



Wrapped
IN RED

WIDE OPEN SERIES BOOK FOUR

SUNDAE LEIGHTON

Wrapped in Red

Wide Open

Sundae Leighton

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This book is intended for mature readers 18 years and older. It contains sexually explicit and graphic scenes and language that might be offensive to some readers.

All characters in this work and all my works are 18 years of age or older.

All sexual acts are consensual.

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For Mom

“And honey, I miss you and I’m being good
And I’d love to be with you if only I could.”

Playlist

“Last Christmas” — Wham!

“Hard Candy Christmas” — Dolly Parton

“Underneath the Tree” — Kelly Clarkson

“All I Want for Christmas Is You” — Mariah Carey

“Santa’s Coming for Us” — Sia

“You Make It Feel Like Christmas” — Gwen Stefani,
Blake Shelton

“Mr. Heatmiser” — Big Bad Voodoo Daddy

“I Need You Christmas” — Jonas Brothers

“Please Come Home for Christmas” — The Eagles

“Cozy Little Christmas” — Katy Perry

“Take Me Home for Christmas” — Dan + Shay

“The Christmas Can-Can” — Straight No Chaser

“Glittery” — Kacey Musgraves, Troye Sivan

“Wrapped in Red” — Kelly Clarkson

About this Book

This book contains themes that might be triggering to some readers. Physical and mental abuse, mental health issues, and some LGBTIAQ+ hate that some might find troubling. Please read at your own risk. This is the fourth book in the Wide Open Series, but it does not need to be read in order.

Prologue

Carson

New Year's Eve

This was probably the worst idea my best friend, Ezra Bardot, had ever had. And trust me, growing up, he'd had a lot of them. I looked around the crowded bar, wishing I had said no to him. This was way out of my comfort zone. Way, way, WAY out of it. There were guys dancing, guys kissing, and I was pretty sure if I dared to look in the dark corners, there might be some getting blowies and hand jobs. Not that I was judging, because that was fine. It just wasn't for me.

"I can see your mind working, CC." Ezra's voice was in my ear as he started to reach for my coat, which I was clutching against my chest. "If you would just relax, you might be able to remove that stick from your ass."

I glared at him. Easy for Ezra to say. He thrived in this environment. Ez was beautiful, with his big brown eyes framed with long dark lashes, perfectly styled auburn hair, and the cutest button nose. Plus, all those freckles on his face. It drove everyone crazy. Not just men. Woman, too.

"You tricked me," I hissed through clenched teeth.

"I did no such thing." He blinked innocently at me. "I told you we were going out. To a bar."

My eyes narrowed. "Not to *this* bar."

"You're gay, I'm gay. Everyone in here is gay. What's wrong with coming to a gay bar, boo?" Once again, Ezra reached for my coat and pried my fingers away from the zipper. "Jesus, it's not like you've never been to one before. Why are you so uptight? If someone tries to suck your dick, CC, tell them no. Stranger danger and all that. When did you turn into this nervous asshole?"

I slapped his hands away. "I can remove my own jacket, thanks."

It was the clothes underneath I didn't want to show the world. The sheer shirt he somehow convinced me to wear, the glitter that sparkled all over my face and hair, the skintight jeans. It was like high school all over again. Ezra had always been a bad influence. Even if he was a fun one.

He had already removed his own jacket and was standing there waiting for me. Dressed in a pair of black skinny jeans, red suspenders, and a tight black shirt that stopped right above his belly button, showing off his flat stomach. Ezra caught many eyes. As I let my gaze skim down his body, I noticed how tight and toned he was. My best friend was gorgeous. I was just meh.

"CC." Ezra held out his hand. "You can't keep your jacket on. It gets warm in here." He wiggled his fingers.

"Fine." I sighed, making a show of forcing down the zipper and ripping the sleeves down my arms. I tossed it at him. "Happy?"

He beamed up at me. "Very." He rose to his toes to reach my ear. "You look hot, boo, so go with it. I'm going to put these away. Don't move from this spot. We wouldn't want you to get lost, would we?"

I folded my arms over my chest and tried not to look as uncomfortable as I felt while I let my eyes move over the room. I should be back at my parents' house, in my childhood room, staring up at the posters on my wall, or watching boring New Year's Eve countdown shows with my mom and dad. I loved coming home for the holidays because I missed my family. Don't get me wrong, I enjoyed being a NASCAR driver and traveling all over the US, but it was nice to come back home to where I grew up.

"You look pissed. How do you expect to meet someone standing there like that?" Ezra appeared in my line of sight before hooking his arm through mine. "Come on. You look amazing because I'm fabulous and know how to work my magic. Let's get some booze in you so you can unwind."

I rolled my eyes as I followed my best friend. I wasn't surprised when people stopped Ezra to say hello, drop a few

air kisses here and there. He introduced me, but didn't mention who I was, which I was thankful for, not that I cared, and then we were at the bar. We ordered; Ez a dirty martini, and me a beer before we managed to snag a booth.

"I'm doing this for you," he told me as he sipped his drink. "I know you never really get to go out, being Mister NASCAR driver and all. You need to have a little fun."

"I have plenty of fun. I'm worried that someone might recognize me."

"Someone has a high opinion of himself, hmm?"

I scowled as I avoided his eyes. I didn't, not really. Odds were, no one in this place knew who I was. I wasn't as noticeable as Rand Shepard or as popular as Watson Brooks, but I had my own fans. People who proudly wore my shirts and my number on their back. Hell, last year someone had me sign their arm and had it tattooed on their body. That's Earnhardt territory fandom right there. Not that I was comparing myself to the Intimidator because I wasn't. He was the best. I'd be lucky to be a Kyle Larson or Joey Logano.

When I finally met his gaze, Ezra's brows dipped.

"That's not it," I assured him. "I don't want pictures."

"You're worried about social media." Ezra knocked my knee under the table with the toe of his boot.

I flipped him the bird only to hear him chuckle. "I'll just let them think that we're a couple."

The look of sheer surprise on his face alone was enough to make me laugh. We had never been a thing, Ezra and I, although there had been a brief moment in high school when I thought I had a tiny crush on him. We were friends, nothing more, even if he was sexy as hell.

"No." He shook his head. "You're not—"

"Your type?" I finished.

Ezra nodded as he ran his finger around the rim of his glass, avoiding my gaze. "I'll always be the Thelma to your Louise, the Kate to your Leo, but we're not soulmates."

“Bestie soulmates, though.” I held out my hand, and when he took it, I squeezed tightly. “I do love you, boo.”

“Right back at you.” Ezra gave me a big smile, though it might have wavered for just a second. “Now, if you’ll excuse me. I see someone that *might* be my type for the evening.” He wiggled his brows before he slipped from the booth and disappeared into the crowd of bodies dancing together on the floor.

Great. Now I could just sit here alone. Feeling sorry for myself. Hashtag Loserville.

I sighed and stared down into my pint of beer. I could order another, get lost in a drunken haze, and maybe, just maybe, find some liquid courage. Although I felt like this was how my life was always going to be like. Me drifting through time, trying to find the love of my life while Ezra hopped from dick to dick. I snorted at the thought of us in a nursing home together, a couple of old gay dudes rooming together.

Someone gripped my arm and brought me out of that thought.

“What’s got your panties in a twist?” I tried to pull away, but his eyes were wide with fright. “Ez?” I climbed from the booth.

He looked over his shoulder as he moved close enough that our bodies touched. “I need your help.”

“Of course, anything,” I assured him as I leaned down to hear him.

“So, you remember Ty Graham from high school?” Ezra was up on his toes to speak into my ear.

My blood pressure shot up. Of course, I remembered. That guy was a douche canoe that should be shoved down Asshole River. He had been nothing but a top-rated prick to my best friend until I broke his nose senior year. Not to mention, he thought he was a better stock car driver than I was. Funny, I didn’t see him racing against me every weekend.

“Is he fucking here?” I started toward the dance floor, but a hand wrapped around my wrist.

“I told him you were my boyfriend, CC.”

I spun back around. “You did what now?”

Ezra was never embarrassed. I had never seen him flustered or blush in the years we had been friends, but right now, his face was bright red.

“Yeah, look, I know it was stupid, but he sort of asked me on a date over the summer. He wouldn’t take no for an answer. I had to do something when I couldn’t get him to leave me alone. I told him you and I were a thing. He backed right off after that.”

“But he’s here now?”

Ezra nodded.

“Come with me.” I grabbed his hand to drag him out into the sea of bodies.

I didn’t dance. I wasn’t graceful. I was like a drunk giraffe on roller skates. If said giraffe didn’t know how to skate. Ezra had to run to keep up with me, but he followed me out onto the dance floor. The music was fast, loud, and I wasn’t familiar with it. I preferred classic rock and the occasional modern country, but Ezra didn’t seem to mind moving in a slow, lazy motion.

“Where?” I murmured as I dropped his hand to place mine on his slim waist.

Ezra glanced around before he met my eyes. “You look so angry right now, CC. We’re supposed to be a couple. Relax,” he murmured.

“Where is he, Ezra? If you want this to work, I need to make sure he’s watching.” I met his dark orbs and was surprised to see them dancing with happiness. Was he enjoying this? “Why do you look like that?”

He only shook his head. “I don’t look like anything, boo.”

But when he wrapped his arms around my waist and tugged me closer, my breath caught in my throat. What was happening? Why was my heart beating so fast?

“You’re supposed to be dancing with me. Make it look real. Your arms are like spaghetti. Put them around me like you mean it.”

“Put them... We’re not a real couple,” I reminded him, but then did as he asked. “You owe me.”

Ezra only leaned his chin against my chest before he did something I didn’t expect. He rose onto his toes again and pressed his lips against my ear. The scent of warm cinnamon and soap filled my nostrils, and my traitorous cock thickened in my pants. He trailed his tongue over the outer shell, then his teeth nipped lightly at the soft lobe. Sweat trickled down my back as my mouth found its way to Ezra’s cheek, and I found myself pressing gentle kisses against his soft skin.

“Trust me, he’s watching, CC.” His voice sent shivers up my spine, and goosebumps broke out over my skin despite the warm temperature in the building.

I nodded as I dug my fingers into his belt loops to tug him closer. To feel his slim, lithe body against mine. His hand moved up to slide through my blond hair before he forced my head down. And then his mouth was on mine. His tongue speared my lips, and I felt the groan that escaped his throat as it vibrated through him. I let him have control as he cupped my head with his small hands, tilting my head and kissing me until I thought I might black out. He released me to stare up into my face with blown-out pupils.

“Holy—Ezra,” I stuttered.

He grabbed my hand and dragged me away from the dance floor.

This was a huge mistake. We had crossed so many friend boundaries tonight. I never should have let him kiss me like that, but all I wanted was to do it again. The way his tongue felt inside my mouth. My dick liked that memory so much it knocked against my zipper, and when Ezra shoved me into a chair in a dark corner and climbed up into my lap to kiss me again? I whined loudly into his mouth.

“CC,” he whispered as he peppered hot kisses against my lips. “Tell me to stop.”

Wait, was he not into this? Because it felt like he was. Ezra’s hand dug at my hair so hard it hurt.

I grabbed his wrists. “Only if you want to stop.”

“I don’t. That’s why I need you to tell me to.” His big, dark eyes searched mine.

“Don’t stop.”

Then Ezra was sucking on my neck, his teeth biting into my skin to the point I knew he was leaving marks. I wanted him to. I wanted to remember this night for days. When I palmed at his dick with my hand, his eyes rolled back, and a soft moan escaped his lips before he batted my hand away.

Ezra’s heated gaze locked on mine. “You first.” He smirked.

I was surprisingly calm as his hands roamed over my stomach before he reached for the button on my jeans. When I didn’t stop him, he popped it open, pulled down the zipper, and slipped his hand inside. I wrapped my arm around his waist to make sure he didn’t fall from my lap.

I hissed when Ezra made contact with my hard length. “Oh, shit, fuck.”

I kept my eyes on him, the way his lips turned up into a smile when he caught me. His thumb slid over the tip, gathered the precum, and ran it down the side of my cock. Ezra slowly began to jerk me with his fist before his mouth came crashing down against mine, his free hand reaching up to grip the back of my head.

That’s it, boo, don’t stop. It feels so damn good. Your hand is magic on my cock.

Heat curled inside my belly as I fucked his fist. Ezra’s tongue slicked against mine, and he yanked on my hair, his teeth nipping at my bottom lip. A low, soft growl grew inside my throat. I met Ezra’s heated gaze as I unraveled before him.

Thick, sticky cum burst from my cock and shot into his hand just as I tasted copper in my mouth.

“Jesus Christ.” Ezra climbed from my lap once he pulled his hand from my pants.

I watched wide-eyed as he brought his fingers to his mouth and licked each of them clean, one at a time. Then he kissed me again, his tongue lapping at the sting on my lip where he bit me.

“That was so fucking hot, CC.”

But then I saw it the second Ezra realized what we had done. I had just let him jerk me off, my best friend, in the middle of a dark club, and the shame was written all over his beautiful face.

“Ezra,” I reached for his hand, but he took a step away from me.

“You shouldn’t have let me do that.” He shook his head. “You shouldn’t...I shouldn’t have kissed you. We’re friends.”

I gripped his chin between my fingers. “Exactly, we’re best friends.”

“I’m sorry, CC. This was a mistake.” Ezra’s eyes flashed with guilt. “I have to go.”

Then he turned and fled from the corner he had dragged me into, leaving me by myself.

Chapter One

Ezra

I shifted my weight from one foot to another. I absolutely should not have come here. I could leave now before anyone saw me. It wasn't like I was invading their space. I was invited. I had been invited to every holiday since I was thirteen. The last one I had spent with my horrible family. Even though New Year's Eve had happened, and CC and I had this weird falling out months ago, I needed my best friend right now. Assuming he was still my best friend. I chewed on my lip as I raised my hand to ring the bell, everything in my body screaming at me to stop. What if his new best friend was in there right now?

My ribs, hell, they hurt the worst. Bruised, that's what the doctors told me. "*You're lucky nothing's broken or that a lung wasn't punctured.*"

If I ever saw him again, I was going to light that man on fire and watch him burn like a sparkler, because it felt like everything inside of me was yanked out and squeezed back in through my nostrils. I stared at my left hand, the one I was going to ring the bell with, and noticed, for the first time, that I had two broken nails. I had tried to fight back; but being all of five-foot-four, one-hundred-ten pounds, it was useless. He was at least a hundred pounds heavier and probably a foot taller. I should have learned my lesson the first time he hit me, but I thought he cared about me.

Maybe I needed to start taking karate lessons or something.

I caught the flicker of the TV in the living room to my left, and I dropped my hand. Senior and Amelia, CC's parents, were probably watching *Jeopardy*. It was about that time of night. It was tradition. I had spent countless nights tucked on the couch with CC trying to win against his father, but that was impossible. Senior was brilliant, hardly ever lost, and I loved messing with him. I would come up with the most

ridiculous answers just to see his reaction. His laugh was infectious.

Again, I thought about leaving. I had my own apartment I could hide in. My own bed to curl up on and cry myself to sleep. Only, there was a chance *he* might be there despite the restraining order. I also needed to see my best friend, apologize for what happened, and have him comfort me tonight. The need was so strong that I finally dropped my finger against the doorbell and put all my weight into it.

The sound hadn't changed. The familiar chime that echoed inside my ears as it rang through the house. How many times had I stood here waiting for CC to come greet me? Countless minutes, I'm sure. He'd rush down to get me, then whisk me up into his room, where we'd play video games or talk about our future. The night I came out to him, tears spilled down my cheeks before he hugged me. CC had been the best friend I could have asked for until I ruined it. Because I ruined everything, like the dumpster fire I was.

"I got it, Ma!" His voice boomed through the wooden door, and I swallowed the nerves in my throat.

I heard the sound of the lock, watched the handle as it twisted and then there he was, staring at me with those big brown eyes, all six-foot-two of him.

"Ez...what happened to your face?"

I grimaced. "Well, it's nice to see you, too, CC."

I knew it looked terrible. Two days ago, I could hardly see out of my eyes, they were so swollen; but that let up this morning before I checked myself out of the hospital against medical advice. Have you ever eaten hospital food? Blech, no thank you.

"What happened?"

"Would you believe me if I said I was attacked by a bear?"

CC's lip curled over his teeth. "That's not funny."

"I'm not trying to be funny." I was, but clearly, this was a rough crowd. "You should see the other guy?"

CC growled. "Get in here." He reached for my hand and yanked me into the foyer.

"Sweetie, who is it?" Amelia called from the other room. "Is that Ezra?"

My eyes widened, or at least as much as they could with the bruising. "No." I mouthed.

"What am I supposed to do, lie to my mother for you?" he hissed, and his eyes flashed with anger. Okay, so he was still mad at me. "We're going upstairs." Then CC was dragging me by the hand through the house, up the stairs, and to his childhood bedroom. "Sit the fuck down."

I did as he told me, glancing around the room that hadn't changed a bit since we were kids, then shoved my hands back into the pockets of my coat. Still the same NASCAR posters on the wall, pictures of us growing up. When I met his gaze again, I realized that my best friend had never looked that upset before.

"It's good to see you."

"Skip the bullshit, Ezra. Tell me who did this to you." CC popped his jaw. "I'm not fucking around here. You look like someone's personal punching bag."

I felt like it, too. "Uh, just some guy." *Lie.*

"Some guy? Some guy, Ez? I haven't seen you in months, not since New Year's when you kissed me, then left me alone at that club. Tonight, you show up at my parents' house, looking like you have one foot in the grave, but when I ask you who did this, you say 'some guy'! You are unbelievable." He threw his hands in the air.

My chin trembled, and I dropped my head. "I didn't know where else to go."

I had promised myself I wouldn't cry, yet I could feel the tears as they stung my eyes. I was so ashamed of myself and how I stayed with he-who-shall-not-be-named for as long as I did. If I told CC, he would hate me even more than he already did.

“Was it someone from town?” His voice was softer.

I shook my head. “No, I’d never met him before.” *Why were these lies so easily coming out of my mouth right now?* “I’m sorry.”

“For what? You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“I shouldn’t have come here. To your parents.”

CC let out a long sigh. “You’re always welcome here. I was just—Fuck, Ez.” When I looked up, he scrubbed a hand down his face. He moved to squat down in front of me. “Did he hurt you anywhere else?”

“Anywhere...oh, no. Nothing like that,” I assured him. I noticed how worried CC’s dark eyes looked. “I promise you, if he tried to assault me like that, I would have ripped off his dick before I fed it to him.” Although he’d tried plenty of times in the past and almost gotten away with it. Not this time, though.

CC’s lips twitched up. “How can you joke about it?”

“I broke a couple of nails.” I held up my hand.

“Well, that makes me feel so much better.” CC rolled his eyes before he stood up and engulfed me in a hug that caused me to yelp in pain. He jumped back. “What else did he do to you?” He yanked the zipper down on my coat.

I folded my arms over my chest. “Stop it.”

“Ezra, either you show me yourself, or I do it for you.” CC narrowed his eyes at me. We played this game once before in high school when a kid on the football team had picked on me. I lost then, too.

I rolled my eyes and climbed to my feet to remove my coat so I could place it on the bed. Then I pulled my shirt up over my head. “Happy?”

“Jesus fucking Christ!” he exclaimed.

I knew it looked bad. The black and blue marks covered my chest, ribs, and belly. They were more bark than bite.

I let go of the shirt so it could drop back around my waist. “Yeah, well, I was stupid.” Not the word I would use, but we’ll go with that. My throat tightened. “Can we not do this now?”

“When would you prefer we do it? I haven’t seen or heard from you in months, boo.” He didn’t sound mad, just hurt.

I stared at my best friend. The man I used to talk and text every day until we crossed lines I couldn’t come back from. “CC—”

“Was it that bad, Ezra?” He cut me off. “Am I a bad kisser? Was getting me off that terrible, or did you not like the way I touched you? Because I’ll tell you, the way you kissed me...yeah, I think about it every single day. It was the best one I’ve ever had. I thought you needed a little time, which turned into nearly a year. I haven’t been with a lot of men, boo, but no one has ever said I was bad at it.”

I had done this to him. I had made my best friend think he was less than adequate when he was perfect on so many levels.

“No, CC, you were perfect.”

“You’re here now.” CC sat down on the bed. “Can we go back to being best friends?”

Something warm spreads throughout my body. “You don’t hate me for what happened that night? I mean, that’s why I left. I figured our friendship was over and you could find someone else to be besties with.”

“Are you insane? You’re the only bestie for me.” He knocked my shoulder, causing me to grimace. “Shit, sorry! Christ, can you get me a name, so I can go pay this guy a visit? I’ll just bring along a baseball bat. Better yet”—CC grinned—“I can show up with Rand Shepard and Killian Hampton behind me. Those two alone would scare the crap out of anyone.”

I laughed, causing pain to rip through my body. “I missed you, CC, and I’m sorry. For everything. For leaving you that night, kissing you, jerking you off, wait... The best kiss you ever had?” I just realized what he had said.

“I shouldn’t have said that.” CC blushed.

I grinned. “You said I was the best. You love me,” I teased ala Sandra Bullock in *Miss Congeniality*.

“You’re never going to let me live that down, are you?” He stood up.

I shook my head. “I’m the best kiss you ever had. Oh, you’re going to compare all of them to me forever and ever. You want me to have like a million of your babies.”

“We’re not doing this.” CC stood up and walked over to the suitcase propped up on his dresser. He dug around inside before he pulled out a shirt. “You can wear this.” He held out a grey long-sleeved shirt.

“What is this for?”

“Just put it on.”

I took it from him before I realized what he wanted. CC wanted me to stay over. Sleep here, like I always did. My heart rattled around my chest.

“Are you sure? I can go home and come back in the morning.”

“I’m sure.”

He folded his arms over his broad chest to stare at me, his blond hair flopping into his eyes. CC needed a haircut. Had he been working out? I let my gaze move over his broad shoulders and his thick biceps; they looked, well, bigger. My best friend had always been sexy, but right now he looked downright eatable.

I nodded. “Right, well, can you turn around?”

“What, why? I’ve seen you naked before. Since when did you care about morals?” CC balked. When I raised my brows, he rolled his eyes. “Fine, whatever, princess.”

My mouth dropped. “Princess? I’ll show you princess.”

I yanked my shirt up over my head to toss it at him before I popped the clasp on my skinny jeans. I toed off my boots and yanked my pants off, leaving myself in just my briefs. Normally when I went on dates, I wore sexy panties, but my

friend, Seth, had gone to my place and brought me a change of clothes. These things were hideous, but they would have to do. I could actually feel CC's dark eyes as they trailed down my body, over my pale skin, over the bruises that covered my ribs and stomach before they darted back to my face.

"You just going to stand there in your underwear?"

"I thought that's what you wanted?"

CC smirked. "You wish."

I tugged the grey shirt over my head and felt it drop around my knees. Was it warm in here, or was it me? My heart was racing so fast I thought it might burst from my chest. Why was CC still staring at me?

"Thanks." I smoothed the fabric down over my chest to read the Brooks Racing font across the front.

"You always looked better in my gear than I did," CC commented. "I know this sounds like a shitty thing to say, considering what happened, but I'm glad you're here. I've missed my best friend."

"Me, too." I sat back down on the bed and patted the mattress. "You need to tell me about your new gig, boo. Brooks Racing, huh?"

He groaned and dropped his head back. "I can't believe I'm going to be working for Watts Brooks. I swear he still thinks I want his fiancé, Holt, and honestly, I don't. There was never a connection between us." He blushed. "Right, you don't know about that."

"You're going to have to tell me all about *that*," I teased and giggled when CC's head shot up to glare at me.

"Seriously, though, we have a lot to catch up on. We should start now."

CC worried his lip between his teeth before he moved next to me. "Best friends love one another for life, boo."

"You didn't." I felt like I was going to burst into tears.

He leaned his forehead against mine. "Eleven months' worth of catching up. You better not plan on getting any sleep

tonight.”

Chapter Two

Carson

I'm not sure what time we fell asleep, but it was late. As surprised as I was to find my best friend standing on the porch last night, I had never been happier. Pissed that his face and body looked the way it did, but if it brought him back into my life, then so be it. Even if he wouldn't give me the name of who turned his beautiful face into minced meat. We stayed up talking and catching up on as much as we possibly could until exhaustion took over. Ezra could hardly keep his eyes open, so we crawled into my bed, and he was out as soon as I turned off the light.

Me, yeah... not so much. I got a couple solid hours of sleep, but now I was wide awake. Maybe it was my mother getting up to go start the turkey for Thanksgiving, or maybe it was everything hitting me all at once. Ezra was back. We had kissed on New Year's Eve. He had gotten me off, and then he'd run. I had thought about it more than I should have. I glanced over at my best friend as he slept next to me.

We had always been close best friends. Shared a bed, were super touchy feely with one another. But we'd stepped over a line that night we'd gone to the bar, and it had messed with both of our heads. Did I have feelings for Ezra? Maybe. I had tried to date after that. Had even signed up for a couple of apps, only to find myself looking at men who looked exactly like my best friend. Auburn hair, small and pretty. It was why I went after Holt Walker. I just couldn't bring myself to respond to messages or send any of my own on those apps. I ended up deleting them before I even got started.

I think, maybe, deep down, I wanted Ezra. He never shied away from anything. He was amazing, bold, and beautiful. Sunshine and rainbows on the darkest day, despite his horrible parents.

We had always talked about him moving to North Carolina with me. Only, it never happened. Why was that? I brushed a few hairs from his forehead as I let my gaze move over his

face. The dark lashes that fanned over his skin. Ezra would knock them all on their asses down there. He'd show up in one of his sexy outfits, decked out with the perfect makeup, his hair on point, and everyone would stare like they'd never seen someone like him. Because they hadn't. They'd fall in love with him, just like I had. Clamor for more, and he'd flip them the bird, because Ezra belonged to no one.

Wait, I wasn't in love with my best friend. It was simply platonic. Yep, that's exactly what it was.

"What time is it?" Ezra mumbled as he eased his small frame toward me. "Why are you staring at me like that? Did I grow third eye while I was sleeping?"

When I didn't answer, he started to sit up.

I swallowed the lump in my throat. "Everything's fine. Go back to sleep."

"Now you really have my attention." He chuckled softly.

Crap. "Is this weird?" I asked. "Us, sharing a bed at twenty-six?"

"No, why? Is it weird for you?" Ezra sounded like he was smiling right now. "Because I can—"

He started to pull back the covers, and when I realized he was going to get up, I wrapped my arm around him.

"Watch the ribs," he wheezed.

"Sorry, just don't move. I'm not weirded out, but we're adults."

"Yeah, I'm not an adult, boo. I still like all the same childish things, eat Fruity Pebbles for breakfast, stay up too late, and sleep until noon."

I snorted. "Okay, I'm the adult." We both lay on the mattress in silence, and I thought maybe Ezra might have fallen back to sleep until I felt his hand find mine.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, lacing our fingers together. "For ghosting you. Almost ruining our friendship. I'm so proud of you and all you've accomplished, CC. Even though we

haven't talked, I still kept up with your career. You're going to be so amazing at Brooks Racing."

I turned my head until I was facing him. "Stalker."

"Excuse me, I think the word you're looking for is supportive, boo. I'm a supportive bestie." Ezra gasped.

I smiled. "You're right. And I missed you. So much, and I'm so glad you're here." I squeezed his hand. "Promise me if we ever fight or something happens again, we work it out."

"I promise," he whispered.

The urge to suddenly kiss Ezra hit me so hard that I found myself untangling my hand from his. That was how we got into this predicament in the first place, and besides, I had a boyfriend. Well, sort of. What I had with Noel was *nice*. Safe. We met right at the end of the season, introduced by Watts. I was sure that was his way of trying to keep me away from his fiancé, which again, he had nothing to worry about.

Noel McCormick raced in the Xfinity series, so he understood what it was like to be a driver. We also wouldn't compete against one another since it was the tier beneath Cup. He was way out of my league with his inky black hair and enticing eyes, but I felt like he might be going through the motions when we were together. Kissing me, holding my hand, and there wasn't much of a spark. We hadn't even made plans to see one another over the break. Most couples did that sort of thing, right? I hadn't ever really had a serious boyfriend before, but I figured we would see one another between now and February when the season started up again.

"Did I lose you again?" Ezra poked my arm.

I blinked nervously. "Sorry." I should be thinking about my boyfriend, right? The guy I hadn't even made plans to see over the next few weeks.

"Did you fall asleep? I should let you sleep." Ezra rested his chin on my shoulder. "Bet your mom is making cinnamon rolls, though. I could really go for one of those."

I chuckled. "Always thinking about your stomach."

“I’m a growing boy, CC. I need to eat.”

“Growing boy, my ass. You’ve been the same height since we were sixteen.”

Ezra smacked my chest. “I could still have a growth spurt. Tomorrow I could wake up and be the same height as you.”

“In your dreams. Have you met your family?” I couldn’t stop the full body laughter that took over me.

“Laugh it up, buddy,” Ezra murmured. “Some of us are just going to be short and pretty.”

I howled. “Good thing you understand that’s your destiny.”

I cackled even harder when I felt his fingers poke at my armpit, and when he climbed up to straddle my waist, I felt tears trickle down my face when he turned into a full-on tickle monster. I could easily turn this around on Ezra, but this felt so familiar and good to me that I let him have his fun. I also didn’t want to hurt him with his injuries. His fingers dug in as I roared until my stomach hurt from laughing.

“I missed us,” Ezra confessed, still sitting on me, his fingers tracing the neckline of my shirt.

This all came back to us so naturally. Like we hadn’t been in some strange limbo these past months.

I grabbed his hands. “Me, too, boo.”

The sun was starting to come up, and in the early light, I could see Ezra’s eyes as he watched me. The freckles that were hidden beneath the ugly bruises of his skin. The red that streaked through his dark hair.

“I have a couple other friends, but no one is you, Carson.” He never called me by my first name, and it made me feel woozy. “No one will ever be you.”

I smiled. “No one will ever be you either, Ez.”

“Should we go get those cinnamon rolls?” He grinned just as his stomach growled.

I poked his taut belly lightly. “Yeah, let’s go.”

“Ezra Quinn Bardot!” my mother exclaimed. “What happened to your pretty face!?”

I warned him he should try to cover it up with some makeup before we came down to the kitchen. I told Ezra that my mother was going to all crazy on him the second she zoomed in on those bruises, but he said it would be fine.

Spoiler alert: It was not fine.

“I, uh... It’s not a big deal.” Ezra’s eyes pleaded with me for help, but I wasn’t going to give it to him since he hadn’t told me the complete story.

My mother was on him so fast he didn’t have time to stop her. Yanking Ezra into her embrace, he squealed in pain, and Mom pulled back.

“We don’t see you for months, not a word, not a visit, nothing, and you show up looking like this! What is going on?”

“I was in a car accident,” he blurted out.

That was smooth. I wondered if he had used it before. Like a domestic abuse victim lying about walking into a door or wall. The thought made me sick to my stomach. Ezra wouldn’t lie to me, would he? He knew he could trust me. I wouldn’t judge him or make him feel bad. I only wanted to protect him.

Mom’s brows dipped. “That doesn’t explain where you’ve been. Senior said you haven’t even come to the Tavern.”

“Ma,” I warned before I reached for Ezra’s hand to tug him closer to me.

She glanced at me. “You said you had a fight, Carson.”

“We did. It’s over now.” That was the truth.

Ezra looked up at me with those big doe eyes. “You told her?”

“I told her about the fight.” I hoped he realized I didn’t say anything else. That was private.

He swallowed nervously, his Adam's apple moving against his throat. "We're good now. It was totally all my fault, Mrs. C."

"Amelia, Ezra. How many times do I have to tell you that? Or Mom, if you prefer." Mom's eyes zeroed in on where we were holding hands. "Carson, sweetie, do you think Noel would want you to be holding hands with another man?"

For the love of—

"Ma, Ezra is my best friend. He was here first," I reminded her. Noel was more than aware of him, too. I made sure of that.

"Who's Noel?" Ezra asked.

Probably should have mentioned to my best friend I had a boyfriend. "Er... the guy I'm seeing." Guilt riddled me like a second skin as I saw the confusion in his dark orbs. Now who was lying?

"You have a boyfriend?" Ezra untangled our fingers like I was physically hurting him.

The sound of a plate landing on the table caused me to jump.

"Cinnamon rolls." Mom sounded nervous.

Good, I hope she was. She just dropped a truth bomb I wasn't ready to deal with yet.

"I think I lost my appetite. I need some fresh air." Ezra pushed past me, and I watched as he rushed toward the front door, into the cold without a coat.

I turned to look at my mother. "Thanks."

"Well, do you think Noel would appreciate you sharing a bed with Ezra and holding his hand? I was just curious." She shrugged.

I dropped my chin to my chest. "It's Ezra. He's harmless."

"And what happened to his face, Carson? That's not from a car accident. People around town—"

“Mom!” I shouted, not caring if I woke my father. “I don’t care what people around town say about him. God, what is wrong with you? You used to treat him like a son.”

I marched toward the door, shoving my coat on as I did, and found Ez standing on the porch, his arms wrapped around himself. He didn’t even look at me when I stepped outside.

“You’re going to freeze to death out here.”

“You didn’t tell me you had a boyfriend, CC.”

“Does it matter?”

Ezra shrugged. “No, maybe, I don’t know.”

“It’s new.” I moved closer before I wrapped my arms around him and pulled him against my chest. I wrapped my coat around him and tried to zip it up around both of us as best as I could. “You’re shaking, boo.”

Ezra tipped his head up so he could look at me. “It’s Noel McCormick, isn’t it?”

“It is.” The bruising around his eyes made me sick to my stomach.

I felt him let out a long sigh before he looked down again. “It would make sense you would date another driver. You can, like, share an RV or whatever.”

“Ez, are you jealous?” I tilted his head back up. “It’s okay if you are. I would be jealous if you had a boyfriend.”

His lips twisted. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It sort of slipped my mind. We haven’t been seeing one another that long, and all I wanted to do was catch up with you. Besides, I don’t think it’s going anywhere. Noel’s nice, but we haven’t gotten past first base.”

Ezra giggled. “First base? What are you, eighty?”

“I haven’t even spoken to him since I got here, and that was a week ago. A few texts here and there, but that’s it.”

Ezra spun around to face me, wrapping his thin arms around my waist, leaning his head on my chest. “I’m sorry,

CC. I know how you really want to settle down and get married.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “Let’s go back inside and eat those cinnamon rolls before my father wakes up, because if we don’t, you know he’ll eat them all.”

Chapter Three

Ezra

While CC napped on and off on the couch, I happily watched the parade from the floor with my back against the sofa. I loved every single thing about the silly event. The balloons, the singing, the dancing. I watched it with stars and happiness in my eyes every year. I didn't care how old I was. I would watch this thing until I was an old man.

“Ez.” CC nudged my shoulder gently with his hand. “Next year, I'm taking you to New York City to watch the parade in person.”

My head whipped around to stare at him. “You're what?”

“You heard what I said.” He grinned at me with sleepy eyes.

I gaped at him. “Okay.”

I didn't know what else to say. CC had always acted like he didn't care about the parade like I did. Or Christmas, for that matter.

He patted the cushion in front of him. “Come here.”

I scrambled up onto the sofa with him without a second thought, and when he wrapped his arms around me, it felt like how it always did. Natural, perfect, right.

“Should we be doing this with your parents here? I mean, your mom might get mad because of Noel.” God, I sounded like such a bitch.

“Watch your parade, Ez,” CC murmured into my hair, his hands caressing my stomach lightly over my shirt.

I shouldn't like that he was touching me like that. I shouldn't let him do it, either. I mean, we were always like this, but he had a boyfriend now. Part of me was happy he still wanted to be this kind of bestie, but it wasn't right.

“Santa's coming soon. It's the best part. It means it's Christmas,” I told him as the pads of his fingers drummed out

their own beat. Goosebumps broke out over my stomach. This wasn't something best friends did. This was so much more than that.

CC chuckled softly. "You and Christmas."

"I can't help it, boo. It's my favorite time of the year. The music, the decorations, everything is so beautiful," I reminded him.

"Glad to see that hasn't changed," CC murmured. "When we go to the parade, we'll go see the big tree, the ice-skating rink, everything."

I took one of his hands and laced our fingers together. "The Rockefeller Christmas Tree."

"Yeah, that one," he murmured into my neck. "We'll have to stay overnight so you can see it all lit up. We'll take a selfie in front of it. Go see a show or something, too. Whatever one you want." He tugged me closer to his big, warm body. "You want to decorate your apartment this weekend?"

My stomach made this strange swooping motion. "Yeah, sure."

What was going on right now? This felt like a couple thing, and we weren't a couple. CC had a boyfriend.

"Want to go Christmas shopping tomorrow morning?"

Okay, what the hell? I twisted around to look at him. "You hate shopping on Black Friday." I narrowed my eyes.

"Yeah, but you like it." CC smiled at me just as the sound of the doorbell echoed through the house.

I arched a brow. "Your parents expecting someone else?"

"Not that I know of, but remember that one year my dad invited a guy who worked at the Tavern? Maybe he did that again." CC's eyes moved behind me before he sat up so fast, I nearly fell off the couch. "Noel."

"Am I interrupting?"

I turned to see the tall, raven-haired man standing next to Senior. Oh, he looked really pissed. I guess if you didn't know

me, it might look bad.

“What, no, of course not. This is Ezra.”

“I know who it is, Carson. You told me all about... him.” He grunted. “I thought you two didn’t talk anymore?”

Noel was staring at me like he wasn’t sure if he should squash me or punch me. Maybe because someone already had, he would just have mercy on me.

I smoothed my hair as I stood up and held out my hand. “This is kind of awkward, but maybe if we just—”

“Maybe if I had told you I was going to show up, instead of surprising you, I wouldn’t have walked in to find you on the couch cuddling with another man.” Noel ignored my outstretched hand as his eyes darted back to CC.

Rude. “Right, I’ll just go upstairs.” I moved to the other door, not the one Noel was currently occupying, which would send me through the kitchen, when I felt a tug on my shirt.

“Stay right here, Ez,” CC growled. “We’re just friends, Noel. We’ve known one another for a long time.”

“Looked a little bit more than that to me, Carson, but whatever you need to tell yourself to sleep at night.”

CC sighed. “You think I’m cheating on you, is that it? I haven’t heard from you except for a few texts here and there, but you decided to just show up at my parents’ house for Thanksgiving. What if I wasn’t even here? What if I had decided to go to Watts’s place? He invited me.”

“Watts told me you declined that offer. Besides, you know I have my hands full with Leo.” Noel’s eyes darted over to me, and I noticed one was blue and the other green. “What are you looking at?”

Wasn’t I innocent in all this?

“Don’t you dare talk to him like that.” CC hissed.

Noel scrubbed a hand down his face. “Wow, okay, clearly this was a horrible idea.” He turned around and headed toward the door.

“CC, go after your man.” I waved my hands at him, but he shook his head. “What? Why not?”

His face twisted in confusion. “I’m not... There’s nothing there, Ez. There’s no spark.”

“So, you’re just going to let him go? Carson, seriously, he’s gorgeous! He came here to see you! Obviously, he must feel something if he flew here on Thanksgiving to surprise you. Don’t let him run away like you did with me.” I pushed at his arm.

He worried his lip between his teeth before he charged after Noel. I watched, with a pain in my chest that I convinced myself was just acid reflux from the cinnamon rolls, while they waved their hands at one another on the front lawn before I turned away to give them their privacy.

“Ezra, sweetie.” I looked up to see Amelia standing before me. “You did a good thing.”

If it was a good thing, why did it feel so terrible? Like someone was twisting my heart in the palm of their hand.

“I know.”

“You love him.” She patted my shoulder lightly.

“Yeah, I mean, he’s my best friend,” I assured her, even though the lie tasted like poison on my lips.

Amelia winked at me before she wrapped her arm gently around my shoulders. “You want some wine with your dinner?”

I had a feeling I was going to need it.

Would it be bad if I stabbed Noel in the jugular with my fork? Because I really wanted to. I was pretty sure he was trying to make me jealous by the way he kept touching CC, batting his lashes at him, and calling him sweetie. Gag me. He kept giving me these little smirks whenever he caught me watching them, like *ha-ha, Ezra, he’s mine, not yours, and I won.*

Did you, Noel? Because I'm the one who gave him the hand job on New Year's Eve. From what I heard, you two haven't done anything more than kiss. Suck on that, bitch.

He did apologize for earlier, for not shaking my hand and for being rude, but I suddenly didn't trust him. He seemed, I don't know, sneaky like a snake, and for that reason, I decided he wasn't good enough for my CC. But I was the one who had told him to chase Noel down. Make sure he didn't leave. So, I guess all of this was my fault.

After we had eaten—I ate my feelings so much that I had a serious food baby situation going on—the three of us, Noel, CC, and myself, were sitting around the table. I suddenly realized that this probably meant I wasn't spending the night again. I would have to go back to my lonely apartment. What about Black Friday shopping? I wasn't going with *icky Noel*.

“What do you do for a living, Ezra?” Noel leaned his head on CC's shoulder as he smiled at me.

I hated him. I hated him so much that I wanted to cry. *Yes, CC, I'm jealous of your boyfriend because you were mine first.* A thought appeared in my head. One that I shouldn't let out because even though it was the truth, it was a big one. Even CC didn't know, but I was about to drop that bomb like Chernobyl.

“I'm a camboy. You know, like OnlyFans.”

“Ha, right, good one.” Noel barked out a laugh as he sat up. When I didn't laugh and he saw the way CC was staring at me, he tilted his head. “Wait, is that not a joke?”

CC's nostrils flared. “Ez, I told you to stop doing that shit.”

“We can't all make thousands of dollars driving around in circles like you and Mr. Wonderful every weekend, can we?” I raised my brows as I stood up.

Noel looked between the two of us. “What's happening? Are you fighting again? Also, why are you wearing a Brooks Racing shirt?”

Did he just notice that? I'd had it on the entire time. I had a few that CC gave me to take home, but I'd keep that gem for later if I needed it.

"Oh, this? Yeah, CC gave it to me." I stomped toward the stairs like a spoiled brat. "Nice to meet you, Noel."

"Carson, where are you going?" I heard Noel ask as I rushed up the stairs to grab my shoes and dirty clothes before I left.

Jealousy was not a good look on me. I had to get out of here before I said something I couldn't take back or broke them up. The second I shoved my shoes on my feet, I could feel the anger radiating off my best friend, and when I glanced up, he was standing in the doorway, blocking my way out of the room.

"What was that, Ezra?"

"What was what, Carson?"

CC rolled his eyes. "That nonsense you just pulled downstairs! You had better be lying about that camboy crap."

"Yeah, no, I'm not." I zipped up my coat. "Can you move because I have to go home? I need to feed my cat."

He growled deep in his throat. "You don't have a cat."

"How do you know? You haven't been to my apartment in—What are you doing?" I gasped when he started walking forward and pushed me back until I felt his bed at my knees. "CC, what the hell?"

"I told you to stop it." His eyes flashed with anger and something else. "You're so much better than that, princess. Are you filming with other people? Is that how you got hurt because some prick thought he could touch you and didn't like it when you said no?"

I swallowed nervously but raised my chin in defiance. "It's called collaborating. I make double the money that way." *Poke the bear, Ezra. Good job.*

"Don't try to be funny!" CC roared. "You could have been killed! Look at your beautiful face, your body! God fucking

damnit!”

Did he just call me beautiful? *No, be strong, Ezra Quinn.* “But I wasn’t. And that was an actual date. Not someone I was collaborating with to make money.” I mean, sort of.

“But you could have. Then what? I would be forced to bury you?” His voice trembled. “Why are you doing this to your body? You’re so much better than that, boo, and I just don’t understand why you can’t see that. You had dreams to design your own clothes. What happened to that?”

I felt my resolve crack. “Those are just dreams, CC. Don’t you understand? I’m good at selling my body, using it to help men get off, and that’s it. It’s not bad. I enjoy showing my body off. I’m pretty, and men like to look at me. They spoil me. It makes me feel good.” Sometimes. Other times, it made me feel used and dirty.

“Who told you that?” He gripped my chin between his thumb and forefinger.

I licked my lips as I stared up into his dark eyes. “No one, it’s just who I am. Who I’ve always been.”

“Carson, should I just leave?” Noel asked from the doorway. “I think... Yeah, I think I should just go.”

CC took a step back, his hand dropped from my face, and he spun around. “Look, this isn’t what it looks like.”

“I know.” Noel nodded. “But I think it might be if you two wanted it to be. I’ll stay at the hotel tonight and go home tomorrow. I shouldn’t have just showed up without talking to you first.”

“Are you breaking up with me?”

This was awkward. Maybe if I just went into the closet, they could do whatever this was, and I wouldn’t be privy to it. Or the bathroom? Would they notice me? Plug my ears with my fingers? Hum a little something? That might work.

“Do you honestly feel anything when we’re together? Like anything at all? You’re a nice guy, Carson, but I’m just...I

don't know what I am. Maybe I need to get my head together, too." Noel sighed.

CC's shoulders slumped. "I'm a nice guy, huh?"

"Is that not what I should say? I mean, we have fun, but I don't feel a spark or an attraction. I never feel that with anyone, though, so trust me when I say it's not you," Noel assured him.

"Maybe you're like pan or whatever," I suggested, then instantly regretted it.

CC glared at me before he continued, "Can we talk about this first? Alone?"

"I don't think so." Noel nodded at me. "Take care of him, Ezra."

Well, didn't I always? He was mine. "Sure will." I gave him a thumbs up and winked.

When Noel had left us alone again, CC spun around. "Now you're going to spill your guts."

"Did your boyfriend not just breakup with you? Don't want to cry on my shoulder about that first? Come on, big guy, hug it out." I opened my arms.

"Fuck off, Ez, this is serious. No more selling your body like fucking Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*, do you hear me?" he snapped. "Now, tell me what else you've been doing that will really piss me off."

I gasped. "I'm not a whore, CC, I'm a camboy. There's a difference."

"Sit that little ass down and talk. Now, before I do it myself." He pointed to the bed.

I shook my head. "I'm going home."

"Ezra."

"Carson."

We stared at one another before he finally threw his arms up in the air. "Fine, you want to go? Leave, but don't expect

me to come running after you. I let my boyfriend break up with me, didn't chase him this time, for you, and you want to just run away with your tail between your legs without talking to me. Again. Just like the last time."

"That's not fair!" I felt my stomach twist, and something funny swirled around inside. "You can't just expect me to dump all my secrets on you."

CC's face grew dark. "Why not? You want me to tell you mine, because I will. I'll tell you every dirty, dark, and filthy thing, boo, but you have to start."

"I'm not playing this twisted version of never have I ever with you," I whispered.

"Scared?" CC asked.

Fucking petrified because this is a game I didn't want to win.

"As if. I'm just above all that. I have to go."

When I walked around his large body, I expected CC to stop me. Call my bluff, but when he didn't and I started down the stairs, moved into the foyer, and opened the front door, I was disappointed. A feeling of sadness clung to me, but I kept going, not stopping until I got home and buried myself under the blankets in my bed, where I surprised myself by bursting into tears.

Chapter Four

Ezra

I stared up at the ceiling of my apartment and listened to the sounds of my next-door neighbors. They were fighting, again, which wasn't a surprise. It would be only a matter of time before the husband left, slamming the door, stomped down the stairs, and drove off in his truck, leaving the wife crying. He would come back later, of course, and they would make up like they always did, but right now? It was their screaming and yelling that had me up at the ungodly hour of—I turned to tap my phone, five forty-two in the morning. If I didn't love my apartment so much, and I really did, I might consider looking for a new one. The location was perfect, right on the beach. I had a porch and so many windows that brought in fabulous light. Too bad my neighbors were just inconsiderate assholes.

My heart still ached from what happened last night. I should have just stayed, talked to CC. We had just made up after not talking for months; and now he was boyfriend-less, mad at me again, and I was brokenhearted because he was upset with me about what I had chosen as a career.

My lip curled over my teeth. Wait, who was CC to judge me? It wasn't a bad gig. I enjoyed people getting off watching me, tipping me, dropping into my DM's, and asking for more. My "fans"—and I used that word lightly because I wasn't some huge star like CC was—sent me messages, commented on my posts, told me they enjoyed my work, said I was gorgeous, and maybe that was why I did what I did. It made me feel important. Instead of just *Ezra*.

I didn't collaborate with others often. A couple of men here and there. It wasn't something I enjoyed doing. I liked solo things better. My hand and toys worked just fine, but when the urge hit me, I would work with another man. It had been a good six months, at least, since I had been with someone else, which was why I had gone on that date in the first place. Big mistake. I would stick to doing what I was

good at. Going out with my abusive ex was a horrible idea, and I should have known better.

I dragged a hand down my face before I gave up trying to sleep and sat up, letting the blanket pool around my waist. A sadness I hadn't felt in a long time clung to my body. Guess there wouldn't be any early morning Black Friday shopping with CC. I had expected to hear from him last night, but maybe he had deleted my number. Blocked me or just given up. I couldn't blame the man. I was a hot mess on a good day, and I had just somersaulted right back into his life, then ruined his relationship with a snap of my fingers.

Great job, Ezra. You really do know how to make an entrance.

I managed to climb from the mattress, stopping to make my bed before I wandered into the bathroom and flipped on the light. I blinked as it temporarily blinded me before I stared at myself in the mirror. My hair was a mess, my dark eyes sad, and ugly bruises covered my face. They still looked as fresh as the morning after it happened.

Stupid, bossy, needy, Ezra. Always have to be in charge. No wonder no one likes you. Even your own best friend probably hates you again. Where does that leave you? Alone, with no one, and that's just the way you always knew it would be.

I stripped off the Brooks Racing shirt and winced at the pain in my ribs. My body looked just as bad as my face. I wasn't going to be able to film any content until I healed, but luckily, I had some saved work I could use. Hopefully, it wouldn't take too long. I stepped into the tub. Not caring that the water was cold when I turned it on, I closed my eyes when it hit me before it quickly turned warm and then hot.

Maybe I could hit up Seth to see what he was doing today. Another camboy I had met online; he lived a couple towns over, which was convenient. We hit it off when he DMed me one night, had a few things in common, and hung out from time to time. Maybe he wanted to go shopping. I didn't want to stay home all day. I rinsed the shampoo from my hair,

turned off the water, and pulled back the shower curtain to reach for a towel, only to find CC standing there glaring at me.

“Holy motherfucking shit! You can’t just break into my apartment!” I exclaimed.

I reached for the towel hanging next to the shower to wrap it around my waist as he flared his nostrils at me. When he didn’t say anything, I stepped onto the bathmat and dragged another towel through my wet hair.

“So, you’re mad.”

He grunted. “Mad? Ezra, I can’t...I can’t even look at you right now.”

“I’m sorry?” Was I that hideous to look at? I mean, when men told you that you were pretty all the time, you tended to believe it.

CC growled before he spun around, crossing his arms over his chest. “The bruises, it breaks my heart that someone thought it was okay to do that to you. Also, I have a key, remember, so I didn’t break into your place.”

Whoops, I sort of did forget he had one. I finished drying my hair before I spoke.

“I ruined us, I get that. Kissing you, touching you, yeah, I get it. Can we just start over and go back to the way things were? I thought we made progress. I know you’re upset about the camming thing, too, but I really enjoy it, CC.”

If he said no, if he said he couldn’t get past those things, I might just shrivel up and die. Dramatic, maybe, but that word should be my middle name.

“I want that,” he whispered. Yes, high five, bitches! “But —” Wait, there was a but? “I need you to be honest with me, Ezra. About everything.”

“Sure, anything you want.”

“It’s just OnlyFans?”

Had I not told him that already? “Boo, please look at me.”

He slowly turned around.

“I’m not a hooker, escort, whatever you want to call it. So yes, it’s just OnlyFans. Wait.” I held up a hand before he could object. “Don’t judge me because of what you think you know.”

“Can you show me?” CC whispered as his eyes trailed over my body.

Heat shot up my spine, and my cock plumped up under my towel. “What?” That was a bad, bad fucking idea.

“Show me what you do?” he asked as his tongue came out to swipe at his bottom lip.

I shook my head. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Are you embarrassed? Strangers are fine, but not your best friend?” CC smirked.

I thought about the last video I posted. The filthy things I uttered because it had been requested, and because I liked it. The view I gave the camera of my backside as I stretched myself wide with the toy I used to fuck myself. Shit, my dick was really hard now.

“Fine, you want to see? Then you promise me right now that you won’t judge me. Not when you see what I do or what I did.”

“What the hell, Ezra?” CC was staring at the bulge beneath my towel.

I pressed a palm over my aching dick. “Don’t judge me.”

“Jesus Christ.” But the look on my best friend’s face, the way his dark eyes were hooded, told me he was more than interested in what I did. He dragged a hand through his blond hair and gripped the back of his neck. “Fine, fine, just take care of that.”

My brows shot up. “What, like here? You want me to jerk off in front of you? Just go sit in the kitchen while I get ready. It’ll go down.” Or, at least, I hoped so.

CC scowled at me but did as I told him, and when he left, I let out a low, slow breath. This was a bad, bad idea. Like kissing him in the club, letting me give him a handy, and

having him watch as I sucked the cum from fingers bad.
Down, I pushed at my dick again.

I took my time getting ready because my stupid cock wouldn't listen to me. I don't know why, but for some reason, I liked the idea of CC watching what I did. Turning on strangers while I pleased myself. It wasn't like he was going to get off on it, although the look on his face told me otherwise. Was he just curious, or was it something else?

I put some gel in my hair, didn't worry about makeup with the bruises, and then dressed in a clean pair of white skinny jeans and a loose red blouse before I headed into the kitchen. CC was sitting at the table with two cups of coffee. One in front of him, and the other at the empty seat.

"You look nice." CC's eyes drifted over me as I eased myself into the chair.

My stomach swooped at his words. "Thank you."

"Are you going to show me or not?"

I glanced up to meet his dark orbs as heat settled in my stomach. "Someone's a little eager."

"I just want to get this over with," he snapped. "Sorry."

I shrugged. "You're sure about this? I mean, once you see it, you won't be able to unsee it."

CC held out his hand, but when I just stared at him, he wiggled his fingers. "Your phone."

"Oh, no. I'll just send it to you. I'm not letting you see my actual account." I lifted my hip to slide my cell from my pocket and unlocked my phone. I found my folder with my all my private stuff and then looked at CC again.

"You still have the same number?"

He nodded.

"I'm not blocked or anything?"

CC shook his head. "No, why...oh, right. I would never have done that, Ez. And..."

I watched the way his Adam's apple moved against his throat when he swallowed.

"I realize the phone goes both ways. I could have reached out to you, too."

"Would've, could've, should've." I grinned as I hit send. "Good, well, you watch that, and I'm just going to—"

"Oh, no you don't, Taylor Swift." CC was faster than I was. He grabbed my wrist before I could leave the room. "Sit that bubble butt right back down. I'm not watching this alone."

He wasn't serious.

"You want me to just." I stared at him as heat flamed my cheeks. "Watch it with you?"

"You bet I do." CC pointed to the chair. "Now, Ezra."

I was never going to survive if I had to be in the same room with him. "Please don't make me."

"Are you embarrassed?"

"Uh, yeah. Do I not look like I'm embarrassed?" I whispered. My entire body was on fire right now.

CC chuckled. "What's on this video, boo? You got your fingers in your ass? A toy maybe? Is it hot? Am I going to like it, or am I going to hate it?"

Please, if there was some sort of God, could she just strike me down right now? I could burst into glitter. I really didn't want to be in the same room while my best friend since the first grade watched a video of me pleasuring myself. He had the sound turned down, but I could still make out the sound of my voice as I spoke to the camera. Shit, this was humiliating. I kept my eyes glued to the table, on my cup of coffee, just as I heard a low groan that hadn't come from the phone.

CC had sunk his teeth into his bottom lip while his hand gripped his phone so tight, I thought he might break it in half. His eyes had a heated, glazed look to them as he watched the video, and his other hand, yeah, it was currently between his legs, palming at his dick. When he realized I was watching

him, he shut off the video, climbed to his feet, and walked over to me.

“Stand up.”

“What? Why? I told you not to judge me,” I reminded him.

CC leaned down to get in my face. “Because I want you to show me how you did that. In person.”

Chapter Five

Carson

I wasn't sure what version of Ezra I was going to get right now as we moved from his kitchen to the bedroom. Sassy, flirty, or the one I just witnessed in that video. Sexy, dirty, and filthy. Honestly? I wanted the latter, because holy shit. I had never heard my best friend talk like that before.

"You like when I fuck myself, don't you?"

"You want to come all over my face, Daddy?"

"God, I wish it was your fat cock in my ass instead of this toy."

Fuck, it was the hottest thing I had ever heard. Clearly, I had been with the wrong men. None of them had ever spoken to me like that. My dick was so hard right now it hurt. I wanted to force Ezra onto his knees so I could blow my load all over his face. Just like he'd spoken about in that video. Was he really into that sort of thing?

"Uh, what exactly are we going to do?" Ezra turned to look at me once we were in the bedroom. "I mean, you said you wanted me to show you. Do I get the dildo I used and— whoa, okay."

He bounced onto the bed when I pushed him down and splayed my body over his, trying not to hurt him.

"You have a filthy mouth," I murmured as I pressed my nose into Ezra's neck so I could inhale his scent. He still smelled like sweet cinnamon.

"You're hurting me," he wheezed.

"Oh, shit." I sprang from the bed. "I'm so sorry."

Ezra laughed as he shook his head. "No, honestly, I was into it until you pressed your giant body into mine. It's my ribs."

"You're into it?" I asked before I noticed the bulge in his pants.

He nodded. “Maybe I could just take off my clothes, and...” Ezra dropped his gaze. “Is this weird?”

“Take off your clothes. Yeah, I’d like that. Should I do the same?”

“CC, are you nervous?”

I wasn’t until I nearly broke you. “Maybe.”

Ezra stood up. “Boo, it’s me.” He tugged off his shirt, and the sight of the bruises had me balling my hands into fists. “You liked it, right? The video?”

“It was so fucking hot,” I admitted. “I just...I want...”

“What do you want, Carson?”

I let my eyes drop to Ezra’s mouth as I remembered what it was like to taste it. How soft his lips were, warm and inviting. “Kiss me.”

It happened so fast I’m not sure who kissed who first. Ezra was suddenly licking around my lips before his tongue plunged inside, his hands playing with the hair on the nape of my neck. I gripped at his waist with one hand as I walked us back to the bed and turned so I could sit down. He climbed up into my lap like we did this all the time. I slid my hand over the warm, smooth skin of his back and felt him shiver at my touch.

“Are you cold?” I stopped to look at him. “We can stop if you want.”

He smiled. “Not cold, CC. Incredibly turned on.” He peppered kisses against my jaw and down my neck. “But last time we did something like this? We didn’t talk for months. I don’t want that to happen again.” He reached for the hem of my shirt.

“It won’t.”

“You promise?”

I nodded. “Yeah, princess, I promise.” I raised my arms and let him remove my top before his hands began to roam over my chest.

“You’re a work of art. Have you been working out more?” Ezra grinned at me as his fingers traced every inch of my upper body. My shoulders, my arms, and down to my abs. “You have an eight pack.” His fingers grazed the light dusting of hair that disappeared inside my jeans.

I grabbed his hand. “I might have been hitting the gym a little harder.”

“I can’t touch you there?” he teased. “Or is that too much?”

Too much. “Can you...” I closed my eyes as I tried to gather myself together. I wasn’t a dirty talker, but I wanted to be for Ezra.

“What do you need, baby?” he murmured. “You want to touch me? As long as you’re gentle right now, you can touch me all you want, or maybe...” Ezra took my hand, and I felt the soft warmth of his lips before his tongue dragged over the tips.

“Fuck.” I groaned.

Ezra sucked the index and middle fingers into his mouth before he spoke again. “You want me to take the lead? Is that what you need from me? Because I can do that. Just like the first time. You know I like being in charge.”

I nodded, afraid to speak. Scared that I would burst this bubble we were in. He dragged his tongue over one finger, then the other, before he swallowed them both. The suction of his mouth was amazing, and I wondered what that would feel like on my dick. It was so wet, and when he swirled his tongue over my fingers, the feeling went straight to my balls.

“You like it. Your eyes tell me everything.” Ezra’s voice was soft. “Should I go get the toy I used? That’s what you really wanted, isn’t it?”

“No.” I didn’t want him to leave me. I wanted him to stay right here, on my lap, his tiny body molded against mine. I leaned my forehead against his. “Don’t leave me right now.”

Ezra touched my face lightly. “Then tell me what you want, baby. Tell me what you need from me.” When I

continued to just stare into his big doe eyes, he tilted his head. “You want me to get you off?”

“Can I...can I come on your face?” Jesus, why did I sound so naïve, vanilla, and timid?

A smile spread Ezra’s face. It had to hurt the way it seemed to cause the entire thing to split, but he still looked so beautiful, even with the bruises.

“I’d like that.”

“Okay, let’s do that then.”

He climbed onto his feet and watched as I stood up from the bed before he sat back down.

I snapped the button on my jeans and yanked them down to my thighs, keeping my briefs on. You could make out how hard I was, my cock jutting out and leaking against the fabric.

“See what you’ve done to me, Ez?” I swallowed the nerves that were dancing around in my stomach as I grabbed myself through my underwear. “I just want to jerk off until I explode all over your pretty face.” Shit, where had that come from?

“I want that so bad, Carson.” He whimpered.

I pulled myself out of my briefs and watched the way his eyes lit up at the sight. “You don’t get to touch me,” I told him as I slowly jerked myself with one hand. “The way you got yourself off with that dildo.” I groaned softly. “I’ve never seen anything that sexy before. You like that, don’t you? Having those men watch you fuck yourself.”

“Yes, I do.” Ezra licked his lips, then his hand slipped to his own needy dick, which was more than obvious through his tight pants.

I shook my head. “That’s mine.”

“Please, Carson?” He pouted.

“Not yet,” I scolded. “You want my cum, princess?” When he nodded, I found myself teetering on the edge. “Get closer.”

He was up on his knees and in front of me in a second, watching as I slid my hand up and down my length as quickly

as I could. I knew I wouldn't last. My balls were already pulled tight, my release threatening to spill over my hand. Pleasure shot up my spine and through my body.

"I need it, baby. Please, give it to me," Ezra whined.

I groaned as I looked down at him. He looked so needy and fucking wrecked for me. I reached down to tip his head up.

"Open your mouth and stick out your tongue."

He did as I told him. I aimed for his mouth just as my orgasm hit me. Cum splattered over his face, into his mouth, and onto his neck as I gave him what it asked for. I threw my head back as I let out a loud shout, not caring if the neighbors heard me. I glanced down to find Ezra happily lapping the cum from his lips.

He dragged his tongue over his lips, then lifted a finger to his face, wiped the cum from his cheeks, and brought it to his mouth, greedily sucking it off his fingers. He sat back on his legs as he kept his eyes on me as he cleaned my release from his face. I grew hard again.

"You taste so good," he whispered. The fire in his eyes was hard to miss.

"You're going to kill me." I pulled my briefs up over my hips, followed by my jeans, but I left them unbuttoned. "And you?"

He smirked. "What about me?"

"You want me to take care of you?"

"I don't expect you to let me come on your face."

I chuckled softly. "That's not what I asked." But I might let him do it another time.

Ezra's hand moved to his waist before he got to his feet. He kicked off his jeans, which left him in nothing but a pair of white lacy panties, and then casually lay down on the bed.

"I'm all yours, CC. Do with me what you want. There's nothing off limits with me."

My eyes moved down his small body. Ezra could say what he wanted about me, but his build was just as nice. Slim, smooth, and free of any hair, I was instantly obsessed. I had seen him in his underwear before, but I had never really taken the time to look at his body. The way his ribs pushed against his skin, his small pink nipples, and the trim waistline. Ezra had no business having a waist that small.

He leaned up on his arms. “Everything okay?”

“You’re perfect, Ez.” I moved up onto my knees.

A flush broke out over his neck and shoulders where he wasn’t bruised. “Thank you, Carson.”

Fuck, the things it did to me when he called me by my full name.

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“I promise you won’t.”

I met his dark eyes again before I slipped one hand down the front of his underwear. They felt smooth and silky against the back of my hand. Ezra’s eyes closed while his mouth fell open, and I couldn’t help but lean forward to nip at his fat bottom lip.

I had never seen his cock in person before, but what I felt in my hand right now felt thick and exquisite. Smaller than mine but fatter. A mouthful that made my jaw ache at the thought of what it would feel like to wrap my lips around him.

“Lie back, princess,” I murmured.

He did as I instructed and bit his lip nervously.

“I’m going to take off your underwear. Tell me if you want me to stop.”

“I won’t want you to stop,” Ezra assured me as he leaned up on his forearms.

I smirked. “Good.”

I slowly slid the panties off, Ezra lifting his hips for me. They were so fucking sexy. White with little green Christmas

trees on them. I shouldn't have been surprised, considering how much he loved the holiday.

"I like these."

His mocha eyes flashed with heat, the way they told me to touch him. I let my gaze drop to his length, hard and begging for attention, glistening with precum. He had no pubic hair, which meant he shaved or waxed it. I peppered kisses over his slim thighs, first the right, then the left, and listened to the whimpers he let loose.

"CC, don't tease me," he pleaded.

"Tell me what you like, Ez. What makes you feel good?"

He blinked down at me in a lust-filled haze. "Everything, all of this. Don't stop."

"This?" I pressed wet kisses down his shaft. "And this?" I leaned down to suck one of his balls into my mouth.

Ezra's hips arched off the bed. "Yes, yes. Both of those."

My tongue dipped out of my mouth, and he watched wide-eyed as I dragged the tip around the head of his cock. Over the salty precum, across the slit, and down the entire length of him before I gripped him with my hand. I wasn't sure I was breathing as his brown eyes watched with a hunger I had never seen in them before. I dropped my head closer to suck the head briefly before I pulled it further inside. Ezra whimpered, his hands reaching down to grip at my hair. Then I slid his entire cock all the way down my throat.

"Oh yes, just like that, please," he begged.

I began to suck Ezra's cock like my life depended on. Bobbing my head up and down, taking him to the back of my throat until I gagged. Spit gathered around the corners of my lips and dripped onto his thighs, but I didn't stop. Tears burned my eyes until they spilled over onto my cheeks, but I kept going.

The sounds my best friend made were downright sinful, and I had one goal. Suck him until he saw stars. Make Ezra come so hard he blacked out. Make this was the best blowjob

he'd ever had. The one he compared to all blowjobs to. Make him forget the last few months had ever happened, that someone had hurt him so badly he'd ended up in the hospital and hope he would remember this moment forever.

Both of his hands were in my hair as he guided me. Ezra's hips arched up as he started to fuck my face, and I let out a low whine of my own. This man, this beautiful man, was going to lose himself, and if he needed to take control right now and use me? He could do that.

"Carson, I'm going to come," he warned.

I looked up at him from under my lashes but didn't pull off. *Give it to me, Ez. Give it all to me. I want to taste you.*

Ezra groaned softly before he let go, his salty, hot cum slipping right down my throat as I kept sucking his dick. I watched fascinated as his eyes clamped shut, my name slipped from between his lips, and then his body fell back onto the bed as I rutted against the mattress. Guess I was ready for round two.

"Come here." Ezra's hands reached for me, and I climbed up onto the bed next to him. He instantly wrapped his arms around me and buried his face in my neck. "You still smell like my CC."

I smiled as I dragged a hand through his hair. "And what's that?"

"Home."

Chapter Six

Carson

That was not the answer I expected to hear. As Ezra continued to keep his face buried against my skin, fear and anxiety began to niggle its way into my brain. Was what we did a horrible thing? Friends with benefits was a sure-fire way to ruin any friendship. We had already tried it once and look what happened. My heart began to beat so fast in my chest I thought it might explode.

“CC, I can feel you starting to freak out.” Ezra’s lips brushed my skin. “Are you having second thoughts?”

I wasn’t sure how to respond to that. I felt like I was on some sort of carnival ride I couldn’t get off. “I think so,” I finally admitted.

Ezra pulled back to stare at me. “Really?”

“I...I just wanted to see that video, and then we...I wasn’t...this...holy fuck.”

Ezra’s hands brushed over my face as he soothed the hair back. “Breathe, boo.” His voice was calm. “We’re good, rock solid.”

My eyes closed as I listened to him try to assure me this time that we hadn’t ruined everything.

“You wanted to see the video, I showed it to you, and you were curious about the toy—which we never got to. Maybe next time I can show you.”

“Next time?” My eyes shot back open. “There’s going to be a next time?”

Ezra chuckled softly. “Gotcha.” He leaned forward to press a soft kiss against my nose. “No, boo, no next time.” But for a split second, I saw sadness in those big chestnut eyes. “I should go wash up again before the cum gets itchy.”

I reluctantly let him up and heard the sound of the shower as he took another one. I sat up, found my shirt on the floor

where I'd tossed it and dragged a hand through my hair. That was... Wow... that was definitely the hottest thing I had ever done when it came to sex. I wouldn't mind a next time, but since Ez had said there wouldn't be one, I pushed the thought to the back of my mind before I remembered I had told him we would put up his Christmas decorations. Obviously, the shopping was out of the question, but I could still help him with that.

I went into the spare room where Ezra kept his decorations, hoping that they were still there, and dug around until I found them. Then I brought out each box into the living room one by one. I heard his voice calling me as I stood staring at the giant mess I had created.

"There you are." I turned to find Ezra looking a little more than relieved. "What are you—Are those my Christmas decorations?"

I nodded. "I told you we'd put them up, right?"

He rushed over to wrap his arms around my waist, and I couldn't help but hug him tight. "Thank you." Ezra rested his chin on my sternum as he looked up at me.

"What do you want to do first? The tree?" I rubbed a thumb over his cheek lightly before I could stop myself and watched the desire that flashed in his dark orbs. My dick instantly took notice.

"Sure," Ezra murmured as he gazed up at me.

I chuckled. "Sure?"

"We need Christmas music." He untangled himself from my arms and rushed back into the bedroom only to come back out with his cellphone in his hands, skipping happily. A few seconds later, *Mr. Heatmiser* by Big Bad Voodoo Daddy started playing, and I shook my head.

"It's basically breaking the law if we don't listen to it," he said.

I rolled my eyes. "Basically."

“Oh, what would you rather listen to? Something boring, like country or classic rock?”

“Are you saying I’m boring?”

Ezra giggled. “Not you, just the music you enjoy.”

I held out a hand. “Come here.” When he took it, I pulled him flush against my body and started to move in a circle as the song changed to something slower that I didn’t recognize.

“Are you willingly dancing with me?” Ezra murmured softly.

I tucked a piece of hair behind his ear. “It looks like I might be.”

Neither one of us spoke as we danced, just listened to the sound of the music, and I couldn’t help but feel like something had shifted between us. It was obvious the change between us that night at the club when Ezra kissed me, but today, here, in his apartment...

“Carson?” Ezra’s voice was soft. “What’s happening right now?”

That’s the million-dollar question. “We’re dancing, boo.”

“No, it’s not just dancing. It’s...different,” he whispered as his fingers dug into my belt loops.

I worried my lip between my teeth. “Do you hate it, princess?”

“I’m afraid that if we take this to another level, and it doesn’t work out, I might lose my best friend,” he confessed. “I can’t have that happen again.”

I tipped his head up. “Best friends love one another for life, remember?”

“I remember,” Ezra whispered.

Of course, he did. He was the one who came up with that.

“You’re really good, Ez. Good at taking control and making me get all lost in these thoughts that I never knew I

had before. That video, it was so hot, and it made realize how virginal I was.”

“Virginal?”

“You know what I mean. I just...I liked the dirty talk.”

Ezra’s eyes darkened. “You like that, Carson?”

“It was hot as hell,” I told him.

“You want me to do that again, baby?” Ezra purred. “You got into it after a little while. It just seems like you need a little encouragement first.”

I did. It just took a little time to convince me.

“I loved it. Yeah, give me that filthy fucking mouth.”

I squeezed his chin, and Ezra groaned when I slid my lips over his. When I released him, he grabbed my hand to pull me over to the oversized couch, where he gestured for me to sit down. Then he was in my lap, his mouth on mine, and I was gripping that perfect round ass of his in my hands.

“God, your hands.” He whimpered. “I love them on me. I want them everywhere. They’re so big, calloused, and firm.”

I nipped at his bottom lip. “Tell me.”

“I want your fingers in my ass, Carson. You think you could do that for me?”

Ezra dragged his tongue around the outside of my lips before he shoved it between the seam to wrestle with mine. He moved his hips to get closer to me, and I felt his hard cock pressed against mine.

I wasn’t used to having such an aggressive partner. Usually, the men I was with wanted it to be me, and, for the most part, I tried. But Ezra was different, so wild, so dirty, and I loved it.

“How many?” I groaned.

“Three, or sometimes four. Baby, the burn makes it feel so good. Fuck, I want it.” He shoved his hand between us to cup my cock. “Someone’s ready for another round.”

I groaned at his touch. “It’s all you.”

“Is it?” Ezra squeezed me gently before his hot mouth began to wander down to my neck. “I think it’s your curiosity, baby. About what I do and what you saw. Would you like to see more videos?”

I growled at the thought. “What...what kind of videos?” I saw red at the thought of him with someone else. “No, no, I don’t.” I grabbed his shoulders to pull him back. “You’ve recorded yourself with others.”

“Carson, that’s not what I meant.”

“I can’t do this right now. Get up.”

When Ezra was off my lap, I stood up and moved over to the bay window.

“Give me a second to get myself together,” I warned when I saw his reflection behind me.

Was I jealous of him being with other men? I shouldn’t be. Hadn’t I had a boyfriend yesterday? Shit, I had no right to get upset at him. I spun around to find Ezra watching me with hurt and confusion in his eyes.

“Talk to me, CC.” His brows dipped as he worried his lip between his teeth. Guilt was written all over his face. “What are you thinking right now?”

I want to break all their faces. Everyone who touched you before me and the ones who would come after me. Because no matter what we were doing now, there would be others. But I had no right to say that. Ezra wasn’t mine.

“Maybe I should just leave.”

“If that’s what you want.” His voice sounded sad.

I didn’t, but what else could I say right now? “I’m sorry
—”

“No, don’t you fucking dare!” Ezra exclaimed. The way he stomped his foot was cute, even though I knew he was trying to show dominance. “You didn’t do anything wrong. Instead of

pushing me away, I wish you would talk to me, but you've never been good with your words, have you?"

My lip curled up over my teeth. "Have you? Where were you for the last year, Ez? I waited for you, but it was just crickets while I floated along, wasting away without my best friend. I won races, changed car owners, tried to date, and yet, nothing. I needed you. I didn't know if you were alive or dead."

"You could have called me!"

"The phone goes both ways, princess. You're the one who ran out on me, or did you forget that?"

"Stop calling me that, Carson. It makes me sound helpless. We both know I'm anything but."

I growled. "Really? Have you looked at yourself lately?" The hurt in his eyes had me instantly regretting my choice of words, but I couldn't take them back now. "Fuck it, I'm out." I stormed into the kitchen to grab my coat, only to hear Ezra right behind me. "You're not going to stop me. I'm bigger, stronger, and faster than you."

An angry laugh bubbled up from his throat. "You think that's why I'm following you? I just want to make sure that I get my key back before you go."

"What?" It felt like a punch to my gut.

"Pretty sure you heard what I said, but if you need me to repeat myself, I want the spare key to my apartment back before you walk out the door," Ezra spat.

I gritted my teeth. "Fine." I yanked my keyring from my pocket to remove it. I wanted to throw it at him, toss it over his head in a fit of rage, but instead, I slapped it down onto the kitchen table.

"Maybe one of your fellow camboys can use it the next time he comes by to pay you a visit." The harsh intake of Ezra's breath made me instantly want to take it back. "You know that I didn't mean that."

“We both know you did.” His dark eyes looked defeated as he turned away from me. “You can see yourself out.”

“Ez, wait.”

But he didn't turn around.

“Please, I'm sorry.”

His shoulders slumped forward. “Me, too, boo, but you already said it. You can't take it back now.”

Chapter Seven

Ezra

I hadn't left my apartment in four days. I was hardly sleeping, uploading saved content to my OnlyFans, and lying on the couch all day watching Christmas movies. This felt worse than when I hadn't spoken to CC for months. Like a part of me was ripped out of my body without permission. I knew I could reach out to him, but I kept hearing what he had said to me.

"Maybe one of your fellow camboys can use it the next time he comes by to pay you a visit."

Did he think that I was some sort of whore? Did CC think so little of me? Was that why he wanted to mess around? Because he thought I was easy? It wasn't like CC couldn't get with some pit bunny at the track, although I knew he wasn't like that. This whole thing made me sick to my stomach.

Speaking of my stomach, it grumbled, reminding me that I skipped dinner last night. I hauled myself up to go see what I had left to eat, and there was a knock on the door. I wasn't expecting anyone, and most of my friends knew better than to just show up. I couldn't think of who would just show up unannounced, so I was leery about who it would be. Afraid to even get my hopes up that CC would come back to me.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Seth." Well, those hopes were crushed.

I moved to unlock the door to let him in. "Could you have not just called?"

"Babe, please." He waltzed past me in a huff, leaving the scent of Chanel N°5 behind him. "Like I didn't try that. Are you ignoring—You look terrible. Your bruises look worse than the last time I saw you." His blue eyes zeroed in on my face.

I rolled my eyes. "Thanks. It's so nice to see you, too. You look great, by the way. Did you do something different with your hair?"

Seth started to shrug off his coat. “So, how’d it go with your original bestie? Did you kiss and make up? Are you friends again? Please tell me yes, because I need some good tea today.”

“No.” I felt my eyes burn with tears as Seth moved into the living room. “Wait!” I tried to warn him, but it was too late. I heard his gasp before I caught him.

“Why does it look like Christmas threw up in here?”

I dropped my head back. Fuck. “Uh, I was going to decorate but lost my mojo.” I dragged myself into the room as he spun around to face me.

“Let’s try that again.” He folded his arms over his chest. “Because I don’t believe for one minute you lugged all these boxes out here. You’re obsessed with the holiday, but you can’t lift all these.” He nudged a box of decorations with his foot.

I gasped. “I work out.”

“Not enough to carry this,” Seth pointed out. “He was here, wasn’t he? Your NASCAR driver.”

I rolled my eyes as I flopped down onto the couch. “Maybe.” I watched as Seth sat down next to me. “It was good until it wasn’t.”

“I’m going to need more information than that.” He waved a hand at me. “Also, these movies are so bad. How can you watch them?”

“Are you sure you’re gay?”

“Since I was born, babe.”

I snorted. “Do you want some coffee before I launch into this? I think I have some stale-as-hell cookies we could eat.” I suddenly wished I was dressed in something other than a pair of pajama pants and the Brooks Racing shirt CC gave me. I still wasn’t bothering with makeup, but at least I had managed to take a shower this morning.

“Just the coffee will be fine.” Seth tilted his head. “Are you really okay, though? Your eyes are telling me a story I

really need to hear.”

I stood up. “Peachy keen.”

As I went into the kitchen to start the coffee, I realized how much I didn’t want to talk about CC again. If I started this conversation with Seth, I would start crying. He would drag it out of me one way or another, and I had already been doing that for the past four days. Seth knew all about what had happened with us that night at the club, how I ran away, and how horrible I felt about it. He was the one who’d suggested I talk to CC after I’d ended up in the hospital.

“I can hear you thinking all the way in here, Ezra,” Seth called out to me.

I grabbed my stool, climbed up to get the coffee from the cabinet, only to hear a soft chuckle from behind me.

“I could have helped you with that,” Seth told me. “I don’t know why you insist on keeping it up so high.”

I shook my head as I added a few scoops to the coffeemaker once I had climbed back down. “It’s fine. Some of us are height challenged.”

“How is he?” Seth leaned his lean frame against the doorway.

At nearly six feet with his chin-length reddish blond hair and blue eyes, he was one of the more popular accounts on OnlyFans. He had dropped into my messages one night after finding me, and we had instantly connected. At first, I think he might have been trying to hook up with me, but when our messages went from flirty to fun and friendly, he changed his tune. He would never replace CC, because I had only one best friend, but he was a close second. I trusted him completely.

I slid into one of the kitchen chairs. “We hooked up again.” When Seth only stared at me, I dropped my head. “Please say something.”

“I think I might need you to start at the beginning, Ezra. Or at least where the two of you made up? I mean, you went to his place on Wednesday after you left the hospital?”

I nodded, which caused my forehead to smack against the table. “Right, so we didn’t hook up right away. Not until Friday.”

“Babe, look at me. You’re going to hurt yourself if you keep doing that.”

I raised my eyes.

“Start at the beginning.”

So, I did. I told Seth what happened when I showed up at CC’s parents’ house. How he forgave me for leaving him that night, about CC saying he wanted to take me to the parade, Noel walking in on us cuddling on the couch, how I made him chase his boyfriend down, how CC freaked out when he found out I was still a camboy, how Noel broke up with him, how I left, and then how CC showed up at my place Friday morning while I was in the shower.

“You showed him one of your videos, and he liked it?” Seth sipped his coffee. “That sounds promising to me.”

I chewed on my lip. “Yeah, he got super turned on. Said he liked how dirty my mouth was.”

“So that did it. Makes sense. You do have a filthy mouth, babe.”

“He came on my face.”

Seth nearly spit coffee all over the table. “Okay, wow.” He reached for a napkin to wipe his mouth. “Something I didn’t think you were going to say.”

“Something I didn’t think was going to happen.” I shrugged. “It was so hot. He got me off after he came on my face. I thought it was going to be a onetime thing, and by the time I washed up”—I jutted my chin to the living room— “He had dragged my decorations out.”

He raised a brow. “But? There’s going to be a big one here.”

I told him the rest of the story. How CC started dancing with me, how he wanted more and the dirty talk. So much

dirty talk. “Until he freaked out when I asked if he wanted to see more of my videos.”

“How so?” Seth went to refill his coffee.

“He thought I meant ones of me with other men. I would never make him watch that.” I dragged a hand through my curls.

Seth grimaced. “He got mad.”

“He got really mad. We yelled about not talking. I made him give me the spare key back, and then...” I closed my eyes, and tears slipped down my cheeks. “He told me to give it to the next camboy I worked with.”

Seth gasped. “He didn’t mean it, Ez.” His hand patted mine. “Babe, that boy is jealous.”

“He’s not.” I shook my head as I squeezed his fingers. “But thank you for saying that.”

He smiled at me. “He’s totally fucking jealous; you just can’t see it. Carson has been your best friend since you were, what, six? Trust me when I tell you that he’s jealous. He’s in love with you and doesn’t know how to deal with his feelings, or he doesn’t realize it yet, so he’s lashing out at you. You should try to get him back. Maybe date someone.” Seth took his phone out. “You know, people always ask if we’re going to film anything together.” He slid his phone across the table toward me.

I stared down at Seth’s Insta. The cute and flirty pictures he had taken of us. Both of us shirtless, arms around one another.

“Uh, no.” I shook my head. “I’m not letting you fuck me.” I pushed the phone back at him as Seth grinned at me. “What? Why do you look like that?”

“Who said I’d be doing the fucking?” Seth reached for his phone before he started laughing. “You thought you were the only bottom in this friendship? I like it both ways, babe.”

I stared into my cup of coffee. “There are some things that I do not need to know about you, boo, and that was one of

them. We're close, but did we have to get that close?"

"Mm, we're not as close as you and Carson." He grinned.

I leaned back against my chair. "Stop staring at me like that."

Seth chuckled. "You've always been super close, shared a bed, were cuddly, huggy friends. Wouldn't it just make sense for the two of you to take the next step?"

"No." I grunted. "I mean, I never looked at CC like that."

But hadn't I? We went to prom together because we were the only gay kids in our high school. He bought me a freaking corsage even though I didn't ask for one. His family made sure I had a safe space while my own made sure I hadn't.

Seth tapped the table with his fingers. "You're thinking about it now."

"Why did you make me think?" I grabbed at my hair and yanked.

"Babe." He smiled. "It's kismet."

"Fuck you and your kismet."

Seth threw his head back, laughing. "Serious question. Did you tell him about—"

"No." I shook my head.

Seth's brows dipped. "Okay, but can I at least—"

"Nope. We don't say his name in this house. Not anymore," I snarled. "Next topic." I didn't want to talk about him. I should have had him arrested for what he did to me, but his grandfather had too much money. The restraining order would have to do.

He sighed loudly. "You didn't tell Carson about that either, did you? He's going to be so pissed when he finds out."

"No, he won't. You know why? Because no one is going to tell him." I dropped my chin. "So don't go opening that mouth of yours, babe, because I know how much you like to talk. This is our secret. Ours, not anyone else."

Seth looked horrified. “I would never.”

“You better not,” I snapped.

He sighed softly. “Fine. How about you let me take you out for an early lunch? That tavern you’re always talking about was open when I drove by.”

“That’s CC’s father’s place.” I shook my head.

Seth grinned. “I’m well aware of that. Put your shoes and makeup on, Ezra. We’re going out.”

Chapter Eight

Carson

My blood pressure had to be at a dangerously high level right now. The moment Ezra walked into the tavern with that other man, it skyrocketed, and it hadn't gone back down. I could feel the blood rushing through my ears, my heart pumping against my chest. They looked incredibly close, leaning across the booth as they spoke. Not once had my so-called best friend even looked over at me while I stood behind the bar. What was the law if I kicked that guy's ass in my father's restaurant? Would I get arrested because I hated the way he kept touching Ezra's hand or laughing at the things he said?

"Carson." Dad's voice brought me back to reality. "Are you going to go say hello to Ezra?"

I gritted my teeth. "No." Because I was sure if I went over there, I was going to break someone's face. Did he feel this way when Noel showed up?

"Then maybe you could finish restocking the glasses?"

Right, I was supposed to be putting the clean glasses under the bar. I had volunteered to help at the Tavern today. To get out of the house, where I had been sitting in my own damn filth since I came home Friday afternoon after storming out of Ezra's apartment. I thought it would be good to stay busy, keep my mind off what had happened. What I didn't expect was for my best friend to show up with this drop-dead gorgeous man and rub it in my face. *The fucking nerve.*

"Son."

I glanced up at my father as I squatted down behind the bar.

"If you keep stacking those glasses together like that, you're going to break them. Just go say hello. It's Ezra."

I shook my head. "I'm good."

“Then I’ll bring him over here.” Dad started to walk around the bar.

“What? Dad, no.” I stood up.

But it was too late. I watched in horror as my father sauntered over to the booth, leaned down to give Ezra a hug, and then pointed to where I stood. I dragged a hand down the front of my face as my best friend and I locked eyes. I noticed the bruising around his face had faded to a dull green and yellow, less swollen but still noticeable. You could still tell someone had used his face for a punching bag.

Ezra’s lips twitched like they might turn up into a smile, and I turned away before I could see it. That smile I missed; the laugh he was giving someone else. I had to get out of here before I did something really stupid.

“So, you’re the best friend I’ve heard so much about.” No way. This guy had some serious balls. “You probably think we’re together, but we’re not. Ez and I are just friends.” I could feel that hulk-anger ripping through me at the nickname I used. “I’m Seth Hill, just in case you were wondering.”

I dropped my chin to my chest, afraid to turn around. “I wasn’t.”

“Ah, so you actually *can* hear me. Wasn’t sure.”

I slowly turned around to find Seth sitting in one of the high-backed chairs at the bar. His eyes were the color of the sky, and he was even more handsome than I thought. Perfectly sculpted cheekbones, pouty lips, a septum ring. He was incredibly beautiful. Yeah, totally not my type, but maybe he was Ezra’s.

“Leave me alone.”

“That’s kind of rude, isn’t it, babe? I’m a paying customer.” He flashed a smile that revealed a pair of straight, white teeth. “Go talk to him.”

I resisted the urge to grab Seth by the front of his shirt and haul him over the counter. “Hard pass. Do you want a drink, or can I go back to what I was doing before you interrupted me?”

“Afraid of what might happen if you do? We both know you how you feel about Ezra.” Seth leaned his elbow on the counter and rested his chin in his hand as he stared at me.

I wanted to wipe that smirk off his face.

Okay, no more Mister Nice Guy.

“Oh, do *we*? Tell me, Seth, how do I feel about him? Because from where I stand, that’s none of your fucking business.” I gripped the corner of the bar between my fingers. “I suggest you go sit back in that booth and leave me the hell alone.”

“You think you scare me, Carson?” he asked, and I watched as he climbed back to his feet. He was about the same height as I was, a little leaner, his body was more that of a dancer, not as wide, but he might be able to take me. “Because you don’t. I’ve known Ezra for a while now. He’s done nothing but talk about how wonderful, sweet, amazing, and caring you are. The best friend he’s ever had. How he regretted running away from you that night, and how he wanted to fix things between you.”

“You need to stop talking.”

“Only right now? Babe, right now, I can’t figure out why he likes you so much.”

My jaw dropped as Seth flashed another blinding smile and then went back to the booth to sit with Ezra. I turned away before I could make eye contact with my best friend, then rushed to my father’s office and slammed the door behind me.

My head was spinning as I stood outside Ezra’s door. I’d had way too much to drink tonight. It started with a couple of beers, a few shots, and it was all downhill from there. It was nice when your father owned his own restaurant-slash-bar because you could get discounts. He was less than thrilled with me, though, and finally cut me off thirty minutes ago, telling me to catch an Uber and go home to sleep it off.

Not home, Dad. Ezra’s.

At least I knew he was here. His car was parked in the driveway, the lights were on, and I just hoped he was alone. That *Seth* wasn't here. Seth. The nerve that guy had, telling me I wasn't a good friend. How did he know? I slammed my fist against the door.

"Let me in, Ez." I was probably way louder than I should be, but whatever.

If I still had my key, I could just unlock the door myself, but no. He took that from me. He probably gave that key to Seth so he could come by any damn time he wanted, and they could—

"Ezra, open the goddamn door!"

My gaze flickered over to the neighbor's apartment, where I saw movement in the blinds. Shit. Would they call the cops on me because I was being drunk and disorderly?

"Ezra, seriously, before I get arrested."

The door flew open, and there stood my best friend. Dressed in a pair of black booty shorts that showed off his toned legs and a matching tank top. I thought maybe I had passed out and was drunk dreaming.

"What are you doing, CC? You're out here screaming like some sort of idiot. I don't want to see you."

"What are you wearing?"

"Are you serious right now? Go home."

Ezra started to close the door, but I shoved my foot in just in time. "Are you alone?"

"That's none of your business." His gaze shot down to where I blocked the door. "Could you please move your foot so I can go back inside? It's cold. I'm busy."

I let my eyes move over his body. The small tank top that stopped right above his bellybutton, his tiny waist, and the swell of his hips. Those damn shorts that I suddenly wanted to slip off with my teeth. I could see the outline of his cock, like maybe he was hard. Was Seth in there? Were they recording

something together? Fuck, the thought made me want to throw up.

“Ez, please let me inside. I need...” I dropped my chin as I tried to gather my thoughts together. My head was full of so many horrible things I didn’t want to think about.

“What do you need, baby?” he whispered.

Goosebumps broke out over my skin, and not just because of the cold. “Is he here with you right now? Are you going to let him touch you the way I did?”

“No, Carson, I’m alone,” Ezra murmured.

I pushed my way inside the apartment and pinned him against the kitchen table. “What the hell are you wearing?” I suddenly felt completely sober as I dragged my nose over his cheek and jawline to take in his sweet scent. “It’s so fucking sinful.”

“The door, CC, shut the door.” Ezra gasped.

I didn’t want to leave him. I wanted to rip those fucking shorts from his body and wrap my mouth around his length. Spread his body over the table and fest on him. But instead, I moved away for a second and did as he asked, making sure it was locked. When I turned back, Ezra was watching me with hooded eyes.

“Fuck, I’m so sorry. I never should have said any of those horrible things to you. I wouldn’t blame you for hating me.” I dropped to my knees and pushed my face against his stomach.

Ezra gently combed his fingers through my hair. “I could never hate you.”

“I just...thinking of you with someone else. It makes me crazy.” I wrapped my arms around his waist his as sweet scent invaded my senses. “You’re so sexy, and knowing that other men have touched you, been inside of you, I just want to murder them.”

“Baby.” Ezra tilted my head up. “What I’ve done with them is nothing like when I’ve been with you. It was sinful, and so damn hot. But with those other men? The ones I’ve

been with on camera. It's all scripted, coordinated, and planned out. Everything with you felt so perfect and right."

I tugged him closer. "Really?"

"Yeah, really." Ezra smiled. "You want to take a shower and sober up a bit?"

"Only if you shower with me, princess."

I climbed to my feet so that I could press my mouth against Ezra's warm soft one to stop him from saying anything else. My hands slipped up into his hair, and I angled his head while his fingers dug into my shoulders. I stood up, and Ezra's legs wrapped around my waist, his tongue finding mine inside the hot warmth of my mouth. I wanted to kiss away all his fear and doubt, make him smile, keep him happy all the time. I started to walk us toward the bathroom before I lowered him down onto the lid of the toilet.

"I want to rip those fucking shorts right off you," I admitted.

Ezra beamed up at me. "I have others." He watched as I put down the bathmat, turned on the water, and closed the curtain. I stripped out of my clothes and dropped them onto the floor.

"When you got here, I was...I was recording a video."

"You what?" I stared at him.

He kept his dark eyes on mine. "Nothing with my face because of the bruises. Just below the waist."

This was Ezra's job. I couldn't get mad at him for trying to make money, but I didn't have to like it. "Okay."

"I just wanted to tell you." He worried his lip between his teeth. "Carson—"

I kissed him again before he could say anything else. I didn't want to think about that right now. Not about other men or woman—because maybe he had female fans, too—seeing his body or what he did to it.

“I don’t want to hear about it right now, princess. What I want is for you to take off your clothes so you’re naked with me and get in the shower. Can you do that?”

Ezra nodded. “I can do that.”

He slowly slipped off the tank top, and I was happy to see the bruises on his ribs had faded. His nipples pebbled under my gaze. Then he got to his feet to slowly slip off his shorts. His cock jutted out hard and ready, a bead of precum teasing me as it hung from the tip. Ezra took a shaky breath as he met my heated gaze.

I tilted his head up with my finger. “You’re so damn beautiful, Ez. I hope your fans realize how lucky they are. That they get to see you like this.”

“Carson.” He swallowed, and I saw tears form in his eyes. “That’s... I don’t even know how to respond to that. Thank you.”

I stepped into the tub first and held out my hand so that I could help him inside.

“Come on,” I whispered.

Chapter Nine

Carson

I motioned for Ezra to step under the water and watched as it cascaded down his face and body. Fucked. I was so fucking fucked. Now that I had a taste of my best friend, I wanted more. I followed Ezra's hands as he pushed his wet auburn hair back from his eyes and gave me an almost shy smile. His freckles were starting to show through the ugly bruises on his pretty face. It didn't make up for the fact someone hurt him like that, but at least he was healing.

I reached for the shampoo just as my eyes zeroed in on the bottle next to it.

"Ezra," I growled. "Why is there lube in here?"

When I turned to look at him, he shrugged.

"Sometimes I record stuff in here."

"Stuff? What kind of stuff? With other people? *With him?*"

"Boo, no. Just solo stuff." He leaned up to kiss me, but the look on my face must have told him something else because he stopped halfway and sank back onto his heels.

Neither one of us spoke as I tried my best to ignore the lube. I grabbed the shampoo bottle, popped it open, and squirted a little into my hand. Ezra smiled at me as I began to work it into his hair. His pupils dilated until his eyes were nearly black, and his cock poked me in the thigh. Yeah, we should have done this a long time ago. When he started to open his mouth, I covered it with mine. My soapy thumbs stroked his neck, and he groaned softly as our tongues slicked together. When I pulled back, he chased after me for more, but I shook my head.

"Please?" Ezra pouted. His hands slid up my chest to twist at my nipples. "I'll be good."

My painfully hard dick jerked against him. "Why don't I believe you? You don't even know the meaning of the word,

do you, princess?”

“Yes, CC, I—Whoa.”

I pushed him back against the wall, and a gasp escaped him.

“You are so mad right now.”

I tilted my head. “What kind of solo stuff do you film in here?”

“Sometimes just my fingers, other times toys. Why? You want to watch?” he teased.

I narrowed my eyes. “No, you know damn well that I don’t want to watch. I’m not watching any more of your videos.” I reached for the lube. “Turn around.”

“Carson.” Ezra’s eyes flashed with want before he did as I told him. “Are you... What are you doing?” He glanced over his shoulder at me.

I honestly had no idea. I still hated the idea of people paying money to watch Ezra fuck himself, to make himself come. It had me so fucked up I wanted to show him how it should be. How good *I* could make him feel. But *could* I do that? I pressed hot kisses over his shoulder and down spine as I popped the cap on the bottle of lube, then I smeared some on my fingers. Then I pushed his cheeks open to slide one digit inside his hot, needy center and groaned as he engulfed me.

“Holy shit, CC.” Ezra pushed back. “More.”

I raised a brow. “You’re not calling the shots here. This is on my terms.” But I gave him what he wanted. I shoved in another one, and then a third, because I remembered what he said he liked.

“Oh god, oh my god,” he whimpered.

I watched, heavy-lidded, while he slid up and down my fingers to get himself off. My fingertips brushed over that spongy spot deep inside him, and he made sounds I had never heard before. It made my aching cock beg for attention. This was the hottest thing I had ever seen. Watching my best friend get off on me.

I moved so that my mouth was against his ear. “Talk dirty for me, princess. You think you can do that for me right now?”

Ezra nodded as he pushed back against me.

“Yes, Carson, fuck. It feels so good having your finger shoved inside of me. I want it so bad. More, I need more. Fuck me with your thick fingers. Spread me open. Make me come screaming your name. Make it hurt.” *Jesus Christ.*

“Do you think you could come just like this?”

Ezra let out a low whine, and I saw tears in his eyes as he nodded his head. “Y...yes.”

I groaned as I pressed my hard-on against his hip and licked his ear. “That’s so damn hot.” I nipped at the soft skin of his earlobe. “Watching you like this, the sounds you’re making.”

He turned to look up at me, pupils blown out, and his mouth open. “Kiss me.”

I covered his mouth with mine, sliding my tongue between his lips. Ezra’s small body trembled. He whimpered and groaned as I fucked him with just my fingers. His ass was hot and tight, wrapped around me. What would it be like if it were my dick? It wasn’t like I hadn’t been with others, but this was Ezra, the one man I loved more than anything. There was no denying the attraction and desire the two of us had discovered we shared, but he had always said he wasn’t the marrying or settling down type. Could he change for me? Would he want to?

A low rumble began to make its way up his chest and into his throat, then Ezra clawed at the tile in front of him, painting it with ropes of cum as he came. I wrapped my free arm around his waist to keep him from falling, and when I was sure he was done, I slipped my fingers from inside him and held him tightly against me.

“You’re so sexy,” I whispered. “That was the hottest thing I’ve ever seen.”

I could feel Ezra’s heart racing in his chest as his hands came up to grip my arm.

“So good,” he murmured. “God, Carson.” He tilted his head to look up at me with a big smile on his face. “You have magic fingers.” He twisted around so that he was facing me, those big brown eyes, framed with thick, long lashes, staring up at me. “Can I touch you?”

“Yes, princess.”

“With my mouth?”

When I nodded, Ezra dropped to his knees in front of me. His wet auburn hair was matted to his head, and he pushed it out of his eyes, then gripped my cock with his small hand. He dipped his head, and I was a goner.

“You’re so perfect, CC,” he whispered before he dragged his tongue over the tip, gathering the water and precum into his mouth.

My head fell back as Ezra’s hot mouth engulfed me all the way down to the root.

“Fuck, Ez,” I groaned.

I wanted to see—no, I *needed* to see what his pretty lips looked like stretched around me. When I glanced down, his eyes were glued to my face. One slim hand wrapped around my length as he bobbed up and down. I reached down to thread my fingers through his hair.

Droplets of water clung to his lashes as spit gathered around the corners of his mouth. I gripped the wet strands of his hair to keep a slow, steady rhythm as energy burned between my hips, riding low on my spine.

“Princess, fuck, I’m so damn close,” I warned.

I tried to fight my release, but the suction of his mouth was too much. I came with a shuddering cry, my free hand coming up to press against the wet tiled wall next to me as Ezra sucked me dry. When he popped off me, I closed my eyes and tried to calm my racing heart.

My best friend didn’t say a word as his arms slipped around my waist and buried his face into my chest. When I

tried to force him to look at me, he shook his head. This couldn't be good.

“Ez, the water's getting cold.”

“Don't care. Need snuggles,” he mumbled.

“Let me just turn the water off.”

“If I let go, you'll leave, and I'll be alone again.”

Well, that was a lie. “Boo, that's not going to happen. You know why?”

Ezra peeked up at me with those big doe eyes. “Best friends love one another for life?”

“Exactly,” I told him.

He dropped his arms, and I turned off the water, then folded him against me and heard the happy sigh he released. I realized that must be how he felt after he had other men here with him. I tried to shake the images from my mind. Ezra's plump lips wrapped around another dick. His eyes glued to his as he watched them the way he had done with me. I know it wasn't the same, but that didn't mean I had to like it.

Fingers dug into my hips. “Carson?” Ezra's voice was soft. “We should dry off and get dressed before we freeze to death.”

I tipped his head up before I released him to brush my lips over his. “Yeah, princess. Then we'll go to bed.”

Once we were in our pajamas and settled into Ezra's bed, I tugged him into my arms. “You always smell so good,” I murmured into his hair. “I mean, since I can remember. Like cinnamon.”

“It's the lotion I use.”

“Is it now?”

Ezra giggled in the dark. “Yeah, boo. I'm glad you like it.”

His lips brushed my skin, and my dick instantly perked up. It wasn't like I had a low sex drive; it was normal, or at least I thought it was, but maybe it was him. Maybe Ezra brought it

out of me. It made me want to do all kinds of dirty, filthy things I had never thought of before.

“Do you need something from me, baby?”

“Are we boyfriends now?” I whispered. “Because if we’re boyfriends, we’re exclusive boyfriends. I don’t share, Ez. Not with anyone. That means I’m yours, you’re mine, and there’s no one else.”

He climbed up and straddled my waist. “I’m yours, CC.” His hands slid up into my hair.

“Mine.”

“I think we just established that, baby.”

I gripped Ezra’s hips with my hands. “No more Seth.”

“Carson, he’s just a friend. I’ve never slept with Seth. Not even once, so you don’t have anything to be jealous about.” Realization must have hit him. “I have to make money.”

I stared up at him in the dark, the moonlight hitting his face. “Let me take care of you.” I felt his body stiffen the moment the words slipped from my mouth.

“No.” Ezra shook his head. “I can’t let you do that. I’m not some kept man or some househusband.”

I gritted my teeth as he moved back onto the mattress. I couldn’t tell him to stop filming even if I hated it.

“I can’t be with you if you continue to have sex with other people on camera, Ez. Solo stuff is fine, but collaborations, that’s a deal breaker.”

“I make more money that way.”

“Are you for real right now? I don’t...this...fuck.” I yanked back the blanket and climbed from the bed. “I can’t talk about this with you because it makes me all crazy.”

I could feel Ezra’s eyes following me as I moved around the room. When I glanced over my shoulder, he was sitting up in bed, his face hidden in the darkness.

“Do you or do you not want to be with me?”

A soft snuffle filled the air. “I want to be with you. I just don’t want you to be my sugar daddy. What am I supposed to do with my life, CC? I’ve never thought about it before.”

“That’s a lie, and you know it. You wanted to design clothes. What happened to that dream?”

“It was just a stupid dream. Not everyone gets to achieve their dreams. Some of us end up doing whatever it takes to make ends meet.”

Where was my outgoing, super enthusiastic best friend? This man sounded nothing like him. I walked back to the bed.

“I could help you. Lie back down, princess,” I instructed.

When he did, I climbed back into the bed and wrapped my arms around Ezra’s small body to pull him close.

“I could help you with whatever you wanted. Go to school, achieve those dreams, design clothes, or whatever you wanted to do. You deserve the world.”

Ezra was quiet for so long, I thought maybe he fell asleep. “Okay.”

“Okay?” I brushed the hair from his forehead. “That doesn’t sound very convincing to me.”

He pressed his face into my chest, his fingers clutching my shirt. “I just don’t want you to have to take care of me.”

“I’m always going to take care of you. I wish you had told me about needing to make money, boo, I would have helped,” I assured him, the warmth of his body making me feel things I wasn’t used to. We had spent plenty of nights in bed together. I guess being boyfriends made it different.

“I don’t want to need anyone the way I need you, Carson.”

My breath caught in my throat. “Ezra.”

His lips found mine in the dark, and everything I wanted to say was lost as he kissed me like his life depended on it.

Chapter Ten

Ezra

When I woke up, I immediately reached for CC, only to find him gone. Did he leave? I couldn't blame him. I had gotten all stupid and clingy with him last night. That wasn't normally how I was. It had to be the sex with him making me like that. I pressed my face into the pillow he had slept on and took a deep breath. God, why did he smell so good? All sexy and manly. I curled onto my side, trying to figure out how to handle what had happened.

No more sex with strangers if I wanted my best friend. No more dealing with *him*. We broke up months ago, anyway, and he had that restraining order. He wasn't even supposed—
Nope. Not going there. I shook him out of my head. I could do that. I *would* do that for CC. But having him take care of me sounded a little too domestic. I had never wanted the whole white fence, dog, and kids' thing, like CC.

The sound of footsteps had me sitting up. Wait, was he still here?

I dragged myself out of bed, grabbed CC's shirt from the top of the hamper, and slipped it on over my head before I came face to face with him walking out of my spare room.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Good morning to you too. I was putting the empty decoration boxes away." He smiled. "Sleep well?"

I tilted my head. "Why does it smell so good in here?" I took a step toward him.

"I made cinnamon rolls."

"You did?"

CC grinned at me. "What, you think I can't bake like my mother? Who do you think she's going to pass all the recipes down to? Go freshen up. I'll warm them up for you."

I stood there for a second as he walked back down the hall. Cinnamon rolls, decorations, this was all very relationship like. I mean, okay, to be fair, we did this sort of thing before we started sucking each other's dick, but... I might be freaking out just a little bit. I moved into the bathroom to brush my teeth and splash water on my face. Relief hit me when I saw how much better the bruises looked. I didn't look like someone's punching bag anymore, but it was still pretty obvious that someone had taken a fist to my face.

“CC, did you make coff—”

The Christmas tree was up, the lights strung around the branches. The boxes of ornaments sat opened and on the floor. The silver and blue garland hung around the windows. Something fluttered deep inside my belly.

“Hungry?” CC's voice was in my ear as he wrapped an arm around my waist.

I nodded. “Yeah, I could eat.”

“I saved the ornaments so we could do them together.”

“Th...thank you.”

CC pressed his warm lips against my neck. “Come with me into the kitchen.”

I followed him, even though I was sort of freaking out and didn't want to tell him that. CC placed a plate of cinnamon rolls on the table, but before I could sit down, he lifted me up and placed me on his lap.

“I can't sit on my own?”

“I like this better, princess.” He flashed a bright smile at me.

I stared into CC's face, his perfectly shaped deep mocha-colored eyes, his soft, plump lips, and reached up to tuck a piece of blond hair behind his ear.

“Should we have done this earlier? You and me, I mean?”

“I think it happened when it was supposed to happen,” he murmured before he reached for a cinnamon roll.

They looked and smelled amazing. Bursting apart, filled with gobs of cinnamon, and covered in layers of icing, my mouth literally started watering at the thought of what it would taste like. This was so much better than Fruity Pebbles. CC broke off a piece and held it in front of me.

I shook my head. "I can feed myself."

"Princess, come on." he murmured and pressed it to my lips.

I opened my mouth. "Fine." I scoffed, knowing damn well how good the thing would taste. CC slipped the pastry between my lips, and I groaned when the rich, sweet taste hit my tastebuds. "Damn," I muttered.

"Right?" He smirked, but I saw the look in his eyes. His dilated pupils and hooded lids. Did my best friend have a feeding kink? And why did my dick like that?

I chewed my food and swallowed before I leaned forward. "More."

"Open for me." CC ripped off another piece and held it out for me.

This time when he held it out, I didn't hesitate to open my mouth, and I let my tongue lap at the tip of his fingers. The soft moan he let out was enough to make my cock plump up just as I felt CC's do the same below me.

I stared at him as my breathing sped up and his dark orbs dipped to my lips. "This is your thing, feeding your boyfriends?" I asked before I reached for a pastry to return the favor.

CC popped his jaw, and I waited for him to fight me, but instead he dropped his mouth open to take what I offered him, his tongue just lightly brushing my finger. Holy shit, that was hot. I wanted to shove my fingers into his mouth, demand he suck on them, and then suck my cock. But instead, I simply fed him the second half of the cinnamon roll and watched the way his eyes darkened to nearly black as he stared right back at me.

“This might be the most erotic thing I have ever done with another man,” I whispered.

CC broke into an easy smile. “I find that hard to believe. You’ve always been more adventurous than me.”

“It was the look on your face. You looked like you wanted to eat me alive.”

“What if I did?”

“I’d ask if you had any leftover frosting.”

CC’s eyes flashed with want. “Why?”

“So that you can drizzle it all over my body, baby,” I purred as I let my hands slide up his neck and into the hairs on the back of his head. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you? Licking it off, inch by fucking sinful inch.”

CC groaned as his lips pressed against my jaw. “You’re going to kill me, Ezra.”

“Maybe, but it would be a fun way to go!” I squealed when he suddenly pushed the plate of cinnamon rolls off the table and sent them flying onto the floor to shove me onto the surface. I stared up into his wild face.

“Don’t fucking move,” CC ordered.

I watched as he moved across the room, grabbed a pastry bag, and brought it back over. “I’m going to take off your clothes.”

I nodded. “Yeah, you do that.”

My throat felt dry with desire, my cock hard as steel, and as I lifted my hips to help CC remove my booty shorts, I was dizzy with want. This was new for me. I’d never had a man eat anything from my body, unless you counted my ass.

“Shirt,” CC growled; his teeth clenched.

When I sat up, he yanked off the shirt and tank top I had on.

“God, Ez, you’re so fucking beautiful. Everything about you is perfect.” He eased me down onto my back again, his

finger grazing the tip of my cock. “Do you shave?”

I shook my head. “Wax.” I shivered as he spread the precum over my length.

“Everything? There’s not an inch of body hair on you. It’s so damn sexy.”

I groaned as he pressed his nose against my thigh. “Yes, everything.”

I felt the graze of his teeth before CC’s mouth latched onto my skin. My hands found his hair, and I dug in deep as he began to mark me. Once, twice, three times before he glanced up to meet my heavy gaze.

His lips turned up into the hottest smile I had ever seen on his face as he took the pastry bag and began to squeeze the frosting out across my stomach, up around my nipples, and then over my mouth. CC pressed a light kiss to my mouth before he spread his tongue between my lips. I groaned when the sugary icing hit my taste buds.

“I think I like this game,” I whispered.

“I’m going to like cleaning you up.”

The pastry bag landed against the table with a soft thud as CC’s mouth found my right nipple, lapping at the peaked and hard bud. His teeth grazed over it lightly, before he dragged his tongue across my chest to suck on the left one.

“That’s it, Carson,” I murmured. “I’m so fucking dirty. Lick me clean. Make sure you don’t miss a spot.”

His eyes darted up to my lips before he kissed me again, his tongue invading my mouth to twist together with mine. His fingers dug into my hips to keep me pressed to the table, his cock hard as he sucked and nipped at my mouth.

“That fucking mouth,” CC warned. “It’s going to get you in so much trouble.”

I smirked. “You going to punish me, baby?”

“Can I eat your ass instead?”

I whimpered. "I'm all yours," I reminded him. "How do you want me?"

"Can..." He closed his eyes for a moment, and I caught his hands shaking. I reached down to take them in mine. I brought them up to my mouth and kissed each palm softly for encouragement.

"Do you want me on my knees, Carson? Or would it be better if I stayed on my back? I can hold my legs up for you."

When his eyes opened again, they were filled with raw need. "Lie back down for me."

When I did as he asked, he pushed my thighs up, and I gripped my ankles with my hands.

"Look at you, just spread out like that. So fucking gorgeous," CC whispered.

"You like it?"

"I fucking love it."

My entire body broke out in warmth and want. "I need you to touch me, Carson. Please touch me." I wasn't normally a beggar, but right now, I felt like I might burst into flames if he didn't get his tongue inside of me.

CC's big, calloused hands gripped my cheeks and spread me wide. "Make sure you keep your legs up for me."

Then his tongue was there again, slowly rolling over my backside, just enough so I could feel it but not enough to feel invasive.

"More, please, baby, I need...fuck."

He speared his tongue inside of my ass. I dropped my head back against the table. When he wrapped his hand around my cock, I cried out in pleasure, my hand reaching down for a fistful of his hair to get more.

"You like it," he whispered against my skin; then he buried his tongue so far inside of me, I wanted him to stay there forever.

I couldn't form words. I couldn't think. I just wanted him to keep doing what he was doing until I was delirious with need. Until I came all over my stomach. Until CC couldn't stand my babbling and moaning, stood up and shoved his cock inside of my ass.

Only, when I didn't respond, CC's mouth was suddenly gone, and his hand disappeared from my dick.

"Don't stop," I protested loudly.

"You need to tell me," CC whispered.

He looked absolutely destroyed. Lips swollen, dark brown orbs blissed out, and spit all over his face. He looked like a man who needed to get off.

"Baby, I love it so much. I want more of it. I want you to do it until I can't see straight. Until I can't remember my own name. Until I'm begging you to bury yourself inside of me," I told him.

He smiled before he started to dip his head back down to go back at it. I reached for my cock, but he pushed at my hand and wrapped his own fist around it while he continued to eat my ass like a champion. Who knew CC could be so bossy?

I whimpered, and my skin broke out in goosebumps. I was getting close, but I didn't want this to end. My breaths began to come out in heavy pants, and he worked me harder, his hand pulling at my dick and his tongue angled perfectly inside my ass. I gritted my teeth as I tried to hold off my impending orgasm, and when I couldn't do that any longer, the sounds I made were like nothing I had ever made before.

CC's full name was on my lips as I came long and loud, cum spilling from my cock and over his fist as he made sure to drag it out as long as he could. But the low moan I heard coming from my best friend made me realize that I wasn't the only one getting off. He finished and looked up at me, a blush on his cheeks.

I pouted playfully when I saw the cum on his fist. "Baby, I could have done that for you."

CC blushed even darker. “I couldn’t help myself, Ez. God, it was the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen. Having you spread out for me like that, getting you off, and the sounds you made.”

“That is so hot.” I couldn’t move, though. My body felt like it had lost all function. “I like bossy Carson,” I murmured as I felt his arms wrap around me. “Where are you taking me?”

“Seems like you should wash up, princess. Then we’ll get you properly fed and caffeinated.”

I nodded. “I like that plan.”

Chapter Eleven

Carson

After we washed up, fooled around again, ate lunch, and decorated the Christmas tree, Ezra lay with his head in my lap, and I ran my hands through his curls while we watched some Christmas movie on TV. I couldn't tell you what it was. I was too busy staring at my boyfriend.

Boyfriend.

If you had told me this would happen, I would never have believed you, but apparently, we were officially official. Kind of. He had posted a picture of us on his Instagram account this morning, and our followers were going crazy. Because, of course, he had to tag me. I didn't mind, though. I had been trying to find the right guy for years when he had apparently been there the entire time. I just had to open my eyes.

“Look, CC.” Ezra held up his phone. “People think we're adorable together.”

I smiled. We hadn't come out as a couple. Please knew he was my best friend because I had been posting things with him for years.

“You're adorable.”

Ezra shifted around so that he was lying on his back. “You're not chopped liver, baby.” He stared up at me with those doe eyes. I was happy to see the freckles appearing back on his face now that the bruises were slowly fading.

“@LeeFord_Carexfan is super jealous of me. He's been your fan since you started racing.”

“I bet.” I chuckled. “He's probably going to stalk you now.”

Ezra gasped. “Are you saying your fans are stalkers? Is that what this is? Should I be worried? Because I was looking at Watts's account, and his fans are super happy for him. They love Holt.”

“You’ve been looking at Watt’s Insta?”

“Holt, too. He’s cute as hell. I can see why you tried to get into his pants.”

I felt warmth creep up my neck and over my face. “I didn’t...I mean...I liked that he reminded me of you, Ez.” This was embarrassing.

“Baby, you tried to date him because he reminded you of me?” Ezra climbed up into my lap. “That’s sweet. I want to meet him. When do I get to meet him? You’re going to introduce us, right? I bet we’d be great friends.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Are you embarrassed of me?”

I wrinkled my nose as I shook my head. “What? No. I just think it’s a bad idea.” *Because I know you.*

“So, I don’t get to come to your races? Are you going to keep me hidden away here like some sort of queer Rapunzel? Should I grow out my hair for you, CC?” He batted his lashes.

I sighed. “Ez, stop being so dramatic.”

“Look,” He shoved his phone in my face again. “I want this.”

He pointed to a picture of Watts and Holt at the last race of the season in Phoenix. Standing on pit road, they were smiling happily, right hands over their hearts during the national anthem while Holt leaned into Watts’s side. Yeah, I wanted that, too.

I grabbed his phone and tossed it onto the couch next to me. “You want that? Fine, come to Daytona with me. Better yet, come to the awards banquet with me next week. You’ll have to get all dressed up. I’ll be in a tux, and we’ll walk down the red carpet together. I know you watch it every single year; you told me. You always watch, trying to catch a glimpse of me while criticizing all the outfits, hair, and makeup.”

“I don’t do—”

“What was that, princess?”

“I don’t have anything to wear.”

“We both know that’s bullshit. I can take you shopping, or, better yet, I think you should make something.”

Ezra worried his lip between his teeth, then his eyes lit up. “I could.”

“Something so sexy everyone will be too busy staring at you to notice anything else. That tiny and sexy-as-hell waist. Seriously, you have no business having a waist that small.” I pressed a kiss to his nose as he stared at me.

Ezra’s pupils dilated. “You think my waist is sexy *and* tiny?”

I reached down to grip both sides of it. “So much,” I whispered.

“You really want me to be there?” he murmured.

I could see his mind working as he thought about it. How long had it been since he made something to wear?

“I would be honored if you would be my date. Do you need to go shopping? We can go first thing in the morning.”

“I—” Ezra quickly climbed from my lap and rushed from the couch before I could stop him. I heard him moving around in the spare room before he called my name. “CC, could you come here for a second?”

I smiled as I got to my feet to get to him. “What do you need, princess?”

“Can you move that desk for me? I want to plug in my sewing machine.”

Ezra must have had that in the closet or hidden in here somewhere, because I hadn’t seen it in forever. When I pushed the desk out of the way, he rolled it over, reached down, and plugged it in.

“I have an idea.”

I bet. “Tell me.”

When we were in high school, Ezra had made everything he wore. Nothing was store bought, nothing was mail order, and a lot of the girls in school had gushed over his clothes. Not all of them, because jealous cunts, but most of them? Yeah, they adored what he made. He even made his own prom dress.

“I have this.” Ezra moved to the closet to grab an oversized baby blue men’s dress shirt. “Oh, and these, too.” He shuffled around in the closet before he held out some white lace. “I was going to make it into something. I just never got around to it.”

My brows dipped. “Something?”

“Yeah, something. It’s a surprise, boo. I can’t tell you yet.”

“I know I’m going to love it.”

He ducked his head, and he gave me a shy smile. “I hope so.”

“I have just one request, though,” I murmured before I wrapped my arms around him so I could tuck his body against mine.

Ezra rested his chin against my chest. “What’s that?”

“You wear a pair of those sexy panties underneath so I can take them off with my teeth in our hotel room later that night.”

He giggled and pressed his face into my shirt. “I think I can manage that.”

The rest of the week flew by. During the day, Ezra spent most of the time working on his super-secret outfit that he wouldn’t let me see, no matter how much I begged him, while I helped my father at the tavern. At night I was wrapped up in my best-friend-turned-boyfriend. We couldn’t get enough of one another. Kissing, getting one another off; it was like a switch had been turned, and we couldn’t stop. Not that we wanted to.

When it came time to fly down to Nashville, Ezra was a bundle of nerves and happiness. He had never been before, so he was more than excited. I let him sit in the window seat, and he babbled nonstop while I held his hand, smiling at him and

wondering why I had never thought to bring him as my date before. Even as friends, I would have had fun with him.

Once we checked into the hotel, Ezra gave me that sneaky smile. He had kept his outfit hidden from me the entire time he worked on it, then held onto that garment bag like it was the rarest possession in the world. I was dying to see what he had created.

“Don’t look at me like that, CC.” He pointed a finger at me. “Perfection takes time.”

I snorted. “You’re already perfect.” I watched the blush creep up his neck and face, something that kept happening lately when I complimented him.

“I have to do my hair and makeup, boo. You’re going to have to wait a little longer. Do you need help with your tux? Your bowtie or anything?”

“I think that I can manage.”

Ezra nodded as he dug around in his suitcase before he pulled out a small makeup bag. “No peeking.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it, princess,” I assured him.

I wouldn’t either. I didn’t want to ruin the element of surprise. Of seeing Ez all dressed and ready for me. Butterflies swooped inside my stomach as I glanced at him slipping into the bathroom. He winked at me over his shoulder before he shut the door.

Warmth bloomed over my skin as I stripped out of my clothes, including my underwear. I wasn’t nervous about this. I was excited. It felt like a first date. I couldn’t wait to show Ezra off. *This is my boyfriend. My boyfriend, Ezra. Have you met my boyfriend, Ezra?* I smiled as I pictured all the ways I could introduce him. I dug around in my own suitcase to find clean briefs, my deodorant, and aftershave.

I heard the door open.

“CC?”

I glanced up at the sound of my name to find Ezra dressed in a pair of blue panties and black stockings. His reddish-

brown hair was styled just right, and his dark orbs were lined with liner. He must have used something to cover up the last of his bruises, because they were completely gone.

“I just realized you probably need to use the bathroom, too.”

My mouth moved, but nothing came out. “Uh...I...um...”

“This isn’t what I’m wearing,” he teased. “The rest of the outfit is still stashed away in my garment bag. There’s no reason we can’t get ready together.”

My throat felt dry with lust and desire. “That would be nice.”

My fingers itched to touch him, but I stopped myself. I mumbled thanks under my breath as I stepped into the room but could feel Ezra’s eyes on me as I grabbed a facecloth and soap. He smiled at me in the mirror as I quickly ran it under my arms and more-than-excited cock before I turned to face him.

“Don’t ruin my makeup.”

“You’re enjoying this too much.”

Ezra’s entire face split when he beamed at me. “Maybe more than I should.” He moved to press his lithe body against mine and eased himself up onto his toes. “If you’re this excited seeing me in just my panties, what’s going to happen when you see me all dressed up, baby?”

“You are such a tease,” I growled.

“I’m hoping it gets me fucked tonight.” Ezra dragged his tongue over my neck and up to my jaw.

My cock throbbed. “You mean that?”

We hadn’t taken that step, although we’d been close. Fingers, tongue, sure, but I hadn’t put my dick inside him yet. I had wanted it to be special. The mood right, and the timing perfect. I swallowed nervously as I stared at him, knowing that tonight was going to be all of that rolled into one.

“Pretty please with a cherry on top.” Ezra batted his lashes at me before he pressed a soft kiss to my lips. “I brought all the necessary supplies.”

“Since you asked so nicely, princess.” I hummed.

Ezra smiled as he took a step back. “Finish getting ready, baby.”

We finished getting ready with minimal interruptions between the two of us except for Ezra not wanting me to see him get dressed. Once I moved out of the bathroom, he shut the door again, and I quickly put on clean briefs and socks before I reached for the bag that held my tux. I had just finished putting on my jacket when I heard the sound of the door and a soft cough behind me.

When I saw Ezra, I was pretty sure time stopped moving.

The once oversized blue shirt he had shown me was now a halter top with spaghetti straps and a matching skirt, both lined with white lace. It gave you a glimpse of Ezra’s flat, toned stomach, and his waist—fuck me, that waist. I was clearly obsessed with it. It stirred something deep inside of me.

“You’re not saying anything, CC. Why aren’t you saying anything? Oh God, do you hate it?” Ezra ran a palm down the front of his stomach. “You do, don’t you? Should I have just bought something?” He rushed to the mirror at the back of the closet door. “It’s terrible. I knew it. Fuck, I can’t go dressed like this.”

I didn’t remember going to him, but when I touched his hips, and our eyes met in the mirror, I smiled. “You look beautiful, princess. You’re lovely, smashing, handsome, glamorous, perfect.”

“What, do you have a thesaurus back there or something?” Ezra teased, but the look on his face was all I needed to see.

I rested my chin on the top of his head. “I can’t wait to show everyone you’re mine.”

Chapter Twelve

Ezra

I leaned into CC's side as we approached the red carpet. I could do this. I could put on a smile; I could dazzle his friends and coworkers. This was important to him. He wouldn't have invited me if he didn't want me here, right? CC squeezed my waist, and when I looked up into his dark, warm eyes, I relaxed. He hadn't stopped touching me the entire limo ride to the Music City Center. One hand on my thigh, the other around my shoulders, and he kept telling me how beautiful I was. How good I smelled. How happy he was that I was here with him.

I had a feeling someone was getting lucky tonight.

"You're the most beautiful person here tonight, Ezra," CC murmured as he stopped to stare at me. "I can't...I can't believe you're mine."

I flushed at his words. I wasn't sure why I kept getting nervous and shy around him when he said things like that. CC had always been good for my ego, but things were different now.

"Have you looked at yourself, baby?" I reached up to straighten his bowtie with trembling fingers.

"Carson fucking Carey!" We both turned to see who was calling his name, and my tongue nearly rolled out of my mouth when I saw Killian Hampton striding toward us.

Killian was sex on two legs. I'd had the biggest crush on him in high school. I mean, who hadn't? As he got closer, I saw those blue eyes land on me.

"CC?"

I wanted to bury my head in his chest, hide in his pocket, and hope the lead singer of Mulligan Downtown didn't try to talk to me. Because, no, I wasn't shy when it came to meeting new people, but I might be scared to meet the one person I wanted to run away and join the circus with when I was a kid.

Or whatever. My tongue was currently stuck to the roof of my mouth, which was better than hanging out while I panted like a dog. Or tried to hump his leg.

“Carson, introduce me to your pretty little friend.” Killian smirked at me. “Babe, come here.” He held out his hand to the tall dirty-blond man behind him.

“Kill, what are you—oh hey, Carson.” Matthias Fuller, Killian’s fiancé and the man who was the reason Killian came out as bisexual.

Apparently, they had a very tumultuous past but were super happy and in love now. Seventeen-year-old me would have loved to have known his hero was bisexual. Not jealous at all of Matthias. Nope, not me. I had my own sexy-as-hell boyfriend, thank you very much.

CC wrapped an arm around me. “This is my Ezra Bardo.”

My Ezra Bardot. Did he just call me his Ezra? *Swoon.* I might just die now. Honestly, that was romantic as hell. I beamed up at him before I looked back at Killian and Matthias.

“Hello, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Weren’t you dating Noel?” Killian blurted.

“Killian, manners.” Matthias poked his side. “Sorry, he left those at home tonight.” He stuck out his hand. “I’m Matthias.”

I swallowed the bile in my throat as I took his outreached hand. “Oh, I know who you both are.”

“I’m sorry, but what happened—did you just pinch me?” Killian glared at his fiancé.

CC tugged me closer. “We broke up.”

“You’re being rude, Killian, stop it. Look at how cute they are. Leave it alone,” Matthias hissed before he flashed those hazel eyes at me. Damn, I could see what the attraction was. He was hot.

“We should get moving before they start without us,” CC suggested.

I suddenly felt like this was a bad idea as more drivers arrived with their dates. Maybe people wouldn't be so accepting of me. I could just be sitting home on my couch watching as I normally did and live tweeting. I could still be a supportive boyfriend that way.

I felt like I was going through the motions as CC stopped to be interviewed. They asked him about his upcoming season with Brooks Racing, took pictures, and once we moved into the convention center and were seated at the table, I excused myself to rush off to the bathroom to try to get myself together, only to run into Killian Hampton on his way out.

"Hey." He smiled at me. "About before, I'm sorry. I..." He dragged a hand through his messy dark curls. "I didn't mean to upset you. I have this habit of talking without thinking. My mouth gets me in trouble a lot."

I stared up at him. "You didn't? Because it certainly seemed like it. I had the biggest crush on you in high school, and you shot that shit down in a heartbeat. I guess it's true what they say about meeting your heroes. I hope you don't treat everyone like that. Especially CC."

"Aren't you a sassy little shit."

"I've been called worse, but yes."

Killian laughed. "A crush, huh? Did you it make you happy or jealous when I came out?"

"A little of both, I suppose. I like Matthias, though. He seems like a good man to put up with your crap." I popped my jaw.

Killian jerked his chin behind me. "I think—Wait, did you call him CC?"

"I did." I folded my arms over my chest as I stared at him.

He was probably used to people being intimidated by him, but that wasn't going to be me. Not now, not ever. I was a little disappointed that Killian had turned out to be like this, but at least he apologized. That was hopeful.

He tilted his head. "Well, I think he's looking for you."

I spun around to find CC watching us, his brows dipped and a scowl on his face. “Yeah, he’s a little protective of me.”

“The good ones always are, Ezra.” Killian patted my shoulder. “Come on.”

CC squared his shoulders as we got closer. “Everything okay?”

“We’re besties now, isn’t that right, little dude?” Killian winked at me as he moved into the auditorium to slip into his seat next to Matthias.

I nodded as I took CC’s hand. “Everything’s perfect.”

Speaking of, I think I made a new best friend in London Pelletier. She took one look at my outfit and attached herself to my side. She was Mason, CC’s soon-to-be-new-teammate’s wife, and she insisted I make her something similar. It was all she could talk about.

“Wait, you made that?” Her blue eyes widened. “Like, you sat down at a sewing machine and just whipped it up? Like no big deal? You just came up with it?”

I nodded. “It took me nearly a week, but yes.” I could feel everyone at the table staring at me as I spoke. Didn’t these people have something better to do? Like talking about racing or the holiday?

“If I bought you the material, could you make me one? I would pay you, of course.” London’s smile was contagious. Her skin was flawless. Her dark hair cascaded down around her shoulders. She was stunning. “I’m going to the CMT Awards in April. Only”—She leaned closer so that our heads were almost touching— “Maybe something that covers my stomach.”

I chewed on my lip. “I mean, I guess, sure.” I had never made something for someone else to wear, but I could do it. She just had to let me measure her and everything, so I got the sizing right.

“Sully!” She jumped up, waving, and when I turned, I saw another woman who looked like she could be her twin. “You have to show my sister. She’s going to want one, too.”

Oh-kay. I had expected people to stare at me. Gawk and point. Not have them want me to make them dresses to wear... Wait, did she say the CMT Awards? I reached for the glass of wine in front of me. I shouldn’t be drinking so much on an empty stomach, but I had to calm my nerves.

“Princess, are you holding up all right?” CC squeezed my hand. He had been engrossed in a conversation with Killian and Matthias, probably work stuff, but again, he hadn’t stopped touching me.

I gave him a reassuring smile. “I’m good, as long as you keep your hands on me.”

“That’s my plan.” CC pressed a kiss against my head.

“Ezra.” London giggled softly. “Can you stand up for a second?”

“Baby, maybe you could wait and do this later?” Mason winked at me as he tugged on his wife’s arm. “We’re sort in the middle of something here.”

The awards banquet hadn’t started yet, but by the way the place had filled in, it looked like it was going to at any moment. I recognized most of the people here, but Holt and Watts hadn’t shown up yet, which was a huge disappointment to me. I was dying to introduce myself to Holt. Stick my tongue out at Watts and say you have nothing to worry about with CC anymore. He’s mine. He never really wanted your fiancé in the first place. He was looking to find another me.

“It’s fine,” I assured him as I climbed to my feet.

“Ezra, this is my sister, Brooklyn, and her husband, Rand Shepard.” London introduced me to the woman standing next to her, and holy shit, that man was huge. He was scary as hell, too. I was guessing six-foot-five, and he was covered in tattoos. I had seen him on television when I watched the races, but that did not do him justice. He was all hard muscle and

scowls as he looked at me with those blue eyes before he broke into an easy smile. Sexy, but scary.

Brooklyn's smile was gentle, but instead of offering me her hand, she moved in for a hug. "You are stunning," she murmured as she pulled back. "Are you with Carson?"

"Um, yes." I felt his hand on my back before I could reach for him. God, he was good. "We're together."

London nudged her sister. "Look at that outfit. Isn't it gorgeous? Ezra made it himself. Wouldn't something like that be perfect for the awards show in April? I mean, with my stomach covered."

"Wait, you made what you're wearing? Oh, wow, yeah, I could see you wearing that. Is this what you do for a living?" Brooklyn tilted her head as her dark orbs took in my outfit.

I guess it was now. "Yes," I managed to choke out. "I mean, it's sort of a side gig for me at the moment, but I've always wanted to make it a full-time job."

"If you make something for me, I can promise you it's going to be your full-time job. I don't mean to sound all high and mighty, but the country music ladies are going to lose their minds when they see me wearing that." London giggled. "Trust me, Ezra, everyone is going to want something like this when they see it. You're going to be a huge star."

CC's hand found mine, and he laced our fingers together just as I caught sight of Noel headed our way. *Oh shit*. Was he going to come over here and slap me? Would he do that? Would they kick him out? I mean, I guess he was probably mad that I stole his boyfriend, but Noel did break up with him. CC and I didn't get together until after that. That's when I noticed a slightly younger version of Noel trailing behind him. Did Noel have a kid? The plot thickens.

"Carson, I need to talk to you for a second." Noel ignored me completely.

What? Was he going to say he was pregnant, because I was very aware of the fact that the two of them never had sex nor did things work like that. Plus, I knew CC was very

responsible and would have worn a rubber if they did do the dirty deed. *Nice try, Noel. You aren't stealing my man again.*

CC glanced up. "Hello, Noel. It's nice to see you." He tightened his grip on my hand.

"Yes, hello. A word." Noel's eyes flicked over to me for a second, and he must have realized who I was, because his eyes went wide. "Oh, freaking great."

Rand grunted. "Noel, you good?"

"I see you two finally worked your stuff out." Noel jutted his chin at me just as the lights turned down. "You know what, never mind. I don't need to talk to you."

Was he going to try to get back together with CC, but because of me, he changed his mind? My stomach turned. Should I maybe let them talk? Noel was probably a better boyfriend choice. I came with all this baggage, anyway, so maybe I should encourage CC to go after him. He had a kid.

"Hey." CC tugged on my hand. "Sit down with me, princess."

Right, I was still standing up. I eased myself back down into my chair and gave CC a brief smile when he looked at me.

"Closer." He leaned over, grabbed the back of my chair, and moved it right on top of his. "That's better."

It was. I leaned into his big body as the banquet started, his warmth and scent helping to relax me. CC dropped my hand but only so he could wrap his arm around my shoulders.

Chapter Thirteen

Carson

Ezra was drunk. Really drunk. I was pretty sure it had something to do with Noel showing up and saying he needed to talk to me. The second they brought another wine bottle to the table, my boyfriend had started drinking, and he hadn't stopped. I had seen the look on Killian's face, too. Other people drinking around him had to be hard since he was a recovering alcoholic, but the way Ezra was throwing the booze back might have been a bit of a trigger.

"Ez," I whispered once the banquet was over and everyone was around mingling, dancing, and having fun. "You need to slow down."

He gave me a sloppy smile. "What if I don't want to?" He slurred his words slightly before he tried to climb up into my lap. Oh, hell. I had to get him out of here before he did something he might regret in the morning. Something that embarrassed the both of us.

"You're cute when you're drunk, princess, but you can't do this right now."

"Don't you want me, baby?"

Fuck me, I wanted him. I'd been thinking about stripping him out of that skirt all night. Pulling those panties off with my teeth and spreading those round globes apart with my hands before I pressed into him. It was part of why I hadn't stopped touching him. Why I had made sure my hands were on him at all times. I was addicted to my best friend.

I gripped Ezra's chin between my fingers. "You know the answer to that question."

"Prove it," he whispered. "Take me back to the hotel right now, Carson. Make me yours."

I glanced around the table. Killian and Matthias were deep in conversation with Mason and London, while Shepard and Brooklyn were talking to Hutch Kelly and his wife, Jillian.

“I suppose we could slip out of here.”

“You’re so getting some tonight.” Ezra purred as I stood up.

No one bothered us or stopped us on the way out. I was waiting for London to try to get Ezra’s number or ask him about his clothes again. I thought Noel was going to jump out of the crowd to try to talk to me, but when we made it to where the limo was waiting, I felt relief flood my system. I helped Ezra into the car and climbed in after him. He was in my lap the second I sat down, his lips crashing into mine and his hands tugged at my hair.

“I missed this,” he whispered. “I can’t wait for you to defile me. Put your cock in my ass and stretch me so wide that I feel you there for days.”

Jesus, that mouth. I gripped his hips with my hands. “Ez, we’re not alone,” I reminded him, as my eyes darted to the driver.

“Think that’s stopped me before?”

“What?”

Ezra chuckled softly as he slipped his hand down the front of my slacks. “Can you be quiet?”

“Wait, no, stop.” I grabbed his wrist. “We’re not doing this in the limo. I want to take my time with you.”

He sank back into the seat next to me. “Fine.” He pouted.

“Don’t do that.”

“I’m not doing anything.”

I sighed. “We have plenty of time.” I reached over to touch his hair, but he pushed my hand away, and it hurt more than I wanted to admit. “You look so beautiful tonight.”

“Whatever.” Ezra crossed his right leg over his left. “Maybe Noel wants you, because I changed my mind.”

I gritted my teeth. “I don’t fucking want Noel. I want you. Is that what this is really about? Why you drank so much and got drunk? Because of him?”

Ezra shrugged.

“Look at me.”

“No.” He turned his head to the left. “I think you should date him, anyway. I’m not boyfriend material. We both know that. I’m just a stupid slutty cam—”

I didn’t wait for him to finish. I slammed my lips over his and shoved my tongue inside his mouth. He tasted like sweet wine and my Ezra.

“Mine, you’re mine, and I don’t want anyone else. Do you hear me?”

“Carson.” He moaned softly.

I smiled as I leaned down to kiss his pouty mouth again. “Come here.” I lifted him back up into my lap. “Tell me you still want me.”

“I still want you.” He tucked his head under my chin. “I want you so bad, baby. I want to feel your cock inside me. Splitting me in half, wrecking my ass. Your hands on my body, everywhere all at once because you can’t stop touching me. I want...” I heard the hitch in his breath. “I want my name on your lips when you finally give in to your release and fill me with your cum. I want to be cum drunk on you, Carson.”

My cock plumped in my dress pants at his words. “Ezra.”

I tilted his head back. It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him things I should have said sooner. Confess all my feelings; instead, I let him swoop in to steal a kiss. Press those soft, warm lips against mine because the truth was, I was scared. Everything I was feeling was terrifying, and I wasn’t sure how he would react. He kept trying to push me away, only to pull me back in.

I left him sitting in my lap the rest of the ride back to the hotel. Neither of us spoke, and as I traced circles into Ezra’s skin with my fingers, I wondered if he fell asleep. This was a lot for him, for both of us, and he had to be exhausted. But when the limo slowed before it stopped completely to let us out, his head popped up and he gave me a shy, sexy smile.

Once out of the limo and inside the elevator, Ezra held my hand, still not speaking, just leaning his small body against mine. I slid the key into the door to unlock the hotel room, only to have him reach up and tug lightly at the bowtie around my neck.

“CC,” he whispered softly.

“You want something, princess?”

Ezra nodded. He pulled the fabric off and dropped it to the floor. “I think I’ve sobered up a little bit.”

“Have you? You drank a lot of wine tonight,” I murmured as I watched him, blood rushing through my veins. My hands itched to touch him, to place him on the bed and strip him bare.

He smiled as he tried to remove my coat. “Help me with this.”

“I think you’re doing a good job on your own.”

“I don’t want to ruin it. It’s a rental, right?”

I chuckled softly. “You want to rip off my clothes, Ez? Is that what you’re telling me right now?”

His dark eyes were nearly black when he stopped to tug the shirt from my slacks. “Carson, I’m afraid you’re going to change your mind.” He slid his soft hands over the hard muscles of my stomach.

“I won’t,” I assured him.

He stopped to stare at me with lust-filled eyes. “Promise?”

“Is that what you’re really afraid of right now? I am yours, Ezra. As long as you want me.” I cupped his head in my hands. “No one is going to take me away from you.”

He nodded. “I want you, *this*, so bad, CC.”

“How long have you wanted to be with me like this, princess?” When he didn’t answer, I tilted his face up further.

Ezra licked his lips. “Since...since that night in the club.”

My stomach clenched at his words. Was that why he ran from me? Because he wasn't sure how to act on his feelings?

“See, this is why—What are you doing?”

I ripped my dress shirt from my body before I began to unbutton my pants. “Getting naked for you.”

“I can see that, but...oh.”

I yanked my pants down my muscled thighs along with my briefs and sat down on the bed. My cock was hard, begging for him to touch me, and it twitched when I caught him looking at me.

“Are you going to just stand there and stare at me, princess, or take off your clothes?”

“I enjoy looking at you, Carson. I thought you wanted to help me?”

I smirked. “Or you could give me a show.”

“Oh, is that what you want?” Ezra slowly began to unbutton the crop top, twirling around and glancing at me over his shoulder. He slipped it down over one arm. “Like this?” He murmured.

He pushed down the other side down over his left shoulder as he spun back around to drop the top on the floor. Ezra's lips grew into a big smile as he ever so slowly shimmied out of his skirt, which left him in just stockings and panties. He was so perfect and beautiful.

I groaned. “Leave those on.”

“That was the plan, baby,” he assured me.

“What do you want to do?”

Ezra raised one shoulder as he looked up at the ceiling as he thought about it. “I want to suck your cock. I want your dick inside me. I want you to eat my ass. I want you to come when you're balls-deep inside of me.”

I loved that fucking dirty mouth.

“Prove it,” I goaded. I leaned back on my hands to watch him. “Right now, you’re all talk and—fuck.”

He climbed up into my lap and wrapped his hand around my length and pumped me.

“There you go, Ez. You’re so good to me.”

He leaned forward to press his lips against my ear. “I have a present for you, baby.”

“You’re the only present I need.” I sat up so I could grip his hips.

Ezra dragged his tongue across the soft lobe of my skin. “Are you sure?” he whispered before he nipped lightly. “So you don’t want to hear about the plug in my ass?”

“What?” I gasped when I saw the look on his face. The blown-out eyes, the way he dug his teeth into his bottom lip. “Are you serious? The whole night?”

Ezra nodded. “I didn’t want to have to waste time with prep.”

“Can I see? Wait, no, can I take it out?” I could feel my heart as it rattled against my chest. When he nodded, I moved us over so that Ezra was beneath me. “Flip over for me.”

I climbed to my feet and watched as he did as I requested, giving me the perfect view of his round ass. I reached down to rip the stockings apart without a second thought before I slid back his panties. I groaned at the sight of the bright pink plug that stared back at me.

Ezra turned to look at me over his shoulder. “Do you like it?” He whispered.

“I love it,” I murmured. “It’s the best present that I’ve ever received.” I reached down to run a finger across it and then leaned forward. “I’m going to take it out, princess.”

He arched his hips up. “Please, baby. Then fill me with your big cock. Fuck me so hard I come screaming your name. So that everyone in this hotel knows who I belong to.”

“There’s that mouth again,” I hissed as I reached down to grip the back of the plug. I started to slide it out, only to ease it back in. The sound Ezra released made my dick jerk against my stomach.

Ezra fisted the blanket. “Carson. Please. I need you to fuck me so bad.”

“Do I need a condom?” I slipped the plug out and tossed it on the floor as he shook his head. “More lube?”

“I’m on PrEP and I was just tested a few weeks ago. I’m negative. Lube is in the bathroom on the counter.”

I hurried to retrieve it, and when I came back, Ezra had moved onto his back. He was lying there no longer in his stockings but still wearing the blue panties. I could see the way his chest moved with every breath. He was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, and he was mine. Not just right now, and I wanted longer. I wanted forever.

“Carson?” Ezra suddenly sat up, and a big smile broke out on his face when he saw me. “Come here.” He held out his hands.

I moved closer, placing the lube on the mattress before I dropped to my knees. “Let’s get these off.” I grabbed Ezra by the thighs and dragged him to the edge of the mattress. “I believe I promised to remove these?” I raised my brows, then grabbed the edge of his panties with my teeth to slowly inch them down his legs.

Ezra watched with bliss written all over his face, lifting his hips and helping me along the way. “That’s why I got rid of the stockings.”

“That’s so thoughtful,” I murmured before I dragged my tongue over the precum that hung from the tip of his cock. My hands shook as I placed them against his thighs. “I want to ravish you, Ez. I want to kiss every inch of your beautiful body and show you just how perfect you are.”

I stared up at him as I tried to gather myself together. This wasn’t the first time for me, so why did it suddenly feel like it was? I could count on one hand how many men I had been

with. All of a sudden, I was nervous, overwhelmed, and wondered if this was going to go horribly wrong.

Ezra touched my cheek lightly. “Baby, do you need me?”

“I think, yeah... I think I do.” I swallowed the anxiety that threatened to bubble up from inside of me.

He patted the mattress. “Sit down, Carson, let me take care of you.”

Chapter Fourteen

Ezra

CC moved to sit back on the bed, and I quickly took control. I wondered if he had this problem with all his partners or if it was just me. I slid onto his lap, pressing soft kisses against his jaw and mouth.

“I’m right here,” I whispered. “Tell me if you need me to stop or if it’s too much.” I reached down to grab his hands so that I could place them on my chest. “I need you to touch me, baby. Can you do that?”

“I want to touch you,” he assured me, his calloused palms roaming over my skin. “You’re so soft.” CC stopped to squeeze one nipple between his fingers.

I whimpered. “You don’t have to be gentle. I won’t break.” I reached for the bottle he had dropped onto the bed, but then changed my mind.

“Ezra, I don’t want to hurt you. I’m not into that.” CC’s chocolate orbs met mine.

I nodded as I dragged my tongue over his neck. “Tell me what you *are* into.”

“Kissing,” he whispered. “I like…” His voice trailed off when I began to run my fingers through the hair on the nape of his neck. His breathing started to come out in pants as my lips moved down his muscled pecs, kissed his peach-colored nipple and then sucked it into my mouth, causing him to groan loud and low in my ear.

I smiled against his chest while I dropped a hand to reach over to find his left nipple. I teased it between my fingers as CC’s hands gripped my waist. I nipped and sucked at the pebbled bud before I kissed him again, my tongue tangling together with his inside his hot, wet mouth. His nails dug into my skin and my cock smeared precum against his stomach. Normally, I wasn’t into foreplay. I wanted to fuck, to come,

and get it over with, but I could see that CC needed the buildup. He was the helpless romantic, after all.

“Lie back, baby,” I murmured, and when he did, I shimmied onto the bed and spun around so I could drag my tongue over the length of his heavy cock. The low groan he released told me all I needed to hear.

My best friend had a gorgeous dick. I might be biased, but yeah, it was the most amazing one I had ever seen. Long and thick, with a vein protruding right against the middle. I had always imagined what CC would look like. I wasn't stupid. I knew he was hung, but this was better than I could have imagined it to be. I couldn't wait to get it inside of me.

I gripped the base with one hand before I slowly wrapped my lips around the head and sucked him all the way down to the root. The sound CC let out was music to my ears. I always thought I was pretty good at giving head—I'd had a lot of experience—but maybe CC just hadn't had the right man get him off. This wasn't the first time I'd put my mouth on him, and I hoped it wouldn't be the last.

“Oh my God.” I felt a hand on my leg as he reached for me. “I want...Ez, let me touch you...oh God.”

Making CC an absolute mess was what I was going for. I hollowed my cheeks as I worked him over slowly. I moved my head up and down as I listened to the sounds he made. The babbling and nonsense that made me preen with happiness. This is what I was good at. Making men fall apart as I worked them over. I wanted nothing more than for CC to unravel for me. Come in my mouth before the real fun began. Until I felt a fist wrap around my dick.

“Ezra, please.” CC's eyes were completely blown out when I glanced down at him. “Your mouth feels so good, but I need to be inside of you.” He pressed a kiss against the tip of my cock.

I released his dick from my mouth. “Whatever you want, baby.”

“What do *you* want?” he whispered as I moved to sit up on the bed. His brows dipped as I gave him a smile. “Princess, you do know it’s not just about me, right?”

I nodded. “Of course.”

I only wanted to make CC happy, though. I wanted to make him feel good. I wanted him to remember this night for the rest of his life so that if this was the only chance I had with him, he’d never forget it. I knew he cared about me. That we worked well together, but I still wasn’t convinced I was boyfriend material or the right man for him.

“Hey.” CC quickly moved to get next to me. “We don’t have to do this if you don’t want to. We can just cuddle and—” He stopped when I held out the bottle of lube. “Ezra, talk to me.”

“Prep yourself for me, baby.”

“I want you to talk to me first.”

I rolled my eyes. “You’re ruining the mood, Carson.”

“I’m ruining the mood?” He huffed out. “You’re acting like this is some sort of job for you instead of a beautiful moment between two people who care about one another.” His eyes darted to my lips. “Do you even care about me?”

I flipped open the cap on the bottle and squirted it onto my fingers. “That’s a stupid question, isn’t it?” I reached for his dick, but he pushed my hand away. “Are you fucking kidding?”

“No, I’m not. I don’t think I want to do this anymore.”

I stared open-mouthed as CC got up from the bed and bent down to pick up his underwear.

“If you put those on, I’m leaving,” I said.

“Ezra, don’t pick a fight with me.” He slid on one leg and then the other before he pulled them up around his waist.

I felt sick to my stomach. No man had ever turned me down before. Not when I was naked. Not when I told them I was ready, available, and would do anything they wanted.

Anything. Not even after I begged him, after he beat me and then said he was sorry. *When I said I was sorry.* He never turned me down.

“You don’t want me? Is that what you’re saying? I made that outfit, I put that stupid plug inside of me, and you don’t... you won’t...” My chin began to quiver, and I suddenly felt like I couldn’t breathe. Maybe he wanted Noel after all.

“Princess, I never said I didn’t want you.” CC sat down to gather me in his arms. “All I asked is for you to talk to me.” He soothed back the hair on my head. “I wanted to know what you wanted. If sex was what you wanted, or if you wanted to keep blowing me. It’s not always about sex. I’d be perfectly happy kissing you all night long.”

I pressed my face into his neck. “It’s always about sex.” God, why did he smell so damn good? Why was he so nice? I couldn’t be with a nice guy. I reached for his briefs, half expecting him to push me away, but he didn’t, and his cock sprang out, still hard and ready.

I whimpered. “Please, Carson. This is what I want.”

“I’m all yours, princess,” he murmured.

I spread the lube I had put on my fingers over his length before I grabbed CC’s hand, squirted out a little more, and placed it against my backside. He didn’t need me to tell him what to do. He eased one finger inside, then another, and I let out a low whine. I didn’t need any more prep. I was ready. I reached back to grip CC’s length with my hand, raised myself onto my knees, and slowly began to ease his head inside of me. Once it pushed past the tight, unforgiving muscle, we both let out a soft groan.

“Ezra.” My name came out in a tight, heavy moan.

His lids were hooded with desire, and when I pushed down all the way until I felt his thick, hairy thighs against my ass, CC bit down on my shoulder so hard I hoped he drew blood. Left a bite mark there for me to see in the mirror every single morning for the next week that reminded me of what we had done here tonight.

I felt him everywhere inside of me. I saw stars when I slid up his length, grabbed his head, and pressed my lips to his.

“You feel so good inside of me, baby,” I murmured against his mouth as heat streaked through my body. “Just like I always knew you would.”

“Mm.” CC’s eyes rolled slightly as he arched hips. “I can’t...I don’t...fuck.”

I dragged my tongue over his lips. “You like it, right? You like having me riding your dick? Making you feel good.” My spine tingled as I moved faster. I really wanted this to go longer, but I wasn’t sure I was going to last.

“Ye...yes.” He nodded. “You’re so tight. Feel so good wrapped around my cock, princess. Don’t stop. So hot.”

I purred. “Just for you, Carson.” I wrapped my arms around his neck. “You want to come inside of me? You want to fill me with your hot fucking cum? I know you do; I can feel your body trembling beneath me. It’s okay if you come, baby. I want it so bad. I want it buried so deep inside of me so that I feel you for days. I want your cum dripping out of my wrecked hole.”

CC whimpered as I rotated my hips in fast circles around his shaft. Beads of sweat began to bead against my forehead and over my back.

“That dirty mouth. Bring it here.” He grabbed my chin so he could spear his tongue between my lips. He nipped and sucked on my tongue before he pulled away to bury his face in my neck.

“Give it to me, baby. Fill me with your cum. I want it. I need it,” I begged.

Every single one of his muscles tightened below me as his climax hit him in full force.

CC’s hips bucked up as he came with a low growl. He threw his head back as he flooded me, and just as I reached down to wrap my hand around my dick, I heard him say my name in a low, soft whimper.

“I love you, Carson.” It tumbled from my mouth before I could stop myself. “I love you,” I said again.

My orgasm hit me without needing to touch myself. A fireball of bliss raged inside of me as ropes of cum splattered against both my chest and CC’s before I dropped my forehead against his shoulder to catch my breath. This was what sex was supposed to be like with someone. The feeling of want, euphoria, and need all mixed into one. I didn’t want to move. I needed CC to stay buried inside me, grow soft, and then just slip out when he was ready.

“I got you, princess,” I heard CC whisper as he helped me onto the mattress and moved me onto my back.

He kissed my lips gently before I felt him climb from the bed. Then he returned with a warm cloth, which he used to gently clean me. No one had ever taken the time to care of me like this before. Tears pricked my eyes as he whispered softly about how beautiful I was, how he would always take care of me and make sure I was safe.

I felt so many emotions hit me all at once. CC could never truly be mine. He was too pure. He was too good. He would never love me like I loved him. I would ruin this relationship before it ever took off. I knew that. My big mouth would get in the way. My need to control everything. CC would want someone easy to be with.

When he was done, CC easily lifted me into his arms, pulled back the covers, then climbed onto the mattress beside me. I snuggled in next to his warmth, inhaling his familiar scent, and hummed softly when CC wrapped his arms around me.

“I love you,” I murmured again, not caring if he heard me or what he thought. Because it was the truth.

I realized it that night I kissed him for the first time, and I was ready to finally give in to my feelings. I was in love with my best friend, and I wanted him to know.

Chapter Fifteen

Carson

I stared up at the ceiling of the hotel, watching the sun come up with my best-friend-slash-boyfriend tucked into my side. Ezra had said he loved me. Not once, but three times. Did he really mean it, and did I bring it up when he woke up, or should I just pretend that it never happened? I had never been in a relationship long enough where I felt like I had been in love. Was it because I was in love with Ezra?

I glanced down at him, and my heart slammed against my chest at the sight before me. Was that what this feeling was? Ezra had his face buried in my side, his fingers curled into the shirt I had put on before I climbed into bed with him, and one leg thrown over mine. This was nothing new, sleeping in a bed with him. I had woken up dozens of times with him like this. His hard dick pressed against me, and we had laughed it off. But had he been into me and never said anything?

I pushed the soft reddish curls back from his head so I could press my lips to Ezra's forehead. My eyes took in the way his lashes brushed his cheek, the freckles that covered his face and the entirety of his body. I eased him onto his back so I could take in the whole package. He was the most beautiful man I had ever seen. He instantly broke out in goosebumps without my warmth, but I needed to look at him. His creamy white skin, his pink nipples, and the gorgeous cock nestled between his legs, which was semi hard. I splayed my body over his, telling myself it was to keep him warm, but I knew better when my own dick grew hard at the thought of touching him.

I peppered kisses against Ezra's neck. "Wake up, princess," I whispered while I rubbed against him.

"Mm, what time is it?" he murmured.

I dragged my tongue over his Adam's apple. "Does it matter?" I growled as I pressed against him.

“Carson.” He moaned my name as he arched his hips. The things it did to me when I heard my full name from his lips.

I slid my hand down to his dick. “I’m just as hard as you are, princess.”

The soft gasp he released made me yearn for more. The sleepy look on Ezra’s face made me smile, and when he returned it, I couldn’t stop myself from leaning forward to brush my lips over his.

“Good morning,” Ezra whispered.

“Good morning.” Then my mouth slanted over his before I could stop myself.

I want you, you, and only you. God, I had never had an attraction to another man like this before. My free hand gripped at his waist, pinning him down against the mattress.

“You can have me, baby,” he murmured.

Shit, I said that out loud. “Really?”

I ran my tongue over the outline of his mouth, my hand slipping between us and over his taut stomach. I watched the way his eyes darkened, heat and desire flooding inside them.

“Really.” Ezra smiled as he gripped my neck to bring our lips back together.

My hands began to roam all over his body as if they weren’t sure what they wanted to touch first. He was so smooth, so warm and soft. I loved touching him. He gripped my ass with his hands, pulling me closer, and I groaned at the way our cocks rubbed together even though I had my briefs on.

“What do you want from me, CC? Tell me.” His kisses were hot, wet with thirst, and I found myself giving him back what he gave me. Sucking, nibbling, biting his mouth while he watched me with those dark, heated eyes.

“I want you,” I confessed. “I want your mouth around my cock, mine around yours. I want to be inside of you again. Hell, I’ll let you inside of me if that’s what you want. I just want to make you feel good. Feel the way you tremble when

you come, hear the way you moan my name when I swallow you down. Let me touch you, princess.” I shoved my hand between us to grip his cock.

His eyes rolled back. “Fuck yes,” Ezra whimpered.

“Yes?” I wanted him to say the words. Tell me he wanted this as much as I did, or I wouldn’t go any further.

Ezra nodded his head before he leaned forward to kiss me. “Yes.”

I gripped his chin with one hand while cupping his junk with the other. “Yes, you want me to touch you, princess? Make you come? Is that what you want?” I dragged my teeth over his chin, my hand tightening around his length.

“Touch me, jerk me off, make me come, Carson. I want you so bad. You never have to ask. I will always want your hands on me, your dick inside of me. It’s always going to be yes with you.”

I stopped to lick my hand before I wrapped it around the velvet smooth skin of his dick. I swiped my thumb over the precum that was leaking from the tip and began to pump my hand up and down.

“This is what you want?” I whispered.

“Y...yes.” Ezra groaned as I squeezed his cock, jerking him and dragging my tongue over his jawline. “Wait. I want to...let me touch you. Let me get you off, too.” He reached for my underwear, his hand shaking slightly as he pulled them down. That was different.

“You’re going to make me feel so good, Ez. You always do,” I whispered as his slim hand slipped into my briefs. I let out a hiss when his fingers made contact with my cock. “Jesus Christ.” I groaned as we both began to move in unison.

“So good,” he murmured as he found my mouth again, his tongue plunging inside. His lids began to sink lower and lower the longer we lay there, the sounds of our heavy breathing filling the room.

I could feel my body getting closer with every movement Ezra made. The way he flicked his finger over the head, the way he moaned into my mouth. The need to come built inside me until I thought it might burst.

“Princess.”

His eyes focused in on me as they opened, and his lips turned up as he pumped me faster. Then it was too late.

Hot, sticky cum spilled down my fingers as Ezra came with such force, I felt his small body shake beneath mine. My name was on his lips as he let go, his hand never stopping as he stroked me, and then I followed right behind him. My vision blurred, my hips canted forward, and my large body slumped down over his.

“Holy shit.” He stared at me, his hand still in my briefs, and my hand wrapped around him. “That was...holy shit.” He broke into a huge smile before a loud giggle exploded from him. “That was intense. I thought I was going to pass out.”

A pink flush had worked its way up his chest and neck. I wasn't used to seeing Ezra like this, but I liked it. He was usually so sure and confident.

I nodded as I tried to gather my thoughts. Words, what were words? I couldn't think of any.

“We should wash up. Get breakfast before we head out. Maybe we'll have time for a little quickie before going to the airport.” I pressed my mouth to his and felt the way his lips turned up into a smile before I pulled away.

“You okay, CC?”

“I'm more than okay, princess.”

Ezra's mouth was on mine again, and I didn't even care that his cum-covered hand, *my cum*, was now raking through my hair.

“I can't wait to do that with you again.”

My cock certainly liked that idea, as it tried to rally up again.

“Me, too,” I whispered against his lips.

I love you, Carson. I could hear the words he whispered last night so clear in my head. It was on the tip of my tongue to bring it up until I heard the shrill ring of my cell phone.

“Somebody better be in jail,” I grumbled as I climbed from the bed to find my phone.

Ezra gave me a sleepy smile before he buried himself under the covers and wrapped them around him like a cocoon. What I wouldn't give to be in there with him. Whispering sweet nothings in his ear before I got my mouth on him again. I located my phone still tucked into my dress pants and grimaced when I saw it was Watts. His ghosting the banquet last night was a little strange, but I had figured it was due to his health or something personal.

“Good morning,” I tried to sound like I wasn't worried about him calling me so early or something worse.

“Hey, man. I hope I didn't wake you up.” He sounded like I felt. Worried, nervous, and a little tired.

I swallowed as I glanced back at Ezra, who had the blanket wrapped around his head so only his mocha eyes were visible. I couldn't help but smile when he blew me a kiss.

“No, I was up.” Giving my boyfriend a handy while he returned the favor. “Everything okay?”

“Uh, not really. I was really hoping to avoid this call,” Watts answered, and my stomach dropped. “We lost the sponsorship for your car for Daytona.”

I felt my knees buckle beneath me, and I hit the floor. “You...what?”

“We're doing everything we can to find someone else. It's so damn close to the race, less than two months, but if we can't secure something soon, we're not sure if you'll be able to race,” Watts told me.

I felt hands in my hair and realized it was Ezra. He had no idea what was going on, but he was trying to calm me, his naked body pressed against me.

“I... Is there anything I can do?” I asked my boss.

“Do you know anyone who might be able to help?” Watts asked.

“I’m not sure.” I wrapped my free arm around Ezra’s waist to pull him against me. “I can ask around.”

Watts sighed softly on the other end of the phone. “I’m sorry, Carson, I really am. Look, if I hear anything, I’ll let you know. I’ll be in touch soon.” He hung up without saying goodbye, but that wasn’t uncommon with him.

“CC, what’s wrong?” Ezra cradled my head in his hands.

I shook my head. “I think I just lost my ride.”

“Well, that’s fucking bullshit. Give me your phone. I’ll call Watson Brooks back myself and give him a piece of my mind. Who does he think he is?”

A laugh burst from my chest despite the shitstorm that just landed in my lap. “God, you’re amazing.”

“What happened?” Ezra whispered. “He can’t just fire you.”

I hugged him closer. “The sponsorship fell through, and with Daytona so close, they’re having a heck of a time finding someone else.”

“What about your father?” He combed his fingers through my hair. “He sponsored your late model in high school. Maybe he could do it again. Just for one race.”

I shook my head. “I don’t... Wait, Ez, that’s brilliant.”

“Really?” He sounded surprised.

I nodded. “Yes, really.” I climbed to my feet, grabbing him around the waist and swinging him around, causing him to squeal with laughter. “It’s one race. Dad could totally do it. He always told me if I needed help with anything, I could ask.” I placed him back on to his feet.

“Um, Seth might be able to do the graphics.”

“Say what now?”

Ezra rolled his eyes. “He’s super talented. Don’t look at me like that, boo. He’s really into drawing and stuff. I bet if I asked him, he’d do it.

“I mean, he probably hates me.” I didn’t want Seth anywhere near Ezra.

He snorted. “Please, he doesn’t hate anyone. He’ll do it, trust me. He likes watching NASCAR now because of me. So, if you get your dad to sponsor you and have Seth to do the graphics, you’d be all set.”

I kissed him before he could say anything else. Pressed my mouth against his soft lips until he squirmed against me, his hard cock mashed up against my leg.

“Ezra, you’re so amazing. Thank you, boo, I just... Let’s shower and eat and then get on that plane. I want to fuck you again. Can I do that in the shower?”

“Baby, you don’t have to ask,” he reminded me. “Just take me.”

I kissed him again. “Come on.” I grabbed his hand to drag him into the bathroom, feeling better about the phone call than I had five minutes ago.

Chapter Sixteen

Carson

Two days later, I paced around the Tavern as my stomach clenched and nerves riddled my body. I was so worried about this meeting between Watts, Killian, and my father that I felt sick to my stomach. I don't know why. Everyone loved my dad. He was easygoing, laid back, and likeable. This was going to go great. They were going to get along swimmingly; the contract would get signed, and I would have a sponsor. Drive in another Daytona 500, get an awesome finish, and secure more sponsors. I just had to get through this part first.

“CC.” Ezra’s voice called to me from across the room. “You’re wearing a hole in the floor, baby.”

I turned to look at him as he beckoned to me with his hands. Things between us had been more than perfect since we returned home. I was practically living with Ezra now, and even though I hadn't told my parents about us, I think my mother suspected what was going on. I couldn't get enough of my boyfriend. It was like he had opened something up inside of me and now all I wanted to do was be inside of him morning, noon, and night. I woke up, I needed him. Ezra smiled at me, I wanted him, and when he kissed me? Forget it. There was a hunger inside of me that was never filled.

It wasn't as if Ezra wasn't exactly the same way. I woke up this morning with his mouth wrapped around my cock, his nails digging into my thighs, and it took about two minutes before I blew my load. Then I yanked him up onto up so he could ride my face, his dick shoved so far down my throat I was surprised I didn't choke on it. We were both insatiable.

I started to walk across the tavern toward him just as Ezra's favorite Christmas song came on the jukebox. My dad was old school like that. He could have satellite or Spotify, but he didn't. He had some fancy expensive jukebox that I sort of loved. The day after Thanksgiving, he would change all the songs to Christmas ones, and I was pretty sure this was the

hundredth time today I'd heard *Last Christmas* already because Ezra loved it.

"Really?" I popped a brow at my boyfriend.

He batted his lashes at me. "You adore this song just as much as I do."

I hadn't brought up the *I love you* thing with him yet. Afraid it would scare him off. Frightened it would send him screaming to the hills. I thought maybe he didn't remember, and he hadn't meant it. A heat of the moment thing. Terrified that maybe he had, and I couldn't say it back. Only, I thought maybe I did.

My best friend simply danced around without a care in the world.

"Boo." He grabbed my hands, and I heard the gold bangles he wore on his arms jangle together. "Dance with me."

"No." I shook my head.

Ezra pouted. "Party pooper."

"I'll watch you, though."

Ezra's face split into a smile. He looked beautiful today, dressed in a green sweater that I had never seen before, a pair of black leggings, and these cute little black boots that looked perfect on him. Ezra's reddish-brown hair was always spot on, but this afternoon, it just framed his face right. I felt my dick plump in my jeans the longer I kept my gaze on him.

He wiggled his hips toward me, and before I realized it, his small body was pressed against my larger one.

"Come on, CC. I want my boyfriend to dance with me." He grabbed my hands. "Just one."

"I can dance with you, babe," Seth announced as he breezed into the Tavern.

He winked at me, and I had to resist the urge to scratch his eyes out. He was here to help me. He wasn't the enemy. I still didn't trust him.

“I’m kidding, Carson, relax. Bestie and boyfriend.” He pointed at me. “Bestie.” He pointed at himself.

I grunted before I turned to look at Ezra. The look in his eyes, the smile on his face. I caved in seconds and lifted my arm so he could spin around, then threw my head back, laughing, when he twirled around. It made me feel good to see him like this. Warmth spread over my body at the happiness that oozed from him. Ezra’s happiness was my happiness. I would do anything to keep that smile on his face.

“Glad to see you and the little dude are still happy and in love.”

I spun around at the sound of Killian’s voice. I had wanted to catch him the moment he and Watts walked into the building, instead of being caught off guard. Yet there he stood in all his broody glory, his dark curls stuck beneath a white beanie, and his blue eyes moving around the tavern like he had never stepped inside a restaurant before. Maybe it was the booze part that was bothering him.

I felt a pinch against my side, and I looked down at Ezra.

“Your dad’s going to figure it out,” he whispered.

“I think my mom already did.” I winked at him as I wrapped my arm around his shoulders. “Come on.”

Ezra shook his head in protest. “This is all you, boo. I’m fine right here.”

I started to drag him with me toward Killian and Matthias just as Watts and Holt entered the room. I wondered how this would go. Would they shoot the idea down? Did they not want me to race for them and this was their way of pushing me out?

“Carson!” Holt exclaimed happily when he saw me and gave me a quick hug before Watts could accuse me of flirting or wanting his man. “This is where you’re from?”

I nodded. “Well, sort of. I grew up in the next town over but spent a lot of summers here. It’s quite the tourist town in the summer. Hutch Kelly is from here, though.”

“Wait, he is?” Killian suddenly seemed interested. “We should have brought him with us,” he murmured.

He yanked the beanie from his head and dragged a hand through his messy curls just as Matthias leaned up to whisper something in his ear. Killian nodded before he pressed a kiss to his fiancé’s cheek. His blue eyes softened slightly as he hooked an arm around Matthias’s neck.

“Killian, Matthias, you remember Ezra? Watts, Holt, this is my Ezra.” I caught myself before my father could hear me introduce him as my boyfriend, but I saw the disappointment on his face. “This is Ezra Bardot. This was all his idea. This is his friend, Seth Hill. He’s worked up some graphic ideas for the car.” I pushed my best friend in front of me while Seth chuckled softly.

Watts tilted his head. “Your Ezra?”

Shit. “I mean, he’s my best friend. We’ve been friends for a long time.” This was going fucking great. Why did Watts have to pick up on that?

Ezra shrugged out from beneath my grip. “Relax, CC,” he murmured softly.

“CC?” Killian smirked.

I shook my head as I tried to pull Ezra closer. Was it warm in here? I could feel sweat breaking out over my skin. “It’s just what he calls me.”

“It makes sense.” Killian grinned. “That’s your dad?” He jutted his chin behind me. “You look like him.”

Oh, thank God. I needed an actual adult here to help. “Dad?” I gestured for him to come over. “Guys, this is my father, Carson Carey, Senior.”

“Please call me Senior.” He shook everyone’s hand. “Thanks for coming up to the Tavern. I know with the holidays and all, it was probably not the best timing, but I want to help my son in every way possible. He deserves this.”

Watts nodded. “You’ve done the sponsor thing before?”

“When he was racing late models in high school,” Dad told him. “Let’s go over to a booth and talk. Seth worked up some graphics.”

I had reminded my father that Killian was sober and talking at the bar was not the best idea, so we had spread everything out in the back corner.

Once we were all settled down, Dad pushed a folder toward them. I chewed nervously on my lip as Watts flipped through the printouts.

“Seth, you just did these as a mockup?” Watts asked. “These are fucking amazing.”

He shrugged. “Yeah, I mean, I just went with the Tavern’s logo and tried to spice it up a bit. See, I moved a few things around, made these a little more practical, and then I added some nautical themes in hopes that maybe Senior would want to do that, too.”

Ezra shot a look at me as I squeezed his thigh. I was so proud of him for thinking up all this for me.

I smiled as I watched my best friend talking to my boss, the way Killian had leaned closer to get a better look, and the way they seemed to be interested. Maybe this could work out for at least one race. I glanced at Holt, who smiled at me before he leaned his head over Watts’s shoulder.

“This looks good, but what about the actual sponsorship, Senior,” Watts asked. “Is there somewhere the four of us can talk? Like an office or something?”

Dad nodded. “Sure, follow me.”

Once Watts, Holt, Killian, and Dad had left, I felt myself relax a little. Ezra climbed out of the booth, bouncing happily on his feet. “This is so exciting.”

“What’s the deal with the two of you?” Matthias asked softly, as he looked between us.

Ezra tilted his head. “What do you mean?”

“He called you his friend earlier, but at the banquet, Carson couldn’t stop touching you. You’re together, right?”

Matthias blushed as he met my eyes. “I mean, if I’m stepping over a line, please tell me.”

Seth rolled his eyes. “Is the sky blue?”

I reached for Ezra’s hand to tug him closer. “No, we’re together. I just haven’t told my parents.”

“I’m sorry, this isn’t any of my business.” Matthias waved a hand at me.

Ezra leaned into me. “Can I see your ring?”

“My engagement ring?” Matthias asked, and when Ezra nodded, he held out his left hand to show off the black band on his finger.

“God, I’m so jealous.” Ezra pouted before he moved to sit next to him. “I mean, honestly, I was so obsessed with Mulligan Downtown when I was in high school. Is that weird that I told you that?”

Matthias shook his head. “You’re not the first person, nor will you be the last. People say the strangest things when they find out I’m with Killian Hampton, the lead singer of Mulligan Downtown. To me, he’s just Killian. Not the rockstar. I knew him before he was famous.”

“That man loves you. I mean, look at this gorgeous thing.” Ezra beamed happily at me. “Did you know? I mean, when you first met Killian, that you were going to marry him?”

Matthias laughed. “Are you kidding? He hated me. Okay, maybe hate is a strong word, but he pretended like I didn’t exist.” His hazel eyes grew all dreamy. “He told me he didn’t understand what those feelings were, so he just tried to ignore me.”

“That worked out well.” Seth snorted.

Matthias blushed. “I was so in love with him that by the time he acted on his feelings, I was scared that he was going to hit me and tell me it never happened. I had no idea he felt the same way I did.”

“That’s kind of sad but also romantic.” Ezra grinned. “You two are the cutest couple, though. I follow you on Insta.”

Matthias lifted his hip to remove his phone. “Well, now I have to follow you back.”

I smiled as I watched them. Happy that my boyfriend was making friends so easily. When I slid out of the booth to stretch my legs, the two of them were laughing with their heads together like they had known one another for years. I walked over to the jukebox to punch in the code to change the song, and *Last Christmas* came on. I felt Ezra’s eyes on me the moment the song started, and when I turned to look at him, I felt like I might burst into flames.

The door to my dad’s office opened at that exact moment. All four men wore smiles, and I hoped that had to be good. When they stopped to shake hands with one another, I felt nothing but relief. Ezra was out of the booth, flying across the restaurant so that he could wrap his arms around me.

“Seth, I wanted to talk to you for a second,” Killian called out, and I watched Seth’s eyes grow wide. “Your graphics are amazing. Do you do freelance work?”

“Carson.” Watts was headed toward me with a big smile on his face. “Looks like you’ve got yourself a sponsor.” He held out his hand, and when I took it, he shook it so hard I thought my arm my fall off. “Ezra.” He shook my boyfriend’s hand, too. “I heard this was all your idea.”

Ezra shrugged. “Well, I mean, I just suggested it.”

“You’re coming to the Brooks Racing Christmas party, right? Both of you? Seth, you’re invited, too,” Watts asked.

Ezra looked up at me with surprise written all over his face. “I...are we?”

“Of course.” I had forgotten all about the Christmas party with everything else going on. I could see the hurt in Ezra’s dark eyes, though.

Holt came over to take his fiancé’s hand. “I’m looking forward to getting to know you, Ezra. The party will be a good chance for us to talk. Baby, we should get going. I can already see the exhaustion on your face.”

“Right, sure.” Watts rolled his eyes just as he stifled a yawn. “Well then, I guess we’ll see you next week. Congratulations on your sponsorship.”

Once we had said goodbye to everyone, I turned to Ezra to find him glaring at me. “Princess—”

“No.” He shook his head. “You don’t get to call me that.”

“Because I forgot about a Christmas party?”

“It’s not just that, CC! Am I or am I not your boyfriend?”

“That’s a ridiculous question. Of course, you are,” I assured him.

Ezra took a step back. “Then tell your parents. Tell everyone. Because I won’t be a secret, Carson. Not again. I’ve played that game before, and it didn’t work out for me. I want everyone to know we’re together. Until then, don’t bother coming to my apartment.” Then he went behind the bar, grabbed his coat, and slipped out of the tavern, leaving me alone.

Chapter Seventeen

Ezra

I waited for CC to show up at my apartment. To say he was sorry, to make up some excuse as to why he didn't mention the Christmas party other than he forgot. To tell me he told his parents about us, only he never came. I sat in my living room with no lights on except my Christmas tree, all by myself, and he never even bothered to reach out or show up. Why did guys keep hiding me like some sort of dirty secret? He who shall not be named did it, too, and look where that got me? Smacked around and punched in the face until I ended up in the hospital.

CC didn't love me. In fact, he never even said a word to me about how I said those three words to him that night in the hotel room. I kept waiting for that, too. Was I just a hole for him? A way to get off because he thought I was just that easy? Why did I keep letting these men use me? Why had I thought CC was different?

Stupid, needy, clingy Ezra. Always thinking you found the right man when they only want to use you for one thing.

"It's just me, babe," Seth called when I heard the door open.

I had texted me him and asked him to come over. Well, that's not exactly true. I had pretty much demanded he come over because I was lonely and depressed. I was feeling needy, so he had better show up with some support hugs and cookies.

"How much have you had to drink?" he asked, plopping on the floor next to the couch. "Are you capable of holding a conversation with me?"

I blew a raspberry at him. "Yeah, of course." I was probably not.

"Okay, so how many fingers am I holding up?" Seth asked as I squinted at him.

“Listen, officer, can you just take your dick out and give me a show? I’m really into that sort of thing. Oh, do you have handcuffs?” I giggled before I reached for my glass of wine.

Seth slapped my hand. “No, you don’t, babe. You’re going to talk to me before you pass out. I thought you and Mr. NASCAR were happy. You sent me that super adorbs picture and everything. I mean, I’m jealous, and I don’t even believe in love. You two seemed to be having fun at the Tavern today. He even danced with you.” He grabbed the bottle from the table and proceeded to drink out of it.

“Ew, you heathen! I have to drink that, too!” I exclaimed.

Seth snorted. “Are you afraid of cooties or something?”

“No, give it.” I took the bottle when he handed it to me and took a long sip to prove I didn’t care if we shared. “We were adorable, huh?”

Seth turned to look at me. “He’s not hiding you. He’s not ___”

“Don’t you dare say that name,” I hissed, yanking back the bottle of wine before he could take it from me. “You’re very aware that Brooks Racing is having a Christmas party that CC failed to invite me to. Acted all surprised like he forgot. Pffft, whatever. Like he didn’t know I would want to go to a Christmas party with him. Liar, liar, pants on fire. He knows Christmas is literally my jam.”

Seth’s brows dipped. “Did you stop and think maybe the man actually forgot about it? He’s had a lot going on. You dropped back into his life like a cat wrapped in tinsel, his boyfriend dumped him, you start dating and fucking, he takes you to that banquet thing, he almost lost his ride. I mean, babe, he’s had a lot going on.”

“You’re making more sense than I want you to right now. You know that, right?” I muttered, handing over the wine. “Why, though?”

Seth nudged my knee with his free hand. “Because I’m the other best friend in your life.”

“I hate you.”

“Correction, you fucking love me.”

I grunted. “Doubtful.”

“If you’re going to be a little shit, I’m not going to share the snacks I brought,” Seth teased as he stood up. “Stay.”

I scoffed. “I’m not a dog, Seth.”

But I listened because if he brought snacks, that meant one thing and one thing only. I dragged my feet up onto the couch and rested my chin against my knees.

“If you brought cookies, I want at least two!” I shouted as he disappeared into the kitchen.

I heard the rustle of the plastic container and grinned happily. God, those little cookies with frosting and sprinkles on top were so good. The backbone of our nation right there. Why was it taking so long, though? I mean, open them up, grab a plate, slap them on and walk back in here.

“Seth, do you need help?”

“Yeah, no, Seth doesn’t need any help.” CC’s voice was thick with jealousy. When my head popped up, he leaned against the doorframe. “Sorry, am I interrupting?”

I stared at him like he wasn’t real. Like he was a mirage that I had made up in my mind. Why did he look so good? It was just a doorway, but, man, if it didn’t make my cock stand up at attention.

“No, of course not. I just thought, maybe... I don’t know.”

“You thought you’d just get drunk with another camboy?”

“That’s not fair, Carson.”

He growled. “Then tell me what you thought, Ezra, because it looks like you’re having a casual date in with Seth.”

“It’s not, you know what? Go home.” I dropped my feet onto the floor and stood up. “Don’t ruin my good time by coming in here, and—wait. What are you doing?” I gasped when he pushed me back against the couch and pressed his big, hard body over mine.

“I’m claiming what’s mine, princess, that’s what I’m doing,” CC hissed. “Do you really want me to go home?”

Christmas lights glittered in his dark eyes. “No.”

“What do you want, then?” CC dragged his nose over my cheek, down my jaw, and against my neck.

I shivered beneath him. “I want you inside of me, Carson.” The low groan he released had my already eager cock growing harder. “Fuck me, baby. Fill me with that big, hard cock, and make me scream your name.”

“You smell good enough to eat, princess. Like a piece of candy that I could just suck on until it dissolves in my mouth.” CC’s hands slid up under my shirt and over my hips. “Why do you have to tease me, push me away, just to make me want you so much more?”

I shook my head. “I don’t, CC. No, that’s not what I’m doing.” I gripped his head in my hands. “Baby, I love you. I would never want you to think that.”

He pressed his lips against mine, hot and heavy, then his tongue slipped between the seams. His hands were everywhere now. My belly, my chest, yanking at my pants, trying to get them down my legs. This version of CC was different, but I liked it.

“You’re so beautiful, Ezra.”

“Wait, Seth is—”

“I told Seth to go home. He said he’d call you tomorrow.”

I pushed at CC’s chest. “You had no right to do that.” I stared at him in the dark. Watched the way the Christmas lights bounced off his face, lit up his eyes, and the way he watched me with such intensity that I started to squirm beneath him. “He brought cookies.”

“Really, cookies? I thought you wanted my dick, Ezra.” He brushed his lips over mine. “But I can have him come back, and you can eat your cookies instead.”

When CC started to get up, I grabbed the front of his shirt. “Don’t you dare.”

“Better.” He arched his hips against mine. “Say it.”

“What am I saying?” I dragged my thumb over his fat bottom lip.

CC pulled me up into a sitting position and yanked my shirt over my hand. “Say you want my dick.”

Someone was pretty eager tonight. Not the shy, nervous man I was with before. I smirked at him as I used my index finger to have him come closer. When CC was inches from my face, I moved so my lips were right up against his.

“I want your dick, baby. Inside of me, stretching me, wrecking me like only you can.”

“Filthy.” CC planted a kiss against my mouth. “Dirty.” My jaw. “Mouth.” On my Adam’s apple and then he was removing my pants along with my underwear and dragging his tongue down the length of my cock.

“Carson.” My hips bucked up before he pinned them down with his firm hands. “Touch me, fuck me. God, I need you so bad.”

I didn’t care that he forgot about some stupid party. That he hadn’t told his parents about us or that he’d sent my friend home. I wanted, needed, and craved my best friend so desperately right now.

He didn’t listen. In fact, CC continued to tease me. He dragged his warm tongue over my length, down my balls, and lifted my legs to get to my taint. He licked the precum from that tip of my dick, pushed my thighs apart to suck little wet hickies into my skin, but not once did he wrap those perfect lips around me.

“Please, Carson, stop teasing me.”

“I’m getting there, Ezra. Give me time.”

I yanked so hard on his hair I thought I might pull it out. “No, I don’t want to give it time. I want your fucking mouth around my cock. Now, not later.”

“Whatever Princess wants,” CC cooed before his lips wrapped around my head.

He hummed softly, taking me inch by inch until his nose was pressed against my groin. He pulled all the way off, then sucked the taut length back in again. My eyes rolled back into my head. I felt his tongue curl around my dick as he bobbed up and down while he rolled my balls between his fingers.

I was lost in a lust-filled haze. I wanted to come, but I didn't want this moment to end.

"Baby, your mouth, you're so good. Don't stop. Suck me harder. That's it. Right there. Fuck, yes."

Electricity shot up my spine, and my toes curled. CC's mouth was a magical cavern full of heat and suction that I never wanted to leave. I wanted it to go on forever.

"God, I love you so much." I didn't care anymore if he didn't feel the same way, if CC never said it back to me. I wanted him to know how I felt.

"Ezra, I want to fuck you." CC pulled off me. "Okay?"

I nodded. "Yes, of course."

He moved up to brush his lips over mine. "Don't move." Then he was gone, and the light came on in my room. I knew he was getting the lube. I started to get up onto my knees, getting ready for what was to come.

"I said don't move." CC spun me back around and pushed me onto my back. He had removed his clothes in the time he had gone to my room and come back. "I want you like this."

I swallowed nervously. "Are you sure? It might be better if I'm on my knees."

"No, like this. I want to see your beautiful face, Ez," he murmured, and his lips found mine again. Soft, gentle kisses consumed me before he nipped at my bottom lip. "Hold your legs for me."

I grabbed my thighs and raised them up. "CC, I really think it would be better if I'm on all fours," I pleaded softly.

"Why?" He squirted the lube onto his fingers. "Who told you that?"

I opened my mouth, but when his finger slipped inside my needy hole, a groan came out instead, and my body began to relax. “You’re so good at this.”

“You’re so ready for me.” CC’s voice was deep and husky. He added a second digit. “So eager.”

I pushed down. “You make me feel good. What’s not to be eager about?”

“Mm, so perfect.” CC dropped a kiss against my left knee and then the other as he worked me open. “Who told you that you needed to be on your knees? Why don’t you like it like this?”

I closed my eyes when a third finger joined the other two. “No... God, yes, more.” I felt my body start to come alive when he brushed over my prostate.

“Open your eyes, Ez. Let me see you,” CC murmured, and when I did, he smiled at me, his eyes sparkling in the Christmas lights. “Ready for me?”

I nodded. “Yeah, baby, I’m ready.”

Chapter Eighteen

Carson

I gripped my cock in my hand and pressed it against Ezra's entrance just as he started to close his eyes.

"Look at me," I hissed as I started to ease myself inside of him.

The heat of him, Christ, he was so tight, and I barely had the tip in.

"Baby, just...just fucking jam it in there," he begged softly.

I gritted my teeth. "I will do no such thing." I slipped in a little farther. "Ezra, I swear to fuck, if you don't keep those gorgeous eyes on me, I won't do this. I will pull my dick out, and you can suck me off instead."

"You wouldn't dare." He gasped, but when I stopped moving, he raised his chin. "Fine, whatever."

I leaned down to grip his jaw between my thumb and forefinger. "Who, princess?"

Mother of all things holy, if I didn't get my cock all the way inside of him, I was going to come before I even got to enjoy this.

"The last guy I dated," Ezra whispered, and his eyes filled with tears. "Just... I don't want to ruin...Carson."

He gasped my name when I slid all the way to the hilt. I grasped his ankles and tugged so he was flat on his back.

I groaned as I pushed into him, not pulling out. "You're so tight, Ez, so fucking perfect. You feel so good wrapped around me."

"Move, please. I need you to move," he begged.

I did as he asked, and the low whine that escaped his throat had me wondering once again why we hadn't done this sooner.

It wasn't like I didn't find Ezra attractive before, it was the whole best friend thing...

I took in the way he looked spread before me in the dim lighting. The way his hard cock bobbed with each thrust of my hips, his hard pink nipples, and how he gripped the arm of the couch behind him with both hands. When I drove into him, Ezra arched up to meet my hips. He wanted this. He wanted me to fuck him, and he wanted it badly.

"You're so perfect," I told him with each thrust of my hips. "You take my cock so well, princess. It's like your ass was made just for me. You should see it."

Ezra's eyes were wild with desire. "When did you start talking like that, baby?"

He dropped his hands down to twist at his nipples with one hand and wrapped the other around his dick. I watched as he began to jerk himself in time with my thrusts.

"Guess you've taught me a few things."

"You should kiss me with that sexy mouth."

I smiled as I leaned forward to do just that, his hand moving into my hair. "You like me fucking you, filling that tight ass?"

"Yes, Carson, I love it. I love having your big cock inside of me," Ezra whispered.

I dragged my teeth down his jaw and over his throat.

"Me, too, princess," I murmured as we moved together, not wanting this to ever end.

Sweat broke out over my body, and I struggled to hold on. My climax threatened to spill over, but I wanted Ezra to come first. I gritted my teeth as I pistoned harder, deeper, faster, and I let go of his ankles to grip his waist with my hands.

"Oh, shit." His lids fluttered. "Please, please, Carson. I want..."

"Come for me, Ez, come on my cock," I told him.

Ezra's mouth fell open, and he came in thick spurts. His eyes rolled back as he called out my name. I watched as it landed against his chest, belly, and on me before I dragged my finger over his stomach to bring it up to his lips.

“Open for me.”

He didn't hesitate, eagerly sucking his cum from my digits.

“Good boy.” I grinned before I came in a shuddering cry, filling him, then collapsed against Ezra, trying to catch my breath.

I stayed there for a moment as I gathered myself together until I realized I was probably crushing my best friend. I immediately sat up and saw the blissed-out, happy look on his face. He smiled at me, raising his hand to drag the tips of his fingers over my cheek as my dick softened and slipped out of him.

“Hi,” Ezra murmured, his lids heavy.

I chuckled softly. “Hi.” I grabbed his hand and pressed a kiss to his palm. “We should wash up.”

“Yeah, we should.” He nodded in agreement. “That was... that was so hot.”

I felt a flush break out over my skin. “Which part?”

“All of it.” Ezra dragged his hands through my damp hair. “I liked when you fed me my own cum, though. When you called me a good boy.”

I glanced up to find his eyes shut as my heart thumped loudly against my chest. “Always happy to help.” I wrapped my arms around Ezra's waist and lifted him up into my arms without a protest. I carried him into the bathroom, where I placed him on the counter.

“Careful, princess,” I warned as he started to lean to the side. “Don't need you falling over and hurting yourself.”

“What?” He blinked at me. “How'd I get in here?”

I chuckled. “You're out of it.”

“I had a lot of wine before you showed up, baby. Don’t judge.” He gave me an easy smile as watched me dip the washcloth under the water. “You’re so good to me.”

“I wasn’t earlier today,” I commented as I carefully wiped off his stomach and chest.

Ezra shrugged his shoulders. “Well, I shouldn’t have gotten mad at you. It’s just a dumb party.”

“Is it, though?” I helped him to his feet so I could wipe up his backside and noticed his cock growing thick between his legs again. “Look at you, all eager and ready for me again.”

Ezra ducked his head. “You make me feel good, Carson.”

I tipped his head up. “I told my parents about us.”

His dark eyes grew wide.

“Come with me.” I laced our hands together to bring him into the bedroom. “I’ll go grab your pajamas.” I ducked into the living room, grabbed his clothes, and turned off the Christmas tree, only to find Ezra lying face down on the bed. “Up you go, princess.”

He moaned when I turned him over. “I’m too drunk for this. My head hurts. Let me sleep naked.”

“Tempting,” I teased. I sat him up and helped get his shirt on, only to realize he was wearing my Brooks Racing shirt again. “Are you like obsessed with me or something?”

Ezra dropped his head against my chest. “Or something.”

“My parents are happy,” I whispered. “My mom figured it out already with Thanksgiving and all, but my dad said he thought something was going on. They love you, Ez. You’re already part of the family, so they thought it was the next step.”

He turned his face. “Next step.”

“Yeah, for us to be together. To date, to fall in love, get married. All that.”

“You...you want to get married?”

I reached for my shirt on the floor. “Don’t you?”

“I’ve never thought about it before. Maybe? Yes? I don’t know.” Ezra shook his head as I helped him under the covers so I could pull him flush against me. “I just know that being with you makes me happy. You make me feel special, and that’s all I want.”

I buried my nose in his hair. “You are special.”

The soft snore he released had me chuckling softly. Did I love Ezra? I thought so. I wasn’t sure I was ready to tell him yet, even though he had already told me numerous times. I just knew I wanted to be with him and no one else.

A week later, Ezra was so excited about flying to North Carolina for the Christmas party. He was practically bouncing off the walls of the airplane. I let him have the window seat again so he could see everything. It wasn’t like he hadn’t been before, but we hadn’t gone together. The few races he had come to in the past, he’d flown down with my parents, stayed in a hotel, because at the time I was living in a one-bedroom apartment, and then flown home again. Not this time. Now I had my fancy townhouse that I couldn’t wait for Ezra to see. To share it with me.

We had a meeting at Brooks Racing first about the graphics. Seth had done some updated art, and we were supposed to swing by on the way to my place to talk with Watts and Killian. I wasn’t sure why I was nervous. They seemed to love it.

Honestly, I should have pushed this meeting back. All I wanted to do was get my boyfriend to my place, shove him down on my bed, and slide inside of him. I couldn’t get enough of Ezra. He was all I could think about lately. His perfect body, the way he felt in my hands. How he came undone and milked my cock. Fuck, now I was hard again.

“Are you even listening to me right now, CC?” Ezra exclaimed.

Uh, nope. “I’m sorry, what?” I blushed when I met his gaze.

“Rude, but I’ll let it slide this time.” Ezra pouted before he reached over to lace his fingers through mine just as the door opened and my bosses walked in. I noticed the way he perked up, fluffed his hair a bit, and batted his lashes. Yeah, that shit was going to stop. Ezra was mine, and Killian was not going to dump Matthias for him. Like ever, no matter how hard he tried.

“Sorry about that.” Watts smiled as he dropped into the chair across from me. “How was your flight?”

Killian grinned at Ezra as he sat down. “Looks like it’s just us.”

Oh, sweet baby Jesus. He was going to regret that, because if he wasn’t careful, he was going to end up with a lapful of my best friend. Wait, boyfriend.

“Exhausting.” I hooked a thumb at Ezra. “He never stops talking.”

My best friend gasped. “I beg your pardon!” He blinked at me. “I’m sorry, but you just sat there, and I had to fill in the gaps. You’ve taken that flight a million times. What was I supposed to do, boo, just listen to the screaming children?”

“Okay, okay.” Watts held up a hand. “Wait, I thought you two were together?” His brows dipped.

Killian chuckled. “They are together. Oh, right, you only notice Holt.” He laughed even harder when Watts punched his shoulder.

“Says the Matthias-sexual.”

Killian’s ears burned pink. “Go fuck yourself, Watts.” But he was smiling, so I guessed that was a good sign.

I glanced over at Ezra, who was suddenly beaming at me with the biggest smile. I leaned over to brush my lips over his. And the smile on his face... I was pretty sure it grew even bigger.

“Show them what Seth worked up, princess.” I nudged his arm. “He worked up some good graphics. Better than the last time.”

“Is it serious?” Watts asked. “I mean, it’s none of my business, but what if you break up? I know his friend is working on the graphics.”

“That’s rude,” Ezra muttered under his breath, and when he met Watts’s glare, he shrugged. “Well, it is, isn’t it? CC and I have been friends for so long that nothing could break us apart. Seth doesn’t have to do this, you know. He’s *my* friend. CC is the best. You accepted, and this relationship is rock fucking solid. Honestly, it’s none of your damn business.”

Warmth fluttered through my stomach as I listened to Ezra stick up for us. He was a little shit, but he was my best friend, my boyfriend, and he was the best one anyone could ask for. Only when I looked at Watts, I cringed. He looked pissed.

“I like this little dude. I gave him some serious shit at the awards banquet, and he was not having it.” Killian grinned as he leaned back in his chair. “Knock it off.” He smacked at Watts’s chest with his hand. “Hey,” he whispered. “Watts was worried you were still after Holt, so this is good.”

Watts glared at him. “Dude, that was private.”

“Matthias isn’t here to keep me in line.” He snickered.

I sighed. “I am not in love with fucking Holt, okay? I was never in love with him, and I don’t want him. I’m so into Ezra, it’s kind of embarrassing. Can we change the subject to, I don’t know, work stuff?”

“You’re so strong, boo. I love your ass.” Ezra smiled at me. “What? Why are you staring at me like that?”

Killian’s eyes ping-ponged between the two of us. “Holy shit. I see it now.”

“You see what?” Ezra asked, but Killian was smirking at me.

Fuck me sideways. “Please don’t do this,” I begged, but I could tell by the look in his blue eyes he would.

“Watts, man, take a good hard look at Ezra for a second. He’s pretty, right? Looks a lot like—”

“Stop fucking gawking at my boyfriend!” I jumped to my feet. “He’s mine. You’re engaged to Matthias! What is wrong with you?” I wanted to rip him over the table and smack him around.

A big smile spread over Killian’s face as he tapped his ink-covered fingers against the table. “You went after Holt because he reminded you of Ezra.”

“I hate you so much right now.” I seethed.

Watts tilted his head. “Do you two need to step outside for a minute? Have like a duel to the death or something? Kill, are you really flirting with Ezra or just trying to piss Carson off?”

“I need him to stop. Before I say or do something that gets me fired. Ezra is off limits; do you hear me? He’s mine.” I pointed a finger at Killian, who shrugged.

“Fine, whatever, he’s off limits.” But when he winked at my boyfriend, I started toward him.

Ezra sighed softly behind. “God, when you say stuff like that, it just makes me want to burst into a million pieces. I love you so damn much, CC.”

I spun around to slam my mouth over his, not caring that my bosses were in the room. Fucking Killian. He could eat shit and die. Asshole. The next time we had a meeting, Matthias needed to be here to keep him in line. How did he even put up with him? Spoiled rockstar.

“See, he doesn’t want Holt. You can relax,” I heard the Mulligan singer murmur. “I know you tried to set him up with Noel for a reason, but clearly, he was already taken.” He coughed loudly. “If you two are done?”

I pulled myself away from Ezra and sat back down, shooting daggers at Killian. “You did that on purpose.”

“Maybe, but it was all for my friend here. Like I said, he was convinced you were still after his fiancé.” Killian wiggled his brows at me.

Watts grunted. “Carson, it’s nice to see you have some fight in you when you need it. Ezra, can I see the new stuff Seth worked up?” He got up and moved to look over the laptop. “Dude, come check these out.” He motioned for Killian to join him.

I leaned over, and even though I had already seen the mockups, it took my breath away how talented Seth was. The colors, the graphics, everything was perfect. The anchor that Seth had put on the hood of the car, the swirly blue font of the Ocean View Tavern above it and the way it looked like it was written in waves around it. Damn, he was good. He was wasting his talent. He should be doing this full time, but it wasn’t really any of my business.

“Fuck me sideways,” Killian murmured. “This is brilliant. We should have Seth come here. Do you think he’d be interested in flying down? We’ve emailed him, but it would be nice to have to talk to him in person.”

Ezra nodded. “I’m sure he would, but you’d need to talk to him about that.”

Watts moved back to his chair. “Obviously we’re going to use these. Shirts, hats, a fire suit for Carson, and the crew.” He glanced at Killian. “What do you think?”

“Diecasts, stickers, everything,” he added.

A felt a thrill run up my spine. “This is actually going to happen. You want this for my car?”

“Of course, Carson.” Watts’s dark eyes met mine. “Why would you think otherwise?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Pfffft.” Ezra blew a raspberry. “He thought you wanted to fire him. That you only agreed to hire him because you felt bad for him.”

Killian and Watts looked at one another before Watts spoke first. “Why? Because of Holt? Look, I know we give you a hard time about him, but honestly? That’s all on me. I’m sorry if I made you feel like that. H and I, we’re good. I know he loves me. You’re a good guy, man, and I like you.”

“Thank you.” It felt like a million pounds had been lifted from my shoulders.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me. I have to get going before my fiancé comes knocking on this door to take me home and tell me it’s past my bedtime.” Watts pushed his chair back. “Ezra, I hope we’ll see you at the Christmas party on Saturday. You’re part of the Brooks Racing family now. Seth, too, if he can make it down.”

Ezra nodded. “That’s the plan.”

“Great.” Watts clapped his hands together. “See you then.”

Chapter Nineteen

Ezra

I let my gaze travel around the townhouse that CC had just dragged me into. It was massive. He had let me think it was like my apartment. Cozy and small, with an extra bedroom that he shoved all the things he didn't know what to do with inside. Spoiler alert, it was not. We were standing in the living room, my eyes stuck on the oversized television that hung on the wall. I couldn't get over the size of it. It was at least three times as big as mine.

“You haven't said anything, Ez.” CC hadn't stopped touching me since that weird encounter with Killian Hampton. His fingers were laced through mine, and as he waited for me to tell him how much I loved or hated his home, I felt nothing but love seep through his skin into mine.

“It's nice.”

CC huffed. “Nice? My place is nice? That's all you've got for me?”

“It needs some help. I mean, it's gorgeous, but there's no love here, baby.” I smiled at him when his brows dipped. “You need to decorate. Make it look like you live here. Where are the pictures, the throw pillows, some color on the walls? Everything is plain and cream colored.” I stuck out my tongue.

“But you like it? Other than that?” CC pulled me closer to him. “It's somewhere you could see yourself living?”

I rested my chin against his chest. “I mean, sure, if you wanted me to visit.” I hummed softly when he dragged a hand through my hair.

“Or if I wanted you to move in with me?”

“Wait, if you wanted me to what?”

CC smiled at me when I gaped at him. “Move in with me, princess. Move to North Carolina. Move here.” He practically dragged me through the kitchen—equally huge and plain but

with a nice island in the middle—and down a hallway. “Look at this room.” He flipped on a light.

“Uh, it’s empty.” It had a huge bay window and a sliding glass door with its own patio outside. That was pretty fancy.

CC nodded. “It’s yours. If you want it. You can work in here. Sew your clothes, film your videos—because honestly, it’s not fair for me to tell you to stop that if you want to keep doing it—whatever you want. Paint it any color you want. Decorate it, glue shit to the ceiling or floor, I don’t care. Make it yours, Ezra.”

“I thought you hated the camboy thing?”

I let go of his hand to move to the door. It wasn’t a view of the beach, but maybe I could put out some bird feeders. I watched his reflection in the glass before I turned back around.

CC shrugged. “I’m not a fan, but I can’t tell you what to—oof.” He grunted when I threw myself at him to wrap my arms around his waist.

“Yes.” I tried to climb up his thick, broad body like a tree.

CC laughed as he picked me up. “Yeah?” He pressed his warm mouth to mine.

“Yes, I’ll move in with you. But you have to let me help you decorate this god-awful prison. Color, baby, you need so much color, and you need—”

He stopped me with another kiss, this one with more need behind it, his tongue snaking between my lips and curling together with mine.

CC leaned his forehead against mine. “You can do whatever you want, Ezra. I don’t care. As long as you’re here with me.”

“Carson.” I stared into his dark chocolate eyes. “Baby, do you love me? Not in a best friend sort of way, but the way I love you? Like you can’t live without me or you’re going to die? It’s okay if you don’t. I have enough love for both of us.”

But it would still hurt if he didn’t. It would break my heart into a million pieces that I would have to brush into a pan and

shove back together. I would recover like I always did. It was how I survived.

He smiled at me, his eyes crinkling around the corner. “Princess, I—”

A loud knock on the front door cut him off.

“Hold that thought.”

He placed me on my feet, and I trailed behind him as he went to go answer the door. Imagine my surprise when he opened it to find Noel standing there.

“Uh, hey,” CC said. “Everything all right?”

“I need to talk—Again?” He narrowed his eyes at me. “Can you give us a minute?”

I put my hands on my hips. “I live here, too.” Why did he keep coming back into CC’s life?

“Because, of course, you do.” Noel sighed. “Please, Ezra? This is important. I promise I’m not trying to get back together with Carson. It’s personal.”

CC pressed a kiss to my head. “Go check out your room again. Start making plans. I promise that I’ll be in there in a minute.”

I wanted to argue. I wanted to stomp my foot and say no, because I didn’t trust Noel at all. Instead, because I was an adult, I nodded and went back into the room that was going to be turned into mine. I chewed on my lip as I thought about paint. I could make it purple because, duh, it was the best. Hang up some fun, cool pictures. A few of CC and myself. That would be nice, too. Maybe find a purple desk for my laptop in the corner. Would CC want a cat? We should get a cat because they were sweet. Although if I went with him to races, who would take care of it? Could we bring the cat with us? Did other drivers have cats? I would have to ask about that.

“That’s not a good idea, Noel. We’re not together anymore.” CC’s voice was loud as it boomed through the townhouse. “I’m sorry, but no.”

“Keep your voice down,” Noel hissed.

I tiptoed over to the door, because I was a nosy shit like that, and tried to hear what they were saying. I mean, CC was my boyfriend, and this was my place, too. If Noel was upsetting him, I should step in.

“Who are you?”

I nearly jumped out of my skin at the sight of the boy before me. Boy, no, this was a teenager. He towered over my five-foot four frame and was all gangly arms and legs.

“Who am I? Who are you?” I shot back. *Mature, Ezra.*

“Leo.” He tilted his head to look at me with sky-blue eyes as he dragged a hand through his dark hair. He had one earbud in and the other hanging around his neck as music blasted from them. “Do you live here with Carson? Are you his boyfriend or something?”

I folded my arms over his chest. “Didn’t your parents ever tell you that you shouldn’t talk to strangers?”

“I’m not a baby. Besides, my brother used to date Carson until Noel dumped him. He’s so dumb for doing that. Carson’s cool. Said we could hang out, but I don’t think he likes me anymore. Are you wearing makeup? How do you get your liner like that? Could you show me?”

I took in his raven-colored hair, his sharp cheekbones. Leo was Noel’s brother? “How old are you?”

“How old are you?” he asked, then stepped into the space. “Why is this room empty? Are you going to paint it? It would look really cool if you made it like pink or orange or something rad like that.”

I chuckled softly. “I’m twenty-four.” I watched as Leo moved to the window.

“I’m fifteen.” Leo kept his eyes locked on the window. “Do you paint your nails? I painted mine once, but the kids at school made fun of me, so I took the polish off. Do you—” He turned around to look at me. “Do you think it’s okay for boys

to wear makeup? I guess you must. I have some at home, but since the nail polish fiasco, I haven't tried to wear it."

Oh, my heart. "I love wearing makeup. You know..." I smiled at him. "Kids can be really mean because they want to have the courage to be themselves, like you were by wearing nail polish. I was always myself when I was your age."

"I hate the kids at my school. Well, most of them."

"You must have at least one friend."

Leo wrinkled his nose. "Not really." The sadness in his sky-blue eyes broke my heart.

"I could be your friend." What was I doing? Noel hated me, and I was telling his kid brother that I would be his friend? This wasn't going to end well.

Leo's eyes lit up like the sun. "Really? Are you sure? You're like so pretty, and I'm sure you're way cooler than I am. I mean, duh, you're here with Carson and..." He stopped. "I don't even know your name."

"Ezra." I held out my hand and was surprised when he shook it.

He stared at my nails and gave me a shy smile. "You're way better at the polish thing, too. Red is far out. I did black."

"Black is good. I could help you with that, too," I told him.

Leo shrugged. "If you want. I mean, I don't know if NASCAR drivers wear makeup or nail polish."

Drivers? Wait a minute, when he said the kids made fun of him, was he talking about Noel? Oh no, no, no. "Are you going to be a NASCAR driver like your brother?"

"Yep." He popped the p happily. "I'm racing ARCA now, but once I turn eighteen, I can race in Xfinity. I know I could race trucks, but I've already had inquiries about it, so I'll probably skip that all together."

I wondered where their parents were in all of this. Not going there right now.

“Here.” I plopped down on the floor. “Join me.” I patted the carpet by my side and was surprised when he did. I slipped my phone from my pocket. “I have some great YouTube videos that I started following when I wanted to learn makeup tips.”

“Really?” He leaned his head on my shoulder like we were old friends. He was really sweet for a teenage boy.

I nodded. “I can text them to you if you want.”

“That would be really awesome,” Leo murmured. “Uh, I have another question.” He lifted his head to look at me with round eyes as he chewed on his lip.

“Let’s go, Leo.” Noel’s voice caused me to jump, and the scowl on his face had me biting back a nasty remark. Like, who the hell do you think you are telling your brother he can’t wear makeup or nail polish? But maybe it wasn’t him. It could be the kids at school, like he said.

“Noel, I just need—”

“Now,” Noel snapped.

Leo scrambled to his feet to follow behind his brother.

I nearly tripped over myself to try to stop Noel. “Wait.” He turned to look at me with exhaustion written all over his face. “Can I talk to you?”

“It’s not a good time, Ezra.” Noel dragged a hand through his dark hair, his multi-colored eyes mixed with exhaustion.

I nodded. “Right, sure, but Leo seems like a good kid.” I heard the sound of CC’s laughter fill the air. “Do you think that maybe I could take him out sometime? Like shopping or whatever?”

I watched Noel’s forehead wrinkled. “You want to take my kid brother out shopping?”

“He had questions.”

“I’m more than aware of his questions.”

“Right, but can you answer them? Do you wear makeup or dress like I do? Do you like nail polish or skirts or any of those

things? Noel”—I took a step toward him —“he told me the kids at school made fun of him for wearing nail polish. Did Leo tell you about that?” I dropped my chin as I leaned closer.

Surprise etched out over Noel’s features. “He never mentioned that. I just, I just thought it was because he was trying to figure himself out, you know, like we did when we were teenagers.” He let out a long sigh. “Don’t you hate me?”

“That’s impossible. I don’t even know you.”

His eyes sparkled with laughter, but he held it back, and I took in his pale blue and green eyes. How unique that was.

“You can say no, but I’d like to help. Both of you.”

Noel worried his lip between his teeth. “Why?”

“Why what?” I put my hands on my hips.

“Why do you want to help me?”

“Because I was that kid, Noel. The kid who was made fun of, but I had CC to help me. To stand up for me. I obviously can’t go to school with Leo, but I can teach him how to be tougher. To grow a thicker skin. How to be himself.”

Noel sighed. “He only goes to school in the off season. Most of the time, he’s with me when we’re racing and does online courses. I don’t even know how they could make fun of him.”

“You’d be surprised,” I murmured. I didn’t want to bring up social media or texting, but I’m sure Noel was aware of that. Again, I wondered about their parents, but that wasn’t any of my business.

“Please, Noel?” Leo whispered as he appeared behind his brother. “I know you don’t want me to be different. Mom and Dad didn’t even want me, but—”

Noel cut him off. “That’s not true. I want you to be yourself. Mom and Dad just... They fucked up. They loved you as much as I do.”

“Please, can Ezra take me shopping? Just once, that’s it. I won’t bother him or you again after that.”

I felt CC's warmth against my back as he came to stand behind me. "You could come with us. If you're worried about him hanging out with a stranger."

"I'm not... that's not it." Noel looked conflicted. "Okay, yeah, sure."

Leo let out a yell of happiness before he went to hug his brother, who returned it rather stiffly. "Thank you! You're the best brother ever." Then he turned to look at me before he engulfed me in a bone-crushing hug that had my ribs reminding me that I wasn't completely healed.

"Can I get your number?"

I liked this kid, and maybe I kind of liked Noel, too. "Of course."

Once we had exchanged numbers and said goodbye, I found CC watching me with a wide smile on his face. "You're fucking amazing."

"Go on." I waved a hand and giggled when he pulled me against him. "He needs a little help, baby. What else was I supposed to do?"

CC tipped my head up. "A lesser person might not have been so kind. He's my ex's kid brother. Ez, you're so perfect. I don't deserve you."

"Lies. You totally deserve me." I eased up onto my toes. "Tomorrow, we're decorating this place for Christmas."

CC brushed his lips over mine. "What about tonight?"

"Tonight? Oh, tonight, you're going to have your way with me on every single surface in this house."

Chapter Twenty

Carson

“Baby, wake up.” Ezra’s voice was a low whisper in my ear.

I was exhausted. My boyfriend had worn me out last night. When he said he wanted me to take him on every surface in the townhouse, I didn’t think he meant literally. He had, in fact, meant literally.

“Carson,” he cooed softly. “I need you.”

I felt warm, wet lips wrap around my cock. I wasn’t sure I would be able to come again. I think he’d sucked me dry for the next week. I had never been with a man like him before. He was insatiable.

My hips arched up without me even thinking about it. “Jesus, Ez, wasn’t last night enough?”

“I don’t think I’ll ever get enough of you.” His eyes flashed with heat when I pulled up the covers to look down at him. He had a sleepy look to him, but the desire that coursed through my veins made me happy I had showered last night.

I grabbed him under his armpits. “Get up here,” I demanded, then rolled and pinned him beneath me. “What do you need?”

“You, your cock, your mouth, everything.” He leaned up to bring his lips to mine.

I smiled against his mouth. “Mm, are you my little cock slut?”

“Who taught you to talk with that dirty mouth?” Ezra groaned as he rutted against me.

I growled and grasped his hips in my hands. “You didn’t answer me.”

“I’m your little cock slut.” Ezra’s eyes were so dark they were nearly black.

I shoved my tongue between his lips and groaned when he sucked hard on it. I was serious when I said I couldn't do this again, but if Ezra needed to come, I would help my man out.

"I got you, princess," I murmured.

"Need you so bad, CC." He trembled beneath me as I slipped my hand between us. "Oh, please, yes, uffh." He dug his nails into my back as he babbled out nonsense.

I slowly began to jerk him in a slow, lazy motion. "You're so needy, boo. What's gotten into you?" I dragged my tongue over his Adam's apple. "Is it being here in my bed? The thought of moving in with me?"

"I don't—Carson, please," Ezra whimpered into my ear.

I chuckled against his skin and tightened my grip around his length. "So beautiful and sexy." I moved down to his collarbone. "You smell so good. You're all mine, aren't you?" I sucked little marks into the skin in the shape of a heart around his own. I looked up into his blissed-out face.

"Carson." He moaned my name as he fucked my fist. "More, please. I need more."

I pumped his cock faster with my fist as I brought my face up to his, my lips against his again. I loved him. I loved Ezra so much it hurt inside. I wanted to tell him, but I needed it to be special. Not like this. The thought of being without him made me want to rip the world to pieces. I never wanted someone to hurt him again. I would always be there to protect him, no matter what.

"You...fuck." Ezra groaned as he burst apart over my fingers and down my hand in a hot rush of sticky seed. He reached up to yank on my hair so that our mouths fused together, until every last drop was milked from inside of him. "Give it." He reached down for my hand and brought it up to his lips before I could stop him.

"That's mine." I grunted before I moved to lick the cum from my fingers at the same time.

Ezra whimpered softly. "That's so hot, CC."

“Are you...are you getting hard again?” I laughed before I wiped my hand on the blanket. That was a problem for later. I flopped onto my back. “You’re like the Energizer bunny.”

Ezra nuzzled into my neck. “Mm, and you’re like this big sexy-as-fuck man I can’t get enough of.” He nipped at my shoulder.

“I need a minute.”

“I have to get up, anyway. We have Christmas decorations to purchase. Then Noel’s bringing Leo over.”

I laughed as Ezra bounced out of the bed, naked and smiling. He turned to look at me over his shoulder, his cute little bubble butt giving me one of the best views. “Care to join me in the shower, Mr. Carey?”

“You go ahead. I’ll meet you in a minute,” I told him, only to hear his little giggle as he left the room and then I couldn’t get to him fast enough.

I stared at the mess of bags and boxes that Ezra insisted we needed for my apartment. I mean, we weren’t even going to be here for Christmas. We were going to go to the party, then head home and spend the holidays with my parents. But I couldn’t say no to him.

“This is going to be so fun.” Ezra bounced on his feet as he started to open a bag full of garlands. “What? Why are you looking at me like that?”

I smiled. “I’m not looking at you like anything.”

“No, you’re looking at me like something, but I can’t figure it out. Is this too much, boo? It is, isn’t it? You could have said no.” He twisted his lips to the right. “I’m a lot to handle, I know, but you know how much I love Christmas.”

“I like to see you happy, Ez. So if this makes you happy? That’s all that matters.”

“You make me happy.”

I grabbed some of the garland and then listened to Ezra laugh when I wrapped it around his waist to pull him against me. “You make me happy, too.”

“I mean, I can tone it down if it’s too much.” He gave me those big doe eyes, and I shook my head. “I can.”

“Ez.” I dropped the garland so I could use my arms. “Don’t you ever try to be someone you’re not. Not for me or for anyone else. Haven’t I always loved you the way you are?”

He paused. “Yes, yes, you have.”

“Then why would I want you to change who you are?” I brushed my lips over his forehead just as the sound of his phone went off. “Okay, it’s really weird that my ex is going to come over. Is that not weird for you?”

Ezra shrugged. “I guess, I mean, he’s not coming over to be with you. He’s coming over because of Leo.”

I watched as he typed something on his phone and then winked at me. “What’s happening? Are you going to be friends with Noel, too?”

“Maybe.” Ezra moved to start opening bags of more decorations.

“This is like an episode of the *Twilight Zone*. You’re going to run off with him.” Ezra’s head popped up, and he stared at me with wide eyes. “You’ll fall in love, leave me for Noel, and I’ll be stuck with my hand.”

Ezra shook his head. “CC, no. That’s not what this is. I love you. Stop that shit.” He tossed a felt ornament at me that bounced off my chest and onto the floor, which had him giggling hysterically.

“Then what’s going on?” I worried my lip between my teeth.

He smiled at me. “I thought maybe he and Seth could, I don’t know, meet.”

“Seth?” My brows shot up.

“What’s wrong with Seth? He’s a nice guy. He might be able to bring Noel out of his shell a little.” Ezra put a hand on his hip. “You don’t like him because you thought we were a *thing*.” He used quotes around the last part. “Which we weren’t, by the way. Like ever. I have a thing for hot blonds with dark eyes who drive fast cars.”

I snorted. “Don’t try to romance me, boo.”

“Is it working? We have time for a quickie.”

“My dick is going to fall off if you touch it again.”

Ezra giggled again, and the sound made my heart thump so loud I thought everyone in the complex could hear it. “You need to learn how to keep up with me, baby.”

“I think it’s next to impossible.” I rolled my eyes. “Back to this Seth and Noel thing.”

He shook his head. “No, no, wait. I have a big sexual appetite, CC. How am I going to get off if my boyfriend doesn’t want me?”

“I never said I didn’t want you.” I let my eyes travel over his body. The slim fit jeans that hugged his hips and thighs, the dark long-sleeved shirt that exposed a bit of skin just below his collarbone. “You do it for me, Ez, really fucking do it for me. I just need a little time in-between to recuperate.”

Ezra’s plump lips broke out into a big smile. “I do it for you, huh?” He moved to get closer to me, sliding his hands up my chest so he could link them behind my neck. “Like you want to kiss me?”

“Yes.” I leaned down to do just that, lightly pressing my mouth over his.

“Or maybe you want to wrap your big, strong, thick arms around me?” he murmured.

I chuckled. “Yes, princess, I want to do that, too.” I tugged him against me.

“You want to stick that big, thick cock inside me?”

I growled. “Ezra, what did I just say about recuperating?”

But now that he'd mentioned it, my dick *was* thickening inside my jeans.

"Doesn't mean you don't want to do it, though, right?" He leaned his chin onto my chest and gazed up at me with dark, heated eyes.

I pushed the hair off his forehead. "You know I do."

When he let out that little giggle, it took all I had not to lift him up and take him to my bedroom. Correction, *our* bedroom.

"You make me so happy," Ezra whispered as he played with the hairs on the nape of my neck. "It scares me how happy I am right now."

I saw the look in his eyes before it disappeared. "You have nothing to be scared of," I assured him. "I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to take care of you. We're together."

Ezra nodded. "I know."

"Hey." I tipped his head up. "What aren't you saying? Does this have something to do with what happened to you?"

He started to open his mouth, but then there was a knock at the door. He quickly untangled himself from my arms to go answer it before I could get an answer from him. Ezra squealed happily when he threw open the door to find Leo and Noel standing there, ushering them inside.

"I'm so glad you're here. Come on, come on, we were just setting up the tree." He flashed me a big smile as he took their coats.

"Sorry about this," Noel muttered as Leo trailed behind my boyfriend like a happy puppy.

I tilted my head. "For what? Ez being, like, the nicest person on the planet?"

"I wanted to hate him. I tried, too, but he really is nice," Noel admitted, and when I laughed, he cracked a smile. "Look, about Thanksgiving and just showing up... I'm sorry."

“Don’t apologize. We weren’t endgame. We had fun, but I...” I watched as Ezra came back into the living room with Leo, chatting a mile a minute. They looked like they had known one another for years.

Noel nudged my arm. “You love him. I saw it that day I showed up, and you were on the couch together. He’s fucking great.”

“Yeah, he’s fucking great,” I agreed.

Chapter Twenty-One

Ezra

Leo sat on the bathroom counter and kicked his feet happily against the drawer below him as he watched me. We had gone shopping earlier to find the perfect makeup, the nail polish he already had, and I let him pick out a few things of mine to wear. He beamed happily at me when I tipped his face up to get a better angle to start applying the concealer.

“Your cheekbones are amazing. It’s kind of unfair,” I murmured. “Also, your skin? I would have killed to have skin this smooth at your age.”

His blue eyes sparkled as I took a step back. “You’re just saying that.”

“I am not.” I scoffed and turned his head to get a better angle. “You hardly even need makeup. You could get away with eyeliner and mascara. Something to make these eyes of yours pop. You lucked out, kiddo.”

Leo blushed. “Really? I mean, you think boys will like me?”

Ah, there it was. “You like boys?” I asked casually as I smiled at him. “I mean, you don’t have to put a label on yourself, but I knew I was gay when I was around your age.”

“I had a girlfriend last year.” Leo chewed on his lip, and I was thankful he hadn’t pushed the lipstick thing. “She was, I don’t know, nice and all, but didn’t really do it for me. I mean, she liked dressing me up in her clothes.”

My brows shot up. “How did that make you feel?” I dug around in the makeup bag we purchased to find the blush before I decided he didn’t need it. I grabbed the eyeliner instead.

“Uh, pretty?” A pink flush appeared over his neck. “I think that’s when I realized I wasn’t straight.”

I giggled softly. “Pretty, huh? Did you tell her that? Open your eyes real wide for me.”

“No,” Leo murmured as he let me slide the eyeliner around his right eye. “I think she was into the whole dating a driver thing. There are a lot of those girls around here.” He blinked when I took a step back. “Thank you, by the way.”

I smiled. “For?”

“All of this, taking me out and helping me.”

“You’re more than welcome.”

Leo looked like he wanted to say more, but when he didn’t, I took the chance to work the liner around his left eye.

“I’m going to mess this up when I do it myself,” he finally muttered.

“It takes time. I gave you those tutorials. They’ll help,” I assured him.

He sighed softly. “Yeah.”

“Hey.” I patted his shoulder. “I didn’t learn overnight. Looking this good takes practice,” I teased, and when he broke out into a smile before he giggled, I felt better. “You can call or text me any time.”

He kicked his feet again, which I hoped meant he wasn’t worried. “Thanks, but I know you’ll be busy.”

“Yeah, but you’re forgetting I’ll be with Carson, so we’ll be near one another.” I pointed the liner at him. Leo looked like I told him he just won the lottery. “This is the worst part.” I grabbed the mascara and was more than surprised at how easily he let me apply it. “You’re beautiful.”

He ducked his head. “Not as beautiful as you. Besides, I’m sure Andy won’t even notice me.”

“I’m sorry, who?” I gasped in mocked horror. “Who is this Andy person you failed to mention to me until just this moment?”

Leo turned about fifty shades of red. “No one,” he mumbled.

“Lies, lies, lies!” I dropped my hands to his sides and began to tickle him. “Tell me all the juicy details. I need to know. How cute is he? What does he look like? Do you talk to him?”

Leo laughed until he was wheezing. “Stop...can’t breathe.” He grabbed at his stomach. He leaned back against the wall, and I realized I would have to fix his makeup a bit. I tapped my finger against my chin, waiting for him to talk. “He’s just a kid in school.”

“And? There has to be more if you want him to notice you.” I pushed for more. “I need to fix your liner. Sorry, that’s all on me.”

He sighed dramatically. “He’s the son of Maverick and Jackson Olson.” My expression must have said something I didn’t because he dropped his chin down. “I’m so fucked. Sorry.”

“For swearing? I don’t care. You’re not my kid or my brother. You just didn’t learn that from me.” I grabbed some makeup remover to help with the liner before I started over. “He’s cute?”

“The cutest. He’s so tall, has these amazing hazel eyes and dark blond hair. God, he’s so hot.”

I smiled at the look on his face. “Does he talk to you? Is he one of those kids who makes fun of you?”

“Oh, no. Not at all.” Leo leaned closer to me as I started to fix his makeup. “He was the reason I wore nail polish. Because he did it first. Someone made fun of him, and he punched them. His dad had to come pick him up from school. He was furious.”

Someone had a big crush. “Which dad?” I asked as I reapplied the liner.

“Maverick. He came in screaming and yelling about how his son should be able to wear whatever he wanted without kids making fun of him. He said if Andy got suspended for sticking up for himself, he would pull him out and homeschool him. Not to mention, he would rant about it on social media,

because did they not know who he was?" Leo gave me a shy smile. "It was kind of cool."

I chuckled softly. "I bet it was. Imagine having a dad who loves you like that." I wouldn't know.

"It must be awesome," Leo whispered, and his eyes welled up.

"Hey." I grabbed him in a hug. "You have Noel. He loves you. And I kind of like you little," I teased. I didn't know about their parents, nor was I about to ask. I had my own shitstorm of family problems to deal with.

He sniffed. "Yeah."

"You two doing okay in—What happened?" Noel asked.

Leo pulled away. "Nothing., We're fine. Just having a moment," he assured his brother as he hopped off the counter. "How do I look? I mean, I have to get dressed, but do you like my makeup? You can say you hate it, Noel. I won't be offended."

"You look beautiful." Noel's eyes softened as he took in his brother.

Leo ducked his head. "You mean that?"

"Of course. Come here. Look, I know I'm a shitty brother, but you're not. You're great, and I'm going to try to be better." Noel looked at me for a second before he opened his arms. Leo immediately rushed into them. "*Thank you,*" he mouthed to me, and I nodded. "Now, show me the whole thing. The outfit and everything before we go to this party."

Whoever did the Christmas decorations for the Brooks Racing party did a heck of a job. There were green and red lights everywhere. Plus, all the garlands hung up. I loved it. I craned my neck, trying to get a look at every little thing as I followed behind CC into the shop. I didn't want to miss anything. I had never been to a proper Christmas party before, and I was more than excited about it. The sound of holiday music filtered through my ears, the smell of pine filled the air, and it made

me feel all warm and fuzzy. This was the most wonderful time of the year.

“You are absolutely beaming right now,” CC murmured into my ear as he wrapped his arm around my waist.

I craned my neck, hoping I didn't trip with these heels on. I had almost changed my clothes at the last minute. Thinking that maybe I should wear something a little less flashy. Self-doubt could be a horrible bitch sometimes, and the last thing I wanted was to embarrass CC in front of his friends and coworkers. Make him reconsider me, us, everything we had become over the past couple of weeks. It didn't matter how high my self-esteem was. Sometimes the things people said to you hurt. Sticks and stones, right?

I swallowed nervously. “Do you think I should have worn something else?” I had never been so unsure of myself before. Not until *he* ruined everything and made me rethink how I thought about myself.

“Ez, what's going on? Did someone say something or look at you funny, because you know I'll fix that shit quick. These are my friends.” CC stopped to stare at me with fire in his amber eyes.

I shook my head. “No, I—”

“LD!” Killian exclaimed from across the room, and I felt a blush shoot up my neck and over my ears. I could hear him chuckle loudly as he leaned forward to press his lips to Matthias's mouth. I fought the urge to give him the finger because, duh, he was Killian Hampton. Plus, I was classy. Sometimes.

I gave him a little nod before I moved closer to CC. “Do you think they have a shirt I could put on? Like a Brooks Racing one? I feel like this top is too much.”

“What?” CC growled as he searched my face. “You're not changing. You look fucking perfect. Like my princess.” He dropped my hand and put his arm around me again.

His words did little to comfort me. I swear everyone was staring at me. Like all these eyes just digging into me. Why

was he wearing that? He was a man, after all. Why would he wear that shirt exposing his stomach? It looks like a woman's top—duh, because it is—and was he wearing heels?

“I just...I feel out of place, Carson.” I fingered the chain around my neck.

“You look beautiful.” He stopped and turned to face me. “Did I tell you that tonight? I don't care. I'm saying it again.”

I bit my lip. “Yeah, but I just don't feel like I am.”

Maybe someday I would get over how *he* belittled me when we were out, but tonight was not going to be that night. I felt good when I put on my green and black top, stared at how the pants I wore flattered my waist and hips, but now? Now I wish I had just worn something similar to what CC had on. Plain slacks and a sweater.

“Ezra, what's going on with you? You're never unsure of yourself. Do you want to go home? I'll just say hello to Watts and Holt. Then we can leave. I'll take you back to our place and eat your ass. You like that idea; I can see it in your eyes.” CC dragged his thumb over my bottom lip.

I felt a tug on my other arm before I could answer him. I turned to see Leo smiling at me with big blue eyes. “I'm sorry to bother you, but I need your help. Andy's here,” he whispered, leaning forward, his ears bright pink. “Please, Ezra?”

“Yes, of course.” I wasn't feeling confident with myself tonight, but I felt like I could help Leo somehow. Or, at least, I hoped that I could.

CC pressed a kiss against my forehead. “Go do your thing, boo.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

Ezra

Leo was a bundle of nerves as he dragged me away from CC. His brows were furrowed low, and he chewed on his lip. I remembered my first crush. How scared I was about talking to him. William Bryant, a boy a year ahead of me in high school. Tall, dark, and so handsome. He was on the football team and never spoke a word to me while we were in school, but he certainly taught me how to kiss and gave a mean hand job.

“Where?”

I turned to lean against the wall with him, but before he could point this Andy Olson out, I spotted his father, Maverick, the drummer from Mulligan Downtown. He was hard to miss with his stark white hair and electric green eyes. Standing next to him was a giant man, his husband, Jackson, who I knew was the coach for the Carolina Panthers.

Leo leaned into me. “You see him, right? I mean, he’s not as big as his dad, but he’s tall, too.” He buried his face against my arm. “He’s just so perfect.”

Andy Olson was tall for fifteen. Broad shoulders, dirty blond hair, and cute, for a teenager.

“He’s looking.”

I giggled when Leo buried closer into me. Was this what it would be like if my parents actually let me spend time with my brothers? It made me feel sad at a time that I shouldn’t be.

“Please tell me he’s not.”

“Afraid he is, boo.”

Leo shook his head before he squared his shoulders. “You know, I’ve never even spoken to him before. We have a couple of classes together. He usually sits in the back with the other jocks. But he’s nicer than they are.”

He dropped his gaze to his feet, and I noticed he was wearing sneakers. I guess we’d get to the shoe thing another

time unless he was more comfortable in those. Then he could wear whatever he wanted on his feet.

“Hm, well, you could always go say hello to him. Strike up a conversation. Something like *hi, I think we go to school together or whatever,*” I told him as I caught Andy looking our way again before he turned to say something to Maverick.

Leo kept his gaze on the floor. “No way. He’s way out of my league. We don’t even have anything in common. He’s a music prodigy, *and* he plays hockey. I just drive a car in circles. He’s super smart. I’m a grease monkey. He couldn’t possibly even know I’m alive.”

“You do know that saying opposites attract, right? Have you met me and Carson?” I teased, just as I noticed Andy headed our way. “Don’t look now.”

He had a big smile on his face that was directed right at my new friend.

“Hey, Leo, right? I’m Andy. We go to school together.” That sounded so familiar. He looked generally excited to see Leo, too. His hazel eyes danced with more confidence than I had at his age. “I didn’t know you’d be here. It’s cool to see someone from school here. Wait, your brother is a driver, right?”

Leo stared at him with wide blue eyes before they dropped back down to his feet. “Uh, yeah, he is. I know who you are.” He dragged his toe over the floor. “This is my friend, Ezra.”

I nodded at Andy, whose smile never faltered despite the flash of confusion I saw in his hazel orbs for a brief second. I was obviously in the way here.

“I think CC is looking for me.”

“No.” Leo’s hand came out to grasp at my wrist to keep me from leaving.

Andy leaned down to try to see Leo’s eyes. “You look nice. Did you get your hair cut?” He towered over both of us, his hair styled perfectly.

“What?” Leo looked up, confused, and the blush that swept over his face was adorable as he let go of me. He wasn’t a small kid, but he was compared to Andy.

Andy gave him a bright smile. “I said you look nice. I like your top.”

Thanks, it’s mine, I thought. It was a red sweater with chunky cable textures that I hadn’t worn in a while, and the moment Leo saw it, he wouldn’t stop talking about it. I had to admit, it looked better on him than it did me. This Andy kid was smooth. I wondered which father he got it from. I took a couple of steps back from them.

“You look nice, too. I like your eyes.” Leo twisted his hands together as he stared up at him, and I wondered if he realized what he had blurted out. Probably not if he was still standing there.

Andy chuckled softly. “You want to get something to eat with me? My dads were saying the food is supposed to be really good. I don’t know about you, but I’m starving.”

“Uh.” Leo glanced over at me, and when I nodded, he bit his lip before he looked back at Andy. “Yeah, that sounds nice.”

I watched them walk away with a little flutter in my heart. Young love was cute. I turned around only to come face to face with Maverick Olson, who looked less than thrilled to see me.

“Oh, hey. We haven’t met yet. I’m Ezra Bardot.”

I felt like he was trying to figure out if he should yell at me or murder me. Those eyes, damn, they were mesmerizing.

“What just happened here? Is that your kid with my kid?” Maverick growled, and I swear it vibrated through the entire building. *Down tiger.*

“Uh, no, that’s my friend, Leo. Apparently, he and Andy go to school together.”

I let my gaze move over Maverick’s face. Despite the pissed-off look he currently wore; he was more than just

pretty. He had delicate features, strong cheekbones, and *those eyes*. His white hair was appealing, but those green eyes made it hard for me to look away. I took in his muscled arms beneath the heavy dark sweater, his thick shoulders, and when I met his gaze again, he scowled even harder.

Sorry, boo, it's going to take a lot more than that to intimidate me. I'm rainbows and sunshine.

"I don't like it," Maverick hissed as he watched them. "It's too soon. Andy shouldn't be chasing after boys yet. He's got his entire life ahead of him to do that. What if he—Never mind. I don't want to think about that."

"Well, we were kids once, too," I reminded him and gave him a big smile. It didn't work. His lips didn't even twitch.

Maverick tore his gaze away from his son to stare at me again. "Yeah, and we got into trouble, or at least *I* did, since I don't know you. Andy just figured out he was bisexual. Now he's already—Wait, who are you again?" he asked as he narrowed his green orbs at me. He tilted his head as he looked at me like he was seeing me for the first time. "Are you a driver?"

I smoothed down the front of my blouse. "No, I'm just Ezra. I'm Carson Carey's boyfriend. He's the driver. I'm just the pretty one."

"The pretty one?" Maverick's lips turned down as he looked me over. "Are you trying to be funny?"

I giggled. "Am I not pretty? Sure, I'm not as beautiful as you, Maverick, but I'm sure as hell cute." I watched a flush sneak up his neck and over his face. *Gotcha.*

"Are you flirting with me? You can't *flirt* with me. I'm a married man." He smacked a hand against the center of his chest that showed off two rings. Yeah, he was absolutely a married man with that giant rock.

He was so cute. I wanted to be besties with him. Hug the shyness right out of him. "I'm so not flirting with you. Look how flustered you are right, boo. Relax." I nudged his shoulder

with the palm of my hand, and he turned an even darker shade of red.

“Stop it,” Maverick hissed through clenched teeth as his eyes practically bugged from his head.

I broke into a big smile that I was sure split my face. “Gay, yes, but I’m not flirting. I’m already taken, and did you happen to notice that you and I are both twinkles? You might be beautiful, but you’re not my type. I like big guys. No offense.”

Maverick’s mouth fell open. “I’m not a—”

“Sweetheart, you totally are. We’ve had this conversation before.” Jackson Olson grinned at me as he wrapped an arm around his husband and turned him around, so they were face to face. “I don’t think Ezra was flirting with you.”

I beamed. “Totally not flirting.”

“I just... He said I was beautiful. You’re the only man that’s ever said that about me before, Jax.” Maverick glanced over his shoulder, like he was trying to make sure I was real or not before he spoke again. “I mean, isn’t that flirting?”

Jackson tipped his head up. “Finally! Someone else can see what I’ve been saying all these years. Someone else agrees with me about how damn beautiful you are.” He leaned forward to whisper something in Maverick’s ear, which caused him to giggle and wrap his arms around Jackson’s waist.

“Wait, where’s Andy?” He bounced back, suddenly remembering what had caused this conversation in the first place.

“Mav, sweetheart, Andy’s fine,” Jackson assured him. “He and Leo, who is the brother of Noel McCormick, a driver, are sitting right over there.” He pointed to a couch where the two boys sat with paper plates in their laps, their heads together as they looked at something on one of their phones. “See? Nothing to worry about.”

Maverick turned to look at me. “I’m sorry. I worry a lot about Andy, and you... you didn’t do anything. Ezra, right?” He gave me a shy smile as he held out his hand, and I noticed

his nails were painted black when I took it. “Oh, I love that color,” he commented when he saw that mine were green.

“Thanks.” I preened happily.

I noticed that he was blushing again. I really wanted to be his friend now. I wanted to corrupt him. The things I could teach this man would probably make him wish he’d never met me. Or make his husband thank me later.

“They are cute, though, right?” Jackson asked his husband. “I mean, other than how worried you are, aren’t you a little bit happy that our son has his first crush, and it’s on a boy?” He wrapped his big arms around him as they watched Andy and Leo.

Maverick worried his lip between his teeth. “He’s had a crush on Leo for months.” My brows shot up. “You didn’t hear that from me,” he hissed. “God, I shouldn’t have said that. Andy will be so mad if he finds out.” His shoulders slumped forward.

“I won’t say anything. Scout’s honor,” I assured him. “Leo came to me for help with his makeup.” I wasn’t about to say anything about his crush, though. That was between us girls.

Maverick still looked nervous. “You did that?” When I nodded, he relaxed a little. “It came out great.” He leaned into his husband. “We shouldn’t...we shouldn’t be watching them. This feels wrong.”

“Probably not,” Jackson agreed, and we turned away. “Mavs, we might need to think about Andy wanting to take Leo on an actual date. Which one of us is going to drive, that sort of thing.”

Maverick looked shocked. “Uh, drive? Goose, I’m going with them. He’s not going on a date alone. No fucking way.” He slapped a hand over his mouth before he looked at me again.

“Not my kid, remember? You’ll have to discuss all the details with...” I pulled my phone from my purse as dread filled me. I turned to see CC watching me as he spoke with Noel, a smile pulling at his lips. When he caught me watching

him, he winked at me. “Excuse me for just a second.” I didn’t wait for a reply as I marched over to my boyfriend, my hands shaking with what I was about to do. “A word, CC.”

CC tilted his head. “Right now?” I nodded. “Okay, sure.”

“Outside, where we can talk in private.” I kept my face as calm as possible, but inside, I was screaming. I was going to hate myself for this tomorrow.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Carson

Ezra gripped my hand so tight I thought that he might cut off the circulation. I could tell by his body language that he was upset with me, and I couldn't understand why. Because I was talking to Noel? We were talking about him, how he had helped Leo, and that was it. I might have brought up Ezra mentioning setting him up with Seth just to see his reaction, which wasn't great, but nothing more than that. I didn't want Noel. I was in love with Ezra.

The second we were outside, he dropped my hand and turned to face me with daggers in his eyes.

“What the fuck?” he spat.

“Ez, I don't know what you think you saw, but I was—”

“No, no, you don't get to weasel your way out of this, CC.” He shook his head. “Do you love him?”

I felt like I'd been slapped. “What, of course not!”

“Do you love me?” Ezra asked, folding his arms across his chest. He had to be freezing out here in that shirt. When I didn't answer, I saw the tears well up in his eyes. “Jesus Christ.” He turned away from me.

I didn't want to tell him I loved him in the middle of a fight. “Ez, don't make me do this here.” He spun back around, his dark eyes flashing angrily. “I wanted it to be special, just us and romantic. Not outside my work.”

“Make you do what? Tell me how you feel? Because I've told you that I love you on numerous occasions, yet I have yet to hear you say the same.”

“Fine, I love you.”

Ezra rolled his eyes, and I watched as tears spilled down his cheek. “Fine? *Fine?* Fuck you, Carson.”

“Fuck me? Fuck you.” What was even happening right now? “You wanted to hear it, so I told you. I'm sorry that it

wasn't what you wanted." I did not want to be doing this. Why were we fighting at all? I thought we were good.

His nostrils flared as he stared at me, dark eyes once again glistening with unshed tears. "What I want is for my boyfriend to feel the same way about me. For him to want forever, to love me so much it hurts inside. Not to say 'Fine, I love you' like it was something you just thought of off the top of your head. Do you even—" Ezra closed his eyes and shook his head. "Never mind."

"Do I even what, princess?" I whispered as I heard the door open behind us and Christmas music filtered out into the dark.

"Watts wanted me to see if you were coming inside. He was going to do this big speech." Killian's voice sounded too cheerful. As if he knew he was interrupting a fight. "You two okay?"

I waved a hand at him. "We'll be in a second." I waited for Killian to leave before I glanced back at Ezra again. "Finish what you were going to say."

Ezra choked out a laugh. "Why? So you can tell me it's all in my head? That I'm jealous for nothing? I get it, CC. I know who I am, and I'm fine with it. I've always known that I'm not loveable or boyfriend material." He held up a hand when I started to protest. "I knew that years ago, so jumping into this with you was obviously a mistake."

"You're not breaking up with me," I warned. "I won't let you. We're in love. Best friends love one another for life."

"Sorry, boo, but you don't get to tell me what I can and can't do." Ezra brushed the tears from his face, and I watched as the mascara smeared across his cheek. "I do, though. Love you. God, I love you so much that I want to go back in there and smack Noel for making me feel like this feral idiot right now. Look at my hands." He held them up so I could see how they shook. "He can have you."

I took a step toward him. "No."

“Are we a good idea, Carson? I mean, think about it. I’m just one step away from crashing off the track, and you’re, hell, you’re perfect. What do I even bring to this relationship?” Ezra’s dark eyes pleaded with me to let him go.

I wouldn’t. I could never.

I could hear loud cheering coming from inside the Brooks Racing shop. “You bring everything, boo. Everything I’ve ever needed. The light, the sparkle, the happiness, and the fun. I can’t—no, I won’t—let you walk away from me. Not again.”

“It’s too late.” He reached up to touch my cheek, and I flinched at how cold his palm was against my skin. “You’ll move on. Find some good boy who makes your heart buckle when he’s simply in the room.”

“That’s you, Ez. It’s always been you. God damnit, don’t do this to me.”

“It can’t be me. I’m just a camboy.”

I reached for him, only for Ezra to step back. “You’re not just anything to me. You’re everything,” I whispered.

“Goodbye, CC.”

“Don’t you fucking do this,” I gasped.

“Hey, Carson, I need you,” Killian called out. “Now, man, it’s kind of important.”

The one second I took my eyes off Ezra was all it took for him to move away from me, and when I looked back? He was halfway across the parking lot, his heels in one hand and his purse in the other. I couldn’t go after him now. I had my boss staring right at me.

“Coming,” I told Killian, my heart shattered like dust in my chest.

“What do you mean, he left?” Leo blinked at me like I had spoken a language he didn’t understand. “I...I don’t understand.”

I shifted my weight. “Did you text him?”

I didn't want to make eye contact with his brother, who stood behind him. After Ezra left the night of the Christmas party, two days ago, he tried to talk to me, and I ignored him. Literally. I walked away like he wasn't even there and out of the party without saying goodbye to anyone. Oh, and the big announcement? Holt and Watts were getting married on New Year's Eve, and everyone was invited. That was just fucking wonderful, wasn't it?

"Of course, I texted him," Leo snapped at me. "He said he's busy. What happened? Did you have a fight? Get him back, Carson. I need him." He pushed his way into my condo without asking, and I turned to watch him march through my kitchen. I knew where he was going. "Wait, Leo!" I took after him as he headed straight for the room Ezra was supposed to use.

"What did you do?" Leo pouted. "He put up paint swatches. He wouldn't just leave if..." His chin started to quiver. "I have a date this weekend with Andy, and Ezra is the only one who can help with my clothes, makeup, and..." He launched himself at me and wrapped his arms around my waist.

"I'm sorry." Noel grimaced when I finally met his gaze. "I feel like this might be my fault." *Thanks, it is. Go away.*

I tried to calm Leo down. "I don't... This isn't a good time. Ezra went back home, and things are just messy," I murmured as I rubbed his brother's back.

"What do you mean, this might be your fault?" Leo spun around to face his brother. "What happened? Did you try to get Carson back? Because that's not fair, Noel. Ezra loves him. They're perfect together. Fix it. Fix it right now, because I can't go on this date without his help. I tried to follow the videos he sent me, but it's not the same. I can't get the liner right, and I'm right-handed, so I can't paint my nails on that hand. It's going to be a disaster if I try to go on this date. I like Andy a lot. Fix it!"

Oh boy. "Listen," I smoothed the hair down on his head, and he turned to look at me. "I can pay for you to get your

nails and makeup done.”

“Carson, you don’t need to do that.” Noel sounded exhausted. “Leo needs to stop throwing tantrums.” His brother shot him a glare over his shoulder. “Don’t look at me like that. I can ground you and forbid you to go on this date.”

Leo gasped. “You wouldn’t dare. I’m not a child.”

“It’s the least I can do.” I waved a hand in the air as Leo pulled away from me. “Look, things with Ezra are complicated.” Understatement. He was ignoring my texts, sending me to voicemail, and I was getting desperate. I had started stalking Seth’s Insta to make sure they weren’t together. I even sent him a DM, which he read but never responded to. Talk about stalker vibes. I was creeping myself out.

Leo tilted his head as he watched me. “Why did he leave without saying goodbye? He’s my best friend. Did I do something wrong?” This kid was breaking my heart.

“I did.” Sort of. I don’t know. “Ezra and I had a fight.”

“Make up with him.” Like it was that easy. Like I wasn’t trying to do that. “Call him, tell him you’re sorry. That you love him and want him in your life. If I had a fight with Andy, that’s what I would do.”

Noel put his hands on his brother’s shoulders. “Leo, it’s none of our business.” *Sorry*, he mouthed at me. His eyes told me how bad he felt. That makes two of us.

“Ezra’s not talking to me right now. It’s sort of his thing when he gets mad.” He runs away, he hides, and he pretends like everything is fine. “Look, I’ll make sure he reaches out to you, Leo, okay? He likes you. None of this is your fault.”

Leo sighed softly. “I’ve never met someone like Ezra before. I miss him.”

“Me, too,” I told him and then squatted down, so we were eye level. “Look, I meant what I said. I’ll help you out as much as I can because that’s what Ezra would do. I have to go home in a couple of days, but I’ll take you out, and you can use my credit card.”

“Carson,” Noel warned as he shook his head at me.

“It’s fine, really.” I stood back up. “Look.” I pointed to the closet. “Ez left some clothes here. If you want to check and see if anything fits, you’re more than welcome to borrow it for your date. Just make sure you take care of it. He might want it back. I’m going to talk to your brother for a minute.” I motioned for Noel to follow me.

Noel leaned against the kitchen island when we went into the room. “You want to tell me what happened?”

“That’s not important.”

“It’s because of me, isn’t it? Because we were talking at the party? I thought Ezra was past that.”

I let out a long breath as I tried to figure out how to tell him the truth. “Yes, but it’s more than that. Ezra is complicated. In a good way.”

“But you love him, right?” Noel asked. When I nodded, he nudged my arm. “Go get him. Don’t worry about Leo, I’ll take care of him. You and Ezra spoiling him the way you have been isn’t going to go over well for me.”

I grinned. “He reminds me of Ezra. Dramatic, feisty, and different. He’s going to be a heartbreaker.”

“He and Andy haven’t stopped texting since the Christmas party.” Noel chewed on his lip before he leaned closer. “Should I, I don’t know, give him the sex talk?”

I snorted. “He’s fifteen. He’s probably had that talk already. Maybe tell him about lube and condoms. Yeah, condoms are super important.”

“I have condoms, and since I plan to bottom, I’ve done plenty of research on lube. You don’t have to educate me on anything,” Leo announced from the doorway. He was holding a couple hangers of clothes in each hand. One of them I recognized as the outfit from the banquet.

I turned to look at Noel, who was suddenly as red as the bow on the Christmas wreath that hung on my door.

“Fuck,” I muttered under my breath.

“What? I’m a fifteen-year-old gay kid. You think I didn’t look that up? Also, there is so much porn out there. It’s not like I haven’t seen things.” He held up his arms. “Which one?”

I stared at the blue skirt and top, remembering how I peeled Ezra out of his panties. How he felt in my arms that night. How gorgeous he looked.

“Not that one.”

“Why?” Leo’s brows dipped as he turned to look at it. “It’s so pretty. You know what, though? Andy said we were going to go skating. I should just wear jeans and a sweater. This would be too much.” Oh, thank God. “I saw a top that might work.”

He rushed off, and I turned to Noel. “You’re in big trouble with him.”

“I know.” He shook his head. “Also, a bottom? I don’t know anything about bottoming. I tried it once, and it was the worst experience of my life. God, how did we get here?” He sighed. “Do you need my help? Do you want me to reach out to Ezra? Try to talk to him, assure him that there’s nothing going on between us?”

“Thanks, but I’m going to see him when I get back to my parents. Whether he likes it or not. He’ll talk to me. Then I’m going to put a ring on his finger and force him to come back to me.” I just hoped it would work.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Ezra

I was so good at running away from the men who claimed they loved me. I was starting to think it was all I would ever truly win at. CC, Ty—wait, we weren't supposed to mention his name. It had to be the wine I was drinking. Ugh! I sucked so bad. Maybe I was just terrible at picking boyfriends. At least CC didn't smack me around until I ended up in the hospital. Treat me like some deep, dark secret he was ashamed of.

I didn't believe for one minute CC loved me. Not the way he just blurted it out. "*Fine, I love you.*" I mean, who does that? It sounded so forced and so not like him. Had he been playing me this entire time, too? Was I just a hole for him? A way to get off because he thought I was just that easy? I mean, I was. I just thought CC was better than that. Maybe it was a good thing I had picked that fight with him.

Stupid, needy, clingy Ezra. Always thinking you found the right man who only wants to use you for one thing. Only CC texted me. A lot. Called me, too. I refused to answer and sent him straight to voicemail. Left him on read. He even had the nerve to DM Seth, which, honestly, surprised me. Was it possible he really did love me?

The sound of my front door opening had me sitting up on the couch, and my phone slid off my stomach, landing on the floor with a soft thud. I knew he was supposed to be coming by, but that didn't make this any easier. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up.

"Hello? Identify yourself."

Three people had a key to my apartment. As far as I knew, one of them was still in North Carolina, and I hadn't thought he would be bold enough to just show up here. Not without letting me know first.

"CC, if that's you, I want you to go back to your parents right now. I'm not ready to face you."

“It’s me.”

I felt sick to my stomach. “Ty, please, don’t.”

I reached for my phone, but he was faster and kicked it under the couch with the toe of his shoe.

“Who do you think you’re going to call, baby? Your precious CC? You already broke up with him. Why would he come save you now?” Ty Graham growled at me with pure hate in his voice. “He can’t have you.”

I felt hot tears prick my eyes. “No, of course he can’t.”

“Say it.” Ty’s blue eyes flashed angrily before he grabbed me by the neck and pushed me back down onto the couch. “Tell me who you belong to, Ezra.”

Tears spilled down my cheeks. “You, Ty, I belong to you.”

“That’s right, baby.” He smirked. “Did he fuck you? I bet he doesn’t fuck as good as I do. Doesn’t make you come like I can. Doesn’t make you scream when you come.”

I pinched my lips together. Ty had texted me when I was in North Carolina. He had threatened to send the video that we had made together to CC if I didn’t break up with him. I had thought Ty was in jail, where he belonged, but his grandfather had posted his bail. No amount of money would be too much for his sweet, innocent Ty, and now here he was. In my apartment, putting his hands on me again, making me feel disgusting, worthless, and small, like only he could.

“You’re a good boy, though, aren’t you, baby?” Ty’s breath fanned over my face. “You did exactly as I asked you to. You broke it off with him. You came home, and you were waiting for me. I know it wasn’t you the called the cops that night. You would never do that to me.”

I nodded. “No, never.” I stared up at Ty in the darkness of my living room as my body prepared for whatever he was going to do. Would he hit me or fuck me first? Sometimes he did both. That was his favorite.

“What in the actual fuck is going on here?” The sound of CC’s voice made me cry out in relief. Even if I was mad at

him. Hurt about everything that had happened. “Really? Jesus Christ, this is great. Is this why you broke up with me?”

An ugly smile spread over Ty’s face. “Tell him, baby. Tell him who I am to you.” He hadn’t turned around yet, so that meant CC hadn’t seen his face. Couldn’t see the fear on mine or the tears that were brewing in my eyes again. He probably couldn’t see the way my body had started to shake at how terrified I was.

“CC, please, this isn’t what it looks like.”

I didn’t see Ty’s hand coming up to smack me across the face so hard that I saw stars when he made contact. I raised my palm to touch where he hit me, and I winced. It wasn’t the hardest hit I’d taken, but it was going to leave another mark.

“It was you!” CC hissed and sprang forward to grab Ty by the shoulder. He spun him around. “Are you fucking kidding me right now? Ty?”

The Christmas lights bounced off their faces in the dark. I sat up and wrapped my arms around my legs, trying to make myself as small as possible. That’s usually how I avoided hits to my body. Unlike the last time, when I failed to protect myself, but that was only because we were outside, and I was standing up.

“What, you thought Ezra walked into a door? That he was just clumsy? You’re smarter than that, aren’t you Carey?” Ty sneered.

CC shoved at his chest. “You put your hands on my boyfriend? You’re the one who did that to him?”

“To be fair, he was my boyfriend first. Oh wait, you didn’t know that, did you?” A loud laugh filled the room. “Well, he was. He likes it when I slap him around, don’t you, baby? It’s foreplay.”

I buried my face against my knees.

“No.” I whimpered, afraid to look at either one of them.

I wanted to be anywhere but here right now. I dug my nails into the back of my thighs, wishing that someone would come

to save me. That I was back in my childhood bedroom when I was thirteen years old. Listening to Taylor Swift and Katy Perry when I was starting to realize that I wasn't like the other boys in my class. Before everything got so complicated.

"I should put you in the hospital just like you did to Ezra," CC growled.

"I'd like to see you try, Carey. You were always bark but never any bite. Mister big NASCAR driver," Ty sneered. "Forgot about your best friend, left him behind. Someone had to take care of him."

CC grunted. "Is that what you think you did?"

I whimpered softly. "Stop it."

The sound of breaking wood caused me to look up. CC was standing over Ty, who was lying across my now-broken coffee table. "I should call the police. Have them haul your ass right back to jail. You broke in, you hit him, and then what did you plan on doing?"

"Stop it!" I exclaimed. "Please, just stop. Get him out and then just leave."

Ty started to climb to his feet, but CC pushed him back down. "You're not going anywhere. I meant when I said." He placed a foot over his sternum. "Ez, I'm not going anywhere. The cops need to be involved in this. He hit you."

"He also didn't break in."

CC's eyes darted over to me. "He... You gave him a key?"

"Let me up, asshole. I belong here just as much as you do," Ty hissed.

CC's fist met his nose, and I felt sick to my stomach. I swore I heard the sound of his bone breaking when he did it again. It was like history was repeating itself. CC did the same thing in high school.

"CC, stop, please," I pleaded. "I don't want any more fighting or bloodshed in my apartment. I'm the one who won't get my deposit back," I begged as I climbed up on shaky legs. My face hurt from where Ty hit me. All I wanted was for

everyone to leave so I could crawl into bed and cry myself to sleep for the next week.

My best friend had his arm cocked back, but when he saw me, he dropped it to his side, and he released Ty. “Give me that key and get the fuck out. If I ever see you around or near Ezra again, I’ll do more than just break your nose.”

“Fuck you.” Ty spat blood onto my carpet. “You don’t get to tell me what to do. Ezra loves me, isn’t that right, baby?” He glanced over at me, and I looked away.

“Don’t look at him,” CC warned. “Ezra could never love someone like you.”

I winced as I waited for what was coming. The words I regretted ever saying, even though at the time, yeah, at the time, I thought I meant them. Before the abuse started. Because Ty felt different then. He said I was pretty and that he thought maybe he could love me, too. Someday.

“He told me loved me all the time.” Ty sounded so proud of himself, knowing he could hurt CC that way. “Isn’t that right, baby?”

I kept my eyes pinned on my feet. “No.”

“Aw, don’t be shy now, Ezra. You told me I made you happy. That you wanted to share forever with me. That I—”

“That was before you put me in the hospital! Before you hit me, pushed me around, and made me feel like a dirty secret. Get out. Get out and don’t come back.” My voice was barely a whisper as my resolve crumbled, and I sank back down onto the couch.

I was such an idiot getting myself into this mess, but now I had to get out of it. I heard the sound of the front door opening and then shutting. I lifted my legs back up onto the couch so I could press my face into my knees and waited for CC to yell at me. Waited for him to tell me how stupid I was for dating Ty, for being dumb enough to think I loved him. Instead, I felt the cushions dip beside me, and then I was lifted up, and he placed me in his lap.

“How’s your face, princess?” His voice was soft in my ear. “You want to put some ice on it?” I shook my head. “You want to go to bed?” CC murmured as he stroked my hair. “It’s been a busy night for you.”

I pushed my nose into his shirt and inhaled his scent. He smelled like soap and his spicy aftershave. I wasn’t sure why he was still here. Why he hadn’t gotten angry with me, but I couldn’t let my guard down.

I dug my fingers into the front of his shirt. “Just get it over with.”

“Get what over with?”

“How foolish I was. How you don’t want me. That you want your key to your condo back and don’t want me living with you. I understand.”

CC tipped my head back. “Is that what you are think I’m going to do?”

“Isn’t it?” I watched the way the lights danced in his dark eyes. I let out a low hiss when he traced a thumb over my cheek.

“You need to ice that, Ez, or it’s going to be really bad tomorrow.” CC slid me off his lap as he stood up. “I’ll be right back.”

I chewed on my lip as I watched him go into the kitchen and heard the freezer door open. When he returned, he held a bag of frozen corn in his hand.

“No peas,” he teased before he sat back down. “Come on.” He patted his thighs.

“I can do it myself.”

“You know I like it better when you’re closer to me.”

I sighed before I climbed up onto his lap again. “Are you dumping me, Carson?”

“This is going to be cold,” he warned, right before the frozen veggies landed on my skin.

I winced and let out a low whine. “It hurts. Stop, no.” I pushed his hand away before tears filled my eyes and spilled down my cheeks. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. For getting jealous and fighting with you. For leaving. God, Leo... He was so upset with me when I talked to him earlier. He called me his best friend. I just... How can he think I’m some sort of role model when I let Ty abuse me?”

“Hey.” CC’s big hands gripped my head. “It’s called abuse for a reason. That’s not your fault.”

I shrugged, willing myself to stop the waterworks, but they wouldn’t listen. “I don’t... I dated him. I thought he cared about me. He hit me, and I kept coming back. I thought...I thought he would grow to love me.”

CC wrapped his arms around me and hugged me against his chest.

“I know you did.”

He let me cry against his shoulder. Sobbing so hard I felt like I would make myself sick. I wasn’t upset that it ended with Ty. I was mad at myself for even getting involved with him. For thinking someone like that might like someone like me. He had said I was pretty, that he liked my freckles and the dress I wore on the first date he took me on. That he had always thought I was special. He flattered me with flowers and expensive out-of-town dates. He drove a big fancy car and held my hand like a boyfriend would do.

But Ty was never going to marry me or show me off to his family. He made sure we went out to places people wouldn’t know him. We went to the movies where it was dark. The restaurants he took me to were dim with low lighting. I never met his friends. He claimed he didn’t have a Facebook or any social media, which I knew deep down was a lie. He was ashamed of me, just like all the others. Just like the ones who would come after him.

CC let me cry until I had nothing left inside of me. Until I was so exhausted, I felt like I might collapse.

“Come on.” He easily lifted me as he stood up. “Let’s get you into bed.”

He carried me so gently, so carefully, that it made my heart hurt. That he would take such good care of me after everything. He didn’t bother to turn on the light in my bedroom before he pulled the covers back.

“You have to let go, princess.”

“No.” I shook my head.

CC chuckled softly as he pried my arms from around his neck and placed me on the mattress. “You’re exhausted.”

“Carson, don’t go,” I begged. Why was I so pathetic?

He didn’t say anything, and I had to fight to keep my eyes open. He was right. I was exhausted. I could hear him moving around the room, though, which maybe meant he wasn’t leaving? I was just so damn tired.

“I’m not leaving, princess.” CC’s voice was soft in my ear when he pulled me against his chest, his arms around my waist, spooning me. I felt his lips against my neck before sleep finally took over.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Carson

Last night had not gone the way I had expected. Walking into Ezra's apartment, finding Ty here. Yeah, not at all the way I planned. Yes, I was going to lay into him the second that prick left. I was going to scream, yell, and call him out. Until I saw the way he was reacting. Ezra had always told me he didn't want the happily ever after. Clearly, he had been lying to me. He wanted someone to love him just the way I did. He was so scared I was going to push him away; tell him I was done with him and leave him for good. So instead, I gave him what he needed.

Love and affection.

When I woke, he was still sleeping, so I took a quick shower, unlocked Ezra's phone, and asked Seth to come over so I could find out more about this Ty situation. Because if there was one person who knew about it who wasn't me? It would be his other best friend. And I didn't mean the fifteen-year-old boy who thought Ezra was the best thing since sliced bread.

"I'm honestly surprised you called me." Seth whisked into the apartment in a cloud of something flowery and a bit overpowering. He dropped his coat on the kitchen chair and turned to look at me, his curls pushed back from his face with a bandana. "You said it was important."

I nodded. "Coffee?" I jutted my chin at the mug I left on the counter.

"Is it safe to drink?" He cocked a perfectly sculpted brow at me. "I'm kidding, babe, relax."

I sighed as I slid into my seat. "Ty was here last night." I watched the way his body stiffened. "I figured you knew about him."

Seth tried to gather himself together, but it was too late. He dumped a couple packets of sugar into his cup, mixed it, and

took a sip before he sat across from me. “I’m not telling you anything about him.”

“Why? Because Ty’s such a standup guy?”

“No, because Ezra’s my friend.”

I drummed my fingers against the table. “He slapped Ezra across the face.”

“He did what?” Seth gasped, his blue eyes going wide. He leaned forward. “What did you do? Tell me you roughed him a bit. That guy is a dick, and that’s being nice.”

I smirked. “I’m pretty sure I broke his nose. Which, if we’re keeping track, would be the second time.” I wasn’t a violent man, but the moment I heard that slap, I wanted to murder Ty. “Look, I’m not asking you to divulge all of Ezra’s darkest secrets. I just want to know when this shit started and when it ended.”

“Nope, still can’t do it.” Seth reached for one of the cinnamon rolls I had baked this morning. I was an early riser. It came with my career. “You’re going to have to ask him— holy mother of God, these are good. Did you get these at the Ocean View Bakery? I’ve been meaning to stop there. This town is amazing. Like out of a Hallmark movie. Maybe if I hang around long enough, I can find some businessman who’s come home for the holiday looking for love.” He moaned as he chewed the pastry.

Visions of licking the frosting from Ezra’s body flashed in my head, and I had to will my dick to behave. “I made them.”

“You made them?” Seth tilted his head. “So, you’re not only hot, but you bake? Do have a brother you could set me up with me?”

“Sorry. I’m an only child, but…” I wiggled my brows. “I might be able to set you up with one of my fellow drivers if you talk.”

Seth frowned. “You’re not playing fair. Which driver?”

“Tell me what I need to know, and then we’ll talk about my friends.” I didn’t have a lot of gay NASCAR friends, but

there was Noel. He hadn't seemed excited about Seth when I mentioned him, but I might be able to change his mind. And Jones Matthews, who had recently come out at the end of the season, which I think had everything to do with Watts.

"Hmmm..." Seth twisted his lips. "Yeah, no, still can't do it."

"What do you mean, you can't do it?" I huffed.

He shrugged as he took another sip of his coffee. "Sorry, bestie code or whatever. Don't look at me like that. You wouldn't rat Ezra out either, babe."

"Fine." I glanced up to find Ezra standing in the kitchen doorway. Shit. He was still wearing his pajama bottoms and a wrinkled t-shirt that said *I'm the Boss* across the front of it. "Good morning, princess."

Seth's twisted around. "Hey, babe."

"What are you doing here? Are you two talking about me?" He blinked in confusion before he reached up to grab a handful of his messy auburn hair. His cheek was swollen where Ty had hit him, but at least it hadn't turned black and blue like the last time.

Seth shook his head. "Not me, no." He brought his fingers up to his mouth in a zipping motion. "He tried to bribe me with dick, though."

"Dude, not cool!" I exclaimed as I turned my eyes back on my boyfriend. "Ezra, you all right?"

He nodded. "I wasn't sure if you were still here." He took a step into the kitchen. "You made cinnamon rolls?" His dark orbs met mine, and a flush crept up his neck and over his face. "Did you save the frosting?"

"Maybe." I pushed the chair back, hoping he would come sit with me. "You ready to talk to me now?"

Ezra looked between Seth and me. "I might be." He took another step into the room as he chewed on his lip. "Can I have one of those?" He pointed to the plate of pastries, which caused a smile to spread over my face.

“You don’t have to ask,” I told him before he rushed to climb up into my lap. “I’m not feeding you this time, though.”

Seth scoffed. “Ugh, are you two going to make me listen to this grossness?” But I caught the smile that pulled at his lips. Maybe he wasn’t so bad after all. As long as he remembered I was the boyfriend and the original best friend.

“You’re just jealous,” Ezra muttered as he chewed his food. “You want what I have. A hot-as-fuck boyfriend who bakes for you and licks frosting from your nipples.”

Seth stared at him before he threw his head back, laughing. “Thanks for sharing that with me.”

“Princess, maybe leave out the personal stuff,” I whispered as I pushed the hair back from his forehead. “Does your cheek hurt?”

“A little.” Ezra smiled at me. “Thank you.”

I pressed a kiss against his hair. “I’m not sure for what, but you’re welcome.”

“For rescuing me, for staying, for…” He waved a hand at Seth and the plate of food. “This.”

I felt warmth and butterflies inside my stomach. “Ez, I—” I love you? Was that the right thing to say? “Best friends love one another for life,” I choked out instead, because I didn’t want the first time I told him I loved him properly to be in front of an audience. I wanted it to be just as special as he was.

The disappointment in Ezra’s eyes made my heart drop. “I know,” he whispered.

“Do you two need some time alone to talk about this? This feels like a couple conversation.” Seth’s brows dipped. “I mean, I know Carson asked me to come over because he felt I could help since I was more familiar with the whole Ty situation, but I could go.”

“Please stay,” Ezra murmured.

I gripped his waist. “Princess, maybe we should talk alone.”

“Seth stays, Carson,” he snapped. “You want the truth? I’m going to give it to you. Just fucking back off for a second.”

I flinched. Ezra was still upset with me. Fine, that made two of us, but I wasn’t going to yell at him.

“Okay, sure.” I swallowed the lump in my throat and dropped my hands from his hips.

“Don’t stop touching me.” He twisted his body around to face me before he grabbed my hand to lace our fingers together. “It started a couple of weeks after us, after we, you know.” Ezra leaned into me, his face against my neck. “I was at a party, and Ty was there. He asked me where you were, since we were supposed to be together. I told him we broke up.”

I met Seth’s gaze. “Sort of true, I guess.”

“I wasn’t interested in Ty, though, at least not at first, but he was persistent. I ran into him a couple weeks later when I was out with Seth for the first time. He asked for my number, and I said no.” Ezra tangled the fingers of his free hand into the hem of my shirt.

Seth nodded. “True story.”

“Then I saw him at the grocery store. He asked if he could take me out on Valentine’s Day.” Ezra drew a shaky breath. “And this time I said yes.”

I placed my hand against his back. “You don’t have to feel guilty about it, boo.” I rubbed circles into his skin. “We weren’t dating. You wanted someone to love and take care of you.”

“Ty was nice to me at first. Kind, sent me flowers and these really fancy looking chocolates.” He sniffed softly. “I knew he was hiding me, though. I mean, who doesn’t have Facebook?”

Seth shook his head when I looked at him again. “*Asshole*,” he mouthed before he stood up to help himself to another cup of coffee.

“He watched a couple races with me, but then got jealous, so I stopped inviting him over. He...” Ezra pulled back to look at me. “He made himself a copy of my key. I didn’t give it to him.”

I saw the fear in his dark eyes. “When did Ty start abusing you?”

“When I tried to break it off the first time. That was in May.” Ezra’s chin began to quiver. “I didn’t know about the key yet, so when Ty left, I thought that was it. That it was over. Until he showed up the next day.”

Seth grunted from behind me. “Tell him, Ez. Tell him the truth.”

“What truth? What aren’t you saying?” I whispered, afraid that it wasn’t just hitting him. “Princess, you said he didn’t hurt you like—”

“He didn’t,” Ezra burst out as tears welled in his eyes. “He just...he said I was only good at one thing and that was sucking cock. Selling my body and being a camboy. He found my OnlyFans account. Subscribed before we started dating. We made a video together.”

Jealousy rushed through my veins. “A video?” I whispered.

“Yeah, just one, and he hid his face so no one would see it was him, but he kept the original. The one where I called him by his first name. He... he said he was going to send it to you if I didn’t break up with you. I’m sorry, CC. I should have told you the truth. I was afraid of what you would say.”

I wanted to murder him. I was going to cut Ty from taint to earlobe and drop his body into the ocean, just like Dexter Morgan. Should I plan a kill room?

“CC?” Ezra touched my face with the palms of his hands.

I looked down to see tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Oh hey, don’t do that,” I murmured. “You’re so much more than what Ty Graham thinks of you. He’s a bully, a liar, and not worthy of the ground you walk on.”

“Is he, though? I mean, what else do I have going for me? I make a lot of money showing myself off, CC. Shoving dildos up my ass and talking dirty on camera. It’s how I got you, isn’t it?”

“No, it’s not. I was already into you before that video. I wouldn’t have let you kiss me the first time if I wasn’t.”

Ezra grabbed my hand. “The night at the club. You were already into me?”

“Pretty sure I was, yes.”

His eyes lit up like a roman candle.

I leaned down so that my lips were against his ear. “I happen to like that filthy mouth, which is just an added bonus.”

Ezra’s mouth had formed a perfect circle. “Did you know beforehand, or did you just figure it out?”

“I’m figuring out a lot of things today.” I tucked a piece of hair behind his ear. “Ez, he put you in the hospital. What happened that night? You told me you didn’t know who it was.”

“Ty told me he wanted to talk, to apologize, and I was in a bad way, CC. Wait, what happened to Seth?” Ezra asked as he looked around the kitchen. “He left without saying goodbye?”

I turned his face back to mine. “I think he knew we needed this time to ourselves. Text him later. Back to Ty, please.”

“Ty said he wanted to talk. To apologize for everything. Deep down, I knew it was a bad idea, but I agreed anyway. Except he was drunk, and when I tried to leave, he followed me out to my car. When he’d hit me in the past, he would slap me around a little, but this time, he punched and kicked me. He hit me so hard that I blacked out. Someone from the restaurant saw what was happening and called the cops. Ty was arrested, and I was taken to the hospital.”

I closed my eyes. “Jesus Christ, Ezra.”

“When I woke up, I was confused and scared out of my mind. I wanted to reach out to you, but I was afraid you had

blocked me. I called Seth instead. He brought me clean clothes and convinced me to at least get the restraining order, which Ty obviously doesn't care about."

I grabbed both of his hands to bring them up to my lips. "I wish you had called. I would have come. I would have dropped everything for you." My throat suddenly felt tight. "I would have been there for you, boo."

Ezra gripped my wrists. "I'm sorry. I am so sorry I didn't tell you the truth about Ty. That I ran away that night because I couldn't face my feelings and that we didn't speak for months. Carson, I love you. I love you so much that it hurts, and it's okay if you don't love me. I want to be with you. If you want to be friends with benefits, I'm down. I'll take whatever you can give me. I just want you."

I splayed my fingers into his hair and tipped Ezra's head up. "You really think that I don't love you more than a friend, princess? That what we've been doing is just a friends-with-benefits thing?"

"Say it then, Carson. Say what you mean instead of hiding behind words I came up with when we were kids because I was afraid to tell you the truth about how I felt about you." Ezra raised his chin. "Don't say it all upset and angry because I forced you to."

I leaned my forehead against his and stared into his dark eyes. "I'm in love with you, Ezra. I'm so fucking crazy about you that it drives me insane. I love you."

Chapter Twenty-Six

Ezra

My entire body began to tremble when I heard those words come from CC's lips. The way his warm brown eyes looked at me, it felt like he could see right into my soul. I stared at him, waiting for the punchline, waiting for someone to jump and scream, "Just kidding. You didn't think Carson could actually love someone like you, did you?" But when that didn't happen, I leaned up onto my knees so that I could press my lips against his.

"Again, please?" I whispered, before I dragged my tongue over his mouth.

"I'm in love with you."

I hummed happily. "Again."

CC chuckled softly. "I'm in love with you."

"Again." I nipped at his fat bottom lip, my hands clinging to his shoulders.

"I'm in love with you, Ezra," he murmured. "If you don't stop touching me like that, I'm going to have to spread you out on this table again. Is that what you're trying to do here?"

I batted my lashes at him. "How about you take me back to my bedroom and stick that big dick inside of my ass instead? Make me come with my legs wrapped around your waist while I beg you to tell me how much you love me. I don't think I'm ever going to get tired of hearing you say that to me."

"Ezra." CC growled deep in his throat as he stared down at me with lust in his eyes.

This perfect man was all mine. Really, really mine.

I dragged my hands through his soft hair. "Again."

"I'm in love with you, princess." CC leaned forward. "You're smart, talented, and so beautiful. Kind, funny, and I couldn't imagine my life without you. I won't go another ten months without you in my life. The thought makes me sick."

I'm never letting you go this time. You're going to move to North Carolina with me, watch all my races, and someday, very soon, I'm going to put a ring on your finger."

My jaw dropped. "You want to marry me, CC? Are you serious? Because you can't joke about something like that. It's not right."

"Yeah, Ezra. I want that with you." He dragged his nose down my jaw and against my neck. "Only you. Pretty sure it's always been you. I just needed you to kiss me in that club to make me realize it."

I felt a smile spread over my face at the thought of being Ezra Carey. "I want that, too," I admitted as something occurred to me. "Are you going to let me pick out the engagement ring?"

"You don't trust me to do that?"

"That's a silly question. I trust you with my life."

CC nodded. "Then I think that you should let me surprise you with—"

I stopped him by covering his mouth with mine, my tongue slipping between his lips and dragging my nails over his scalp to hear him moan loudly.

"You're crazy," I whispered. "Crazy, but mine."

"All yours, boo," CC assured me before he kissed me again, his lips hot and wet against mine. "Fuck, I love you."

I sighed happily. "I love you, too."

CC wrapped his arms around me as he stood up and walked me into the bedroom. He pressed me into the mattress, his large frame splayed over mine, and then he slowly tugged my pajama bottoms down my hips. "This is okay?"

"Yes, yes, more than okay. You never have to ask," I reminded him as I smiled up into CC's face. "I love you," I said again, just in case he forgot.

I would never let him forget. I would tell him a hundred times a day, every day, for the rest of his life.

He slanted his mouth over mine. “I love you, Ezra Quinn.”

Fuck, that shouldn't be so hot, right?

“Mm, that's nice,” I whispered as he wrapped his hand around my cock and squeezed. Not too hard, but enough to make me melt beneath him. He gave it a slow tug as he peppered kisses against my neck. “Carson,” I whimpered his name.

“I love you.” He dragged his tongue over my Adam's apple and then his mouth found mine again.

I fisted his hair, my hips arching up against him, his hand still gripped around my length. CC kissed away all my doubt and fear as I writhed beneath him, silently begging him to fuck me into next week. Only, he just kept giving me steady, leisurely jerks while our tongues slicked together.

When he pulled back, I chased after his mouth, wanting more. “Don't stop.”

He smiled as he pulled off his shirt. I couldn't help but ogle his torso full of hard muscles.

“I love you,” I reminded him.

“I love you, too.” CC leaned down to brush his lips over mine. “Just need to get my pants off, princess. I'm not going anywhere.” He stood up to do just that, kicking them off onto the floor along with his briefs. “Let's get you naked, too.”

I quickly shucked off my pajama pants and sat up to tug off my shirt. “Better?” I beamed up at him.

“Beautiful.” CC's eyes roamed over my body. “So beautiful.” When he dropped to his knees and pushed my legs open, “Everything about you is everything I've ever dreamed about.” But I saw the hesitation in his eyes, even as he ran his palms over my thighs and pressed his nose into my groin.

I dragged a hand through his thick blond tresses. “Baby, do you need me?”

I had never asked CC how many men he had been with, not that it mattered, but now I wondered just how few it was.

Was that why what I had been doing with the camboy stuff bothered him so much?

“I don’t...I want to have the confidence you have.” He looked up at me. “You’re attracted to me, right?”

What was this? “Carson.” I sat up and slipped down onto the floor to sit in front of him, my back against the bed. “Why would you ask me that?”

“I don’t know.” Liar. He ducked his head into my neck and inhaled. “You smell so good, Ez. So sweet and tantalizing. My own personal treat.”

I cupped his face and tilted his head back up. “I find you insanely attractive,” I assured him. “These?” I traced CC’s lips with my finger. “The only lips I ever want to kiss. And your hair?” I dragged my hand through his blond tresses. “Silky and sexy.” His mouth turned up into a smile. “Your arms are big and strong to hold me.” I wrapped my hands around a bicep. “They hold me tight and make me feel safe. I’m insanely jealous of your body. So, fucking hot.” I slipped the palm of my hand over his hard pecs and toned abs. “Your thighs are my favorite,” I murmured and watched CC’s eyes flash with desire. “I want to bite and lick them all over.”

CC’s mouth covered mine before I could say anything else. His hands roamed all over my body like he wasn’t sure what he wanted to touch first. He pinched my nipples, then lifted me and squeezed my ass before he laid us down so that we were on our side facing one another on the bed.

“Ezra.” He smiled at me, his dark orbs sparkling.

“Yeah, baby? What do you need?”

“Can you go get that toy you used in the video you showed me?”

I nodded. “It’s actually in the room. After you got all excited about it, I hid in the dresser so if you—”

CC’s lips came crashing down on mine. “I want you to use it on yourself. Show me how you get yourself off.”

I whimpered as he pushed me over on the bed. I stared up into his eyes as the thought of him watching me had me nearly blowing my load. He brought his mouth against my ear.

“I want to watch you fuck yourself, princess. I want to see how you come apart when no one is watching, hear the sounds you make, and I want to jerk off while you do it.”

“I can do that.” I traced his jaw with the tips of my fingers, my hand shaking as I touched him. “I’d do anything for you. You don’t even have to ask.”

He smiled at me. “Me, too, princess.” He pressed a kiss against my lips before he moved and dropped onto his back.

“Oh, is that code for go get the dildo?” I teased before I scrambled off the bed.

His hand smacked my backside playfully. I giggled as I went over to the dresser and opened the drawer, but when I looked over my shoulder, the sight of CC spread out on my bed had me do a double take. He was watching me, his eyes wide and heavily lidded. His cock hard and heavy between his legs. I could watch him all day.

“Ezra.” CC smirked at me. “Are you going to stand there staring at me like I’m breakfast, or are you going to do something about it?”

I placed a hand on my hip. “I’m tempted to just watch you, baby. I mean, you are a snack.” But then the thought of CC coming undone while I got myself off had me digging through the drawer for the toy and some lube before I jumped back on the bed. “I want you to prep me.”

“Fuck yeah.” He got up onto his knees before that look came back onto his face.

“Carson.” I patted the mattress, and he sat down. I immediately straddled his lap. “Can I ask you a question? You don’t have to answer it if you don’t want to.”

CC smiled at me. “I know what you’re going to ask me, Ez.” He wrapped his hand around both of our cocks and tugged lightly, causing us both to groan. “I’ve slept with three men.”

“Does that include me?”

“Yes, it does.”

I nodded. “Does that include Holt?”

“What? No. I never slept with Holt. We kissed, that was it.” CC rolled his eyes. “I didn’t sleep with him or Noel. I don’t shit where I eat.”

I kissed his nose. “But you would have slept with Holt.” When he hesitated, my brows dipped. “You really liked him, didn’t you? More than you wanted to admit to me, Watts, even Holt.”

“I just...I told you. I wanted you, Ez. Holt reminded me of you, and I thought, maybe... Ah, fuck.” CC dropped his chin. “Yes, I would have slept with him.”

I tucked a finger under his chin, bringing his gaze back to mine. “I love you, Carson. You have nothing to be ashamed of, baby. I wish things were different. Maybe if I had kissed you a couple years earlier, or if I wasn’t such a whore—”

“You’re not a whore,” CC growled. “Don’t you ever say that about yourself. Did Ty say that to you?”

I dropped my gaze. “I don’t want to talk about Ty.”

“Ezra, did he?” CC whispered. “Listen to me, princess. Just because you like sex, because you like to explore your sexuality, the things you enjoy, that doesn’t make you a whore. I’m sorry if I ever made you feel that way. And Ty is a fucking asshole who couldn’t even show the world he had you. You’re mine now. You’re mine always, and I will spend the rest of my life showing you just how much you mean to me.”

I kissed him, my mouth covering his, my arms wrapping around his neck, and my hands playing with the hairs on the nape of his neck. My heart slammed against my chest while my stomach swooped and filled with butterflies. No one had ever made me feel as special or important as CC did. No one had ever told me I was beautiful, sexy, or wanted to show me off like he had.

“I love you, Ezra,” CC murmured. “Nothing is ever going to change that. Not now or ever.”

I smiled as I met his dark orbs. “I love you, too.”

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Carson

I dragged a hand through Ezra's auburn hair. "Show me, princess," I murmured against his mouth.

His eyes darkened and flashed with hunger and longing. He stared at me before he slipped off my lap and back onto the bed, reaching for the toy he had retrieved from the dresser.

"CC." Ezra batted his lashes at me as he held out the bottle of lube.

I shook my head, my nerves once again getting the best of me.

"Please, Carson, I want you to do it. I want your fingers inside of me. Stretching me, getting me ready for the toy." He dragged his teeth over his bottom lip before he ducked his head and gave me a coy smile.

I growled deep in my throat. "You're a tease, you know that?"

"That's the whole point, baby." He leaned closer. "Please?"

I let out my breath. "What if—"

"Nope." Ezra shook his head. "You won't."

I rose onto my knees to take the bottle from him. "You're lucky you're cute," I muttered as I watched Ezra maneuver himself, so his backside was facing me.

"I'm adorable." He glanced over his shoulder at me before he spread his legs.

I stared down at him, my mind going a million miles a minute. The other guys I had been with had prepped themselves. I wasn't sure why I was so nervous about this because I had done this before. In the shower, on the couch, but this time felt different. Ezra's butt was so round, his thighs shapely and inviting. When he wiggled his hips, I chuckled softly.

“Are you impatient?”

“I am.” He leaned back towards me.

I popped the cap on the bottle and spread some of the lube on my fingers and then slowly slid one digit inside his tight, hot hole. Ezra groaned softly, and when I added a second digit, his head fell forward.

“You like that, princess?”

“Mm... Yeah. Carson, give me more. Fill me up and fuck me with your big, thick fingers. You know how I like it.” He started to reach for his hard cock between his legs.

“Don’t touch that,” I warned.

Ezra whimpered. “Please.”

“Not yet,” I growled. “You have to give me my show first.”

I slid a third finger inside, and he let out a low whine. Fuck, that was hot as hell. The way he just slipped back down to take what he wanted. I pumped in and out of his tight ass a few times, listening to the sounds he made, the soft whimpers and low groans.

“You think you’re ready, princess?”

He nodded. “Yes, so ready.”

I slapped his ass with my free hand before I slowly eased my fingers out.

“Ezra.”

He turned to look at me over his shoulder, his cheeks pink and his eyes heated and heavy.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.” He smiled at me. One so big that it nearly split his face. “I’m going to make this so good for you.”

I leaned back on to the pillows. “I know you are.”

Ezra winked at me before he grabbed the lube and the toy. I watched as he slicked it up with lube before he turned to look

at me, his teeth digging into his fat bottom lip before he reached behind him to press the tip against his entrance.

“Ready, baby?”

“I am,” I assured him, my cock already begging for relief.

He smiled. “I hope so.” Then he started to ease the toy inside. “Fuck.”

Ezra arched his back, and we both groaned. My hand instantly wrapped around my cock as I watched the flesh-colored toy start to disappear inside him.

“I wish...Carson...I wish it was you.”

“That makes two of us.”

His eyes darted back to mine, his dark eyes nearly black. I gripped myself so tight it nearly hurt. My orgasm was already starting to creep up my spine and over my hips.

Ezra began to slowly fuck himself, his breath coming out in slow, breathy moans. “God, it feels so good.” I was going to come before he even got started. “You feel so good, baby.” His eyes landed back on my face. “So big and thick, buried deep inside of me. Stretching me, filling me.”

“Ezra,” I groaned out his name as my hand moved up and down my length in the same rhythm.

He let out a whine, and his eyes clamped shut. I was suddenly on my knees, grabbing that fucking toy and tossing it on the floor before I pushed him down onto his back.

“Mine,” I growled. “You’re all fucking mine, do you hear me?”

Ezra nodded. “Fuck me. Please fuck me.” Ezra begged. “I need you, Carson.”

That would make two of us. “I know, princess.”

I slapped lube on myself before I slid all the way inside him in one fluid motion. I stared down into Ezra’s beautiful face, the way his lips formed a perfect circle as he watched me. I leaned down to drag my hands through his soft hair.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too,” he whispered.

I gripped his hips and slowly began to move, the precum on the tip of Ezra’s cock dripping down his taut stomach. I reached down and ran my thumb over it before bringing it up to his mouth. He sucked it off without hesitation. He smiled at me, his hips canting, his cock bobbing with each thrust of my hips. I grabbed his hands and pushed them up over his head to link our fingers together and buried my face in his neck, his sweet scent invading my senses.

“Carson.” Ezra called out my name as I pegged his prostate. “Please, baby, I need to come.” He wrapped his legs around my waist as he writhed beneath me.

I nipped at his neck and dragged my teeth over his skin before I released his hands to drop mine to his hips. “You want to come for me, princess?”

“Fuck.” His eyes rolled back the second his fingers made contact with his cock, and thick streams of cum landed over his stomach and chest; his mouth was open, but no sound came out.

I joined Ezra moments later, my release filling him as I called out his name and sweat trickled down my cheek. Then I eased out of him, leaned down, and dragged my tongue over Ezra’s stomach to clean him up, smirking when he combed his hands through my hair.

“Dirty, filthy man,” he murmured as he watched with sleepy eyes.

I chuckled before I shoved my tongue between his lips, and he groaned as he curled his own against mine.

“Mm, you’re so sexy when you come.” I dropped down onto the mattress and wrapped my arms around him to pull his small body against mine.

“You obviously haven’t seen yourself.”

“That would be a negative.”

Ezra nuzzled into me. “I should wash up. Shit, I really need to call Leo. That poor kid.” He pulled back to look at me. “He probably hates me.”

“I wouldn’t say he hates you, but he was upset.” I stroked his cheek with my thumb. “I might have spoiled him a little.”

“You’re a good man, CC.” Ezra leaned up to kiss my chin. “What did you do?”

I smiled before I pinned him down beneath me. “Let me wash you, princess, and then take you out to lunch. I’ll tell you all about it.”

“Anything you want, baby. I’m yours,” Ezra whispered.

“You took him out to get his nails done?” Ezra dunked his French fry in his ketchup and popped it in his mouth. “You’re seriously the nicest person on the planet.” He beamed at me from across the booth at the Tavern.

I shrugged. “Leo’s a good kid.”

“He has a date with Andy. He wants me to be there. I feel awful.” Ezra sighed softly.

I reached for his hand and laced our fingers together. “We could go down there for the weekend if you want.”

“I can’t afford that.” Ezra brought my hand up to his lips and kissed it. “I told him to send me pictures if they took any.”

I tugged on his hand. “Ez, I can afford it.”

“What?” His eyes went wide before he shook his head. “No, CC. No way. I can’t let you pay for some expensive tickets just so I could...really?” I saw the tears well up inside his eyes. “He said that Maverick was going to be the chaperone, too. And that if I wanted to be his... CC, I would pay you back.”

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

“Tough, because I will. Once I get paid for the dress I made London, the money is yours.” Ezra was out of his booth and next to me before I even realized it. “You’re the best

boyfriend in the world.” He climbed up onto his knees to kiss me. “This is okay, right?”

I grabbed his chin to keep those dark eyes on mine. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

“No reason.” His smile faltered for just a second. “I love you.”

“I’m not him, Ez. I’ll never be him. You can kiss me, hold my hand, hug me, climb into my lap, any time you want. Understand?”

“Yes, I understand.”

I smiled before I reached across the table to pull his plate over. “Stay here with me.”

Ezra nodded and sat down before he started picking at his fries again. “So, do you think we could leave Friday?” he asked.

“Yeah, princess, we could do that. I’ll look at the flights and see what’s available.” I pressed a kiss into his hair. “Oh, by the way, we’re going to Watts and Holt’s wedding.”

He stared at me. “We are?”

“That big announcement at the Christmas party? That was Watts inviting everyone. It’s on New Year’s Eve.” I tucked a piece of hair behind his ear. “You’re my plus one. No excuses. You’d better start planning your outfit.”

Ezra reached over to take my hand. “That sounds like fun.”

“You still think you want to set Noel and Seth up? That might be something we could work out for the wedding.” I stole a fry off his plate.

“Hey, you ate your food already!” He giggled as I pretended to eat it, only to lift it to his lips instead. “You want to do a blind date with Noel and Seth?”

I shrugged. “It might work. I mean, Noel’s a nice guy. Seth might be an okay guy.”

“Oh my God! You think Seth’s, okay?” Ezra gasped before I covered his mouth with my hand.

I laughed when he licked my palm. “He might not be that bad after he came over when I asked him to. He cares about you.”

“He’s my friend, boo. I mean, when we had our little falling out, Seth was there for me. He and Noel might fall in love, or at least, Seth might show Noel a good time. He’s a lot of fun.” He shook his head. “I didn’t mean it like that. Seth and I never had sex; I swear to you. He’s a flirt, but he’s innocent.”

I grunted. “He’s very aware that you’re mine. You already know that Noel and I never had sex. He was never into me like that. He held my hand, kissed me once, but I don’t even think he wanted to. Like, he felt he had to because we were on a date.”

“Well, Seth might be good for him then.” Ezra nodded. “He can pull him right out of that comfort zone.”

I grimaced. “That’s not why I think we should do this. I just want Noel to be happy, like us.”

“He will be. Just let Seth work his magic on him. They’ll talk, Seth will push him, and Noel will figure it out. Trust me.” Ezra grinned.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Ezra

A few days later, I found myself back in North Carolina. Leo was over-the-moon excited when I told him I would be able to be there for his first official date with Andy, not to mention help him get ready. He chose jeans and one of my oversized blue sweaters, which matched his eyes perfectly. Leo already had his nails done thanks to Carson, but he insisted I do his makeup again. I might be biased, but I thought Leo looked perfect. I just hoped that Andy did, too. The last thing I wanted was for the poor kid to end up with a broken heart. I was pretty sure he was already head-over-heels for Andy.

I sat back in the chair and watched as Andy reached for Leo's hand to help him on the ice. Okay, this might be the cutest thing I had ever seen in my life. I knew that Leo was nervous about the date, about falling and embarrassing himself in front of his crush, but it looked like Andy was trying to make sure that didn't happen. They had the entire rink to themselves thanks to Jackson, and I was envious of them.

When I was their age, I would have loved to have my father spoil me like that. Instead, he was more than ashamed of who I was. I practically lived at CC's house until I turned eighteen and got my own place.

I sat, sandwiched between Noel and Maverick, with Holt to his right and Matthias on Holt's left. CC, Jackson, and Watts were out doing some Christmas shopping together. I think CC was a little nervous about me spending alone time with Holt, but I had promised him I would be on my best behavior. I was excited to be here for Leo, but I was also thrilled at the chance to make some new friends. It wasn't something I did very easily. Plus, this would give me the chance to bring up the possibility of Noel and Seth date thing.

"This is a good thing your husband did," I murmured to Maverick.

He grunted. “My husband is a romantic. I would have preferred they do something like a movie at our house, but this is what Andy wanted. Jax spoils him.”

“You don’t?” I asked as I watched Leo beam happily at something Andy said. That boy was already head-over-heels in love. I wondered if Noel was ready for that. I knew Maverick wasn’t.

Maverick turned to look at me. “Do I look like the type of man who would spoil his son?” He turned back to the ice when Andy started laughing.

I think you are.

“You’re kind of a hard ass.”

“Thank you, Ezra.”

I snorted as Noel leaned across me. “I don’t think Ezra meant that as a compliment. Do you not like my brother? Am I going to have to break his heart because you don’t want him near Andy?”

I grimaced and made a slashing motion at my neck, but Noel ignored me. Maverick was like a little evil Tinkerbell when it came to his son. I wouldn’t want to piss him off. He would probably curse Noel and Leo if given the chance.

“I have nothing against your brother. He seems, uh, nice. I just don’t want Andy dating yet. He has plenty of time for that.” Maverick folded his arms over his chest and tucked his hands under his armpits. “God, could he have picked a colder place?”

“You could borrow my jacket. We’re about the same size.” I offered as I shrugged out of it.

Noel sighed. “We were kids once. We dated.”

“I didn’t date. I was in love with Jackson, but it took me a long time before I realized that.” Maverick mumbled, then blushed. “I’m sorry. This is hard for me. I love my son, and I’m a little overprotective. Leo seems like a great kid, and you two seem nice, too. I don’t make friends very easily.”

I handed my coat to Maverick, who I noticed was already wearing several layers of clothing. “I am pretty great.” I giggled when I saw the look on Maverick’s face. “Put this on before you freeze to death.”

“Uh, thanks.” He pulled on my jacket. “You smell nice.” He turned red again. “Jesus, that sounds like I’m hitting on you. Which I’m not. I only have eyes for Jackson.”

I touched his arm. “Maverick, you can say things like that, and I don’t think you’re hitting on me. I can call you pretty or beautiful and not be hitting on you. It’s what friends do. We’re both taken. You’re really hot, but no offense, you’re not my type.”

“Now I’m offended.” Maverick rolled his eyes before he let out a little giggle. “You’re not my type either, Ezra. I like mine big and tall.”

I stared at him. “Did you just make a joke?”

“Maybe.” He smirked.

Matthias leaned over to knock my shoulder with his hand. “He pretends to be this big asshole, but he’s really a softie on the inside. You’ll see. Pretty soon he’ll be hugging you and sending you text messages about having you over for dinner. He’s kind of clingy at times.”

“Dude, so rude,” Maverick gasped, but he was smiling.

I wanted that. I wanted to be Maverick’s friend. Matthias’s, too.

Holt had his face buried in his phone. I think he was texting Watts when Matthias grabbed it. “Hey!”

“I think he’s fine.” Matthias stood up and shoved the phone into his pocket. “You can relax for a couple of hours with your friends since Watts is out with his. What are you going to do during your bachelor party?”

Holt blushed. “I don’t want a bachelor party.” His entire face went white. “Matthias, no. Don’t you dare. I don’t want strippers or anything like that.”

“Who said anything about strippers, but now that you mentioned it... Oh, we could find someone who looks like Channing, right?” Matthias sat down.

Holt shook his head. “Please, no. I only want Watson. We can just hang out or something.”

“How do you know Killian isn’t going to plan some huge party with strippers for Watts?” Maverick asked. I nudged him. “What? I’m just being realistic.”

“I’ll crash it.” Matthias folded his arms over his chest. “I don’t want anyone touching my man. You know that’s what will happen. They get all excited when they realize he’s Killian Hampton from Mulligan Downtown. Fuck, no strippers at your party,” he told Holt. “I’m sorry.”

I reached over to grab Maverick’s hand. “Let me see those rings. I need to get an idea for what I want to slip ideas to CC.” I glanced down to watch the boys. Andy was taking his time and making sure they moved slowly together. He kept one arm around Leo’s waist, the other around his shoulders.

“That’s smooth.”

“Are you and Carson getting engaged?” Maverick asked, as he held out his left hand.

I shrugged. “Not any time soon, but he did mention he wanted to. Jesus, look at this engagement ring.” I ran my finger over the hockey sticks and drumsticks. “This is amazing.”

“Jax picked it out for me,” Maverick whispered.

I smiled as I released his hand. “You two are cute.”

“Could we talk about something else?” Noel sighed softly. He sounded a little sad.

Shit. “I’m sorry.” I nudged his arm. “Hey, if you don’t have a date for Watts and Holt’s wedding—”

“Nope.” Noel shook his head before he met my eyes. “I’m not interested.”

My brows dipped. “You didn’t even let me finish.” I lifted my hip to pull out my phone and unlock it. “Look, this is my friend Seth.” I showed him a picture of us on my IG. “He’s really nice. A little high maintenance at times, but you already handle your brother pretty well, so it shouldn’t be a problem. He’s about CC’s height, so he’d be taller than you. Smells good.”

“He’s cute.” Maverick leaned over my shoulder. “What? I’m married, not dead,” he asked when I mock gasped.

I chuckled. “I just thought you were Jackson-sexual,” I teased.

“No, don’t get me confused with Killian, who can only see as far as Matthias.” His gaze moved down to the rink.

Matthias let out a loud laugh. “Please. You’re so Jackson-sexual it isn’t even funny. Oh, don’t look at me like that, Mav. You eat, breathe, and sleep your husband. It’s fine. I’m the same with Kill. Have been for a long time.”

“I mean, Maverick isn’t wrong. He’s cute.” Noel worried his lip between his lip. “I like his nose ring.”

“Me, too.” Maverick grinned as he touched the one in his. “Smart guy right there. You should totally marry him. Guys with septum rings are totally marriage material.”

I think Maverick was starting to open up a little. “Maybe I could give him your number? You could text, maybe talk on the phone?”

“I don’t know.” Noel dropped his gaze back to his brother, and I did the same. I didn’t want to push him but getting him to admit that Seth was cute was a step in the right direction.

“Can I have my cell back?” Holt whispered. “Please? I worry about Watson after his accident.” He smiled when Matthias sighed and handed it back to him.

We sat in silence for a few minutes as we watched the boys. Leo seemed more comfortable with skating, and eventually, Andy dropped his arms and took his hand. They stayed close like that for a little while before Andy stopped

and pressed his lips to Leo's like it was no big deal. Like his father or Leo's brother weren't there watching.

"Oh, fuck me. Fuck, fuck, fuck," Maverick muttered. "My kid has a boyfriend now. How did this even happen? One second, he was this thirteen-year-old who wanted hugs and needed me to teach him how to play the drums, and now he's on his first date. He just..." He turned to look at Noel. "Did you see that?"

Noel nodded. "Leo's been worried how that was going to go down. Looked like it was fine to me." He was so calm about everything.

"Andy just put it out there like I wasn't even watching. The little shit." Maverick burst into laughter. "I thought I had more time to prepare myself."

I squeezed his arm. "You're holding up much better than I thought."

"I, uh... I just... Excuse me for a second." Maverick stood up and rushed off. I figured he was going to call his husband. He was probably freaking out, too.

"Good." Holt suddenly moved into the seat he vacated. "I've been wanting to get to know you." His hazel eyes searched my browns. "You and Carson, huh?" What was happening?

I nodded. "Yes, we've been friends for a long time." I tilted my head. "Are you checking up on me or something? I've known CC since we were six years old."

"CC. I think that's cute." Holt wasn't smiling, though. "Don't hurt him, Ezra. He's too sweet, too nice, and has a good heart."

"Do you think I don't know that?"

"I don't know, do you?"

I narrowed my eyes. "What are you not saying right now, Holt? Do you not think I'm good enough for Carson? Do you not like me?"

“I haven’t decided. Why haven’t we met before? Why haven’t you come to any races?” Holt’s brows dipped. “I’m not trying to be an asshole here, Ezra. I’m just trying to make sure my friend doesn’t end up broken-hearted like at the Christmas party. You did leave, right? Broke up with him?”

My stomach dropped. “I don’t think that’s any of your business.” I suddenly needed fresh air.

“You’re the reason Noel and Carson broke up, too, right?”

Noel grunted. “That’s not why.” He leaned forward to look at him. “Holt, what are you doing? Let them have their happiness. You got yours already.”

“I’m looking out for Carson. I’m not sure he’s going to have happiness with Ezra,” he answered before his eyes flicked up behind me. “Mav, take my seat.”

I felt dizzy. I needed to get out of here before I said something to Holt that I shouldn’t. He was CC’s friend, and I had no reason to get upset because he was looking out for him. I swallowed the lump in my throat as I climbed to my feet. “I can’t do this.”

“Can’t or won’t,” Holt asked as he stood up. He was only an inch or two taller than I was. Broader in the shoulders, like he worked out a lot.

I shook my head. “This...I don’t know what you want from me. I love CC, and what happened at the party was a onetime thing. Why are you doing this to me?” The sound of the loud talking and laughing had Matthias looking up behind us.

“Babe, are you having fun with the rest of the wives?” Killian teased as he hooked an arm around his fiancé. “Oh, this looks serious. What’s going on?”

I turned my gaze to find CC watching me.

“Ez, is everything okay?” He stood next to Watts as Maverick climbed over the chair to get to Jackson. They sure made a cute couple. The size difference alone made you stop and stare.

“Nothing. Everything’s fine,” I lied. “Can we go? I’m tried.”

CC’s eyes moved between Holt and me before he nodded. “Yeah, princess, we can go. Do you want to say goodbye to Leo first?”

I nodded. “Yeah, I’ll be quick.” I moved around Holt before I hopped down the stairs with tears in my eyes, hoping no one else saw them.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Carson

I'm not sure what happened between Holt and Ezra, but whatever it was, it upset my boyfriend. He sat in the car, his head pressed to the window as he stared outside, not talking to me. I knew I shouldn't have left them alone together. I knew it had been a bad idea. I reached over and took Ezra's hand, lacing our fingers together.

"Did Leo have fun?" I asked, squeezing his hand lightly. When Ezra didn't say anything, I realized something really bad had happened. "Jackson said Andy kissed him."

Ezra pulled his hand away and put it back in his lap. "Yeah." What the hell was going on?

"Where's your coat?" I put both of my hands on the steering wheel as I gritted my teeth.

He grunted. "I let Maverick borrow it. He can keep it. I have more back home."

"Princess, what's going on? Did you not have fun tonight?"

"I'm just tired." He waved me off before I could ask anything else.

I scowled into the glass. "What did Holt say to you? You two seemed to be having a heated discussion when we showed up. Did he upset you?"

But Ezra didn't answer. Instead, he twisted his small frame closer to the window. Yeah, we were not doing this. I pressed my foot down on the gas, hoping I didn't get a speeding ticket on the way home. When I pulled into the parking lot, I reached for the seatbelt to stop Ezra from unbuckling himself.

"This isn't like you."

"I'm just tired, Carson. I want to go inside and go to bed."

"Why are you lying to me? Why won't you tell me what happened?"

Ezra sighed. “Please.”

“I’m going to call him.” I went for my phone, and when he didn’t stop me, I reached over to turn his face toward me. “Ez, talk to me.”

His chin quivered. “Holt doesn’t think I’m good enough for you.” He pushed my hand away to look back out the window. “Don’t get mad at him. He’s just being a good friend.”

“He had no fucking right,” I growled. “Ezra, I love you. Look at me, please.”

He shook his head. “Maybe he’s right? I mean, what do I know about dating? Nothing. What do I know about being a boyfriend or someone’s significant other? I might be really bad at it. I’m good at sucking dick, being a good piece of ass, but honestly, what else?”

“Shut up.”

“I suppose I could learn to be a good boyfriend. I love you, and I want to make you happy, CC. You’re the most amazing person in the world. I love the sound of your laugh, the way you make me feel and your smile. God, when you smile, it makes me weak. I want to just kiss the shit out of you.” Ezra sniffled. “You could find someone else, though. Someone like Noel or someone who—”

“Shut up, Ezra!” I bellowed.

That got his attention. He finally turned to look at me with big wide eyes, tears glistening on his cheeks.

“You are not breaking this off. You are not leaving me again or trying to push me back on Noel when I fucking need you. Holt is an asshole for putting those thoughts in your head. I am going to call him tomorrow and make sure he apologizes, but right now, you’re going to listen to what I have to say. Do you understand me?” He nodded. “Good, now we’re going inside.”

Ezra slipped off his seatbelt and opened the door, but I made sure to move fast enough to meet him there. I scooped

him up and carried him in my arms, his legs wrapped around my waist.

“I can walk.”

“Tell me you love me,” I demanded.

He ducked his head under my chin. “I love you, Carson.”

“I love you, too.”

I stopped to open the door, with Ezra clinging to me like a child, and when I slammed it shut behind me, I didn’t bother to turn on any lights. I walked straight to his room and placed him on his feet.

“Here.” I shoved the bag I’d grabbed from the backseat at him.

He stared at me. “What is this?”

“I got you something tonight. Open it.” I tipped his head up and pressed my mouth against his soft, warm lips. “Fuck, don’t you dare ever try to break up with me again, do you hear me?”

A sob escaped Ezra’s throat. “I’m sorry.”

“Nothing to be sorry about, princess,” I assured him. “Open the bag.”

He gave me a shy smile as he did as I asked, digging through the tissue paper and pulling out a pair of white panties with *Holly Jolly* written on them in red script.

“CC,” Ezra whispered as he dropped the bag and held them up. “These are perfect.”

“Uh, there’s one more thing inside.” I reached down for the bag.

Ezra smiled. “These are more than enough. You don’t have to—Is that a bralette?”

“You don’t have to wear it. I wasn’t sure if—Oh.”

Ezra slipped off his sweater.

“You like it? I didn’t know if you would or not.” The moment I had seen the bra and underwear, I knew they

belonged to Ezra. I just wasn't sure he would wear both of them.

He winked. "Boo, I have never worn one before, but I've always wanted to. Will you help me put it on?" He turned around as he slid his arms into the straps.

Fuck, my cock grew hard as steel at the thought of what he would look like in it. I swallowed nervously as I hooked it together, and when Ezra turned around, he smiled up at me.

"Ez." I let my gaze move over him.

"You like it?" He moved his hands over the lacy fabric. "Do I look pretty?"

I nodded. "You look so beautiful. Put on the rest for me." I watched heavily lidded as Ezra unbuttoned his pants and yanked them down his legs before stepping out of them. He was wearing a normal pair of briefs, which he tugged off, and then he slowly pulled on the panties.

"What do you think, baby?"

"I think I want to fuck you."

Ezra's eyes darkened. "Yeah?"

"But you have to keep those on." I growled before I caged him in against the wall. "You think you could do that for me?"

His hands dropped to my pants. "Baby, I can absolutely do that."

My mouth was on his as his fingers tore at my pants to get them undone, and I don't remember ever wanting anyone so badly in my entire life. I nipped at Ezra's lips. My tongue curled around his and then I pushed him to the carpet, shucking my jeans off the process.

"Wait, the lube." He chuckled. "It's in the other room."

"Stay here."

I jumped to my feet, kicking my pants off and losing my shirt in the hallway. I found what I needed before I rushed back to Ezra, who was lying like a starfish on the floor for me.

“Jesus, look at you.”

He held his arms out. “You like what you see?”

“I love it.” I climbed down to splay my body over his, then flipped us, so he was on top of me. “I love *you*.”

I groaned when Ezra rubbed himself against my erection. I leaned up to suck his nipple through the lacy fabric, and he let out a low whine.

“I need you. Right now, Carson. I can’t wait.” Ezra whimpered as he dragged his hands through my hair. “Please, please, please.”

I reached between us to palm at his cock and then grabbed the lube.

“Turn around.”

He scrambled around to give me his backside, and I pulled the fabric of the underwear back. He leaned forward as I squirted the liquid onto my finger.

“You’re so sexy, Ezra.”

“Carson.” He whimpered softly as I slipped a finger inside, followed by another. His hips arched. “That feels good, baby. Give me more.”

I smiled at the sight before me. His two perfect round globes, his tight little hole.

“More?”

I slid a third digit inside, and Ezra cried out as he rocked back against me.

“More, please.”

“What do you want, princess?”

Ezra glanced over his shoulder. “You, Carson. You inside of me. Fuck me. Fill me up, stretch me wide, and make me come all over your big, fat dick.”

“Don’t move,” I hissed as I removed my fingers.

I slathered my length in lube, then I grabbed his hips to position myself at his entrance and plunged inside. I stared at

the way we fit together. How perfect we looked. How good it felt. Ezra clenched around me, and I groaned.

“Tease.” I slapped his ass, and he shifted his hips. My own bucked up, and we both groaned in pleasure.

Ezra started to slowly move, and I was mesmerized as I watched him. The way he stretched around my cock, slid up and down my length. It took everything I had not to come at the sight before me. He pressed his palms against my thighs as he rode me, and I gripped his slim waist to keep a steady rhythm going.

“Carson, you feel so good,” he whispered, and I caught sight of a bead of sweat as it slid down his back before it got stuck in the fabric of the bra. “I love you. I love you,” he chanted.

I smiled even though he couldn’t see me, and heat and pleasure flooded my veins. “I love you, too, Ezra.”

“Can I...will you...” Ezra’s head dropped forward as he let out a low, deep whine. “Fuck, I’m going to come.” He dug his nails into my legs as he let go, and I felt the splatter of his hot cum as he took what he wanted from me. When he was done, I gripped his waist tight to watch as I filled him from behind.

My cock jerked and twitched inside of Ezra’s ass as I emptied myself. I had never taken the time to actually do that before, not that I had a lot of experience, but it was one of the hottest things I had ever seen. The way it never seemed to stop. The way Ezra just took it all and pushed back, trying to milk everything I had.

When I was finally done, I helped him off and down on the carpet next to me.

“You are perfection,” I murmured, dragging a hand through his damp auburn hair. “Let me get something to wash you with.”

Ezra shook his head. “Mm, not yet. I like this post-coital bliss thing we have going on right now.”

“I might never get over the sight of how my cock looked emptying into your ass,” I confessed. His head popped up to

look at me, a smile spreading over his face. “What?”

Ezra giggled. “You’re starting to sound a lot like me.”

“Your dirty mouth is rubbing off on me,” I teased before I pressed a kiss to his nose. “I meant what I said. I’m calling Holt tomorrow.”

He sighed. “Please don’t do that, CC. I don’t want to start a fight. Watts will get involved, and I just... Can you just drop it?”

“No.” I wasn’t planning on it either.

He started to stand up and grab his clothes.

“Ez, look at me,” I growled. “Hey, I’m serious right now. You were going to break up with me over that. *Again*. You have to stop doing that when things get complicated. What we have is none of Holt’s business. If Watts gets mad because I took a tone or whatever with his fiancé, that’s his problem. Holt shouldn’t be talking to you like that. He got mad when people gave him shit for them being stepbrothers. People got over it. Holt will get over this. You two might even become friends.” When he continued to stare at his phone, I nudged his leg with my foot. “Everything okay, boo?”

Ezra’s hand shook as he turned to look at me. “No, it’s not.” He held his phone out to me. “Ty leaked the video. The one I did with him. Everyone knows, Carson. They know I’m a camboy. How am I ever going to face them again?”

Chapter Thirty

Ezra

I couldn't even look at CC right now. I was so embarrassed. I never should have let Ty record that video. It was the stupidest thing I had ever done, and that was saying something, because I had done some really stupid things in my life. I turned away from him again to grab my pants and pulled them up over my hips.

"Hey, it's going to be fine," CC whispered as his arms wrapped around me. "We'll fix this."

I pulled away. "On what damn planet is this fine?" I exclaimed. "That's not you on there? You don't have to worry about everyone seeing you—oh my god, Leo!" Tears burned my eyes at the thought of that innocent kid finding out what I did. "Noel isn't going to let me near his brother."

"Ezra, stop for a second." CC reached for me again. "Noel isn't like that. He already knows about it, remember?"

I bit down so hard on my lip I tasted blood. "No, no, the things on there... It's bad." I tried to push him away again. "You'll see."

"Trust me, Ez. I won't be watching that video," he growled. "Stop struggling and let me hold you."

I turned to look at him, tears spilling down my cheeks. "It doesn't matter, boo. Everyone is going to know how fucking disgusting I am. What I let him do to me." I caught the flinch in CC's eyes.

"Ezra, what does that mean?"

"I thought you didn't want to know?"

CC stared at me before he yanked me against his naked body. "I love you, princess. Whatever is on that video isn't going to change how I feel about you. We're a forever thing."

"You promise?" I whispered, because I wasn't sure he would feel that way.

He pulled back to look at me. “I promise.”

The shrill sound of his cell phone ringing from the hall had him releasing me, and I watched as CC went to go answer it. I bent down to grab my shirt and pulled it on.

“Are you fucking kidding?” CC yelled.

I grimaced as I moved to the doorway.

“That’s bullshit, Watts.” CC was trying to pull his briefs on and had his phone tucked under his ear against his shoulder. “That asshole released a video without Ezra’s knowledge. There has to be some sort of legal action.” He turned to see me standing there. “Princess, can you give me a minute?”

I felt my chin start to tremble as I backed away from him. This was all my fault. If Watts saw the video, that meant everyone else probably had, too. They saw what Ty had done to me. The outfit he had me wear for him. How I let him tie me to the bed, and the dirty things he’d said to me. The names he called me. I rushed to the kitchen sink just in time to throw up my dinner and then I rested my head against the counter. What if Watts fired CC because of this? He wouldn’t want this attention brought to Brooks Racing. Holt already hated me. Everyone else was going to hate me, too.

“Ezra.”

My head shot up, and I turned to see CC leaning in the doorway.

I scrubbed a hand down my face. “What happened?” My entire body began to tremble. “Did they see it? Everyone saw it, didn’t they? Are they going to fire you? I’m a whore, Carson.”

“Hey, what did I say about that word?” He moved to grip my shoulders. “I think we should wash up and go to bed. We’ll deal with this mess in the morning.”

“No, I can’t. I should go home.”

“You are home, boo. This is your home.”

I burst into tears, and CC wrapped his arms around me.

“It’s going to be okay, princess, I promise.” He pulled me closer. “No one is losing their job. Watts wanted to know who was in the video with you. That’s it. He has his lawyers looking into this.” That only made me cry even harder. “Ez, boo, come on.” He started to walk me into the hallway. “I want you to take a warm shower.” But when he tried to get me into the shower, I only clung to him, shaking my head. “Want me to take one with you?”

I sniffed softly. “Yeah.”

“Okay.”

CC took me to the bathroom and turned on the shower with me clinging to him for dear life. He undressed me, dropping my clothes on the floor, then he did the same for himself. He picked me up and placed me in the tub, then followed me inside.

“Step under the water, princess.”

I reached for him. “Please.”

I kept my gaze on his feet, staring at his toes and taking in how long the second toe was, in fact, bigger than the first one. The little hairs that stuck in weird directions. I liked it, though. I liked everything about CC. I always had.

“I like your toes.”

“Do you?” CC chuckled as he lifted my head up with his finger. “You have a foot fetish, Ez?”

I tried to look away, but he gripped my chin.

“I love you,” I murmured. I wrapped my arms around him as the hot water washed over my head and down my body. “Don’t leave me.”

“I’m not going anywhere, princess. I love you,” CC assured me as he held me under the stream of the water. We stayed like that for a few seconds before he surprised me. “What’s on that video, Ezra? How bad is it going to be when I finally have to watch it?”

I choked back my tears. “Bad. Please don’t make me tell you. You’re going to hate me.”

“That’s impossible, boo. I could never hate you,” he whispered as he brushed the wet hair back from my forehead. He leaned down to turn off the water. “Stay right here.”

My teeth chattered together as I watched CC pull the curtain back and climb from the tub. He grabbed two towels and then he smiled at me as he wrapped one around me tightly before he hung the other one around his waist. I let him dry my hair with a smaller one and then I followed him into the bedroom. He dug out some clean clothes, and I didn’t object as he dressed me in an oversized sweatshirt and a pair of pajama pants. Then we both climbed into bed. CC wrapped his arms around me and held me against him so tight that I never wanted him to let go.

I woke up alone. CC’s side of the bed was cool to the touch. He’d left longer than I wanted to think about. Had he even slept there at all? I sat up and dragged a hand through my curls before I gripped the back of my neck. I felt like I hadn’t slept at all, but that wasn’t the case. The sun was up. I climbed from the bed, then went to the bathroom to brush my teeth and freshen up. As I came out, I heard hushed voices.

“You had no right to say anything.”

“I was only looking out for you, Carson.”

“Is that what you call that, Holt? You don’t even know him.”

“I know enough.”

I froze. Holt was here right now? He hated me. It was obvious by the way he was talking about me. I swallowed nervously and moved to the hallway. I should say something.

“Look, Carson, Holt’s only looking out for you. Are you sure that Ezra isn’t just using you?” That sounded like Watts, maybe?

CC growled. “Fuck you. Ezra isn’t like that.”

“I’m not.” I burst into the room. “I love him. I’ve loved him a lot longer than any of you have known him. I don’t care

about his money or his fame. He could stop racing right now, and I'd still want him."

Holt's hazel orbs flashed angrily. "Really? Where were you when I stayed here? When Watson and I weren't together. He didn't even mention you."

"That's enough, Holt," CC warned.

"No, I want an answer. You never even mentioned your so-called best friend. I was here for a couple of weeks. You never spoke about Ezra or brought him up at all. I slept here, ate here, cried on your shoulder. Almost twenty years is a long time to be friends, Carson. Where was he that whole time?" Holt stared at me.

I stormed into the room with my hands on my hips. "We had a fight. I kissed him. He let me." I stopped to stare at CC before I reached over to link our hands together. "He let me jerk him off, and I liked it. It was so much more than that, though. Neither one of us realized that our feelings were deeper than friendship until that moment. We didn't talk for months." I nudged CC. "Tell him, baby. Tell him why you went after him."

"Oh, oh, pick me!" Killian grinned as he raised his hand, but Matthias grabbed it and pushed it back down.

CC sighed softly as he looked at me. "I went after you, Holt, because you reminded me of Ezra. You're almost the same height, the same body type. I thought maybe I could get over Ez if I had someone else."

"What?" Holt exclaimed. "I don't..." He stared at me like he was seeing me for the first time. "I don't have freckles."

I rolled my eyes before I leaned into CC. "And I have brown eyes, but you see it, right? The resemblance?"

"I see it," Watts answered. "I mean, H, you're hotter, but I totally see it." He pressed a kiss into Holt's hair.

CC squeezed my hand. "I love him, Holt. I love Ezra so much it hurts. I loved him the night I asked you out and the night you came here to stay until you and Watts worked everything out. I was never going to end up with you, and I

knew that. I wanted to try to see if someone else would make me feel the way he did. I tried with Noel, too.” He turned to look at me. “Ezra lights up my entire world just by being in it.”

“I think I need to write that shit down,” Killian muttered under his breath.

I stared up at my best-friend-turned-boyfriend. “That is the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

“I only said it because it’s true.” CC smiled before he leaned down and slid his lips over mine.

A low sob bubbled up before it escaped my throat. I threw my arms around him. I didn’t care what Holt thought. If he hated me or liked me. Our relationship was none of his business. All that mattered was that CC loved me and wanted me.

“I hope that answers all your questions, Holt,” Matthias murmured, just as someone knocked on the front door.

I clung to CC as he tried to untangle me from his waist. “Princess, I need to go see who else is here. We’re having a busy morning.”

I shook my head. “Take me with you.” I giggled when he did just that. Lifting me up like a child and tucking me against his hip. “I could get used to this.”

“Don’t,” CC teased before he pulled the door open. “Maverick?”

I leaned my head on his shoulder. “Everything okay?” I asked.

“Is this like a sex thing?” Maverick asked, as he pushed past us. “Oh, are we having a party, and I wasn’t invited?” He turned to look at me as CC placed me on my feet.

I shook my head. “No.” I was more than surprised when Maverick moved to wrap me in a hug, but I happily returned it. I really wanted him to like me.

“Good, because I saw your video.” Maverick pushed the white hair back from his face.

I made a slashing motion across my neck as I tried to get him to stop talking.

“You let him hit you? Is that some sort of kink I wasn’t aware of? Because it’s disturbing. I don’t think I’d be into that. It looks painful.”

“He did what?” CC exclaimed.

Shit. I hung my head as I turned around.

“There’s evidence of Ty’s abuse on that video, Ezra?” CC gripped my chin to force me to look at him.

I nodded. “Yes, but I always had the men I worked with sign NDA’s. That wasn’t part of the deal, and he knew that.”

“Good, we’re having that bastard arrested.”

Chapter Thirty-One

Ezra

I stared up at CC just as a pair of arms wrapped around me and pulled me into a tight side hug. It wasn't CC, though. It wasn't Maverick, who smelled like peppermint and chocolate. It wasn't Matthias or Killian, because they were—

“I'm sorry I judged you, Ezra.” Holt's voice was soft in my ear as he held me against him. “I had no right to do that. People did that to me when they found out the truth about my relationship with Watson. I shouldn't have done that to you. I understand if you don't want to be my friend or have anything to do with me. But I hope that you'll give me a chance. I'd like to be your friend since we'll be spending a lot of time together.”

I twisted my body around to look at him. He really was pretty with those big hazel eyes, and dark brown hair. He stared at me as I watched him. Holt was a little taller than I was, but not by much. I could see what all the fuss was about now. Why Watts fell for him. Why CC thought maybe he could, too.

“I forgive you.”

“Really?” Holt's brows furrowed. “I mean, I was a jerk, and I don't want you forgive me because you feel you have to.”

I hugged him. “I don't hold a grudge,” I assured him.

“They're staring, aren't they?” Holt whispered as we looked over at CC and Watts.

I giggled. “Yes, they are.” I leaned closer. “Do you think they expect us to start making out or start fighting?”

“No one is making out with my fiancé but me!” Watts exclaimed, which only made me laugh harder. “You two can stop hugging now. It's weird.”

I released Holt, expecting him to go back to Watts, but he didn't. Instead, he stayed next to me. "We should go out. You, me, Mav, and Matthias. I think our men might be busy for a while."

"Good idea," Maverick agreed. "I have to get Jax something for Christmas. What do you get the man who has everything? By everything, I mean me."

I grinned. "Should we bring Noel? I feel like he could use some fun in his life. Oh, I could talk up Seth while he's with us. You know, for the wedding. I'm totally setting them up. I think it's a brilliant idea."

"I think we should grab Leo, too. Andy can come here." Matthias pushed his chair back so he could come stand with us.

"What's happening?" Watts asked.

Killian chuckled. "I think the WAGs are bonding, man."

"What's a WAG?" CC asked softly.

Maverick snorted. "Wives and girlfriends. Keep up, CC." He winked at me.

"Seth and Noel?" Watts shook his head. "You know what? I don't even want to know. Let them figure that shit out."

"Baby, do you need me? I'm going to shower so I can go out."

I met CC's eyes, and the smile that spread over his face had my heart thumping loudly in my chest. He looked so happy that I wanted to just climb him and kiss the hell out of him. Nothing was stopping me from doing that. This was our house. These were our friends. *Friends*. I had friends. That was multiple. It had an S on the end.

CC used his index finger to call me over, and when I did, he leaned down to bring his lips to my ear. "I think I love you so much that I can't stand it. I'll be thinking about all the dirty things I want to do to you while you're gone." I pulled back to stare at him. "You okay with that, princess?"

“Yes.” I swallowed hard as he leaned down to slide his lips over mine.

“Are you two being gross right now? This is literally your house. Go find a room to use,” Killian teased, but I saw the way he looked over at Matthias.

I rolled my eyes. “When are you going to marry him?”

“I think about that all the time, LD. This man saved my life. I should just rush him off to Vegas right now and put another ring on it.” Killian grinned before his face grew serious. “I know Matthias deserves the world.” He held out his hand, which Matthias quickly took.

My skin broke out in goosebumps. Why were all these big bad men such fucking lovesick assholes when it came to their significant others? I wasn’t complaining. I liked it. I looked up at CC, who winked at me.

“I love you,” I blurted out. “Like so much, and I don’t even care who hears me.”

“I love you, too, boo.” He grinned.

I nodded. “Okay, well, let me go shower so I can go out with the WAGs.”

My stomach flipped and swooped. This was my life now. I had never felt happier as I rushed off to the bathroom.

“Where are we going?”

Leo was practically bouncing off the seat of the silver SUV Matthias was driving. He was beyond thrilled when we picked him up along with his brother, but when he saw Andy in the vehicle, I thought he was going to spontaneously combust. Andy had no interest in staying at the townhouse, even though Jackson was heading there once practice was over with the Panthers. He wanted to spend time with his boyfriend. The whole young love thing. The two of them were sitting in the third row of the truck, holding hands and cuddling together like we couldn’t see them.

Noel nudged me before he turned around. “Christmas shopping. You’re not going off on your own, either. Maverick and I are watching you.”

“Right.” Maverick was busily texting on his phone. “Totally watching.” Guess he wasn’t that worried about his son anymore.

I leaned over his shoulder. “Who are you talking to?”

“My brother, Dean.” He flipped his phone over so I couldn’t see. “He’s having a crisis.” He used air quotes over the last part.

I giggled. “Girl problems I don’t understand.” I leaned back and put my head on Noel’s shoulder. “Have you thought anymore more about Seth?”

“Why are you touching me? I’m not a cuddler. Also, no.” Noel grunted, but he didn’t move away.

I batted my lashes at him. “Too bad because I’m a cuddler. It’s my thing. You’ll get used to it now that we’re friends.”

“Is that what we are?” He wrinkled his nose at me. “Why do you smell like cinnamon? Is it, like, a Christmas thing or your shampoo?”

“It’s his secret. He’ll never tell you,” Leo answered from the backseat.

I held up my hand for a high-five. “Thanks, boo.”

“You smell like cinnamon, too,” Andy murmured, and I swear I felt Leo blush. He knew my secret because I told him. Only him and CC.

Maverick spun around to stare at us. “My brother is in a relationship with a man. He’s bisexual, or something along those lines.”

Holt gasped. “He what? You never told me that. I thought we were, like, friends or whatever.”

“What now?” I sat up. “Dean? Isn’t he in love with Killian’s sister? A man? What man? Since when? I need more than just that. Spill it.”

Matthias chuckled. “That would be the one.” He glanced in the rearview mirror to meet my eyes and winked. “She’s my best friend, but uh, she’s engaged to someone else. It’s pretty serious, too. Boy, I wish my husband was here right now to help handle this.”

Wait, what did he just say *husband*? Holt shot me a look like he could read my mind. He heard that, too, right?

“I’m watching you,” Maverick warned as he stared over my shoulder. “Don’t even think about it.” He made a motion with his fingers as he brought them up to his eyes and pointed them behind me at Andy. “Yeah, so Dean is seeing a man. They’ve been together for a while, and I think he wants more, but I don’t think Beau does. More than that, but young ears.”

“Dad, I’m fifteen. I’m not a kid,” Andy reminded him. “I’ve kissed a boy.”

“Don’t remind me,” Maverick shot back. “You’re always going to be my baby, so just stop.”

Andy groaned. “Uncle Dean is with Beau Whitlock. He wants to get married, but Beau is being weird about it. Don’t look at me like that. We talk. He knows I’m bi, too.”

“Beau Whitlock, the hockey player? Whoa, when did that happen?”

My head was so full of questions. I needed to meet Dean now. Also, I had to get Matthias alone because he had totally called Killian his husband. Since when? Did they secretly get married and not tell anyone? Ugh, this was so unfair. The gossip in me wanted to scream at him, but I wasn’t going to do that. Not with all the people in the car. I could wait. Maybe.

Maverick grunted. “I’m going to need you to stop right now, Andrew.” He met my gaze. “We’ll talk about this when the children aren’t around.”

“Not a child, Dad,” Andy reminded him, as we all heard Leo giggle.

Noel sighed softly. “I am not ready for this dating thing. I am so unprepared.” He leaned into me, and when he took my

hand, I nearly fell over. “I appreciate all your help, Ezra. You’re way better at handling Leo than I am.”

Friends with an S.

“You’re welcome.” I wasn’t sure what else I should say because I was so surprised that he took my hand.

Noel had already confirmed he wasn’t the touchy feely type, but I’d take this if he was going to give it to me. I leaned my head against his as Matthias pulled the SUV into the mall parking lot.

“Oh, I’ve been wanting to check out the new record store that just opened,” Andy announced.

Once we had parked and everyone had climbed out of the vehicle, Maverick pointed his finger at his son. “You two can go off alone. However, you’re going to behave yourself,” he warned. “Don’t give me that look. You’re a good kid. I’ve never had to ever worry about you, but now that you have a boyfriend, I’m going to start.”

“Dad.” Andy rolled his eyes.

Maverick shook his head. “Don’t you dad me, kiddo. I’m too young to be this stressed out. Worry about diseases and sexual education. God, I can’t do this.” He threw his hands up in the air.

“Dad.” Andy sighed before he moved to hug his father. “We’re not having sex yet. We just started dating, and we’re not ready for that. We like each other. That’s it. We’re just seeing what happens. Hey, I promise to talk to you before we take that step, okay?”

Noel shook his head. “I can’t do this either.” He looked at me.

“I’m here if you need me,” I assured him. “Let’s just go inside,” I suggested, watching Andy grab Leo’s hand.

Once we were inside the crowded mall, Andy and Leo went off on their own, promising to meet us back here in two hours. I had no idea what to get CC for Christmas but hopefully something would jump out at me as we walked

around. Just as I started to open my mouth to ask them if they had any ideas, Maverick's phone started ringing.

"My brother is Face Timing me," he announced.

I clapped my hands. "Answer it. I want to meet him."

"Of course, you do." Maverick rolled his eyes but held his phone out as I shoved my face next to his. "Hey."

"Hey? Hey? I'm having a meltdown over—who is that?" Dean Frost stared at me. "Where are you, Mav? I need to talk to you and you're in public?"

Matthias chuckled. "Hi, Dean."

"Matty, is that you? Is Kill there? I need my best friend, too, and he's not answering my texts." Dean looked frazzled as he ran a hand through his pink hair.

"Don't you normally have green hair?" I asked him.

Dean nodded. "I do, but I decided to change it up a bit. I'm sorry, but who are you? Mav, are you making more friends down there? Where's Jax? I'm coming for Christmas, by the way. I need to get away from Beau. You know what? I'm hanging up so I can just call you."

Holt laughed as he moved closer to me. "You heard Matthias, right?" he whispered. "It wasn't my imagination?" I nodded. "Oh, thank God. I can finally talk to someone else about this now. He's supposed to be my best friend. I knew they got married, but I was sworn to secrecy. But now that he let that slip, it's not off-limits anymore."

The smile on my face suddenly disappeared as I caught sight of a familiar face that disappeared into the crowd. Was that Ty? There was no way. Was he following me? I felt sick to my stomach. Did he see Andy and Leo? What if he went after them?

"Hey, are you all right? You look like you saw a ghost," Noel asked.

I shook my head. "I think...I think we should leave."

Matthias stepped closer. "What's wrong?"

The Christmas crowd suddenly seemed like too much. The noise level is too high. “I thought I saw Ty.”

“What?” Noel’s eyes flashed with worry.

I stumbled as I tried to move. “He’s supposed to stay away from me, but that hasn’t stopped him before.”

“Dean, I’ll call you back,” Maverick hissed. “Do you think he knows who Andy is? I have to get my kid.”

Matthias grabbed the back of his sweatshirt. “We’ll get him and Leo. Stop.” He had his own phone in his hand. “I’m calling Killian.”

My legs felt like they might give out, and I might have gone down if Noel hadn’t caught me. I needed CC. I needed him to tell me this would be okay. That it wasn’t Ty, and that no one would hurt those boys, and that it was just my imagination.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Carson

My heart was so full. Seeing Ezra making friends with my friends and the smile on his face when he left had never made me so happy. Well, that might not be completely true. Being with Ezra made me happy. But I liked seeing him like that. Smiling, laughing, having a good time, and just being himself.

I had been so pissed at Holt and the way he attacked Ezra the way he had. Before Ez had woken up and heard us, I was prepared to end my career if it came down to it. That's how much my boyfriend meant to me. I would have, too, if they hadn't worked things out.

"CC, you with us?" Killian nudged my foot under the table and grinned when I flipped him off. "When are you planning on making an honest man out of the little dude?"

I felt my cheeks heat "Soon."

"That so?" Watts leaned back in his chair. "You have a ring?"

The knock at the door had me getting up, and when I opened it, I found Jackson standing there, along with a blond-haired, blue-eyed man I didn't recognize.

"This is Wyatt." Jackson stormed in angrily, with Wyatt following behind him.

"Uh, hey." I watched as both of them went over to Killian and Watts. Was Wyatt one of his players or just a friend? You know what; it didn't matter. He was more than welcome to hang out here.

Watts jutted his chin at Jackson. "Hey, man."

He was waiting for a call from his lawyer to see what we could do file charges against Ty. I had yet to watch the video, and I would avoid it at all costs, but Killian had. He said it was pretty bad, and that, yes, Ty had put his hands on Ezra.

“Guys, this is Wyatt Murray,” Jackson announced. “He’s been traded to the Panthers.”

Wyatt dropped his chin and stared down at his shoes, shifting his weight back and forth. I didn’t know a lot about hockey, but that seemed odd in the middle of December.

Killian folded his arms over his chest. “Now? Isn’t it kind of a strange time? I mean, I’ve been paying more attention to the sport, but isn’t this kind of random? Isn’t the trade normally in March?”

“Normally.” Jackson grunted. “But since he and Asher couldn’t keep their dicks in their pants, and it turned into a giant mess—literally—he’s here.”

Wyatt’s shoulder slumped forward. “Could you maybe not tell everyone my personal shit?”

“Why not, Wy? Are you ashamed of what happened?” Jackson asked.

“I’m not ashamed, just hurt,” Wyatt said, his voice shaking.

Jackson dragged a hand through his hair. “Look—”

My phone ringing caused everyone to turn to look at me as I answered it. “Hey, princess.”

“No, it’s Noel.”

“What’s going on?” I was on my feet, grabbing my coat as the others stood up. “Where’s Ezra?”

Where the hell had I put my keys? I couldn’t remember. We had come home last night, I carried Ezra inside, and we went into the spare room. I turned to see everyone watching me.

“Uh, yeah, so Ezra thought he saw Ty,” Noel blurted out.

My blood turned cold.

I thought I might pass out.

“Wait, what? Back up and tell me exactly what happened.”

“Everything okay?” Watts asked, but I saw the fear in his eyes as he shoved his phone in his pocket. “Do we need to go to wherever they are? Someone want to drive, seeing as I can’t.”

My body had started to shake. “Where are you?” I asked again.

“The mall.”

“Which one?” There were several in the area.

Jackson grabbed the phone from my hand. “Where is my husband? My kid? If something happens to them, I will murder you.”

Killian put his hand on his shoulder. “Down, killer.” He took the phone from him and handed it back to me.

We were already walking outside. “They can’t—Why are you calling me from Ezra’s phone? Where is he?” When Noel didn’t answer me, I stopped in the middle of the sidewalk outside my house. “Noel?”

I could hear all the shoppers behind him, but I could also hear Matthias. “Noel, please tell me he’s with you.”

“Yeah, no, he’s with me,” he assured me. “He’s just... He’s scared, Carson. We can’t...we can’t find Andy and Leo.”

My stomach dropped. “What mall are you at?” I was afraid to look at Jackson. He was going to lose his ever-loving mind. “How are you so calm?”

“This is just how I am all the time,” Noel assured me.

Things might not have worked out between us, but I was thankful to have Noel as my friend. I glanced up at Jackson to find him glaring at me.

“Right, so tell me what mall you’re at, so we can meet you there.”

Jackson barely parked his car, and he was out the driver’s side, rushing inside. I hadn’t said a word to him about the boys being missing, but it was like he had a sixth sense about it.

Maybe he did. It made me not want to have kids. Killian, Watts, and Wyatt were right behind us, but I couldn't think about anything but Ezra. I had to get to him. I needed to make sure he was okay; assure him this wasn't his fault. I kept Noel on the phone with me the entire car ride over because apparently Ezra was in shock. He had nearly collapsed, and now they were in the security office waiting for us.

"Where's my husband?" Jackson demanded, storming inside. He was a big man and, right now, scary as hell.

"Sir—"

"No, my husband. My kid, now." Jackson growled at the girl behind the small desk. "Small man with white hair, green eyes? Bundled in layers of clothes."

She nodded. "Right this...Are you all together?" she asked as she saw us.

"We are. My boyfriend is here, too. He's the one with freckles," I told her.

She didn't say anything but led us toward the back of the room towards a door and knocked before she led us inside. The moment Ezra saw me, he burst into tears, and I gathered him in my arms as he sobbed.

"It's all my fault," he sobbed. "If something happened to Leo or Andy..." He buried his face in my neck.

Maverick was whispering softly to Jackson, who was looking more and more like he was going to commit murder while Noel looked completely out of place. Killian was hugging Matthias, and Watts was holding Holt against him.

"It wasn't Ty," I assured Ezra as I rubbed his back. "Princess, he's not here."

He nodded his head. "I swear I saw him. I just froze, and my knees gave out. I guess I started screaming. Someone thought I was being attacked and called security. I'm so embarrassed. Now we can't find the boys. This is all my fault."

"It's not your fault," I murmured.

“When was the last time anyone saw Andy and Leo?” Killian asked as he pulled Matthias onto his lap.

That was interesting to see. They were about the same height and weight, but Killian acted like it was no big deal. He hooked an arm around Matthias so he could haul him down onto his legs before Matthias buried his face in his neck. It was pure love between them.

Maverick wrapped his arms around Jackson. “About two hours ago, maybe? We got to the mall, told them to meet us back where we came in, and that was it. Dean called me. It got all fucked up after that.” His chin started to quiver.

“I’m not leaving without my brother. I don’t care if I have to search every nook and cranny of this place.” Noel gritted his teeth. “He’s still here. I can feel it.”

“I can help.” Wyatt spoke up from the doorway. “I mean, I know you don’t know me, but I don’t have anything else to do.”

Noel tilted his head. “Who are you?”

“Uh, Wyatt Murray. I’m a friend of Jackson’s.” His lips twitched like he might smile.

Noel’s nostrils flared as he took him in. “More eyes would be good, thanks.”

Ezra struggled against me. “We should be out there right now. Looking for them. What if someone took them and hid them somewhere? What if he...what if...” His chest moved as he tried to get himself under control.

“Breathe, princess, you’re going to make yourself sick. You’ve already had a stressful couple of days.” I tilted his head up. “Maybe they got sidetracked somewhere. They could have gone to the arcade or the food court. We were teenagers once, remember?”

Jackson made a noise in his throat. “Carson’s right. Mav and I got into a lot of trouble when we were kids. I’m sure you two did, too, right?”

“We did.” Ezra sniffed softly. “Maybe they just lost track of time.”

Holt worried his lip between his teeth. “It’s Christmas time. It’s really crowded here. Maybe someone should go back out to where we were supposed to meet them and—”

“I’ll do it,” Noel blurted. “I don’t have any reason to be standing around playing slap dick, and I need to make sure my brother is okay before I lose my damn mind.” He started toward the door. “You guys okay with that?” He glanced over his shoulder.

“Noel!” Leo burst into the room and threw himself at his brother. “Oh my god, I thought I was never going to see you again.”

Maverick launched himself at Andy the second he saw his son standing in the doorway, and Jackson stood back for a moment before his husband reached for him. I felt a warmth spread over me as the family reunited.

Ezra let out a soft sob.

“It’s okay,” I assured him.

“Y’all look like you’re in mourning here. Is this because of us? We lost track of time and then we couldn’t find you at the meeting spot.” Leo stared up at his brother.

Noel hugged him closer again. “Everything is fine.”

“You’re not mad.” Leo let out a soft chuckle before he untangled himself from his brother. “I just need to make sure Ezra is all right.”

Ezra turned around to look at him. “Me? I’m fine.” My boyfriend was anything but fine.

“You look upset. Can I hug you?” Leo asked.

Ezra nodded. “Cuddles are my preferred method of affection, boo. You should know that by now.” He moved to wrap himself in Leo’s open arms.

I smiled as a sense of relief filled the room. “Where were you two?” I asked.

“We were just walking around and lost track of time. We stopped for lunch. Then we went back to meet them, and they weren’t there. I texted Dad, but he didn’t answer. I got really nervous; you know? That maybe some crazy fan kidnapped him or something.” Andy was sandwiched in-between his fathers.

Killian snorted. “Mav would probably scare them away if that happened.”

“Stop it.” Matthias slapped at his chest. “This isn’t funny.”

Killian nodded. “Sorry, babe, you’re right.”

Watts looked at his phone. “Well, now that everything is settled, I guess we can head out.”

“For what it’s worth, if Ty had actually been here, I would have knocked that motherfucker out.” Noel grunted.

“Uh, what?” Ezra looked surprised.

Noel nodded. “I thought he took my brother, his boyfriend. I was scared. What he did to you, Ezra... Hurting you, releasing that video. No one hurts my friends or family and gets away with it. Prick.”

“I’m your friend?” Ezra whispered.

Noel nodded. “Well, yeah. Aren’t you?”

“You need to hug me now.” Ezra opened his arms.

Noel wrinkled his nose. “I’m good, really.”

“No.” Ezra wiggled his fingers. “You held my hand before, right? Let me rest my head on your shoulder. Cuddles are my love language, boo, bring it in. Bring it right now, or I will be forced to hug you against your will.”

I tried to hide my smile as Noel looked at me for help. Wyatt looked so confused.

“Noel, just do it. Ezra isn’t going to take no for an answer.”

“You don’t mind? I mean, I’m not stepping on your toes or anything?” He moved closer to Ezra.

I shook my head. “He’s just a super affectionate guy. I know he’s mine.”

“Oh-kay.” Noel stepped into Ezra’s open arms as my boyfriend squealed. “You’re literally squeezing the life out of me. How is that possible? You’re so tiny.”

Ezra giggled happily. “It’s my special powers. Small but mighty.” He moved back toward me, and I wrapped my arm around his waist. “Thank you for not hating me.”

“Why would I hate you?” Noel’s brows dipped as he stared at him. “You didn’t do anything wrong. No one did.”

Ezra dropped his chin. “I just...” He glanced up at me, toward Wyatt, and then over at Noel. “The video... everything.”

“We’re friends. I trust you,” Noel assured him.

Ezra rushed over to hug him again. All he ever wanted growing up was friends. Something he never had, and now he had so many, he wasn’t going to be able to stand it. Or maybe he would.

Watts coughed loudly. “We should head out then. Jax, can we use your place? It’s the biggest.”

Jackson nodded. “Yeah, of course.”

“Great, I’ll have my lawyer meet us there,” Watts agreed.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Ezra

I was exhausted. I also never wanted to see a mall again for the rest of my life. That whole experience was something I never thought would happen.

Watts, Killian, CC, and Jackson were all sitting on the living room floor with a laptop between them, while I was currently nestled between Matthias and Noel. Holt was at my feet, and I kept running my hands through his hair. He had great hair. It was thick, soft, and smelled like peaches. I needed to find out what kind of product he used on it so I could get the same results.

Watts had spoken with his lawyer about the video. After I produced a copy of the NDA that Ty signed, he said he would get to work on filing charges. It made me feel a little better about the situation but not great. I still felt sick to my stomach about CC watching it.

I wasn't sure what to make of Wyatt yet. He hadn't said much. He was sitting by himself on the loveseat, his feet tucked beneath his butt while he scrolled through his phone. He had a sadness about him that I wanted to take away, but until I knew what it was, I couldn't help him. Maverick was in the kitchen, fussing over Andy and Leo. I hadn't realized he was cooking until I caught a whiff of something that smelled absolutely amazing. My stomach growled, reminding me I hadn't eaten anything, and Matthias chuckled softly.

"Look at you four," Killian commented from where he sat. "Where's my phone? I need to take a picture of this."

Maverick walked into the living room. "I made dinner." He stopped to stare at me. "Are you cuddling without me?"

"Are you wearing an apron?" I asked. It was super cute, with frilly lace around the edges. I suddenly had the best Christmas present idea for him.

Maverick put his hands on his hips. “I am. I don’t like to get messy.”

“That’s a lie,” Jackson muttered under his breath, and Mav flushed pink.

I scooted over so that I was nearly on top of Noel. “There’s room.” I patted the cushion next to me. “If you want to sit with us.”

“Please.” Maverick bounded over to sit down. “My feet hurt. I think I wore the wrong shoes today.” He had on fuzzy pink slippers now.

Killian stood up. “Hey.” We all looked up as he snapped a picture. “I hope you all stay besties forever.”

“CC is my bestie,” I reminded him. “I mean, no offense.”

I ruffled Holt’s hair and wondered why Watts wasn’t pissed at me for touching his fiancé. Which reminded me... I glanced over at Matthias, who smiled at me. I didn’t want to bring up the whole husband thing now, but I had so many questions.

Noel leaned forward. “Where are the boys?”

“Crashed upstairs in Andy’s room,” Maverick answered. “Don’t worry, the door is open. They look adorable, though. I took a picture if you want to see.”

Noel scowled as he leaned back against the couch. “Not necessary. What smells so good?”

“I made taco casserole.” Maverick beamed happily as Jackson smiled at him. “It’s his favorite.”

“You’re my favorite, sweetheart.” Jackson leaned forward to see something on the laptop, and Watts pointed to something on the screen.

CC glanced over at me. “You okay, princess? You look tired. We can go any time you want.”

“I’m fine.” I was, too. I didn’t want to leave. I was more comfortable than I had been in a long time.

“Can I ask a question?” Wyatt waved his hand in the air. “Are you always like this? I mean, super close or whatever?” A flush began to creep up his neck and over his cheeks when everyone turned to look at him.

I giggled. “Why? You want in?” I teased. “It’s okay if you’re straight. We don’t bite.”

His blue eyes went wide. “I’d like to be included in whatever this is.” He waved his hand around the room. “And I’m very gay.”

“No.” Jackson shook his head as he stood up. “Wy, I love you like a brother, but you need to get your shit together before you go cuddling with my husband and his friends. You were a mess when you called me.”

Maverick nudged me. “Ask him,” he whispered.

“You ask,” I hissed.

I shook my head. “Why? Because I’m the big gossip here? I don’t even know him. He’s your husband’s friend.”

Matthias let out a sigh. “What happened to bring you here to North Carolina, Wyatt? This seems to be the place everyone ends up when they need to get their shit together. Kill and I moved here for a fresh start. Mav needed to get himself together so he could come out and fix his relationship. What about you?”

“I don’t...I can’t talk about it.” Wyatt’s chin began to quiver. “Excuse me for a minute.” He rushed from the room, and I heard the sound of the door as it slammed behind him.

“Hey, WAGs, what happened?” Killian teased. “You just broke poor Wyatt.”

Jackson smacked his shoulder. “He was already broken when he got here.”

“What’s his deal?” Watts asked as he stood up and stretched his arms over his head. “Don’t start with me, H. I’m fine. I’ve been sitting on the floor. We’re staying for dinner.”

Holt looked back at me before he climbed to his feet. “I didn’t say anything. Must be your guilty conscience.”

“I’m not spilling Wyatt’s secrets. That’s his story to tell,” Jackson answered.

I patted Maverick’s knee before I got up and followed Wyatt outside. He was standing on the porch, just staring at the front yard. He didn’t move or turn around when the door closed behind me.

“I’m sorry. We had no right to ask you about your personal life,” I murmured.

“You didn’t know. You were just being friendly.” Wyatt raised a hand to wipe his cheek. “Have you...” He turned to look at me. “Have you ever dated someone who wasn’t out? Someone you were in love with but wasn’t gay?”

Oh, you sweet man.

“I have, yes.”

“Is that what happened with this Ty person?”

I twisted my lips. “Sort of. He would take me out to places where no one knew him. His family wouldn’t have allowed Ty to marry a man. Deep down, I knew that. He might have said things I wanted to hear, spoiled me with money, and lavished me with gifts and things, but I was never in love with him.”

“I was in love with Asher. I’m *still* in love with him,” Wyatt admitted. “I think I fell in love with him the moment I laid eyes on the man. The second he said hello to me. Is that possible?”

I nodded. “I think so, yes.”

“He never said he loved me. He never promised me anything, but I thought...I don’t even know what I thought.” Wyatt’s shoulders slumped forward.

I touched his arm. “You thought maybe he could learn to love you, too, in time.”

“Yeah, I did.”

“I’m sorry.”

Wyatt gave me a faint smile. “You have nothing to be sorry about, Ezra.”

“I know, but if we’re going to be friends, then it’s my job to say things like that.” I moved closer.

He chuckled softly. “I see why everyone likes you.”

“Everyone doesn’t like me. I’m very high maintenance.” No one had ever said that to me before. My heart thumped happily against my chest.

Wyatt broke into a big smile that lit up his entire face. His blue eyes crinkled around the corners as he watched me, his teeth appearing briefly before the smile disappeared. “That’s the first time in at least a week I’ve managed to smile. I forgot about Asher for a second.”

“You’ll forget about him forever once you start hanging out with me, boo.”

His eyes filled with tears, and as he tried to blink them away, one slipped down his cheek. He brushed it away quickly.

“If I meet him? I’ll just have to kick him in the shins. I’m assuming he’s big and tall like you? His loss is my gain, because now I have you in my life.”

Wyatt barked out a laugh. “He doesn’t see it that way. I think he’s in denial about his sexuality.”

“Like I said, his loss.” I reached over to squeeze his arm. “When Asher realizes how badly he fucked up? He’ll come crawling back, but by then?” I raised my hands. “You’ll be so madly in love with the most fabulous man who will feel exactly the same way. You’ll say, Asher who?” I brought my hands together into a heart shape as a thought occurred to me. “Have you met Noel?”

Wyatt’s brows dipped. “The guy with the dark hair and two different colored eyes? Yeah, hard pass. He reminds me too much of Asher. Besides, doesn’t he have a kid? I can’t date a guy with a kid. A teenager, too.”

“Brother. Leo is his kid brother.” I nudged his side. “He’s cute, though, right?”

“Ezra, no.” He shook his head as he slipped his phone from his pocket and shoved it in my face. “Look at this.”

It was a picture of Wyatt with a raven-haired, blue-eyed man. Okay, I could see the resemblance. Asher, I assumed, was the one with him, but the eyes were wrong. He had tattoos on his arms and a scowl on his face. He didn’t look happy, and even though I thought Seth might be fun for Noel, he wasn’t going to be a permanent fixture in his life. Wyatt might be that someone if he could get over the one that broke his heart.

“Stop it. Whatever you’re thinking right now? I don’t want any part of it.”

I batted my lashes. “I’m not thinking of anything.” Lie. “It’s cold out here. We should go inside.” So, I can make you sit next to Noel. Maybe he’d like a big, strong hockey player with curly blond hair and sky-blue eyes.

“No, Ezra.” Wyatt pointed a finger at me before we started inside the house.

“I didn’t say anything.”

“Yeah, but you’re thinking it. I can see the way your mind is working. I just had my heart broken by my closeted bisexual teammate.” Wyatt stopped to look at me. “What does he do for a living?”

Oh, okay, Mister Not-Interested-But-Curious. “He’s a NASCAR driver.”

“Hmm.” Wyatt chewed on his lip.

“Dinner’s done.” Maverick poked his head outside. “Did you give him the third degree about that dick, Asher? God, I swear. If I ever see him again?” He made a fist and punched his palm with it.

Wyatt snorted and shook his head. “You two are so much alike, it’s not even funny. You’re like two pretty little—”

Maverick cut him off. “Don’t you dare say twink, Wyatt Murray.”

“That’s what we are, boo. Why not just go with it?” I dragged a hand through my hair. “We’re pretty, we’re twinks.”

It's not a bad thing." I hooked my arm through Wyatt's. "We're friends now. This is what I do with my friends. I'm not hitting on you," I assured him. "CC will not get upset."

Wyatt shrugged. "As long as your boyfriend doesn't think I'm trying to steal you. I don't need to get into a fight with someone because you're super affectionate with me."

"I don't, so you have nothing to worry about, Wyatt." CC appeared behind Maverick and winked at me. "Just checking on you, princess."

I preened happily. "See? He knows me. Let's go eat. I'm dying to try this casserole Maverick made."

Chapter Thirty-Four

WAG Group Chat

Maverick: *What are you guys doing? I'm bored.*

Matthias: *I am literally right down the street from you. I can come over if you want.*

Holt: *Me, too.*

Ezra: *This is so unfair. I can't wait until I move there so I can just pop in any time I want and yell "Surprise, bitch!"*

Noel: *You will not be doing that at my house.*

Ezra: *Bet.*

Noel: *Also, I can come over, too.*

Maverick: *You can come over to my house any time, boo. You don't even have to knock. Unless Jax is home. Then you might want to call. Because we might be busy.*

Holt: *You mean you might be having sex on your kitchen table?*

Noel: *Please don't talk about sex in this group chat.*

Matthias: *Oh, sorry, boo. You don't have a partner. What happened with setting you up with Seth?*

Ezra: *I love that you all call one another boo now. That's all me. Oh, Seth? Yeah, I changed my mind. I think we should set Noel up with Wyatt.*

Maverick: *YES! I second that. Then we can be like brothers-in-law by proxy or whatever.*

Noel: *You realize that I'm in this group chat, right? I can literally read the messages you're sending about me.*

Ezra: *Duh, boo, we know. What do you think? He's a big guy. Might be able to throw you around if you're into that thing.*

Maverick: *Hockey players have great butts. Can confirm. Also, thighs for days.*

Holt: *Wow, TMI, Mav.*

Maverick: *Jealous, H?*

Holt: *Watts is the only one who gets to call me that, sweetheart.*

Maverick: *That's just rude.*

Ezra: *I miss you all so much. The wedding can't get here fast enough.*

Noel: *I kind of miss you, too.*

Ezra: *Wait, I need to screen grab that.*

Matthias: *I think you should frame that. Noel has feelings. He said he misses you.*

Noel: *Fuck off.*

Matthias: *My husband might get mad.*

Matthias: *Oh shit. Can you forget I said that?*

Ezra: *OMG! I knew I forgot to ask you something. Did you and Killian secretly get married?*

Holt: *Cat's out of the bag now, Matthias.*

Ezra: *You lucky son of a bitch. I'm so jealous.*

Matthias: *Are you? I mean, you got your man.*

Ezra: *Seventeen-year-old me would hate you, but twenty-four-year-old me is super happy for you. Killian is a catch. Did you take pictures? I want to see them. When, where, how? Deets, boo.*

Noel: *I hope you all let me live through you. I'm never getting married. I don't even like sex that much.*

Holt: *How can you not like sex? It's like the best thing ever. Maybe you just haven't met the right man yet. Do you at least like to jerk off?*

Matthias: *Can I tell you in person? I'd rather not send it over text. Killian is going to be pissed. Helena and Dean don't even know yet.*

Noel: *Yes, I masturbate.*

Ezra: *You might be demi or pan. Not that there's anything wrong with that, Noel. You just need to find the right man to get you going. Maybe Seth would be fun for you, but you need a man to understand you. Wyatt might.*

Noel: *Ezra, stop. I know you mean well, but I'm not interested right now.*

Ezra: *Yes, Matthias, I can wait until I see you again. Speaking of sex on the kitchen table, did I tell you about the time CC spread frosting all over me?*

Noel: *What did I say about sex talk in the group chat?*

Ezra: *I can't recall, your honor.*

Chapter Thirty-Five

Carson

I leaned back in my seat while I listened to Watts go on about the plans for when the season started, but I was absolutely distracted by my boyfriend as he sat cross-legged while he worked on Christmas presents for his new friends. He was wearing a pair of headphones, humming Christmas songs to himself, and he had no idea how beautiful he looked. The tip of his tongue poked out from between his lips as he worked the sewing machine. Occasionally, Ezra would push the hair back from his forehead.

How the fuck did I get so lucky?

“Carson, are you listening to me, or are you too busy staring at Ezra?” Watts asked. *Busted.*

I felt a blush creep up my neck. “Sorry.”

“Give the guy a break, man. You’re just as bad. All you can talk about is the wedding.” Killian leaned into the frame and winked at me. “Maybe we can pick this up when you get here? Which is what? The twenty-ninth from what Matthias told me.”

I nodded. “Yeah, I think the WAGS have been counting down the days.”

“They text constantly.” Watts shook his head. “I’m glad they get along so well. H needed some friends. I mean, he has me, but he’s always wanted a close-knit group he could just do whatever with.”

I glanced over at Ezra as he sang the words to “Santa’s Coming for Us” by Sia under his breath. “Ezra, too,” I told them. “He’s the happiest I have ever seen him.”

“Look at you two. Sappy bastards.” Killian chuckled. “Look, Matthias is happy, too, but I want him all to myself. I don’t like to share.”

I smiled as I continued to watch my boyfriend. “Is this meeting over?” I asked.

I needed to get my mouth on Ezra. Hands, dick, everything.

“Go be with your man, Carson. Have a good Christmas. We’ll see you next week,” Watts told me before he ended the call.

I was up out of my chair before I realized it, my arms wrapping around Ezra. He let out a surprised gasp before he pulled his headphones down. “Am I being too loud? Do you want me to go into the other room? I’m sorry... oh.” He sighed happily when I leaned down to cover his mouth with mine. “Is your meeting over?”

“Mm, yeah it is.” I spun his chair around to face me before I dropped to my knees. “You were too distracting.” I gripped his hips with my hands.

Ezra stared at me with wide eyes. “I was?” His dark orbs darkened with lust as I pulled him down onto the floor with me. “CC, I have to finish this.”

“I’ll be quick,” I promised.

He whimpered as I tugged his sweater up over his head. “Just this one time. You know I like it when you take your time with me.”

“I know you do, princess, and I like it, too.” I pressed soft kisses against his collarbone.

Ezra dragged his fingers through my hair. “Please, baby.”

“You want me, princess?”

“I always want you.”

I smiled against the sweet scent of his pale skin. “I’ll never get tired of hearing you say that.” I moved to press him down against the floor.

“I love you, Carson,” Ezra whispered as he lifted his hips so I could slip his pants off, leaving him in nothing but a pair of those sexy holiday panties he loved so much. I reached

down to run my palm over his cock, and he groaned at my touch.

I continued my way down his body.

“I love you, too,” I whispered.

I stopped to look up at him. His eyes met mine, and I swear time stopped. Ezra smiled at me, his chest moving with heavy pants, and I quickly moved back to kiss him again, my tongue sinking between his soft, plump lips.

“So much,” Ezra murmured as he reached down to pop the button on my jeans. He slid his hand inside and gripped my length with his slim hand. “I love your cock, too.”

I chuckled. “The feeling is mutual. Let me get these off.”

I pulled back to slip my pants down around my hips and then watched as Ezra pulled his cock out of his underwear. My mouth watered at the salty headiness of him. I wanted to suck him off until he came. But when I felt Ezra’s hand wrap around my cock, my brain short-circuited. Pleasure coursed through my veins at the way he dragged his thumb over the tip, spreading the precum as lubricant.

“Baby, just come here,” he begged me. “Bring that dick next to mine.”

I might not ever be the dominant one in the bedroom. Ezra was confident, bossy, and everything I wasn’t, and I was fine with that. He still loved me. He knew what I needed, when I needed it. Ezra wouldn’t make me feel bad about my lack of confidence or sexual experience, nor would I ever do that to him. We were made for one another. It was why we met all those years ago.

I cupped the back of his head. “I know what you need.”

“Do you?” Ezra whimpered when I wrapped my hand around his cock, his hand, and then brought our lengths together. “Fuck, yeah, you do. *Carson.*”

The way he moaned my full name caused goosebumps to break out over my skin. I pressed my lips over his. All I wanted to do was make him feel good. I flipped us so Ezra

was on top, his small frame above my larger one, and I grabbed his hip with my free hand as I worked us over, capturing his soft moans with my lips. I stared into his dark orbs, hoping he could feel the love I felt for him. Wanting Ezra to know just how much I meant those three words.

He pulled back. "I love you." He wrapped his arm around my neck as his hips canted.

"I love you, too," I assured him as my balls drew tight and heavy. "I'm going to come."

"Thank god." Ezra groaned, and he shot across my stomach and abs in thick, sticky ropes as buried his face in my neck.

I called out his name as I spilled down my fist and fingers, our cum mixing together.

I slumped, eyes closed, against the wall to catch my breath. "See, now you can go back to the presents you were working on."

"I'll have to shower first." Ezra giggled before I felt him drag a finger over my cum-covered abs. "Open your mouth for me, baby."

I opened my eyes. "Only if you return the favor."

"You don't even have to ask." Ezra popped his fingers inside his own mouth, and I watched as he sucked the cum off before he pressed his lips to mine. "Could be yours, might be mine. I don't care, CC."

I was already growing hard again. "If you want to actually get your Christmas presents finished, you might want to behave."

"Or what?" He smirked.

I grabbed Ezra as I stood up and flipped him over my shoulder. "Guess you'll just have to find out." I slapped his ass.

He let out a burst of giggles as I carried him into the bathroom.

We spent Christmas Eve at my parents' house. It was a tradition and had been for the past ten years. Sitting in the living room in the matching pajamas my mother bought us and sipping on hot chocolate was something I always looked forward to. This year more than ever, now that Ezra was my boyfriend.

“Where does your mother find these?” Ezra turned sideways to look at himself in the mirror in my room. “These are the cutest ones yet.”

I had to agree. They were red with the Grinch on the front that said “Don't Be a Grinch” in big bold letters and then little Grinch faces all over the bottoms.

I smiled. “I don't know. She keeps her lips locked about that.”

I hadn't told Ezra I had found our own pair to wear at his place tomorrow night. I mostly planned on having him try them on so I could rip them off seconds later. Little plaid shorts lined with fur. And... now my cock was getting hard.

“Why do you have that look on your face, boo?” Ezra snapped a photo of himself, which I assumed he was sending to his group chat. I knew he was counting down the days until he officially moved to North Carolina and could see them all again.

I willed my dick to go down. “What look?” I moved closer. “Take one of us. We look cute.”

“The look you get when you want me to suck your dick.” Ezra patted my abs with the palm of his hand. “We look more than cute.” He beamed up at me. “We make the perfect couple. You want me to send it to the rest of the WAGS? Is that what you want? You have your own friends you text with.”

When I wrapped my arms around his small body, he leaned back against me and happily took a photo.

I pressed a kiss into Ezra's hair. “No, I just wanted a photo of us on Christmas Eve.”

“I sent it anyway, because Matthias just sent one of him and Killian. He’s wearing a Santa hat. Can you believe it? He doesn’t seem the type.” He held out his phone, and sure enough, he was. His dark curls were sticking out beneath the hat, but he looked happy as he smiled at the camera, Matthias in his lap.

I chuckled. “He loves Matthias. I think he’d do anything for him.”

“I agree.” Ezra scrolled through his phone before he showed me a picture of Leo and Andy. “Look at how adorable they are.”

Sitting in Maverick and Jackson’s living room, they were more than adorable as they sat in front a massive Christmas tree wearing matching sweaters.

“You did that,” I whispered.

“I did not.”

“You did.”

Ezra turned to look at me. “All I did was help Leo with his makeup and clothes. I’m pretty sure Andy had already decided he was into him before that party.”

“Mm, maybe, but if you hadn’t chatted up Maverick the way you had? Pushed your way into his life the way you have a way of doing? They might not have gone on that date. You’re perfect, princess. Perfect, and mine.” I tipped his head back so I could slide my lips over his.

Ezra sighed softly as he deepened the kiss and tossed his phone onto my bed. The sound of more texts coming through had me chuckling softly.

“Gossips,” he muttered, digging his fingers into the front of my pajama top.

“You wouldn’t know anything about that,” I teased.

He scoffed. “As if. Maverick wanted to make sure that if you proposed to me, I sent him a picture of my ring first. Then Noel made it clear I was not allowed to give Seth his number, and Holt—”

I stopped him by fusing our mouths together. I shoved my tongue between his lips, the taste of sweet peppermint on his mouth.

“Have you been eating candy?”

“It’s Christmas. Of course, I’m eating candy.”

“What kind?”

Ezra tugged himself closer to me. “Candy canes.”

“Your favorite,” I whispered before I kissed him again. His mouth was addictive enough, but now with the taste of peppermint, it was much worse. “Do they really think I’m going to propose to you?”

He nodded. “Mav’s convinced you’re going to get down on one knee tomorrow morning and ask me to be your husband.” Ezra blushed. “Are you?”

“Where’s the surprise in that, boo?”

We hadn’t even looked at rings since I told him I wanted to marry him, but that hadn’t stopped me from picking one out without his consent. I saw the disappointment on his face before he pushed it away.

“I want to marry you, Ez. More than anything in this world, I want you to be my husband.”

He gave me a brief smile. “Me, too.”

“But?” I saw the hurt flash in his eyes, which pained me more than he knew. “Do you want me to do it here? In my parents’ house? Where’s the romance in that?”

Ezra shrugged as sadness wrapped around his body. “I don’t need romance, CC. I only need you.”

“Princess.” I tipped his face up. I had plenty of romance planned for tomorrow morning. He just had to get there first. Damn Maverick for putting that idea in his head. They *were* a bunch of gossips. “I love you. You’re everything to me, and don’t you forget it,” I reminded him, but the disappointment and hurt continued to glitter in his dark orbs.

Ezra nodded. “I know.”

“Doesn’t feel that way from where I’m standing. Let it happen when the time is right,” I whispered.

“I will. Yeah, sure,” Ezra murmured, but I knew this would set him off for the rest of the evening.

Chapter Thirty-Six

WAG Group Text

Maverick: *Merry Christmas! Am I the only one up at the ungodly hour of six o'clock?*

Noel: *I'm up. I think Andy and Leo planned this. Like they're still five years old.*

Maverick: *Andy gets up early because of hockey practice. Just like Jax. I'm never going to be a morning person. Even when I'm old.*

Matthias: *Killian, too. You'd think he didn't know the presents I bought him. Pretty sure he went through the bags I tried to hide in the spare room.*

Holt: *Are you kidding me? It's so early. Can't I sleep in this one time? I'm getting married in a week. I need to not have puffy eyes. Watson is still in bed.*

Maverick: *Stop it. You'll look great. Isn't Ezra going to do your makeup?*

Holt: *Yeah, I'm nervous about that, though. Ez, no offense, but I've never worn makeup before.*

Noel: *I think he's still sleeping.*

Maverick: *Do you think he got that ring?*

Matthias: *I don't know. Maybe he's getting dicked down this morning. Maybe that's what we should all be doing.*

Noel: *Stop.*

Maverick: *Noel, do you want Wyatt's number? He might be able to help with that.*

Noel: *I'm going back to bed.*

Maverick: *Guys, I don't think Carson asked Ezra to marry him.*

Holt: *What? Why not?*

Matthias: *Should we call him?*

Noel: *How do you know? Did he call you?*

Maverick: *No, but he's not here. He's usually the first one to text. Maybe I'm thinking too much into this.*

Noel: *I'm calling him.*

Holt: *He's in this chat, remember?*

Maverick: *Maybe he's busy. Could be a cinnamon roll morning.*

Matthias: *That would make sense.*

Noel: *Is that a sex thing? Please don't answer that question.*

Matthias: *Are you sure you're gay?*

Noel: *I assure you, I like dick.*

Matthias: *I'm sorry. That was uncalled for, Noel.*

Noel: *It's fine.*

Matthias: *Merry Christmas, WAGS. I have to go. My husband is calling me.*

Noel: *That was a sex thing, too, wasn't it? I'm kind of feeling left out.*

Maverick: *Want me to send Wyatt over? You know he's staying with us, right? Kind of hard to fuck my husband with him down the hall from us. You can just sit and talk or whatever. He likes to cuddle. We should invite him to the chat.*

Noel: *Jesus Christ.*

Noel has left the chat

Maverick added Noel back to the chat

Noel: *Really Maverick?*

Maverick: *You love me.*

Holt: *What happened to Seth?*

Maverick: *You have to ask Ezra about him.*

Noel: *Goodbye. Merry Christmas.*

Holt: *Did we scare Noel away?*

Maverick: *I think we did.*

Holt: *I think that Noel and Wyatt would make a cute couple. Think of the babies they would make.*

Maverick: *They would be cute. I don't know if Wyatt is up for that right now. He's pretty crushed after the last relationship he had.*

Holt: *That's too bad. Seth seemed pretty nice from that time I met him. I think that Ezra was going to invite him to the wedding as Noel's plus one.*

Holt: *Shit. Noel's going to see that.*

Holt: *Shit. So is Ezra.*

Maverick: *Maybe Wyatt and Seth will end up together. Poor Noel will be left alone. That's kind of sad now that I think about it. Noel's nice. I want Andy's future father-in-law to have someone.*

Holt: *I'm sorry, what? They're fifteen.*

Maverick: *I need coffee. Blame it on the lack of caffeine.*

Ezra: *CC ASKED ME TO MARRY HIM!*

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Ezra

I went through the motions on Christmas Eve with CC and his parents. I smiled as I opened the presents they gave me, and as always, it was too much. Gift cards to my favorite places, fabric to make clothes, candy, and a couple of new t-shirts from the Tavern. But my heart wasn't in it. I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up that CC was going to ask me to marry him. We hadn't even been together that long. Maybe he wanted to wait a year or two. That's what most people did. Only we weren't most people.

"You're mad," he commented as I unlocked the door to my apartment and flipped on the light to step into the kitchen.

I shook my head. "No."

I wasn't. I was just sad. Heartbroken, maybe, was the correct word. Did CC want to marry me? Sure, he said he did, but when it came down to it, he was the one who would have to put the ring on my finger.

"Ezra." CC reached for my hand and tugged me back against his thick chest. "I love you."

I nodded. "I know."

"Don't you love me?" he asked, running the back of his hand over my cheek. "You're so beautiful."

I swallowed the lump in my throat. The one that had been there since he told me he wasn't going to propose to me. "Yes, I love you."

"I'm sorry I upset you, boo."

"You didn't."

CC sighed softly. "You're lying to me now? It's Christmas Eve, Ez. I don't want you to go to bed mad at me."

"I upset myself, Carson. I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up for something I knew wouldn't happen. I let the WAGS... Never mind." I tried to untangle myself from his grip, but he

held on tight. “I’m tired. I just want to go to sleep. We have a busy day tomorrow.”

He shook his head. “Too bad, princess, because I’m not done with this conversation. You know how much I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

“CC, stop.” I rolled my eyes.

“Stop what? I’m serious. I love you. Okay, sure, I might have mentioned to Killian I thought about proposing. Obviously, he said something to Matthias. You four are pretty tight now. I want to marry you so bad I can see it. I can see you walking down the aisle holding flowers, dressed in a white gown, because you will be wearing one, right?”

I nodded. “Yes.” I felt tears sting my eyes.

“Carrying flowers, your hair done perfectly, makeup on point? All that shit. Maverick will probably be your best man, or maid of honor, or whatever. Maybe Seth?” CC asked.

I smiled at him. “Uh, Seth and Maverick. What, don’t look at me like that. I love them both equally as my other besties.”

“You love them, huh?” CC smirked. “More than you love me?”

I rolled my eyes. “No, don’t be ridiculous. You’re my boyfriend, my CC. You mean everything to me, baby.” I needed to go lie down. I couldn’t think with all this talk of marriage and flowers and— “What are you doing?” CC had just dropped to one knee in my kitchen.

“Asking you to marry me, Ezra. What does it look like I’m doing?” He smiled up at me with happiness dancing in his dark brown orbs. “Say yes.”

I stared down at him. “Are you doing this because I was upset that you didn’t? Because that’s not how it’s supposed to work. You’re supposed to propose because you want to.”

“I *want* to marry you. I love you. Best friends love one another for life, boo. You’ve been the light in my life since we were six years old, and maybe I didn’t see that until a year

ago, but I've been in love with for a very long time." CC reached for my hand.

I felt my body begin to shake. "Carson, don't—"

"I love you, Ezra Quinn Bardot. Let me make you Ezra Carey. Unless you don't want to change your name. Whatever you want is fine with me. I'll change my name if that makes you happy, princess. I love you so much. I love your smile, your laugh, the way you say my name, and when you talk dirty to me. I love it when you take charge of a situation. I really love how bossy you are. I love that my friends love you. I want you to be in my life forever. I want a family with you. Or if you don't want that, that's fine too. My life means nothing without you in it, Ezra."

"Carey," I blurted out.

"What?" CC's face split into a smile.

I got down onto the floor with him. "I want to be Ezra Carey."

"Yeah?" he whispered.

I nodded. "Yes." I pressed kisses against his jawline before I got to his mouth. "I'll marry you."

CC growled as I nipped and sucked at his lips. "I was afraid I was going to have to grovel a little more. Also, remind me to never tell Killian—"

I covered his mouth with mine before he could say anything else and dragged my hands up into his soft hair. "No more talking, baby."

"Don't you want your ring? It can wait if you want, but—"

I pulled back. "There's an actual ring?"

"Did you think I was proposing without one? I was planning on doing this tomorrow morning. I had this whole big romantic thing set up." CC pressed a kiss to my nose.

I cupped his head in my hands. "Ring, please." I was thankful I had done my nails because the pictures were going to look amazing.

“You’ll have to let me up, Ezra. It’s in the other room.” He winked.

“It’s been here the entire time?” I gasped as I climbed to my feet.

CC grinned. “Yep.”

I watched as he disappeared from the room, and I walked into the living room to turn on the Christmas tree lights. When he reappeared, he held a small box in one hand.

“Give me your hand, princess.”

I was surprised to find it shaking when I did as he asked. Tears filled my eyes as CC slipped the pear moissanite ring onto my ring finger, and I could only stare at the rose gold masterpiece as he brought my hand up to his lips to press a kiss against it.

“It’s too much,” I blurted out.

“It’s not enough.”

“That diamond is...how big is that?”

CC chuckled. “That’s a rather personal question, isn’t it, Ezra?” He pulled me flush against his firm body.

“Take it back,” I whispered as I stared at my hand, the Christmas lights shining off the diamond. It was mesmerizing.

CC rubbed his palms over my back. “Do you not like it? Do you want something else?”

“That diamond is ridiculous.” I brought my finger up and traced it lightly. “It’s stunning, Carson.” I glanced up at him. He was my fiancé now. But when he tried to touch it, I yanked my hand away and hid it behind my back.

CC chuckled softly. “I thought you said you wanted me to take it back?”

“Too late. It’s mine now. You’re stuck with me. No takebacks, Carson.” I dragged my hand back out and placed it against his chest. “It sparkles so brightly.”

“Just like you.”

I glanced up at him.

“What, you think you don’t brighten every room you walk into?”

I ducked my head. “I suppose I’ve never really thought about it.”

“Well, you do. You’re the brightest star I’ve ever seen, Ezra.”

“Love me forever,” I whispered before I could stop myself.

CC smiled down at me. “I plan on it.”

I stared down at my hand. Okay, I was staring at the ring on my finger. Last night, CC had shown me just how much he planned to love me by fucking me right beneath the Christmas tree. Twice. Then he helped me to bed and whispered that he loved me just as I drifted off to sleep. I didn’t remember ever feeling this happy. Not once. Not when he told me loved me or when he asked me to move to North Carolina with him. Now I finally understood what Maverick, Holt, and Matthias were talking about. Speaking of—

I untangled myself from my sleeping fiancé. I was going to milk that one until he became my husband, and then I would never stop calling CC that. It would just be husband this and husband that. I might never call him by his name again. I went into the bathroom to freshen up and then quickly grabbed my phone. Talk about a bunch of gossips. Did CC think I was bad, because he honestly hadn’t seen anything when it came to these four. I quickly scanned the messages, my heart breaking for poor Noel, before I added my own.

Ezra: *CC ASKED ME TO MARRY HIM!*

I included a picture of my ring before I dropped my phone on the counter. I climbed up to grab the coffee, turned on the machine, and listened to the messages as they started to come through.

Holt: *Holy shit, look at that thing! It must weigh at least ten pounds.*

Maverick: *It's gorgeous.*

Matthias: *Congratulations, boo! I'm so happy for you. Yeah, I had to come back.*

Noel: *It's nice, isn't it?*

Maverick: *Wait a second. Did you know about this?*

Noel: *I might have been there when Carson picked it out.*

Maverick: *You are out of the WAGs! How dare you not share with the rest of the class?*

Holt: *May, would you have been able to keep that a secret from Ezra?*

Matthias: *Kill knew and he couldn't wait to tell me. See how well that worked out?*

Maverick: *You have a point.*

Ezra: *It's beautiful, isn't it? I swear it's the biggest diamond I've ever seen.*

Holt: *How are you even talking to us? Shouldn't you be celebrating all over your apartment?*

Noel: *And that's my cue to leave.*

Maverick: *Noel, stay. Please. I'm sorry for saying I was kicking you out.*

Ezra: *We celebrated last night. Plus, we're going back to his parents later. We need all the energy for that.*

Noel: *Are you happy?*

Matthias: *Were you surprised?*

Maverick: *What do you mean that thing weighs ten pounds, Holt? That ring that Watts gave you has to weigh at least twenty.*

Holt: *It's the best engagement ring in the world, and you're jealous.*

Maverick: *Agree to disagree.*

Ezra: *I am beyond happy. CC had me convinced he wasn't going to propose. I'll tell you exactly what went down when I*

see you next week, but yes, I was surprised.

Noel: *You deserve all the happiness.*

Matthias: *You do, boo.*

Maverick: *All of the goodness.*

Holt: *Goodness, happiness, and everything that comes with that.*

Ezra: *Girls, you're going to make me cry. Is that what you're trying to do to me?*

I glanced up and over my shoulder at the sound of CC's soft cough behind me. "Good morning, fiancé." I beamed happily at him.

"Good morning, fiancé," he repeated as his honey brown eyes moved over me before he met my gaze. "WAGs chat?"

I nodded. "Give me one second, baby."

Ezra: *I love you all. Thank you for being such amazing friends. My fiancé is up, and I have to go service him. Merry Christmas. Give your children, brothers, and significant others hugs for me. Send lots of pictures.*

CC motioned for me to come toward him when I placed my phone on the counter. When I got close enough, he hooked his arm around my waist so he could yank me against him.

"Merry Christmas, Ezra."

"Merry Christmas—" My words disappeared when CC's lips found mine, and I got lost in my fiancé.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Carson

My parents knew I had plans to ask Ezra to marry me, so the moment we walked back into their house in the afternoon, my mother was all over him. She was trying to play it cool, but she kept glancing at Ezra's hand for a glimpse of the ring. She was more than obvious, and I could see that my fiancé—I really loved the way that sounded—was purposely trying to hide his left hand from my mother.

“How was your Christmas morning?” Mom smiled at us as we sat snuggled together on the couch. “Did you exchange gifts?”

Ezra leaned into me. “I made CC a few things.”

“A few things? Ez, you made me some gorgeous tops that I'm never going to be able to wear for fear I ruin them.” He needed to start his own clothing brand. He was beyond talented, and he needed to start selling his work online.

A blush crept up his neck and over his face. “It's not a big deal,” he murmured.

“Liar,” I teased and pressed a kiss into his soft auburn hair. “Give me your hand.” I reached for his left with my right and held it out for my mother. “You know that's what she's waiting for. Put her out of her misery already, princess.”

“Holy Christ on a cracker! Senior, get in here!” Mom exclaimed when she saw the engagement ring that glittered on Ezra's left finger. “That is stunning. Oh, I am so happy for both of you.” She clapped her hands together. “Come here, Ezra.” She held her arms out.

Ezra ducked his chin as he climbed to his feet but happily moved into my mother's hug. “You're happy then?”

“Happy? Sweetheart, I am over the moon about this. You've been a part of this family for years, but now you're officially my second son.” She cupped his face in her hands. “I

love you dearly, you sweet boy, do you not know that?" She kissed his forehead.

Ezra shook his head. "I just assumed that you were being nice."

"Bullshit!" Dad exclaimed. "We love you like our own. You've always been a Carey, but now it's official."

I watched as Ezra's chin begin to quiver. "Dad, you're going to make him cry."

"That would make two of us then." My father moved to wrap his arms around Ezra. "I've always loved you like a son. I'm sorry for everything you had to go through with your family. You don't deserve that. You've grown into a wonderful man, and it's their loss that they didn't get to see that."

Ezra shook his head. "Thank you, sir. That means a lot to me," he whispered.

"No, no, none of that. It's Dad from here on out," Dad told him. "You hear me, Ezra?"

Ezra burst into tears. When I started to move toward him, he held out a hand. "Wait." He sniffed before he moved away from my father. "I'm okay, really. Just, this is all so much for me. You all have been the kindest, sweetest, nicest family. You took me in when my parents kicked me out, and you didn't blink an eye when I came out. You didn't care that CC was gay either. You let me into your home, into your son's room, and let us hold hands and snuggle even before I realized how much I loved him. CC is so lucky to have fantastic parents like you. I am absolutely honored that I am going to be a Carey. That you want me to be officially official. I love you both so much."

I smiled through tear-filled eyes. "This is a very happy Christmas," I murmured.

"It is Carson," Mom assured me. "Okay, well, I'm going to check on dinner." She brushed her cheeks, and when Dad followed her into the kitchen, it gave me the chance to talk to Ezra. "You holding up all right?"

He nodded. "I think this is the best Christmas ever, don't you?"

"Oh, boo, you have no idea," I whispered.

"Are you kidding me!" Ezra squealed the moment he saw Maverick and Jackson standing on the front porch.

I was more than surprised to find Dean Frost, Maverick's younger brother, beside them.

"Is this part of my Christmas present?" He didn't wait for my answer as he rushed outside to launch himself at Maverick, nearly knocking him over in the process.

Maverick giggled happily as he hugged Ezra. "Surprise!" He pulled back before he motioned to his brother. "This is my brother, Dean. Dean, my best friend Ezra. Well, okay, second-best friend." He winked at Jackson.

Dean, who was famous for his green hair, must have died it recently, because it was now striking pink. It wasn't bad, just different. He was dressed in a pair of blue jeans and an oversized sweatshirt, and as he dragged a hand through his long hair, he smiled. He was an exact carbon copy of his older brother, just a little taller.

"Hey."

"Hey? Okay, we don't just do hey here." Ezra giggled before he nearly tackled the guitar player in a hug.

Maverick laughed. "I warned you, Dean."

"God, you're like a koala bear," he joked. "Wow, you're small, but you're strong."

Ezra beamed up at him. "Thank you. It's my special power. Come on, come on. It's cold out here. Tell me about your boyfriend, the hockey player." He grabbed Dean's hand as they walked inside the house.

"He has no idea?" Jackson asked me as we followed them inside the house. I heard Maverick's voice go up when he

asked about the engagement ring, and when I turned to look, Ezra was showing it to him.

I shrugged. “He’s going to lose his mind,” I murmured as the doorbell rang again.

“CC, no,” Ezra whispered as the sound of my mother greeting Killian and Matthias filled the air.

He rushed right back into the foyer, and I leaned around the corner of the living room to watch as he hugged Matthias first, then Killian, before he dragged Matthias back to where Maverick and Jackson were. His brows dipped.

“Where’s Andy?”

Jackson grinned. “He’s coming.”

“What?” Ezra asked. “Does that mean Noel is on his way here with Leo? Carson, what did you do?”

I winked. “Princess, just go with it. This is my gift to you.”

Maverick wrapped an arm around Ezra’s waist. “This is the best Christmas ever.”

“Is it?” Jackson grunted. “What about the one where I ate your—”

“That’s enough, Goose.” Maverick cut him off as his face burned bright red. “No one needs to hear about that.”

“That’s for sure,” Dean muttered. “Hey, Kill, nice to see you.” They knocked fists before they laughed and moved in for a hug.

Ezra giggled as he glanced out at the front bay window as a car started to slow down in front of the house. “Who is... that’s Holt.”

He dragged Maverick along with him as he rushed outside, and I grinned as I watched the three of them hug like they hadn’t seen one another in years.

“I don’t think I’ve seen Maverick so happy before. Well, that’s not true. When I proposed to him, he was pretty over the moon. On our wedding day, he couldn’t stop smiling. When we officially adopted Andy. This might be the fourth happiest

day of his life.” Jackson clapped a palm against my shoulder. “They really like one another.”

I nodded. “They do.”

“That doesn’t bother you?” Jackson’s question surprised me. “I mean, I’m not worried. Maverick’s figured himself out, and he’s close with everyone else, but he and Ezra seem to have a different connection.”

“I’m not worried,” I assured him as Noel, Leo, and Andy pulled up.

I was more than surprised to see Wyatt with them, but my mother would be more than excited to have another mouth to feed. She would let everyone stay here if we had the room.

Jackson jutted his chin at Seth as he climbed from his car. “Who’s that?”

“Seth,” I answered.

“Oh, the elusive Seth. Wait, didn’t Ezra want to set Noel and Seth up? How is that going to work with Wyatt here?”

My brows shot up. “What does that mean? Are Wyatt and Noel a thing now?”

They were still standing next to one another, but I watched as Ezra introduced Seth to everyone. The way Seth took in both Wyatt and Noel before he hugged Ezra, keeping his arm around my fiancé. His eyes never strayed from the two men.

“No, but they flew up here together.” Jackson tilted his head. “Do you not like Seth?”

I shook my head. “I thought... Okay, I might have thought they were a thing when Ezra and I first started talking again. We had a fight. I said some things I’m not proud of. I’ve gotten past that.”

“I’m more than aware of your fight. Mav and Ezra have told one another everything,” Jackson assured me as the group started into the house.

My stomach dropped. “Everything?” What did that mean? Did he know about the camboy thing? Our making out at the

club? Not that I cared.

“Everything, Carson, but don’t worry. Maverick did a lot worse to me. I’ll tell you about it sometime if you want.” He grinned before he went to grab his husband and son to bring them both against him in a hug. It was interesting to see the massive ex-goalie-turned-hockey-coach so affectionate like that.

Then suddenly Ezra attacked me, nearly climbing up my body to get to my mouth and pressing kisses against my lips.

“You are a wonderful, wonderful man,” he whispered as I lifted him into my arms. “I love you. Thank you for this.”

“I love you, too.” I took in the happiness on his face, the way his dark eyes sparkled as he stared at me. “I just wanted to see you smile.”

Ezra wiggled in my arms, and I placed him back on his feet. “All my friends are here. How could I not be happy?”

“I had a hard time not saying anything this morning,” Maverick admitted as he fussed with Andy’s hair. The boy shooed him away. “Stop, it’s a mess.”

Andy rolled his eyes as he reached for Leo’s hand to tug him closer. “I thought Dad was going to let the cat out of the bag this morning. We flew in last night.”

“You did? What about the pictures you sent?” Ezra gasped.

Watts moved to sit on the couch, making sure to pull Holt onto his lap. “We took those earlier this week.” He looked exhausted as he rested his chin on Holt’s head. I wondered if I should offer to let him nap in my room.

“I’m so glad this is over so we can finally stop keeping secrets.” Noel leaned against the wall next to Wyatt. “What?”

Ezra pursed his lips. “You want to tell me about this now or later, boo?” He pointed between the two of them.

“Oh, go fu—fudge yourself.” Noel corrected himself just as Mom walked in.

“Wait, what is that?” Seth grabbed Ezra’s hand. “Are you flipping kidding me right now, Ezra?” He stared down at the ring. “You didn’t tell me you got engaged? When did this happen?” He sounded like he might be hurt.

Ezra’s eyes shifted nervously between me and Seth. “Um, last night.”

“Last night? You couldn’t bother to text your bestie to tell me? Let me guess, everyone else here knows?” Seth shook his head. “Maybe I should leave.”

“Seth, wait,” Ezra called out to him.

He looked around the room for help. I certainly wasn’t sure how to help out. I was still kind of pissed that he hung himself over my fiancé the second he had the chance. Why did Seth bother me, but none of the WAGs did? Probably because they were all coupled up.

Maverick grimaced. “Boo, you should probably go after him. He looks devastated.”

“Come with me.” He grabbed Maverick’s hand and dragged him along as he chased after Seth.

Mom clapped her hands. “Carson, you need to introduce me to your friends. Noel, it’s nice to see you again, sweetie.”

I watched as my ex blushed and dropped his chin before he leaned into Wyatt. Oh, there was something going on there that I was sure Ezra was going to have to pull out of him. I introduced my mother to everyone, and then my father, who had met everyone except Jackson, Leo, and Andy. Ezra and Maverick were still outside, trying to convince Seth to come back to the house. I wondered why Ezra hadn’t told Seth about our engagement.

“You want me to go out there?” Matthias asked. “I mean, I don’t know really Seth, but Mav and Ezra are my friends.”

I shook my head. “I could...” I watched as Seth grabbed Ezra’s left hand as he yelled at him, and I saw red. I didn’t remember going outside, but the next thing I knew, I shoved Seth onto the frozen ground.

“What the fuck?”

“Let go.” He grabbed at me.

“You put your hands on him,” I growled.

Seth tried to pry me off. “It was a gut reaction. I didn’t mean to. I would never hurt Ezra.”

“I should kick your ass.”

“You should. I’m sorry.”

Hands grabbed at my arms and shoulders. “Carson, let go. It’s Christmas.” I recognized Jackson’s voice.

“I want you gone.” I let go of Seth as I stood back up.

Ezra wrapped his arms around my waist. “CC, stop.”

“I’m sorry,” Seth whispered. “I’m jealous.” He sat down on the frozen grass.

“Are you in love with him?” I asked. Jealousy didn’t even begin to cover how that thought made me feel.

Seth barked out a laugh. “What? No, of course not. I just... I thought we were friends.” He dragged a hand through his hair. “Obviously we’re not that close, or he would have told me. Ezra, I’m sorry. You know I would never hurt you. Not after... Well, you know.”

I knew he meant Ty.

“Seth.” Maverick moved to sit down next to him. “We’ve been keeping him pretty busy with the WAG chats. It’s partially our fault. We can include you if you want.” He shivered in the cold New England air.

“Sweetheart, get up off the grass before you freeze to death.” Jackson hooked an arm around him, but Maverick pushed him away. “Are you kidding?”

Maverick shook his head. “Not now, Jax.” He smiled at Seth. “I get it. It’s hard when your bestie makes new friends. It’s going to be harder when he moves away.”

“It’s going to suck. I don’t have a lot of friends in my line of work.” Seth sighed. “I’m really sorry, Ezra. I don’t blame

you if you hate me.”

I looked down just as Ezra looked at me. “Go ahead.” It would take much longer for me to forgive Seth than it would my fiancé.

“I don’t...” Ezra moved to sit down on the other side of him. “I don’t hate you, boo. I’m sorry I’ve been busy, and that I didn’t tell you. You’re my best friend, too.”

“I feel so stupid. Like we’re in junior high or something,” Seth grumbled just as Ezra hugged him, and Maverick did the same. “Oh, I could get used to this. Is this a WAG thing? Is it too late to be included in this chat you spoke of? Are cuddles part of this? Because you know I’m always up for cuddles.”

I snorted. “Great, add another one to the WAG list.” Maybe if the rest of them included Seth, I wouldn’t be so jealous of him.

“Carson—”

I held up my hand. “Give me a little time, Seth.”

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Ezra

Best Christmas Ever.

CC loved me. I was engaged. My friends were here. There was nothing else I could ask for. Also, I was proud of CC for getting everyone here without me figuring it out. The pictures the WAGs sent me were like they were home and celebrating their holiday. That was a good one. I had no idea they were here and getting ready to surprise me this morning.

After dinner at Mom and Dad's—I loved the way that sounded—we hung around for a bit, before we went to the house my friends were staying at. I had friends. That was friends with an S, thank you very much. Seth, too. I felt bad about not telling him. Now we were all sort of just lying around talking and enjoying the rest of the holiday.

This place was massive, too. One of those rich houses on the beach I had dreamed of living in as a kid. Decorated for Christmas. Beautiful, warm, and perfect. I was in between Maverick and Holt while CC had his head on my lap as he sat between my legs, my hands combing through his soft hair. Jackson was on Mav's right, and Watts to Holt's left. Killian and Matthias were snuggled up on the loveseat. Andy and Leo were on the floor next to the tree. Dean looked sad, though. I hated that for him. He kept looking at his phone like he was waiting for a text that wouldn't come.

“Hey.” Maverick nudged me. “Look at Noel.”

I glanced over to find him sandwiched between Seth and Wyatt. What in the male-male-male romance novel was going on right now? “Huh.”

“Huh? He's snuggled in like he's in some gay porn fantasy, and all you can say is huh?” Holt murmured. “I have questions.”

“I have questions, too, but leave him be. Maybe he's happy.”

“Maybe he can hear you.” Noel flipped us the bird. “You three, I swear.”

Matthias chuckled. “It’s not just them.”

“It absolutely is *not* just them.” CC waved his hand in the air.

Jackson shoved his shoulder. “My son.”

“My brother,” Noel added.

“We’re not babies,” Andy reminded us, for the millionth time. “God, you’d think we’ve never watched porn.”

Leo giggled. “Or been on the internet. Have you seen Twitter? There is actual porn on there. For anyone to see.”

“NO!” Maverick clamped his hands over his ears. “It’s Christmas.”

Leo blushed and buried his face in Andy’s shoulder. “I’m not having this conversation with your dads here.”

“It’s okay, Ricky.” Andy wrapped his arm around his shoulders, and Leo snuggled in closer.

My brows shot up. “Ricky? Please explain that to me.”

“It’s from the movie *Talladega Nights*,” Jackson, Maverick, and Noel all answered at the same time. Guess that had been asked a few times already.

I smiled. “That is so cute. Wait, it’s cute, right? You don’t hate it, do you, boo?” I asked Leo.

“I don’t.”

I could see he was blushing from where I sat. They were so adorable; I couldn’t even stand it. I hoped I could make his wedding outfit when that day arrived. *Let me dream. I know they’re only fifteen.*

Seth nudged Noel. “You think we should mess with them?”

“It might be fun.” Noel smirked as he leaned into Wyatt. Wait, was there something going on between the three of them or just between Noel and Wyatt? I mean, I know they just met

Seth, but he was drop-dead gorgeous and really sweet when you got to know him.

Maverick made a face. “What’s happening?”

“Are they flirting? I mean, I was never good at flirting, but it might be some weird mating ritual I’m not aware of,” Holt whispered.

Wyatt leaned across Noel. “I think that they think something’s going on between us other than a friendship.”

“They are kind of gossipy.” Seth wiggled his brows. “Not that I am or anything.”

I snorted. “No, not you.”

“What, when have I ever been a gossip?” Seth gasped before he winked at me. That little shit. He made me look like the Queen of England when it came to gossip.

Noel stood up. “I’m going to bed.”

He stopped when Wyatt grabbed his hand and tugged him back onto the couch. It took all I had not to demand they tell me what their deal was. Especially when their fingers stayed laced together.

“No.” Wyatt pointed a finger at me. “Keep all your questions for a later date. All three of you.” Matthias raised his hand. “You, too, Hampton.”

Killian rolled his eyes. “Did I say anything?”

“Like we all don’t know you two got married,” Jackson blurted out. “What, Matthias told the WAGs. Maverick keeps nothing from me.” He leaned his head back as his husband ran his fingers through his auburn curls.

Killian narrowed his eyes at Matthias. “Really, babe?”

“It just slipped out, Kill. Besides, I want to be able to call you my husband. Everyone else gets that.” He pouted as Killian leaned forward to kiss him.

“Like I could stay mad at you,” he murmured. He climbed to his feet to pull his phone from his pocket. “Merry Christmas, Josie.” He started to walk out of the room.

My eyes immediately went to Matthias. “Josie?”

“She’s a friend,” he assured me. “Don’t give me that look. I trust my husband. Finally! I can say that now.” A dreamy look appeared on his face.

I leaned forward to rest my chin on CC’s head. “Who is she, though? You’re not worried that—”

“Sometimes you are the biggest troublemaker.” Killian pointed his phone at me when he stepped back into the room.

I stared at him, trying to figure out if he was kidding or if he was serious. Sometimes it was hard to tell with him.

“If I didn’t like you, Ezra, I swear...” Nope, he was pissed.

“Watch it,” CC growled.

Killian’s blue eyes flashed angrily. “Josie is a woman I met in rehab. She’s my friend. She’s married. And she’s agreed to be our surrogate.”

“Wait, seriously?” Matthias was off the couch and in Killian’s arms.

Killian cupped his face in his hands. “Babe, we’re going to be parents.” He kissed him so softly, so lovingly, that I felt like the biggest asshole in the world. When Matthias buried his face in Killian’s neck, I felt the angry glare burning from the singer’s eyes.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know,” I murmured.

He hugged Matthias closer. “Don’t worry about it.”

“Are you sure, because I was a bitch, and I love you guys.”

Killian smiled. “We love you, too. LD. Really, no hard feelings.”

“Can I call you Daddy now?” I grinned.

“Absolutely fucking not.” He growled, but when Matthias lifted his head and murmured something in his ear, a flush slipped up his neck and over his face. He turned and kissed his husband so hard, I thought he might hurt himself.

I giggled happily as I leaned forward to drop a kiss against CC's forehead. "Love you," I murmured as he smiled at me.

"I love you, too, Ezra." He reached for my face so he could kiss my mouth. It was awkward, but he somehow managed to pull it off.

Dean coughed softly. "Wyatt, you seem like you're holding up all right."

"Yeah, well, as best as I can, since Asher broke my heart," Wyatt muttered. "How are you and Beau?"

Dean dropped his gaze to his lap. "Can we talk about something else?"

"You." Killian pointed at his best friend. "And me. Now." He motioned for Dean to follow him. "I'm not kidding. We need to talk."

Dean grunted. "Says the guy who got married without telling me."

"I'm not fucking around, Dean. Stand up or I will carry you. Better yet, I'll have Jackson do it."

Jackson wrinkled his nose. "Don't involve me in your weird friend rituals."

"Fine." Dean stood up and dragged a hand through his long pink hair before he yanked the elastic off his wrist to pull it into a messy ponytail. "But I'm not talking about Beau."

"The hell you aren't," Killian grunted before they disappeared down the hall.

"Ezra." I glanced over at Seth at the sound of my name. "A word." He tilted his head toward the kitchen, and I climbed over my fiancé to follow him.

He leaned against the counter and crossed his arms over his chest. Was he still mad about the engagement thing? I thought we had smoothed that over.

I gave him a quick hug. "What's up? Are you not having fun?"

His blue eyes had lost their shine, which was never a good thing.

“I don’t think I should go as Noel’s plus one to this wedding next week,” Seth whispered as he looked behind me. “I think that would ruin whatever he and Wyatt have going on.”

I felt myself relax. “Or hear me out. It will push them in the right direction.”

“He seems to like Wyatt well enough without you meddling.” Was Seth jealous? “Also, I don’t think your other friends like me very much.”

“We like you.” Maverick peeked his head into the room. “Sorry, I’m just being a little protective.”

Seth grunted. “You all seem to be that way. I’m not used to having to share Ezra.” Yeah, he was super jealous, and *I* wasn’t used to *that*.

“What’s happening, Seth? You’re normally so chill and relaxed. Talk to me, boo.” I put my hand on his arm. “This isn’t my bestie.”

“Because I’m *not* your bestie. Not really. You have Carson, Maverick here, everyone in that living room. You’re going to be moving to North Carolina in a few days, and I’m never going to see you again.” He held up his hand. “Don’t try to bullshit me and say we’ll keep in touch, because we both know that won’t happen.”

I pulled my lip between my teeth. “Seth.”

“Ezra.” Seth rolled his eyes. “You have more than enough friends now. You don’t need me anymore.”

“Why don’t you move, too?” Maverick interrupted. “What, do you have something keeping you here?” He nudged my hip with his. “I know what you do, Seth. Ez told me. Isn’t that a job you can do from anywhere? We have a room you could stay in until you find an apartment or whatever.”

Seth stared at Maverick like he hadn’t heard him correctly. “You can’t be serious. You don’t even know me.”

“But you’re friends with Ezra, so that means you’re a good person,” Maverick insisted.

“Are you having a WAG party without me?” Holt waltzed into the kitchen and hoisted himself up onto the table. “Here.” He held out his arms. “You, Seth, come here.” He wiggled his fingers for my friend to step between his legs, and when he did, he started to comb them through Seth’s curls. “You have the nicest hair. You have to tell me your secrets.”

“Thank you.” He smiled up at Holt before he turned to face me again. “I mean, I suppose I could move to North Carolina. Wait, you’re not flirting with me, are you?” Seth asked.

Maverick giggled. “No, this is just a friendly thing. If you join our WAG group, then you get in on this all the time. The more the merrier.”

“Seth’s joining?” Noel interrupted as he dragged Wyatt in behind him. I bit my tongue and let them be.

“I think that’s a great idea.” Matthias leaned against the doorway.

Seth looked around at us with worry written in his blue eyes. “You wouldn’t mind?”

Wyatt shook his head. “I know I wouldn’t. I’m still new to the group. Sometimes I have no clue what’s going on.”

“I’m in.” Seth smirked.

I clapped my hands, trying to alleviate some of the tension in the room. “Awesome. I’ll add you to the chat, boo. It’s going to be so much fun.”

“Not just the chat. Maverick, how soon can I move in?” Seth’s smirk spread into a wide grin, and I saw relief flood his face.

He had confided in me once how hard it was for him to make friends. That he had a rough childhood, but he never got into the details.

A strange noise escaped Noel’s throat. “Wait, what? Maverick, was that your idea?”

“Maybe.” He picked at a string on his sweater. “What? Stop staring at me. He’s Ezra’s friend, and I told him he should move in with us until he found his own place. What’s the big deal? It’s a big state.”

“Relax, Noel, I’m not after your man,” Seth assured him with a wink.

Wyatt blushed. “He’s not... Noel and I are just friends.”

“Are you sure you two aren’t sleeping together?” Holt asked before I had the chance. “We’re all thinking it, Noel. Don’t look at me like that.” He rested his chin on Seth’s head. “You smell nice,” he murmured, and Seth giggled.

Noel let out a long sigh before he let go of Wyatt’s hand. “No.” He grabbed one of the kitchen chairs and swung it around to sit down backwards.

“No? That’s all you’re going to give us?” Maverick gasped. “You suck. Like really fucking hard. I hope you know that.”

“Apparently not,” I muttered.

Holt started to giggle. I joined him, followed by Maverick. Seth covered his mouth and shook his head, and that’s when CC, Jackson, Killian, and Watts appeared in the doorway.

CC nudged Watts. “Look at them,” he murmured. “Just having their own party in here like we don’t even exist.”

“On Christmas, no less,” Jackson added. “Kind of rude.”

Killian leaned into his husband. “Merry Christmas, Daddy. Let’s go to bed.”

I glanced over at CC, who winked at me. I wiggled my fingers at him, and he moved into the room.

“Having fun, princess?” His amber eyes sparkled as they met mine.

“Yes,” I assured him. “So much.”

Watts leaned against the kitchen table. “I don’t suppose you want to go to bed now, H? I mean, I would hate to break up the WAGs.”

“I think I could handle that,” Holt teased as he slipped off the counter.

“How about you, sweetheart?” Jackson held out his hand for his husband, and Maverick moved to take it. “Miss me?”

Maverick leaned into him. “I always miss you when we’re not together, Goose,” he murmured.

Everyone slipped out of the kitchen, leaving me alone with CC. He wrapped his arms around me, pulling me flush against his body. I rested my chin against his chest and smiled up at him as I hugged him tightly.

“Merry Christmas, Carson,” I whispered.

He leaned down to brush his lips against mine. “Merry Christmas, Ezra.”

Epilogue

Carson

New Year's Eve

Holt and Watts's wedding was simple but beautiful. It was held in their parents' backyard, and Ezra might have shed more than a few tears as we sat watching my boss, and our friends, confess to everyone how much they loved one another. Both men were dressed in matching casual white dress pants and white dress shirts. It was obvious how happy they were in the way they held hands, repeated their vows, and by the smiles that never left their faces. I wondered how I never saw how much Holt was into Watts before. Or why Holt ever agreed to that date with me in the first place.

"You're next, right?" Shepard nudged my side from the chair next to me as he leaned closer. "What, like I didn't hear from Watts that you got engaged over Christmas. Congratulations, man."

I felt myself grow warm with happiness. "Thanks."

"Did you pick a date yet?" He smiled up at his wife, Brooklyn, who was the wedding photographer as she snapped a photo of us. "Let me guess. It's up to Ezra?"

I let my gaze move to where my fiancé was dancing with Matthias, London Pelletier, Andy, Leo, and Noel. They were just moving their hips and waving their arms in the air, but the smiles on their faces said it all. Even Noel seemed to be having a good time.

"It's all up to him," I murmured as Ezra wiggled his fingers at me.

"Isn't it always?" Shepard chuckled before he grabbed his wife and hauled her into his lap. "Darlin', you take my breath away," he whispered before he pressed his lips to hers.

Mason Pelletier grunted. "Get a room." He threw his napkin at them, but he was smiling. "My wife seems pretty enamored by your fiancé."

“Ezra has a way with people. She’ll probably be included in the WAG texts next,” I warned. “He’s always looking for new recruits.”

Wyatt landed in the seat next to Jackson. “Fucking Seth,” he hissed between clenched teeth.

My brows shot up as I met Jackson’s eyes. It wasn’t like I hadn’t seen Wyatt out on the dance floor with Noel the entire night, but it also hadn’t escaped me when they had invited Seth over to dance with them. I’m sure Maverick would get it out of them one way or another.

“This was a bad idea.” Wyatt sighed when I started to open my mouth to say something, anything. “Why are men so damn confusing? I’m going to end up with another broken heart, Jax.” He scrubbed a hand down my face.

My brows dipped. “Do you want me to have Ezra talk to him? Seth and I aren’t exactly close.”

“No.” Wyatt’s eyes flashed with hurt as he watched Seth dancing with Ezra and Matthias. “I think it would just be better if I left him alone. Noel’s the safer option.”

Seth looked over just at that exact moment and winked at him before he tried to wave him over. Wyatt shook his head and turned away.

“I really like him more than I thought I would. He’s funny, sweet, smart, and so pretty. God, is he pretty. Way prettier than Asher, but he reminds me of him, too.” *Well, thanks for sharing that information with me.* “I knew better to start anything with him after the last time, but I guess I’m just a glutton for punishment.”

Mulligan Downtown was the wedding band, and as the song switched tempos to something slower, I caught the way Jackson’s, who was sitting across from me, entire body language changed. I had never heard this song before, and it was obvious by the way Jackson was reacting that he hadn’t either. It wasn’t just a love song. It sounded almost like a confession. Killian had switched to rhythm guitar while

Maverick sang lead and stared at his husband. There was no question who this song was written about.

“Maverick wrote this,” Jackson blurted out like he could read my mind. He raised his chin as he continued to watch the band while he tapped his fingers on the table.

You saved me from myself / you saved me from my demons.

You brightened up my darkest moments / you brightened up my darkest hours.

I was lost until you pulled me back / I was broken until you said my name.

You're the half that makes me whole / you fixed all my broken pieces.

I could see the pride written all over Jackson's face as Maverick's sweet voice floated through the backyard. I wondered why he didn't sing more often. His voice was perfect.

“It's beautiful.”

“He is.” Jackson's eyes glittered with tears before he grabbed a napkin. He gave me a shy smile and ducked his head just as Ezra landed in my lap.

Ezra was even more carefree than ever. Ty had taken a plea bargain instead of having his case go to trial and was now spending the next seven to ten years in jail.

“Dance with me.” He wrapped his arms around my neck. “Please, CC, just once. I've been out there with my friends all night, and I know you're not a big fan of dancing, but I just need one with you tonight.”

I pushed a few wayward curls back from his face. “Anything for you, princess.”

“Yeah?” Ezra smiled so big I thought it would split his face.

I nodded. “Yes, of course.”

The band finished up their set and when Ezra continued to stay on my lap, I waited until he was ready to move. I wasn't

going to rush him back out there. I figured he wanted to talk to Maverick since they hadn't spent too much time together yet.

"Ezra." He turned to look at me. "Have I told you how gorgeous you look tonight?"

He tilted his head. "Yes, but I always like to hear you say it."

He had chosen a little black dress with star print and puff sleeves that looked like it was made for him. I couldn't wait to peel it from his body later.

He leaned closer so his lips were by my ear. "I bought new panties just for tonight."

"Fuck, princess," I growled, and my cock thickened in my slacks. He giggled as I tickled his sides and then leaned his head on my shoulder.

Maverick came bounding towards the table, a smile on his face, before he stopped in front of his husband. "Goose." He reached up to tug on the tie Jackson wore around his neck. "Mouth please."

"I'm so fucking proud of you, Mavs," Jackson told him before he covered his lips with his.

The DJ that took over after the band began to play a slow song, and that was when Ezra climbed from my lap.

"You promised." He grabbed my hand. "Come on, CC, just one dance. Then we can go home."

He laced our fingers together but stopped to whisper something to Wyatt that I couldn't hear. He gave him a quick side hug and then led me out onto the dance floor. I quickly wrapped my arms around him as he leaned against me.

Other couples followed behind us. Watts and Holt had never even left the dance floor, happily surrounded in their love cocoon, Killian and Matthias, Jackson and Maverick, Mason and London, Shepard and Brooklyn, Leo and Andy, but the couple that surprised me the most was Noel and Wyatt. I didn't see Seth anywhere either, so I wondered if that meant they were together.

“Okay—”

“Let it go tonight, Ezra,” I stopped him.

He pouted up at me. “Just for tonight. Then tomorrow I’m going to blow up the WAG chat like no one’s business.”

“I bet you are.” I chuckled as I tugged him closer.

“I mean—”

“Princess,” I warned him, and he smiled at me with happiness in his big doe eyes.

“I love you, Carson,” he whispered.

I leaned down to brush my lips over his. “I love you, too, boo.”

“So, do you think they’re sleeping together?” Ezra giggled when I clamped my hand over his mouth.

“Forever,” I added.

He nodded. “Forever.”

Ezra
February
The Daytona 500

I had never been so nervous in my entire life. CC had been racing for years. I had watched more than enough of them, but right now, watching the Daytona 500 live and in person? I was sure I would have no nails left by the time it was over. The makeup I had put on this morning was probably smeared all over my face from crying and sweating, because it was really hot. I was surely a mess from running my hands through my hair. How did everyone do this from week to week? I was going to give myself an ulcer or pass out from the excitement.

I gripped Holt's hand tightly. "I can't watch," I shouted over the roar of the engines.

"It's crazy, right?" He smiled brightly at me as Noel leaned into my side from the right.

Noel had won the Xfinity race yesterday and was smooth as silk. I wondered if he ever got upset about anything. Sex. That seemed to ruffle his feathers a lot. Wyatt didn't, though. He wasn't here, but I knew for a fact he had called last night and congratulated Noel on his win. They both claimed they were just friends, but I had my doubts.

I wanted to cover my eyes. I wanted to turn away and bury my face in my hands for fear that something bad was going to happen. I had seen Watts's crash. It had been terrible to watch. Even worse now that I had gotten to know him, gotten closer to Holt, and had become friends with the two of them. I couldn't imagine what that had been like to go through.

I swallowed the nerves that were threatening to spill over as the laps began to wind down. As Mason continued to lead, CC kept pushing him in second place, and when the checkered flag waved, Brooks Racing became a winner in just their first race. Not just a first-time winner, they had finished one-two at the Daytona 500. I hugged Noel, not caring that he hated affection, and smiled when he returned my embrace. Funny

how just a couple of months ago, I thought he hated me, and now I considered him one of my closest friends.

I felt tears in my eyes as Mason burned donuts into the front stretch, while Holt and Watts had their own moment together. A smile spread over my face as CC parked his car and climbed out. I wanted to run to him. I wanted to kiss the living hell out of him and tell him how proud of him I was as I watched him remove his helmet and push the damp hair back from his face. I knew he had interviews to do. I knew he would be busy until God only knew when. Pride swelled inside of me at the prospects this would bring for CC, for Brooks Racing. New sponsorships. New deals that would have his name in households all over the United States. My fiancé was going to be so famous.

“Are you crying?” I turned to see Mason talking to Holt and Watts before he jumped in front of the camera that suddenly appeared. I adored him. He was a great friend and since this was going to be his last year racing, he deserved this win more than ever.

Arms wrapped around me. “Did you enjoy the race?” CC whispered into my ear.

“I’m so proud of you.” I gasped as I spun around to face him. “I might—”

My words were lost the moment CC’s mouth found mine, and I couldn’t think about anything but the feel of his tongue as it slipped between my lips and curled around mine. He was mine. Mine, mine, mine, and right now, everyone could see that.

“I have to go, but I needed to do that before the rush of everything. Promise me you won’t leave until I’m done?” He gripped my chin between his thumb and forefinger.

I put my hand over his wrist. “Baby, I’m not going anywhere.”

And I didn’t. I stayed while CC was interviewed. Photographed. Interviewed again. Had more pictures taken. I stifled yawns. I leaned against Holt and Matthias while their

husbands had their own press to take care of. I didn't want to miss anything, no matter how late this went on.

"Carson, you recently got engaged." My ears perked up as Holt nudged me. "What can you tell us about that?" the interviewer asked.

CC's eyes met mine across the room. "I'm going to marry my best friend." His face broke into a huge smile. "Ezra's amazing. I can't wait to spend the rest of my life making him as happy as he makes me."

Tears stung my eyes as he continued to watch me, as the questions changed, as the night grew longer. How did I not realize CC was everything I ever needed or wanted in my life? Why did it take a kiss that night?

"I'm taking off." Matthias squeezed my arm as he climbed to his feet. "My husband is waiting for me."

I noticed Killian standing by the door as I hugged Matthias. "Text me tomorrow."

"I will," he assured me before he disappeared from the room.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, but I ignored it. Holt left with Watts, but not before I hugged both of them, once again wishing them congratulations on their win, and then, finally, CC was free to leave with me. He wrapped his arms around me the second he was close enough, and I melted into his embrace.

"Let's go, boo," he murmured. "I need you."

Heat pulsed in my veins while want, desire, and lust swirled inside my belly. It never got old. The want, the yearning. I hoped it never did. I loved him. More than anything, I wanted this relationship with CC to last until we were old and had our grandchildren taking care of us. Wait, that would mean we would have to have children.

"Do you want kids?" I blurted out.

CC smiled at me. "I'd love kids with you. Little blond haired, freckled kids with your eyes. Yeah, I'd love that."

“Me, too.” I whispered. “Take me home, Carson. Make kids with me.”

He chuckled. “You know that’s not how it works, right?”

“I know, but we can pretend, right?” I gripped his hand in mine.

“Oh, we can pretend. I’ll breed the shit out of you, princess. All night long,” CC promised.

THE END

Want more Ezra? Sign up for my newsletter for two bonus chapters. A group text with the WAGs and breakfast with Maverick. <https://4sund.ae/sc>

A Note From Sundae

Let me just start by saying this book was always going to be Carson's. I originally was going to write it as an age-gap, but it wasn't working. First, I was going to make Carson and Asher a thing (from Frost, Jackson's teammate) then I scratched that because hockey would be going on during November—February so that would be hard to work around. Then I thought, what if Asher had a twin brother who ran a bar? But that didn't work either. Also, how many M names do I need? Matthias, Maverick, and Asher's brother's name was going to be Murphy? Sorry, not feeling that one either. The one constant while working on this book? Ezra, Carson's best friend. He was that sassy, balls out, flirty guy who kept talking to me, and one morning it FINALLY came to me.

Carson and Ezra! So, it turns out Carson gets his HEA with his bestie. I loved writing Ezra so much. If you're in my Facebook group, you'll know I planned on giving him a book, anyway, so now it's a little earlier than planned.

Noel, Wyatt, and Seth will be getting their own book. It will be an MMM, which I'm more than excited about diving into for the first time.

Leo and Andy will be getting their own book. Don't worry, they will be eighteen when that happens.

Jones Matthews, you might remember him, the driver who hit Holt in *Amnesia*? I mentioned him for a hot second in this book. You can expect a book for him, too. Expect stepbrothers, friends-to-lovers-to-enemies-to-lovers, a sweet cinnamon roll and opposites attract.

And yes, Asher will be getting a book of his own.

If you'd like to read Watts and Holt's book, *Amnesia*, it is available now.

Killian and Matthias's story, *The Lying Tree*, is available now.

Maverick and Jackson's book, *Frost*, is available now.

Rand and Brooklyn's book, *Picture Perfect*, is free on all digital platforms.

Mason and London's book, *Gravity*, is available now.

If you want to learn about Josie, you can start the Kingston High Series with *Piece of Cake*, which is available now.

All of my books are free to read in Kindle Unlimited.

If you enjoyed this book, I would love for you to leave a review on Amazon. It really helps indie authors like myself.

Acknowledgments

My husband — Thank you for being my biggest supporter, cheerleader, and all-around favorite person in the universe. I'm lucky to have you and appreciate everything you do for me. The occasional push to promote myself more than I do is much needed. Dealing with my moody ass can't be easy. You're the chicken. *Real love is forever.*

Stephanie— Thanks for being my bestie. I miss your face. I hope that we can get together soon. Tell Phil I'm still working on naming a character after him.

My family and friends — Even though you don't read the spicy words I write, I love that you still take the time to like, share, and comment on everything. It would be strange and awkward if you did read them (Eva!).

My readers — THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! Thank you for taking a chance on me. I wouldn't be able to continue to keep writing without you. Each review, edit, teasers, TikTok, and reel, they all mean more to me than you will ever know. I especially love it when you drop into my DM's and ask me who is getting the next book. Dee, I told you that Wyatt and Asher were getting a book. I just didn't say if they would be together or not. An extra special thank you to Colleen for the teasers you made for *Killian & Matthias* and *Frost*. You're so kind to do that.

Mom— I miss you so much.

Carson Hocevar — When I was writing *Amnesia* in 2022, I happened to be watching the NASCAR truck series. I needed a name for a side character, and, well, Carson Carey was born. Now let's see if he can go win that truck championship!

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Books by Sundae Leighton

Wide Open Series

[*Picture Perfect*](#)

[*Gravity*](#)

[*Amnesia*](#)

[*Wrapped in Red*](#)

Kingston High Series

[*Piece of Cake*](#)

[*Cakewalk*](#)

[*Triple Layer*](#)

With the Band Series

[*The Lying Tree*](#)

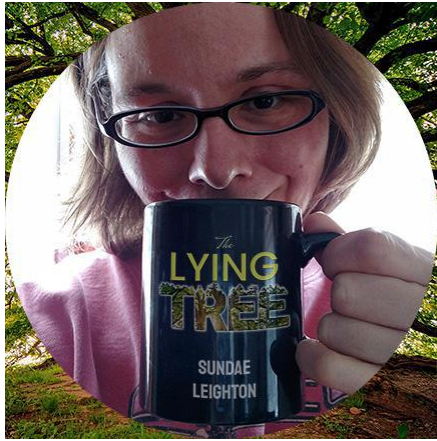
[*Frost*](#)

[*Killian & Matthias*](#) (novella)

Standalone

[*Out of the Dark*](#)

Playlists, signed paperbacks plus over 80 items for sale at SundaeLeighton.com



About the Author

Sundae Leighton writes romance novels that are sweet with a dark twist.

She got her start writing fanfiction with her friends in school, but didn't take the plunge to publish her first book (Picture Perfect) until 2020. Born and raised in Connecticut, where she currently resides with her husband and their cats. She sometimes scares herself when she writes things darker than intended, considers coffee the nectar of the gods, and once ran the NYC marathon (OK - *half* marathon). When she isn't writing down what the voices in her head tell her to, she likes watching murder shows, auto racing, and reading romance books with a lot of dark angst.

Read more at [Sundae Leighton's site](#).