“Yeah.” He kissed the side of my mouth. “You’re right. I can’t keep lying to everyone either.”

“I get that this year is different. That next year we’ll have to keep things quiet or even take a break.”

He pulled away and looked at me sharply.

“I refuse to be the reason baseball doesn’t work for you. If me being in your life complicates things next year, then I’ll wait for you.”

His jaw dropped.

“I want you to have everything you’ve dreamed of.”

“You’d really wait for me?”

“Yeah. For as long as it takes.”

“I could play for a decade if my knees and stats hold up. You’d wait ten years for me?”

“Of course. What’s ten years when we have a lifetime?”

His eyes softened, then took on a determined look. “No.”

“What?”

“No. I’m not putting our lives on hold for a game.”

“But—”

“Now it’s time for you to let me finish.” He smiled, taking the sting out of his words. “I’m going to have to tell any team that shows real interest in me that I’m gay. Hell, their vetting process will most likely expose me anyway. The point is, if they can’t accept it, they won’t sign me. I can pretend to be straight until the cows come home, but enough people know about me that it would only be a matter of time before the story broke.”

I bit my lip to stop myself from interrupting.

“So why the fuck should I put my life on hold? We might have to keep things quiet at the beginning, but eventually, the truth will come out. I refuse to give up any time with you, lifetime or not.”

“Are you sure? I don’t want to be a complication.”

“You’re never a complication. Loving you isn’t a complication. Us being together isn’t a complication.” He gripped my shoulders, his eyes boring into mine. “You’re mine.”

“I am.” I grinned, and what felt like bubbles erupted in my chest.

“Yup. Just like I’m yours.”

“You totally are.”

He dropped his hands and shook his head. “Today has been one hell of a day.”

“Yeah, I’m about at my limit for epiphanies and heart-to-hearts.”

“How about we order some dinner, take a nice shower, then do some butt cuddles?”

“You read my mind.” I gave him what I hoped was a sexy grin. “As long as that shower involves lots of touching.”

“So much touching.” He grabbed my hand and yanked me up. “Especially my tongue and dick touching your hole.”

“Now there’s a fun mental picture.”

We jumped at Eli’s amused voice.

“Dude!” Jax gaped at him. “How the fuck are you so stealthy?”

“I have three younger siblings. Being stealthy is the only way to avoid having little kids chase me around and demand I play with them.”

“Wish that worked with my younger brother. He’d set traps if he figured out I could stealth him.”

Eli snickered. “Mine are a lot younger. They’re not quite at the *set traps to get their way* stage of development.”

“Hearing you guys say stuff like that makes me very glad I’m an only child,” I said.

“So this is something I’m not sure if I should say.” Eli bit his lip, his expression troubled.

“What do you mean?” Jax and I exchanged a look.

“Remember when we were talking and you told the guys that I saw you in the hallway?”

“You told them?” Jax turned to me.

“It’s a funny story.” I waved him off. “But yeah, I remember. Did I put you on the spot?”

“Not exactly. But I lied, and I don’t know if I should tell you that.”

“Lied?” Jax blinked. “I’m so lost.”

“Me too. What did you lie about?”

“I said I never saw you guys having sex. The truth is I did see you.”

The blood drained from my face, and Jax went stock-still beside me.

“I came home, and you guys were…” He waved at the couch. “I left and went for a walk. You were done when I came back. It felt wrong not to tell you that.”

I opened my mouth to say something but closed it.

He looked between us warily. “I shouldn’t have said anything. That was the wrong call.”

“No, it’s fine you did,” I said. “I’m just processing that you saw us.”

“Will this make things weird?” he asked softly, fear shining in his big eyes. “Did I ruin everything?”

“Not at all.” Jax laughed. “But things are really unfair now because he’s seen you, you’ve seen us, but I’ve only seen this guy.” He elbowed me in the side.

“Like I said, you only need Google to see me.” Eli smiled in that serene way of his.

“Don’t ever tell us your work name. I don’t need to see my little brother doing *that* again,” I said.

He gave us a smile, a real one, and nodded. “Deal. Enjoy your shower.” He winked and swept toward the kitchen.

“So that happened.” Jax took my hand and led me up the stairs.

“It did. You think the universe has anything else to throw at us tonight?”

“I hope the fuck not. Still want to shower together?”

“Only if there’s all that touching you promised.”

“There will be lots of touching.”

“Then what the fuck are we waiting for?”

Jax narrowed his eyes and dropped my hand.

“Think again, sucka!” I darted around him and raced up the stairs, taking them two at a time. “Last one in the bathroom uses the tiny towel.”

He thundered after me. “Cheater.” A strong arm grabbed me around the waist and hauled me to a stop.

“Hey, who’s the cheater now?” I shouted as Jax lifted me off the ground and spun me behind him.

Laughing, Jax ran into the bathroom and came skidding to a stop, a big grin on his face and his arms raised in victory.

“Joke’s on you because I’m still using the big towel,” I said sweetly.

“Such a cheater.” He closed the door behind me, a fond smile on his lips.

“You love me.”

“I do.” He leaned in and brushed his lips against mine. “And I always will.”

Jax yanked off his shirt, then turned off the water.

The flutters in my chest intensified, and a deep sense of contentment and peace settled over me as I watched my boyfriend get the shower ready for us.

The next few years were uncertain, and I had no idea what our lives would look like when the season ended, but we’d figure it out together.

It wasn’t going to be easy, but no matter what happened, it would be worth it because *we* were worth it.

JAX

“Ready?” I asked as we paused in front of the locker room doors.

Matt nodded. “Ready.”

“You forget how to work a door?” Hayes hurried toward us. “Get your asses inside. I’m not getting on Coop’s bad side because you fuckers can’t figure out how to get in the room.”

“You don’t need us to get on Coop’s bad side.” Jax gave him a pointed look and pushed the door open.

He flashed us a grin and shoved past Jax to get into the locker room first.

We’d timed our arrival so we got there as everyone was supposed to be dressed and ready for practice.

Cooper had offered to tell the team for us, but we’d decided it would be best if it came from us. Cooper didn’t need to be caught in the crosshairs if people had issues.

“Look who’s late,” Big D shouted from his locker.

“Did you oversleep again?” Adams asked, a big grin on his face. “Poor baby. Did you have a rough night?”

“Ask your dad.”

The locker room went deathly silent.

Shit. Probably should have held that one in, considering what we were about to do.

“Burn!” Hayes hooted. About half the team started laughing.

Adams shot me a grin and came over for a fist bump. “Good one.”

I could hear a few groans mixed in with the laughter, but only one “disgusting.” Didn’t need to be a mind reader to guess who’d said that.

“Okay, children.” Cooper waited for the laughter to die down. “Landry and Crawford have something to tell you. Then you fuckers are going to get your asses out there and practice hard. We’ve got a game against Rainier in two days.”

The team made sounds of agreement, but all eyes were on us.

“So.” I glanced around. “Um.”

We’d decided that being direct and telling them we were dating would be the best course of action. But the words didn’t come.

Matt slipped his hand into mine, and we both braced for... something.

“We have something to announce.” I cleared my throat.

“Fuck, yeah!”

We both jumped at Petey’s excited shout.

“You owe me twenty bucks,” he said gleefully and pointed at Hayes.

“Double or nothing,” Hayes shot back.

“What?” Matt blinked. “You bet on us?”

“Yup.” Petey grinned. “I said you’d tell us you’re dating when the season started. He said you’d wait until closer to the playoffs. I win.”

I glanced at Matt, whose jaw was hanging open.

Taking a chance, I looked around the locker room. A few of the guys were amused, a couple looked bored, a few seemed confused, but there was only one sour face among the crowd.

“No fucking way.” Chase stepped forward.
“Unacceptable.”

“Shut it down, Balzac.” Coop’s tone was exasperated.
“There are no rules against teammates being in a relationship.”

“You mean fraternizing,” Chase sneered.

“Who the fuck says fraternizing anymore?” Adams looked between Cooper and Chase.

“No one. Just let it go,” Cooper said wearily.

“No.” Chase shook his head. “I’m not letting this go. This is *exactly* what I said would happen!”

“Chase.” Cooper gave him a pointed look. “Stop. Last warning.”

“No one’s going to talk about how Landry was straight until Crawford got to him?” he burst out.

“I obviously wasn’t straight,” Matt’s face was the picture of innocence. “But you never know until you have a dick in your mouth.”

“Landry,” Cooper groaned and dropped his face into his hands.

I rolled my lips inward to cover up my grin.

“You sick fuck.” Chase took a step toward us, his eyes flashing with rage.

“Enough!” Cooper moved between us and glared at Chase. “Get your ass into Coach’s office, now.”

“Why? Because we can’t risk hurting the little queers’ feelings with the truth?”

“Just stop.” Big D stood up to his full height and crossed his arms. “We’ve listened to your passive-aggressive bullshit for years, and I’m done with it. They’re together, end of story.” He looked around the room. “Anyone else got a problem with that?”

A low murmur of voices rose and fell in the room, but no one raised their hand or made any indication that they had

concerns.

“There. Problem solved.” Big D snapped his fist into his glove. “Can we play ball now? I’m bored.”

Chase blinked, his mouth opening and closing like a fish.

“You, in Coach’s office.” Cooper pointed at Chase. “You.” He whirled around and pointed at us. “Hurry your asses up and get changed. The rest of you, get out on the field and start your laps. Five extra.”

The team made various noises of unhappiness as they dutifully filed out of the locker room.

“Five minutes or you can add another five laps to your warm-up,” Cooper said.

“Yes, Captain.” Matt snapped out a sloppy salute, and Cooper rolled his eyes.

“Be captain, they said. It’ll be fun, they said,” he muttered and turned toward the door. “Like babysitting a bunch of overgrown toddlers.”

“Don’t forget herding cats!” I called after him.

He flipped me the finger over his shoulder and shoved the locker room door open.

“Well,” Matt said when the door had banged shut. “That went a lot differently in my head.”

“Me too. I mean, I knew Chase would have an issue... but I honestly thought at least some of the other guys would too.”

“Maybe some do.” Matt dropped his bag and rolled his shoulders like he was working out some tension. “But they can hate us all they want as long as they do it quietly.”

“I can’t believe Adams and Big D called Chase out like that.”

“Why not?” He gave me a confused look. “They’ve done it before.”

“I guess... I just didn’t expect it now. Not after telling them about us.”

Matt stepped into my space and wrapped his arms around my waist. “I know you’re waiting for the other shoe to drop. That your brain is telling you this can’t be real. That it can’t be this easy.”

I held him close. “I’ve spent so many hours agonizing over this. I almost lost you because I was convinced we wouldn’t be accepted. That *I* wouldn’t be accepted.”

“You never almost lost me.” He grinned cheekily. “You’re stuck with me. Remember that whole ‘I love you and I’ll wait for you’ thing? Does that sound like a guy who would be willing to let you go?”

“No.” I smiled despite myself.

“It’s not going to be easy. I know that. And I’m not trying to make light of your fears or experiences,” he said, his tone and eyes serious. “But our team supports us, and our friends do too. That’s what we need to focus on. We might never have the freedom to be this open again, and I’m okay with that. But this year, with these guys, it’s going to be okay.”

“I love you.”

“Love you too.” Matt looked around, a wicked grin on his lips.

“What? I know that face.”

“I had a dream the other night.” He ran his teeth over his bottom lip. “We were the only ones left after practice. You slammed me against the wall and kissed me so hard it made my head spin.”

“Then what did I do?” I tightened my grip around his waist.

“You leaned back against the wall and moaned my name while I went down on you.”

“Fuck.” I choked out a laugh. My dick throbbed, already full and heavy between my legs. “You had to say that shit now when we can’t do anything about it?”

He grinned cheekily and stepped back. “Sorry not sorry.”

I looked down at his bulge. “How are we supposed to practice like this?”

“Just think about Chase. That’ll fix it.” He winked and scooped up his duffle.

“Or.” I knocked the bag out of his hand, grabbed his waist, and shoved him backward.

“Oh shit!” he gasped as his back hit the wall.

I kissed him hard and hot, crushing him to the wall with my body. He moaned under my lips and reached up to take off our ball caps, which had ended up askew on our heads.

“Busted!”

We jumped apart, and I whirled around.

Petey stood in the doorway, a big grin on his face. “I’m telling Cooper you two were getting it on instead of getting dressed.”

“Please don’t.” I put my hands together in a begging motion. “We’ll make it worth your while.”

“I’m listening.” He crossed his arms.

“Landry will float you a pitcher and a pizza next time we’re at Red’s.”

He squinted at us like he was thinking hard. “Make it an extra large, and we have a deal.”

“Large, but you can get premium toppings,” Matt countered.

“How many?”

“Five.” I picked a random number.

“Deal.” He put his hand on the door. “But for real, you’d better hurry. Coach is in a mood, and Cooper’s channeling some major drill sergeant energy.”

“Thanks.” I grabbed my bag from where I’d left it in the middle of the floor.

“No problem, Max.”

“Um, neither of us is named Max.” Matt shot me a confused look.

“No, but you’re Jax and Matt. You can either be *Max* or *Jatt*.”

“How about neither.” I grimaced.

“You get one or the other. Or you keep being the *dream team*. It’s already been decided.”

“Max is better,” Matt said quickly.

He wiggled his fingers at us in a wave. “See you out there, *Max*.”

“We’d better hurry before they come up with any other weird nicknames,” I said.

“Or have to do extra laps.” Matt hurried over to his locker. “But I want your dick in my mouth as soon as practice is over.”

“Not. Helping.” I shoved my sweatpants down and waved at my semi.

He winked. “Have fun squishing that into your cup.”

“You’re evil,” I grumbled.

“You love it.”

“I do.”

His look went from teasing to tender. “Love you too. But we *really* need to get out there.”

I turned my back to him so I could get my practice gear on.

The team knew, and the world hadn’t imploded. I wasn’t under any delusions that this was the new normal. That my sexuality or relationship would always be accepted and that it wouldn’t cause issues for us in the future. But right then, I had everything I’d ever wanted.

I was starting my final year of college ball with my best friend, who was also my boyfriend, at my side. Maybe I’d get to play pro ball; maybe I wouldn’t. A few months ago, the

start of the season had signaled the beginning of the end. That the only way to have one dream was to give up another.

Now I knew that wasn't true and that while one chapter of our lives was coming to an end, the next phase was right there on the horizon. And having Matt by my side as we figured out this crazy ride called life was all I needed. Everything else was just background noise.

EPILOGUE

Matt

Six years later

“He’s here!”

The excited whispers of my team filtered through the conversation I was having with Denning, my assistant coach. I glanced up from the tablet we’d been using to go over stats.

Jax was walking toward us in workout gear with a big grin on his face.

“Holy shit, it’s Jax Crawford!”

“Language, Russ,” I said more out of habit than anything.

My team consisted of kids between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, and while the league discouraged swearing, I didn’t bother doing more than correcting them. I’d said a lot worse when I was their age.

“Sorry, Coach,” Russ, one of my newbie pitchers, said. He stared at Jax, who hopped the fence and walked onto the field.

“What are you doing here?” I asked.

“Had some time off and wanted to come by and play some ball.” He slung his arm over my shoulders. “That okay with you, Coach?”

“I suppose.” I pursed my lips like he was putting me out.

Jax and I did this at the beginning of every new season. The kids loved getting the chance to play alongside a pro player and pepper him with questions about how he'd gotten to where he was.

I liked that it gave the kids a chance to see us interacting as a couple in a low-stress environment.

Our relationship wasn't a secret and hadn't been for years.

The story had leaked halfway through Jax's rookie season, and the next year, we'd been hounded by reporters and publications.

The frenzy around Jax being an out player had died out, and now people mostly left us alone. When we went to events together, we still got looks or questions, but it was nothing compared to the shit storm we'd had to deal with when we'd first made headlines.

"What do you guys think?" Jax asked my team. "How about a scrimmage?"

"You're going to *play* with us?" Danny, my youngest player, asked, his eyes wide and disbelieving.

"If you'd like." He grinned.

"You guys want to keep doing drills or do a scrimmage?" I asked the team.

"SCRIMMAGE!"

Both Jax and I jumped back at the sheer volume of their answers.

"Okay." I laughed and turned to Denning. He'd known Jax was coming by and had the equipment out and ready. "Team list is on the board. Get organized and get out on the field. We're starting in five minutes."

The kids rushed into the dugout to check the noticeboard.

"Hey." Jax pecked a quick kiss against my lips. "Missed you today."

"Missed you too." I gave him one more squeeze, then stepped away. Now wasn't the time to get in some sneaky

cuddles. My team and coaching staff were cool with me being with a guy, but we still kept the PDA to a minimum around others.

Jax pulled a pair of batting gloves out of his back pocket.

“Sweet.” I plucked them out of his hand and flipped them over. “I need a new pair of these.”

“Then get your own.” He swiped them out of my grip and held them out of my reach.

“Why would I do that when yours are right there?”

“You’re such a brat.” He shoved the gloves back into his pocket. “Why do I love you again?”

“Because I’m amazing. And it’s your fault for introducing me to your magical Canadian gloves. I wouldn’t need them if they weren’t so awesome.”

Jax raked a hand through his hair, the thin black band around his ring finger catching my eyes.

I ran my thumb over the smooth silicone of my matching ring, grinning like a fool.

After the last game of his rookie season, Jax had asked me to marry him. He’d filled our condo with flowers and had been standing in the middle of our living room in a suit, holding a pizza box in one hand and a six-pack of beer in the other.

It had been the most over-the-top and cheesy moment of our entire relationship, and I’d loved every second of his proposal and the celebratory sex and pizza that had followed.

Our wedding had been a small and informal affair, just family and close friends. The media circus surrounding our engagement and marriage had been a pain in the ass to deal with, but we’d learned to treat that stuff as background noise. We did the interviews and put in the face-time at events because it was part of Jax’s job, but our focus was on the important things, like our careers and our friends and family.

My relationship with my family was as good as it had ever been. I’d taken the coward’s way out and waited until midseason before I’d told my dad I wasn’t going to be playing

after college and was looking into coaching. He'd had some choice words for me that still stung, and had hung up on me. I'd thought that was it, that I'd lost any chance at a relationship with either of my parents. A few months later, my mother, of all people, had come to visit me at school. We'd gone into Seattle for lunch, since nothing in town was up to her standards, and she'd asked me why I'd decided to stop playing.

I'd told her the truth. That I'd only played because of Dad and it had always been his dream and not mine. I'd also told her about Jax. That we were together and I loved him.

She'd been confused for a few seconds. I'd kind of hoped we'd have one of those moments when the mom said they'd always known or suspected their kid wasn't straight, but it didn't happen.

She had, however, accepted it, and that was enough of a win for me.

That night I'd called my dad and blurted the truth out to him too. I'd expected anger or expletives or for him to blame Jax for why I'd given up ball, but he'd given me the shock of a lifetime when he'd asked if Jax was planning to go pro. It seemed my dad didn't need to brag about me in particular and was satisfied with being able to brag about his son-in-law.

Not that everything had magically gotten better or that we were close now. That hadn't happened. We had a polite relationship, and we called and sent cards on holidays, but that was it.

It didn't matter because Jax's family had adopted me into their fray, and I had all the family I needed with them.

Jax was my everything. My best friend, biggest cheerleader, and my partner in everything. Every annoying reporter or unflattering story was worth it to get to come home to Jax's waiting arms and see his smiles every day.

Being the partner of a Major League ball player wasn't easy. There were long absences while he was traveling and times when our schedules were so off that we barely saw each

other, despite living in a two-bedroom condo. The team wives and girlfriends were great and had accepted me into their group, but as the only male among them, I often felt out of my element.

Jax's team had also welcomed me into their ranks. Being a player and coach helped me fit in, but they'd put the effort in to making sure that not only Jax was included in things but I was too.

Life wasn't perfect, but it was better than I'd ever dreamed it could be.

"Emerson asked if he could get a ride tonight. I said that was fine," Jax said.

"Yeah, no problem."

One of Jax's teammates lived in our building and liked to use me as their DD when we went out. Tonight the team was celebrating one of their veteran player's birthdays. Not many ball players were still playing at thirty-five, and the team had rented out a trendy downtown restaurant for the night.

"Coach Crawford!"

My entire team fanned out behind me, their gloves on and their faces bright with excitement.

"You guys ready?" I asked.

"Yeah!" they shouted.

"Home team, on the field and start your warm-ups. Visitors, into the dugout."

The boys scampered off.

"Ready to lose, Crawford?" Jax asked, a gleam in his eyes.

"You may be the big shot ball player, but this is my team and my turf. You're going down."

"You think so?" He quirked a brow at me.

"I know so." I shot him a sugary sweet smile.

"HMMMMM." He stepped closer and put his lips to my ear. "I think we need to put a wager on it if you're that confident."

“Hel-heck, yeah.” I lowered my voice. “If I win, you have to wear that new jock I got you to dinner.”

“Done. But if I win, you have to wear that red set I love under your suit tonight.”

“Can’t do that.” I sighed regretfully.

“Conceding already?” He grinned.

“Nope, just can’t wear the red set tonight because I’m wearing it now.”

Jax’s eyes bugged out of his head. “Really?”

“Yup.” I winked. “Sorry not sorry.”

He gave me a heated look. “Then I want to see you in the yellow set.”

“Deal. Prepare to lose.”

“In your dreams.”

“And they’ll be great ones too.” I winked. “Come on, superstar. Time to play some ball.”

He gave my ass a playful slap and jogged past me to get into position behind first base.

I did a quick sweep of the field, my chest so full it felt like my heart would burst. This was the life I’d always dreamed of, and I was so thankful that twenty-one-year-old me had taken a chance and set me on the course for all this to be possible.

I had my best friend, who was also my partner and the love of my life, and baseball. What more could I ask for?



INTERESTED IN READING a bonus chapter where Matt and Jax have some fun in the locker room showers after hours? Click [here](#) to be taken to Prolific Works and claim your copy

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ABOUT WILLOW

What can I say about myself? It's kind of like being the new kid in school and being asked to tell everyone a bit about yourself. Anyone else forget everything they've ever liked, thought of, and even their name in those moments?

A few facts about me; I'm Canadian, and I love books! I've been writing my own stories since I was eight and wrote my first novel at sixteen. I'm the first to admit those attempts weren't my best work, but they started me on a journey of creating stories that has led me to fulfilling my dream of becoming an author, and I'm so happy to be able to share my stories with people today.

I currently live on Canada's east coast with my kiddo and my cats. I have a shoe collecting addiction, and I enjoy taking long walks, discussions with friends, and reading anything and everything I can get my hands on.



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