



FRAT WARS

SAXON JAMES

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KING OF THIEVES

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First published in Australia by May Books 2021

Newcastle, NSW, Australia

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Acknowledgments

ABOUT THE BOOK

We're basically Romeo and Juliet. But dudes. And without all the dying.

Chad

Being VP of Sigma Beta Psi is wild. I get all the benefits of being in charge with hardly any of the responsibility.

Parties, pranks, and frat politics—college life has never been sweeter.

Until I meet Bailey Prince.

He has the face of a goddamn angel. I don't know where he came from or why I'm so obsessed.

But I do know he's a Kappa.

And our houses have a rivalry that's written into legend.

Bailey

At Rho Kappa Tau, I'm a legacy.

It's a lot of pressure, but I've always been responsible, never had that rebellious need to rock the boat, and I like it that way.

But after a party at Sigma—the jock frat—I meet Chad Doomsen, and for the first time in my life, I want to step outside my square.

Our houses have always had a rivalry, but some of the guys seem to hate Chad specifically, and I don't know why.

He's surprisingly sweet and kind. At least to me.

I need to stay away. A relationship with Chad would be betraying the very legacy that brought me here.

But I can't help myself. And it seems, neither can he.

This one is for the Chads.

CHAD

“NO, BIT HIGHER. YEAH, THERE YOU GO.”

I watch as the pledges seal the black contact paper over the windows at Rho Kappa Tau. I can already imagine the look on the face of their prez, Charles, when he realizes we’ve outsmarted them.

One day a week, they have their chapter meetings on campus at West Haven University since their house isn’t big enough for all the members to attend, and they always leave some dumbass pledge in charge of watching the house.

Well, he can watch it from where we’ve zip-tied him to the kitchen cabinet.

“This is the shittiest prank ever,” Carter scoffs from his place on top of Raymond’s shoulder.

“Less talk, more focus, pledge.” I smirk. “You’re getting bubbles in it. Have some pride in your work.”

Even though I can’t see his face, I know he’s rolling his eyes as he pulls back the contact paper and reapplies it.

“Seriously though,” Raymond says. “Why this? We could piss on their grill or leave roadkill in their air ducts.”

“First up, both those things are gross. Second, we wanna keep operating on this campus. What did the rules say?”

“No serious fuckery.”

“And?”

“No hazing.”

“And?” I prompt.

“Misconduct of a serious nature will result in the suspension of Sigma Beta Psi.”

“Exactly.” I stuff my hands in my pockets as I admire their work. “Plus, we’re not total assholes. We might wanna piss off these guys, but we don’t actually want to go too far.”

“But they’re *Kappas*,” Carter says like that explains it all.

I grin. “Yeah, but we don’t hold it against them.”

Mostly. One of the first things I learned being initiated as a Sigma was our long-standing rivalry with the Rho Kappa Tau house. It used to be bad, well before rules were brought in on campus about how fraternities could

behave. There're rumors of some really nasty shit like actual assault and sexual abuse, which I don't want to believe but have a bad feeling might be accurate. Especially if the back room at the Sigma House is anything to go by. It's only maybe two decades old, whereas the rest of the house was built sometime in the twenties, and our president, Zeke, swears it's because the Kappas set dynamite to one of the back posts.

Some of the more hard-core brothers long for those days.

But I prefer not having to fear physical injury.

"This will piss them off," I say, giving more information, since I'm a nice guy. "Ever tried to get sticky shit off a surface? It'll leave crap all over the windows, and they'll have to spend hours cleaning that off too."

"As if," Raymond says. "The rich bastards will pay someone else to do it instead."

"Know thy enemy. They might be richer than God, but they believe in hard work, and I'd put my next week's wages down that they do the cleanup themselves."

That's the thing about the Kappas—I *want* to hate them, but they make it hard.

Our frats couldn't be more different. They're the future leaders. Bankers and managers and politicians. Their idea of a good time is an intellectual gang bang, whereas Sigmas don't count it a weekend unless we've done something stupid. They have Beemers; I'm driving a beat-up old station wagon.

Our chapter members are all here on sports scholarships, and nearly all of us are holding down a part-time job on top of coursework and training and frat duties.

Kappas aren't bad people. They're just *different* people.

Carter finishes covering the last window, and I check the time on my phone.

"All right, pack this shit up. They'll be back any minute."

I was planning to toss the poor pledge inside some scissors, but his brothers can deal with him when they're back, which ...

The sound of a car pulling up out the front makes me stop. I creep up the side of the house to check, and yep, they're back early.

"Shit." I laugh as I jog back to where Carter has jumped down from Raymond's shoulders. "Back already, let's go."

I run for the fence separating Kappa House from the frat next door and

hoist myself up over it. The pledges beside me do the same, and as soon as we drop to the other side, we bolt. I fly past two Betas relaxing in a blow-up pool, and neither of them looks shocked to see us.

“Fucking Chad,” one of them calls right before I round the side of their house and make for the street.

Shouts start coming from the Kappa House as I hit the street and take off. The Sigma Beta Psi house is on the complete opposite side of Greek Row to the Kappas. Our houses bookend the street with other frats and sororities in between.

The pledges should easily keep up, but if they can't, it's not my problem—they knew what they were getting into. Everyone always wants in on my dumbass ideas until we almost get caught. I swear the Kappas will report us one of these days, but until that happens, I'll keep having my fun. This is my last year of school, and no way am I going to spend it holed up in my room studying.

Cs still get degrees.

I self-five as I jog across the grass and up the steps at Sigma Beta Psi. I'm panting by the time I reach the porch, and I bend to catch my breath before glancing up at Zeke, who was clearly watching the whole time.

“Done stealing my pledges?” he asks. He's smiling, which takes the bite out of his words.

Carter and Raymond thunder up the steps behind me, and Zeke immediately drops the smile. “Get your asses inside. We have work to do.”

They hurry to apologize and head inside, way more respectful of Zeke and his authority. As the president, people listen to Zeke. I'm just the shithead VP.

As soon as they're gone, he laughs. “Wait until they find out it's their turn to stay sober tonight.”

“I do not miss those shitkicker days.”

Zeke and I rushed together as dumbass freshmen. We've been through the ritual of being bottom rung in the house, so I have no sympathy for those guys. We've all gotta pay our dues—literally and metaphorically—and if they end up initiated, they'll be where we are one day.

Living out the best days of our lives.

Before it all goes downhill from here.

Who knows where I'm going to be this time next year? Probably back at home, drowning in student debt that my partial scholarship doesn't cover,

while I struggle to get a job. I'm not good or interested enough in football to go pro, and while I thought studying business would cast my net wide, I still have no goddamn clue what I'm going to do with it.

So until then, head, meet sand.

We walk inside and join the others. The large living room has been almost cleared of furniture. We have thirty people living in the house and another fifty members spread out between off-campus housing and the dorms.

Almost all eighty of us are here, filling out the one room.

"Shut up, you animals," Zeke calls, making his way over to a spot in front of the fireplace. For some reason, that's always been considered the head of the room by unspoken agreement.

It takes a minute, but slowly everyone falls silent.

"In a minute, Robbie is going to take you through how the night will run and who's in charge of what," Zeke says.

A hum of excitement ripples through the guys waiting. This is our first big party of the semester, and everyone expects that Sigma House will go epic or go home. It's a good thing Robbie is our social chair this year. He might dress like a dad and have the kind of loud voice that borders on obnoxious, but he's friendly and fun, so people give him a pass on just about everything.

Being six foot four with two hundred and thirty pounds of fat and muscle probably helps too.

"Yeah, yeah, it's exciting, but shut up a minute." Zeke gives everyone a few more seconds. Unlike our president last year, he's laid-back and only takes the job as seriously as he needs to. "Tonight, pledges, you're on dry duty. Not a single lick of alcohol, and if your Big catches you breaking the rules, you're out. No second chances." Some of the Big Brothers—guys in charge of looking after our pledges and teaching them the ropes—puff out their chests and try to look intimidating. They take this shit seriously. "Because when we party in Sigma House, your job is too important. First, you've got to keep people from fucking shit up and getting the dean's attention—that goes without saying. Second, you keep an eagle eye on those Kappas. See, the rivalry isn't just a rivalry. It's a competition. Every year Kappas and Sigmas engage in a game called King of Thieves, and we're on a three-year winning streak. I'd like to end my time as a Sigma completely undefeated."

Him and me both. And after spending the whole week before the semester started by helping Zeke go through the house and relabel every item that wasn't attached, I'll be pissed if they screw this up for us.

"Everything in the house has a number of points." He picks up a vase on the top of the fireplace that's probably been there since the stone ages and points to the number on the bottom. "The small, easy-to-take things have a low score. The big things—like our beds—have an insanely high number. Basically, the harder it is to get something out, the more we reward for it. At Harmony Week in six months' time, we return what we've taken, tally the points, and whoever has the most wins. Got it?"

The pledges hurry to agree, because if they're still lost, their Bigs will catch them up to speed.

"So tonight, you make sure nothing gets past you. That's it."

"No worries, Zeke," Carter says. "We'll pat them down on the way out if we have to."

I can't see a reason that'll be necessary, but hey, I appreciate the dedication.

Robbie takes over, and the energy in the room jumps up to a thousand. "Okay, assholes. Rick and Miles—kegs. Get them out back and hooked up. Pledges, start scrubbing, I want this house spotless. It'll be good practice for the morning when you get to do it all again." He finger guns them. "We've got to get the soundproofing up in the windows and a sweet backdrop for the sorority sisters to snap some pics. You know the rules. The more hotties posting about our party, the more people through the doors at twenty a head." He points at Brandon. "Once you guys are done, run everything past this killjoy and get his sign-off. We good? Good. Get to it. Oh, and if you're not costumed the fuck up, you can sit on the front lawn in your briefs all night."

Brandon shakes his head as he approaches Robbie. "You're an asshole."

"Guilty. What's your point?"

"I'm not a killjoy. I'm the risk manager. If I didn't put a halt to half the idiotic things you want to do, we'd be shut down by now."

I've heard this argument a million times from all the people who held their roles before them. Social chair and risk manager somehow work together while being completely at odds. Robbie and Brandon have always been complete opposites—from their opinion on the correct length of shorts, to whether elbows on the table should be called in beer pong—and these roles have made the divide between them even deeper.

“Just get it done,” Zeke says. He walks over to me. “Think they’ll be up to it?”

“All we can do is wait and see.”

He rakes a hand through his sandy hair and nods.

“Hey, it’s not like this year is riding on tonight, right?” Except it totally is. If tonight isn’t crazy and word gets out that Sigma House is throwing subpar parties, no one will come to any of the others. Parties are the way we make money and keep the membership dues down. Unlike Kappa, no one here can afford paying any more than we need to, which is why, year after year, we’re known as being the house that knows how to have fun.

It’s the thing that keeps us running.

Zeke groans. “Thanks for that reminder, Doomsen.”

“Hey.” I nudge him. “We’ve got this. The frat’s ours this year, and no Kappa douche is going to make us look stupid.”

Frat first, everything else second.

That will never change.

BAILEY

I PULL UP AROUND THE CORNER FROM THE HOUSE, LIKE I'VE DONE EVERY DAY since I moved here. The covered parking at Kappa House is reserved for the president and vice president, and I prefer to leave my car out here rather than have it targeted by a ridiculous Sigma prank.

It still strikes me as odd how intense they are about the rivalry here. I transferred colleges and chapters at the end of last year so I could be closer to home, and the Sigma and Kappa chapters at UVM have largely let the rivalry go.

Mostly because the UVM guys are more interested in hating on the frat guys from CU. I guess they do things differently here in Connecticut.

I stretch my neck to the side before grabbing my bag and jumping out. Even early in the semester, I already have a lot of coursework to catch up on, and with everyone out of the house at a party tonight, it will give me the perfect chance to get ahead.

We're far from a raucous house, but having people constantly passing my bedroom and filling out the common areas makes it hard to concentrate. Transferring right before senior year hasn't been smooth either, and the only reason it was allowed was because my dad gave a great, fat donation to Rho Kappa Tau. Pity all that money couldn't buy me friends, and while everyone is nice enough, they're all tight already.

I'm the outsider.

Thank fuck it's only one year to get through.

I know something's up as soon as I round the corner and see a bunch of my brothers out on the lawn. Charles, our president, is gesturing to something, and instead of ducking my head and passing them, I suck in a big-boy breath and move closer.

"What's going on?"

"Sigmas." He shakes his head, copper hair almost red under the setting sun. "Assholes have covered up all our windows, so it's pitch-black inside."

When I look back over at the house, the windows are indeed covered with something black. "Can we remove it?"

"Yeah, it will take time though."

Neilson scoffs. "Bet it was Chad Doomsen. How they voted that guy VP, I'll never know. He's almost as bad as Robbie."

“Agreed,” Charles says. “But Zeke isn’t any better, and it’s not like they had a pool of worthy contenders in Sigma Beta Psi, so they’re scraping the bottom of the barrel.”

I have no idea who any of these people are that they’re talking about. I’ve heard Chad mentioned a few times, but by the time I transferred last year, I was bogged down in finals prep, so barely did anything else outside of the house and frat duties.

“What makes the Sigmas so bad anyway?” I ask.

I’m met with four blank stares.

“They’re a bunch of douchebag jocks with more muscle power than brainpower, and they never leave us alone,” Jordan says. “Don’t worry, newbie, you’ll cross paths with them soon enough.”

I smile and thank him for the warning, then go to head for the house.

“Bailey, wait.” Charles catches up to me. “I hate to do this to you, but with the pledges cleaning this crap off the windows, we’ll need the extra hands tonight.”

“To ... night?”

“At the Sigma party. Obviously it’s going to be a fun time, but while we’re there, the main aim is to stealth sneak as many items out of the house as possible. I can count on you, right?”

“Ah ...”

“Come on, man. I know you work hard, but this is only one night.”

Only one night where I would have had the house to myself. We walk inside, where all the lights are on because the windows have been completely sealed. I actually don’t think I’ll mind if they’ve done this to my bedroom window—it’s more effective than block-out curtains.

“I was hoping to get some studying done.”

Charles’s face drops, and he pulls me to the side as some of our brothers pass by. “Look, I’m going to be real with you ... I think you should come tonight and try bonding with some of the guys. You’re on your own a lot, and I know it must have been hard to walk in here when we’ve all been together since freshman year, but parties help. Those Sigmas are a bunch of boneheads, but they know how to go all out.”

“I don’t know—”

“Okay, I’m pulling rank on you. You’re coming. Your dad got you in here, but you have to put in the effort too, man. Party. Tonight. Theme is CEOs and Office Bros or Hoes, depending on who you ask, so you can’t even

flake out because I know you've sure as hell got a suit in your closet."

Unfortunately, I do. A few of them, actually.

"Okay then." Not like there's much else I can say. I leave and head to my room, trying not to sulk about a night out. I'm not an antisocial person—I had a lot of friends at UVM, but it's always difficult to decide who's authentic, so I tend to lie low.

The guys here all have influential families, but Dad is head of one of the largest banks in the world, and one day, it'll be run by my sister and me. Being a Prince is weird. People are either intimidated and avoid me like the plague, or overly friendly, to the point where the friendship becomes sterile.

I spend as long as I can studying, but the excitement in the house is high, and everyone is too loud for me to be able to concentrate. Around seven, I give in, shower, and get dressed before heading downstairs.

The living area has been cleared with most of the brothers gathered around the outside of the room, and a beer pong table is set up in the center. I slide in, trying to keep to myself, but our house manager, Lucas, spots me right away.

"Hey, I didn't know you were coming tonight?"

"Charles's orders."

He laughs. "Good, you can be on my team for BP. We'll be up soon."

"Should I be worried about why you don't already have a partner?"

"You caught me. I'm terrible. Like, ridiculously terrible, so if my balls accidentally go into one of our holes ..." He squints. "Can we pretend I didn't say any of that?"

"I think that would be best."

I like Lucas. Out of all the brothers, he's always been the nicest one, and if I'm honest, he's not bad to look at. He's all crooked smiles and kind eyes. It's sweet.

But I'm not Out here, and I have no idea how he identifies.

It's not that I want to make a big deal out of it or anything. At UVM, everyone knew and no one cared, but since I don't know any of these guys well yet, I figure it's information I'll keep to myself. Besides, it's not like I have the time to date anyone this year, so what's the point of getting into it? And I never hook up with people who know who I am.

Beer pong is usually my least favorite game because of how long it takes and how few people can play, but we keep the teams in rotation so people aren't standing around waiting for long.

After a few turns, it's confirmed that Lucas is so bad I'm already tipsy, and the night has barely gotten started.

"All right, brothers," Charles calls. "Listen up. As far as those Sigmas know, we couldn't care less about the damn windows, got it?"

A few cheers meet his words.

"We're going to go down there, have a wild night, and stealth steal all the items we can get our hands on. What's the golden rule?"

"Games before dames!" literally every brother but me recites.

"What is it?"

"*Games before dames!*"

I lean closer to Lucas. "This thing is serious, isn't it?"

"Hell yeah. It's our year to win. I don't want to graduate never having won King of Thieves."

Now that I have a slight buzz going, I'm intrigued. "Okay. I'll try to help you guys out."

A strange look crosses Lucas's face. "*Us* out."

"What?"

"Us. You're one of us now. You have to stop viewing us as the other guys. *We're* your brothers now."

I nod, because he's right. "Sorry, hard habit to break."

"I bet. I'll tell you what though." He pats me on the shoulder. "If you come back tonight with something worth big points, everyone here will love you. Kappas are team players. Remember that."

Because how do I forget a vaguely serious life lesson while tipsy?

Tell me once, shame on you. Tell me twice ... well, I'm starting to get the message.

Apparently no one is going to let me drift by this year unnoticed, so it's time to get involved.

By stealing, apparently.

Game on.

CHAD

I CHEER ALONG WITH MY BROTHERS AS TWO SORORITY GIRLS WRESTLE IN A blow-up pool. It's entertaining, but unlike the others, the sight doesn't make me lose my mind. Their tits and bras are on full display under their wet shirts, and I find it attractive but not on the same level as the other guys. College has been eye-opening. I've discovered that while I think most women are pretty, men are fire. Sexy and exciting, the sight of them burns through my bloodstream.

Well, most guys anyway. My brothers are off-limits, which could be because I think they're all butt-ugly or because I knew before I got attached to anyone that it would be a bad idea.

Most of college I've spent hooking up with women while I experimented with men. It was over the summer that I finally felt comfortable enough to call myself bi, even if I haven't officially come out to anyone. I have a feeling the guys in my house have at least heard the rumors about me, and if they haven't, I doubt it will take long for them to get wind of it.

Because fuck any homophobia to hell, this year I have my own room, so I'm living college life to the fullest, which means hooking up with any and every guy who will have me.

I leave the backyard behind and head inside, passing by Robbie, who's on a table, downing a beer. Brandon is trying unsuccessfully to get him off it, and I have a feeling that babysitting Robbie is going to take up a large part of his night.

There's a dance floor set up in the living room, smash cups happening in the kitchen, and a whole line of people waiting to take photos in front of the backdrop Robbie set up. Zeke had nothing to worry about. This party is frat as fuck.

A few people try to talk to me as I pass through the house, but the bass is so loud I've got no chance of making out actual words, so I upnod them and keep moving. We've got plywood lined with foam pieces to board up the windows, so other than the front and back doors, barely any sound is getting out, which makes it even louder inside.

I check the bathroom only to find a massive line to piss, so I change direction and head outside. There are some bushes with my name on them.

Carter and Raymond are our door bitches, and I check in with them to

make sure everything is fine before jogging down the front steps and rounding the side of the house. The bushes are in the shadows, outside of the golden glow of the streetlamps, and I hurry to undo my zipper and get to business.

It's immediate relief, and I sigh through the whole long piss.

I'm dazed in that happy kind of way I get from alcohol, and as I tilt my head back and look at the sky, a dopey smile crosses my face. I might only have a year left of this paradise, but on a night as perfect as this one, that's not something that can get me down.

All I need now is to find someone to get off with later tonight.

Hopefully someone tall and broad, maybe with stubble, or rough fingers, or a low, sexy voice.

A shiver of want races through me.

I shake myself off and tuck my dick away, reminding myself I have to *find* the guy first, before I get too excited.

I swing around to head back inside—

And slam right into someone.

He staggers backward, slips, and falls into the bushes with the sharp snap of twigs and aggressive rustle of leaves.

Oops.

I cringe and creep closer.

At least he landed upstream from where I pissed. I think.

“Ow ...” comes the pathetic, belated cry.

“You okay?” I ask.

“Hard to say.”

“Why?”

“Because I have something digging into my back, and all I can see is bush.”

“That's what she said.” I reach down to take his hand and yank him out. “Though if you ask me, that sounds like the perfect end to a ...”

The guy straightens, and I catch sight of his face. No details, because it's dark, but what I *can* see? The defined lips, inky curls, long, dark lashes ...

He's not what I thought I was looking for tonight, but *damn* my dick is into it.

“Perfect end to ...” he prompts. And where I'd originally been imagining something gravelly and deep, his voice hits me like that first crack of a can of beer. It's smooth, comforting, and sends anticipation racing over my skin.

“The night.”

He tilts his head, gaze roving down my body, and it occurs to me a second too late that he’s checking me out.

I subtly flex, hoping he likes what he sees.

“I agree partially,” he says. “But bush isn’t really my style.”

But something digging into his back is? That’s promising.

“I’m Bailey, by the way.”

“Hey, I’m—”

Loud voices interrupt me from around the front of the house. I turn toward them, hoping I can ignore it, but they keep getting louder, so I sidestep the cutie and hurry to see what’s going on. Raymond’s holding some guy back, who’s yelling in the direction of the house.

“Fucking idiot.” I could step in and help, but I’d rather see how this plays out.

“I’ve heard that’s a popular opinion around here,” Bailey says.

I’m not sure what he means, but I’m thrilled he followed me.

I groan as Raymond shoves the guy down the stairs, and the guy puffs up like he’s inflatable. They go for each other, and shit, I better step in.

Fucking pledges.

As I close the space between us, I recognize the guy, Toby, from another frat. He’s yelling something about his girlfriend. Raymond shoves him again, and right as Toby goes to take a swing, I shove him from behind.

“Lay off, dude.”

Toby swings around, fist ready, and clips me in the chin so fast I don’t see it coming. The pain smashes through my face, and it takes me a second to shake it off and step up to him.

“What the *hell*?”

Alarm crosses his face. “Shit, I didn’t realize it was you ...” He holds his hands up like I might hit back, and yeah, I’m fucking thinking about it. My face *hurts*, even through all the booze. The only thing that stops me is that damn conscionable voice in the back of my head, reminding me that frat houses have been shut down for less.

“Time to go,” I say between my teeth. “And if you bring your shit around here again, I’ll make sure you’re blacklisted from every party on this street. Got it?”

“But Sarah—”

“I don’t care.” *Please go so I can stop playing tough.* “Night’s over.”

He scowls, then shoots a filthy look over his shoulder at Raymond before stalking away. I relax my fists that were clenched tightly at my side.

Raymond moves closer. "I'm sorry, Ch—"

"Don't." I slap him over the head. "We deescalate, not detonate, dumbass. No one's going to report anyone for a little hit"—that hurts like hell—"but if both houses ended up getting involved, you can bet your ass the dean would hear about it, and we'd all be hauled in."

"I said I'm sorry."

"Yeah, well—" Shit, *Bailey*. I whirl around to where I left him, more than prepared to search every inch of the house if I need to, but thank the Greek gods he hasn't left. "Just don't let it happen again," I mutter to Raymond before heading for the guy I'm hoping to see naked by the end of the night.

And *damn*. Now that he's in the light, I can see more clearly. He's tall and thin and has adorable freckles over his nose. This guy's fucking beautiful.

"Now that shit is dealt with, want to grab a drink?" I ask.

"Isn't that why we're all here?"

"One of the reasons." My other two are to have fun and find someone to get off with, so we'll see how I go with the other two goals. At the moment—sore face aside—things are looking good.

I lead Bailey inside, past the ear-splitting noise, until we reach the kitchen, where the music is low enough I only have to raise my voice a little to be heard.

"How haven't I seen you before?" I blurt, then cringe, because way to play it cool, Doomsen.

"I'm reasonably new."

"Yeah, I would have remembered your face."

"My face?" He frowns. "Because ..."

Oh no ... Did I read him wrong?

I hurry to step back and place some distance between us. "Ah, it's just, you know, interesting. Dude. So, a drink? Want one?"

He still has a crease between his eyebrows but eventually nods. "That sounds great."

I pour out two vodka and Cokes that are more alcohol than soda. When he sips his and doesn't react to the taste, my respect for the guy bumps up a notch.

A smile slowly works its way over my face, and I can't seem to make it

stop. “Where’d you come from?”

“Vermont. I went to UVM until the end of last year when I got a transfer here.”

“Why here?”

“Closer to home.” He shrugs a little. “Mom got sick last year. She’s fine now, but I feel better being within driving distance.”

“Shit.” That must have been scary. My folks piss me off occasionally, but I’d do anything for them. “I’m sorry.”

“We’re past it,” he says softly. “What’s your life story?”

“Thankfully, super boring. Parents and twin baby sisters all back in Atlanta, and I was offered a partial scholarship here, so I took it.”

“Smart man.”

“You’d be the first to say that.” My dumb grin is back. “I’m not known for my brains.”

His gaze drops to my arms, and when his tongue swipes over his bottom lip, it looks almost involuntary. “Well, you have so many other positive qualities, it must be hard to choose.”

“You’ve got no idea about my *qualities*.” I pump my eyebrows, and thankfully, he starts to laugh. I mean, what’s a dick joke between friends?

Not that he’s my friend.

That’s definitely *not* what I want from him.

I grab his drink and top up both glasses before nodding to the hall. “Come with me.”

“Wait.”

Shit, did I read him wrong again?

Instead, he surprises me by crossing to the freezer and pulling out a bag of frozen berries that one of my brothers uses in his smoothies. I watch Bailey close the distance between us, and when he’s right in front of me, he presses the cold bag to my face.

I want to point out it doesn’t hurt—thank you, vodka—but then I catch his clear blue eyes, and all the air zaps from the room. He’s standing closer than he needs to, filling my gut with fizz and my pants with a boner I could stab someone with. And hopefully that someone is him.

The last thing I want is to break contact, but when his eyes start to fill with heat, I can’t take it anymore. I grab the berries, toss them back in the freezer, then take his hand.

“Come with me?” I expect him to question me, or maybe hesitate, but his

hand tightens around mine.
“Lead the way.”

BAILEY

I FOLLOW THIS GUY FROM THE KITCHEN, DOWN A HALL, AND UP THE STAIRS TO a bedroom, where he pushes open the door and steps aside. I missed his name earlier, and now it feels too weird to ask.

“You sure this is okay?”

He winks. “I won’t tell if you don’t.”

I’m guessing that means he’s closeted, which works out well for me. All the stolen glances and lingering eye contact has told me exactly what he’s after. I’m not an idiot. And I’m not about to turn down a guy who looks the way he does.

He’s the quintessential frat boy jock.

Frat boy is taller than me, with broad shoulders and a narrow waist. His arms are the size of my torso, I swear, and I can’t stop staring. When we bumped into each other outside, I couldn’t believe my luck. I’d be lying if I said ending up in the bushes wasn’t fair payment for being delivered my perfect idea of a hookup. Especially since he has no idea who I am.

As he closes the door behind us, I take in the room. It’s a big, private one. A bed takes up a lot of the space, but there’s a desk stuffed into one corner and a small couch shoved up against the other wall. At least that makes seating decisions easy.

I perch on one side of the couch, and he switches on the desk lamp before taking the other side. We’re so close that when he angles toward me and stretches his arm over the back of the couch, his hand brushes my hair.

I swallow.

“I haven’t done this in a while,” frat boy says. His voice is deep and rumbly, and it might as well be a flute with how quickly my cock rises at the sound.

“Done what?”

“Ah ...” His dark gaze darts away, and the same uncertain look he gave me earlier returns. I’m not sure if he’s nervous or if I haven’t been obvious enough, so I might as well help him out.

“Hooked up, you mean?” I eye his impressive muscles. “I find *that* hard to believe.”

A relieved smile fills his face that sets off all these little nerves in my stomach. He looks all big and badass, but there’s something almost shy under

his dude-bro first impression. “Hooked up ... with a guy.”

“But you have before?” I’m not in the business of dealing with bi-curious guys. In my experience, they take up more time than I have to give.

“Don’t worry, I more than know what I’m doing.”

“Thank fuck. Playing teacher isn’t my kink.”

Something sparks behind his eyes. “You don’t wanna reward me for extra credit?”

“That came way too easily for you.”

“I’ve been around.”

I tilt my head. “Are you bi, or ...”

“Yep. You?”

“Full-blown homo.”

“So I take it you’ve done this before too?” He reaches over and rests his hand on my thigh. “This okay?”

Damn, he’s precious. I love this whole bashful bad-boy thing he’s got going on. Instead of answering, I reach for his hand and slide it up my leg until he’s palming my erection through my pants.

“*This* okay?” I tease.

“Fuck.” He gives me a squeeze before a soft laugh falls from his lips. “I’m so nervous all of a sudden.”

“Nervous?” I don’t mean to sound so cynical, but *come on*. “Does that line actually work on people?”

“What? I am.”

“Uh-huh.” I grab his shoulders and swing my leg over his lap until I’m straddling him. This close up, I hear his sharp inhale. My lips find his ear. “Still nervous, big guy?”

“If I am, I’m suddenly too turned on to care.”

“Much better.” I go to kiss him, but he tilts his head back and reaches up to cup my face. “Problem?”

He shakes his head. “You’re just so ... pretty.”

A trickle of annoyance passes through me. “And?”

“I can’t stop looking at you.”

His voice has dropped with awe, and I frown as I puzzle out whether this is another pickup line. His face is so open though, his eyes soft as his stare traces my features. I want to believe him, but this is college, and people will say anything to get laid.

“You can drop the flattery. I’m not going anywhere.”

He leans forward and nips my bottom lip. “Good. I hate rushing through the fun things in life, and I have a feeling I’m going to want a follow-up.”

“We’re on the same page, then.”

“Kissing okay?”

I card my fingers through his hair. “It’s the only way to start.”

His warm breath hits my skin a second before his mouth is on mine. His lips are cold and at war with the warm tongue he sweeps into my mouth. He tastes like sugar from the soda he’s been drinking.

For how nervous he apparently was, the kiss is borderline desperate. He groans as he presses forward, tilting me back under the force of it.

Then suddenly his arms wrap around me, and I’m being hauled back against his body. He leans against the couch, and when I kiss him back, I’m just as needy for more. I’m glad he said there’s the possibility of round two, because while he might not want to rush, my dick has other ideas.

It needs to be touched.

“How pathetic am I if I come in the next five minutes?” I murmur against his mouth.

“Depends.”

“On?”

“Whether I end up coming first. Because *fuck* I don’t think it’ll take long.”

Excellent. It feels good to know I’m not the only one being driven mad here. His business shirt is unbuttoned halfway, and the sliver I can make out of his chest makes me want more. I hurry to reach for the rest of the buttons, and as soon as his shirt is open, I can’t help splaying my fingers over his abs.

“Fair warning, I don’t have any of these.”

“That’s okay, I have enough muscle for the both of us.”

“I’ll say.” I want to lick them. “Your body’s unreal.”

“Eh.” He reaches for my buttons, and I meet him halfway. “I work hard, but ...” He pushes my shirt off my shoulders. “This.” His fingers run from my throat down to the sensitive skin on my stomach. “This turns me on so much.”

I look down at my scrawny, too-pale body. “You need to watch more porn.”

He chuckles, and I cut the sound off with my mouth, giddy with the feel of his warm skin flush against mine this time. I’m desperate to get to our pants, to feel his dick gliding along my length.

I've reached for his zipper, fingers brushing an impressive erection, when someone pounds on the door so hard it makes me jump.

"Doomsen! You in there?"

"Assholes ..." He goes to kiss me again, but the door handle starts to rattle.

"Doomsen!"

"Go the fuck away!" he shouts.

"Quick, man. There are two chicks topless and kissing! You've gotta see this."

"Yeah, I'll pass!"

Whoever is outside says something too low for us to hear before leaving. But I'm now looking at this guy in a whole new light. We're not in some random bedroom like I thought ... we're in *his* room, which means ...

"*Chad* Doomsen?" I ask.

"The one and only."

"Shit." I scramble out of his lap and immediately start looking for my shirt.

"What's wrong?" That adorable uncertainty is back in his voice.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought you knew. Everyone does."

"Conceited much?"

"No, not like ... I mean ... shit. Stop. What's happening?"

I quickly shrug into my shirt and pin him with a look, but as soon as I see his face, I realize my mistake. He looks like a kicked puppy. Dammit. He's also *really* hot.

I sigh and sit back opposite him. "You're a Sigma Beta Psi."

"Duh." He gestures around his room.

"I thought you were only getting to the party when I did," I explain. "If I'd known ..."

"What's the problem?"

How do I explain to him that I'm trying to *make* friends with my frat brothers, and this is the exact opposite way to do that? "The only reason I came tonight is because our pledges are busy removing *your* prank from earlier."

Confusion covers his face for a split second before, "You're a *Kappa*?"

"Rho Kappa Tau." I lift my hand like I'm swearing on the bible.

"Fuck." He runs a hand down his face. "*Fuck.*"

“Uh-huh.”

“But ... but you said you’d just *transferred* here.”

“I did.”

“*Fuck.*” He slumps back into the couch, looking like he’s experienced the ultimate betrayal—dramatic much?

Sure, this isn’t ideal, because I don’t want to be even more of a black sheep with my brothers than I already am, but the whole Sigma-Kappa thing is barely on my radar. It’s more that it’s *him*. I know his name because of how much it’s muttered around the house. As far as Charles and the others are concerned, Chad Doomsen is the worst of them.

He turns the most disappointed expression I’ve ever seen on me. “Do you think ... we could still ...”

“Probably not a good idea.”

He quickly nods. “You’re right.” But the way he’s looking at me is at odds with his words. Like he wants to devour me, and *damn* I want that. A shiver rattles along my spine.

“I should probably go.”

“Yeah ...”

I stand, about to leave, when Chad jumps up and his hand closes over my hip. He spins me back to him.

“I don’t want you to though.”

He doesn’t? “But aren’t you all about that dumb rivalry?”

“No.” He shakes his head. “Well, no, yes I am, but ...”

“But ...”

His warm eyes study me, tongue swiping over his lips, but every time he tries to say something, he doesn’t get far.

I step back out of his grip. “See you around, Chad.”

He watches me leave, and his need to say something is heavy between us. I know he doesn’t want me to go, and I don’t want to either, but one random hookup isn’t going to be worth all the drama it could potentially cause.

So I force myself away.

An idea hits me as I flick the lock on his door, and I glance over at his desk. I pick up the desk lamp and turn it over.

A hundred points.

Interesting.

“What are you doing?” he asks.

I grin back at him over my shoulder. “Souvenir.”

Then I yank the cord from the wall, throwing him into darkness, before I slip out of his room, taking the lamp with me.

CHAD

THE LIGHT OF DAY DOESN'T CLEAR MY HEAD ANY BETTER THAN A FULL NIGHT of tossing and turning. After Bailey left, I sat there, trying to convince myself to go after him and get my damn lamp back, but instead ... I let him take it. I don't know how to feel about that.

It's possibly the dumbest move I've made—and I do a lot of dumb shit.

I'm awake earlier than most of the house since I stopped drinking before my failed hookup and didn't go back out to the party. After I passed out around four, I got a couple of hours' sleep in, but then the sun came up, and here I am overthinking everything again.

I finish making my protein shake, then take a seat at the small table. I should be more annoyed about the lamp than I am. All Zeke and I talked about yesterday was the competition and being on the lookout, and then I let some random hottie walk out the door with a big-ticket item.

Instead of regretting that though, all my regret lies solely on the fact I didn't get him naked. I groan as my dick twitches over the thought of him spread out across my bed. Those curls messy against my pillow, his long thin fingers clutching my sheets for dear life. I'd still be in bed right now, that's for sure. Maybe he would have been in there with me too. Maybe we'd be having a third round ... or a fourth.

All-weekend sexcapades aren't out of the question for me.

But he had to go and be a goddamn Kappa.

I pound my fist against the top of the table, hoping to relieve the nugget of frustration building in my gut. If that idiot hadn't come looking for me last night, I could have had my fun with Bailey *before* finding all this shit out, and then we would have parted ways, fully relaxed after a night of hot sex.

I definitely wouldn't have let him walk out my door with that stupid, goddamn lamp, if my blood flow hadn't been directed south.

"Who pissed in your Pop-Tarts?" Carter asks as he walks into the kitchen. His brown hair is ruffled from bed, but otherwise he looks like he always does.

"You're up early," I say, hoping to redirect his attention away from my pouting.

"I'm on cleaning crew before I meet my girl for lunch. Then work later."

"Yeah, me too. I swear the cafe schedules me into any spare time that

isn't taken up by training. No clue when I'm supposed to get coursework in."

He pulls a face. "Fuck, senior year. That sounds like hell."

"Yep. Turns out business degrees aren't so easy." Not that I ever thought it would be, but no one needs to know that. Growing up with parents who moved constantly to chase a paycheck has made me crave stability in the future. College is all fun and games, but the minute I walk away from here, I plan to start building a real life. If that means off-the-rack suits and a nine-to-five, I'll do it.

Carter's mouth stretches in a wide yawn. "Oh, and can you tell Zeke we only caught one dude trying to get out of here with a cushion? A cushion! Like we wouldn't notice that stuffed up his shirt. I thought people said Kappas were smart?"

I force a laugh, gut sinking. I'd sort of hoped that they would have caught Bailey and fixed my fuckup. "You only caught one guy?"

"Either they're good at hiding things, took small shit, or maybe they were on their best behavior."

"It's definitely not that last one."

Carter shrugs and goes to the cutlery drawer. He pauses, then moves to the dishwasher. "Ah ..."

"Yeah?"

"I'm beginning to suspect you might be right."

Oh no. I cross the kitchen and pull open the cutlery drawer. All of the slots are empty.

"Well, shit," I say.

"What's shit?"

I look up at Zeke's voice, and unlike Carter, he looks messy as shit. He's wearing his shirt from last night and his boxer briefs, and the lines under his eyes are as dark as his stubble.

"Kappas got all our cutlery."

"Fuck." Zeke checks the drawer and the dishwasher too. "How much were they worth?"

"One point apiece."

He hums. "Annoying, but could be worse, I guess."

Yeah, like a hundred points worse.

"Why are you both up?" Zeke asks, turning on the coffee maker.

"Couldn't sleep."

"Need to get my allocated rooms clean before hitting the gym," Carter

says. “Later.”

Zeke watches him leave the room. “I think he’ll do good here.”

“Hmm ... maybe. He was giving me a bit of lip yesterday.”

“What about?”

“Just why we were pulling such a basic prank on the Kappas. I’m sure it was nothing.”

Zeke’s eyebrows pinch in the middle as he pours himself a coffee. “Keep your eye on it.”

“Planning to.” We both sit at the table, and I tap my finger on the side of the shake, wondering whether to fess up to Zeke. He’ll be pissed and want to know what the hell happened, but getting it out now is a better option than having it come out down the line. It’s not like Bailey and I actually hooked up—and not by lack of trying on my part; I all but begged him. And if Zeke knows they’ve got one hundred points on us, plus the cutlery, we can work to catch up now.

Instead of letting it all out though, I say, “Did you hear Kappas had a new guy transfer in?”

“Bailey Prince? Yeah, it happened last year. From what I can tell, his dad got him voted in by paying for that kitchen upgrade they had done over the summer.”

Bailey Prince. “Must be nice to have all that money.”

“Pity they’ve had to sacrifice their personalities to get it.”

Any other time, I would have readily agreed with him. But the memory of Bailey moving my hand to rest over his cock, then him straddling me, teasing me, not taking me at my word. I got that hint of someone quiet but fun.

Him walking out was the best outcome, but I have to keep reminding my dick of that. And the worst part is I’ll probably end up running into him all year. Seeing him at parties, maybe hooking up with other dudes, knowing that I was so close but never got to cross the finishing line with him.

I scrub at my face in frustration. Am I seriously obsessing over this guy? Fuck, I need to get laid worse than I thought.

“You okay?” Zeke asks.

“Yeah, tired, you know. I’ve gotta work later. Is it possible to be a senior and be too old for the party scene?”

“No.” He smirks. “Next you’ll tell me you’re giving up drinking.”

“Let’s not get crazy.” I’m just trying to distract him anyway. No way am I giving up on partying. “Last night looked good though. Any word from

Rick on how much we made?”

“Nah, he’s still sleeping. He hooked up with the cutie he’s been talking about all week, so we probably won’t see him for a while.”

“Good for him.”

Zeke laughs. “And good for *you*, I hear. Miles says you were already holed up in your room at eleven. Who was she?”

“Nah, nothing like that.”

“Yeah, right, man. The only time you ditch a party early is because you’re getting your dick wet. Is that why you didn’t get much sleep? Walk her out early like a gentleman, did you?”

“You’re an idiot.” I finish my shake and head to the sink to rinse the cup. “I’m going to get ready for work. Got plans today?”

“The parents are coming up for a visit. Might bring them by the cafe.”

“Please don’t.” First, I hate people seeing me work there. Second, I swear everyone on campus chooses the cafe to meet up with their parents over the weekend, which means we’re always run off our feet.

“Fine. I’ll take them to that restaurant with the cheese things I like.”

“Excellent, good talk.” I slap him on the shoulder on the way past and head back to my room.

The guys might give me shit about working in a cafe and making mothers’ groups their Iced Lattes, but I actually like it there. My boss and coworkers are pretty chill, everyone works hard, and those mothers’ groups are usually the ones who leave me the best tips. They can’t resist my big brown eyes.

Maybe if Bailey was a thirty-five-year-old woman, I’d have had a better chance with him.

And shit.

There I go again.

I know it’s been a while since I hooked up with a guy, but that doesn’t mean the first one I get close to should tie me up in knots like this.

He was gorgeous, and I saw hints of a guy I would have liked to see again, but that’s it.

I don’t know him.

I *can’t* see him again.

So the best thing I can do is let it go and forget about him. And when I leave for work later, I definitely shouldn’t glance at the Kappa House hoping for a glimpse of him.

But I do anyway.
Fuck.

BAILEY

I SHOULDER THROUGH THE DOOR TO DEJA BREW, RUNNING A FEW MINUTES late to meet the parents. By the time I'd woken up this morning, I'd needed to jerk off after a night of sexy dreams about a certain sexy jock.

When people spoke about Chad Doomsen, I'd been expecting a loud, obnoxious dude-bro, not some adorable monster with sweet eyes and pretty words. It might have all been an act, but if it was, it was a damn good one.

I push the thoughts of last night away, and I make my way toward my parents' table.

Deja Brew is one of those alt-looking, hipster, wanna-be-cool places that I used to act allergic to, but even I can't complain about the coffee. Plus, once Mom sets her mind to something, there's no arguing with her.

My parents are waiting in a shadowy nook at the back, sitting in overstuffed armchairs and bickering happily about something. It's a thing they do. Bicker. Never an argument, just a constant back-and-forth discussion of opinion, which for some reason they enjoy.

Neither of them sees me approach, so when I reach the table, I lean down close to Dad's ear and ...

"Hey!"

He jumps about a foot as I pull out the chair opposite them.

"You'll give me a heart attack one day, Bailey, I swear."

"Got you good that time."

"Yeah, yeah, smart-ass. You're lucky we already ordered or you'd be getting your own."

Mom laughs at us both, and I love hearing that sound. The cancer scare was a real worry for a moment there, and I want to wash away the memories of her sick with as many happy ones as I can.

"Here you go." I hand her a mason jar full of cookies that I bought from a bake sale on campus. Every time we meet, I aim to bring something different. Anything small that will make her smile. Last time was a pen with googly eyes, the time before chocolates, the time before a blend of tea I know she likes.

"You have to stop spoiling me so much." But she reaches eagerly for the jar and takes one before offering them to Dad and me.

"You'll spoil your lunch," Dad says affectionately.

She shrugs and sets the cookies beside her. “How has this week been?”

I wrinkle my nose. “Is ‘weird’ an adequate answer?”

“Only if you’re planning on elaborating.”

“Okay then, I’ll go with fine.”

“Ouch.” Dad cringes. “That bad, huh?”

“Not ... bad.” I don’t think that’s the word I’d use to describe last night. “Just Greek dynamics.”

“None of those boys are being assholes to you, are they?”

Trust Dad to jump straight to protective mode. If he could protect me from everything, he would. “No, nothing like that. Charles might have pointed out that I need to make more of an effort with the brothers, but that was fair.” I rub my arm as I glance around the busy cafe. “It’s more that they want me on board with this rivalry thing, and I’m not comfortable with—”

Holy *shit*. Chad is here.

He cuts through the crowded room with the confidence of someone who expects people to notice him. He’s over six foot, so he’s hard to miss, but add that to his enormous frame and he stands out like a beacon. I have no idea how I didn’t see him sooner.

“Bailey?”

I blink and turn back to see Mom and Dad waiting. “Ah ...”

“Not comfortable with ...?” Dad prompts.

Where was I going with that? My legs start bouncing under the table, and my mind wanders to whether Chad’s seen me and is ignoring my presence like I should be doing to him.

“I’m not sure what to do. To make friends, I’m going to have to join in, but the whole thing is stupid to me.” I haven’t even shown anyone the lamp yet.

“You’re like a little old man,” Mom says. “Sometimes stupid things are fun. It’s all harmless, right? No one gets hurt or takes it too far?”

“Well, no.”

“Then embrace your final year. Stop limiting yourself.”

Dad nods, agreeing for once. “When you start working next year, there won’t be time for goofing off.”

“I have never goofed off, and I don’t plan on starting n—”

“Bailey?”

Before I even get a chance to look up at Chad’s voice, his hand clips the Iced Mocha he’s placed on the table, and I’m hit with a deluge of icy,

chocolatey sludge down the front of me.

I shoot to my feet. “Shit.”

“Oh, fuc—I mean, shi—damn.” He grabs a wad of napkins and shoves them my way, but I wave him off without a word, turn on my heel, and leg it to the bathroom.

The drink is seeping through my shirt and freezing the front of me, and I have to ignore the stares of just about everyone in the cafe before darting down the short hall and ducking into the bathroom. Someone walks out as I enter, thankfully leaving the room vacant.

Until the door shoves open a second later and Chad all but barrels in after me.

“I’m so fucking sorry.”

“Uh-huh.” I flick on the tap and lean forward, holding my shirt under the water. “So you’re going to try and tell me that wasn’t some stupid retaliation for last night.”

“What? No. You really think I’d do that?”

“Considering the little I know of you has been relayed to me by my brothers, I’d say that would be right on brand with the impression I’ve built up.”

“Ah.” He shoves his hands in his pockets. “I guess that would be enough to make you hate me. No wonder you ran out so fast last night.”

I finally glance up at him and find his steady brown eyes trained on me. “We both know why I ran out.”

“Actually, I think I’m confused about that. Sure the situation was sucky, but we’d already crossed all sorts of lines. No reason we couldn’t have gone further and not told anyone.”

I turn off the tap and inspect my shirt. Thankfully it’s not a good one, but it doesn’t look like it’s stained anyway. Now it’s just dripping wet, and when I wring it out, it wrinkles like old lady hands.

“Here.” Chad grabs my arm and drags me back into the hall and down to a door marked “employees only.”

“Where are we ...”

“Those bathrooms only have hand towels. The staff one has a dryer—you can hold your shirt under it.”

Well, okay, that’s a smart idea. I guess. “Thought of that quickly.”

“There’s not a whole lot of room behind the counter, so when we get busy, we run into each other a lot. I’ve worn a drink or two in my time here.”

I eye what he's wearing. From the soft gray T-shirt with the Deja Brew logo to the black apron that looks miniature on his frame. "I'm not surprised you get in people's way. You look like you're going to Hulk out of that apron."

"Yeah, the uniforms weren't made with someone like me in mind."

And yet ... the shirt pulls nicely over his muscles, and the tight, black skinny jeans hug his ass sinfully.

He pauses. "Are you checking out my butt?"

"Of course not."

"Yeah you were."

I shake my head. "Are all Sigmas this conceited?"

"Varying levels, sure. But you were definitely checking me out." Chad nudges me through a door into a room with a toilet, sink, and hand dryer. The door closes, trapping us in the small space. "Shirt?"

I tug it over my head and hand it to him; then he holds it under the air, and the thunderous old hand dryer comes to life. I have to lift my voice to be heard over it. "For the record, you had a mark on your pants."

"In the butt area?"

"Obviously. You must have sat on something."

Chad snorts. "Right. Yeah. I'll believe that never."

"I think you want me to have been checking you out."

"It'd make us even." His gaze drops to my torso. "Didn't realize you had freckles on your shoulders too."

I almost roll my eyes as I lean back against the wall. "You done?"

He pretends to feel the shirt. "Not even close."

"How convenient."

Silence drops between us for a second.

"It really wasn't on purpose," Chad says.

"Okay."

"Yeah?"

"In your defense, you did look surprised."

"I was," he agrees. "And I'm half-asleep, so I've been messing up everything today."

"Will you get in trouble for not being out there helping?"

"After my boss saw me dump a drink on a customer?" He waves a large hand. "No way. Plus, she totally loves me."

"And there's that conceit again."

“No, it’s true.” He chuckles. “All the old chicks love me.”

“You clearly don’t call them old chicks to their faces, then.”

“I’m not an idiot. They do love it when I call them ma’am though.”

“Ma’am?” I can’t stop from smiling at the thought of his big dopey ass calling someone *ma’am*. “Well, don’t you have the manners of a saint?”

“Only at work.” He hands back my shirt that’s now warm from the heat and only a bit damp.

Before I can put it back on, Chad’s hand is on my hip, and he tugs me close so his lips are by my ear.

“If you’d stuck around last night, you would have seen how bad my manners could be.”

Holy shit. Lust prickles at my skin, and I force myself to swallow before I turn my head to meet his eyes. “I’m good at getting guys to say please.”

“I would have said anything you’d asked me to. I still might.” His gaze drops to my lips, and I have a split moment of indecision.

On one hand, Chad can kiss. Like, *really* kiss. And he is so fucking hot, I’d drop my damn panties just by him looking at me.

On the other hand, there are hundreds of other guys who would be a way safer hookup option and won’t make my life more complicated than it needs to be.

I step away from him, and his fingers drop from my skin. “Thanks for doing this.”

He straightens, and I ignore his obvious disappointment. “And thanks for not getting me fired.”

“I don’t think I agreed to that yet.”

He groans. “What’s it gonna cost me?”

I pretend to think. “Maybe another big-ticket item from your house ...”

“What?” He’d look outraged if he wasn’t smiling. “You already got my lamp.”

“Yeah, why didn’t you stop me with that?”

“Ah ... You left too quickly.” His stilted words make it impossible to believe him.

“I’ll remember that for next time.”

“Next time?”

But I’m not going to clarify what I mean by that when I can leave him curious. It has nothing to do with *me* not knowing what I mean. “For now, I’ll settle with you replacing my drink.”

“Consider it done.”

He leaves me in the hall to make my way back to the table, and when I reach my parents, he’s already back behind the counter.

“Are you smiling?” Mom asks as I take my seat.

“Nope.”

“I was expecting anger,” Dad says helpfully. “This definitely isn’t anger.” I shake my head at him. “Chad didn’t do it on purpose. I’m fine.”

Mom hums, looking back over at Chad, who’s started back in our direction. “I’m sure it has nothing to do with how cute that guy is ...”

And I’m glad she stops talking immediately because there’s no way in hell I want him overhearing that my *mom* thinks he’s *cute*. Urg.

When he reaches us, he turns a charming smile on the table. “I’m so sorry for interrupting your lunch,” he says, sliding my drink back down and thankfully not upending it this time. “I brought these as an apology, sir.” He slides a tart in front of Dad and a heart-shaped brownie in front of Mom. “Ma’am.”

I choke as Mom melts.

“That was very kind of you.”

Dad nods. “You know Bailey?”

“Ah, yeah.” Chad shifts, and the slight splotchy blush that hits his cheeks might as well be screaming at my parents that he had his tongue down my throat last night. “I see him around at frat parties ...”

“Oh, you’re in a fraternity too?” Mom asks. “Which one?”

“Sigma Beta Psi.” I swear he puffs out his chest.

Dear lordt.

Dad’s attention drops from him, back to me, and a shrewd look crosses over his face. “Interesting.”

“Wait.” Mom points at us both. “That’s the fraternity yours doesn’t like, right?” Her question is for me, but she’s looking at Chad.

He answers before I can. “No big deal. Mostly history by this point.”

“It was nice meeting a friend of Bailey’s.”

His gorgeous smile is back on his stupidly gorgeous face. “Nice meeting you too.” He meets my eyes. “See you around.”

Then he crosses the cafe with more of that same confidence from earlier, only pausing at a table full of women to laugh with them over what happened.

“Isn’t he sweet ...” Mom says, not even trying to keep her unasked

question to herself.

“I barely know him.”

“At least now we know why you’re so resistant to the rivalry.” Dad’s looking entirely too smug. They both are.

“Fine. Maybe we kissed before we realized who the other person was. That’s it. A drunken five minutes, and seeing him now is literally the extent of our relationship. Now can you *please* have the decency to go back to lunch and pretend that whole thing never happened?”

I’m not exactly shy when it comes to talking to my parents about my personal life, but adult or not, it isn’t the funnest conversation to have. Especially when the kiss in question preceded a night of disappointment.

They reluctantly agree—but not before they tell me how Chad *seems like such a nice boy*—and for a few minutes, I’m able to put him out of my mind while we catch up.

It’s not until we’re on the way out the door and pass Chad bent over wiping a table that I get an eyeful of his firm, muscular ass and have to question my sanity on putting a stop to our hookup.

“You’re doing it again ...” he taunts.

This time I can’t even deny it.

CHAD

ALL WEEK ON CAMPUS, I KEEP MY EYE OUT FOR A HEAD FULL OF MESSY curls, a tall, thin frame, a sly smile that I can't stop picturing ... but Bailey and I mustn't have any similar classes because I don't see him once. Makes sense, I guess, since I'm pretty sure I've never seen him before the weekend.

Then again, him being at Deja Brew can't have been a coincidence. It's totally possible he's a regular there and I've never looked twice. In my defense, normally I'm behind the machine making the orders, not taking them to the tables, but our normal server was out sick. There's no way I could have seen him before and not noticed. There's something about his face that makes me want to stare.

He's not what I'd call smoking hot, more ... beautiful, I guess? *Can* a dude be beautiful? I don't know, but I like it. Whatever the *it* is that ties my gut into knots.

After seeing him at the cafe, I know I want to run into him again. There's a party this weekend that I normally wouldn't go to, but if there's a chance he's there ...

I toss the ball across the backyard to Robbie, and he catches it easily. We've already changed out of our training gear, and he's wearing another Robbie-special. Cargo shorts that pass the knees and have more pockets than I can count, and a faded blue polo shirt with the collar starting to fray. All he needs is a fanny pack. Which he has and does wear frequently.

"What's on your mind, Doomsen?" he asks as he lobs the ball back to me.

I jog until I'm underneath it and catch it with a grunt. "You have plans for this weekend?"

"Other than the game?"

"Obviously."

He shrugs. "Was gonna see if Claudia wants to go on a date."

That's surprising. I throw the ball back. "I didn't know you were the dating kind."

"If it gets me laid, I'm the *everything* kind."

"Including desperate."

Robbie passes back a bit harder this time. "Nothing wrong with wanting to get my dick wet. And speaking of ... still not gonna tell your brothers who you hooked up with on Saturday?"

“Nope.”

“It was Carter’s girlfriend, wasn’t it?”

“Fuck no.” I shudder. “First, you know I don’t do that shit. Second, I can pull my own hookups.” I avoid referencing any specific gender, and I’m a bit annoyed with myself about it. I’ve always thought the guys know I swing both ways, but we’ve never actually talked about it, so it could be me being paranoid. Maybe none of them actually pay all that much attention to me and I really am as conceited as Bailey says.

Or maybe they assume it’s some kinda college experimental thing, and once I’m done here, I’ll be done with that.

But for all my claims of spending this year getting as much action as possible, we’re a few weeks in, and I haven’t managed it once.

I blame it on training.

And coursework.

And dumb Bailey running out and being dumb.

“Bring Claudia to that toga party after the game?” I suggest.

He eyes me funny. “A toga party? What are we, freshmen?”

“It’s our final year. Aren’t we past the stage of acting too cool for things?”

“I’ve never acted too cool for anything.” And yeah, that’s true, at least. “Toga parties are shit because they’re always full of people who are getting their first taste of freedom outside of mom and dad. Everyone gets way too sloppy, and I swear half the girls there are barely legal. Not my scene.”

Despite what we might think of them, they always draw a big crowd from other frat houses, including Kappa, because togas are easy costumes and, well, there’s alcohol and people looking for sex. It’s the golden triumvirate of parties.

“Come with me.”

“You’re actually going?”

“Sure.” I drop the football onto my foot and kick it his way. “We can probably get Zeke and Brandon on board too.”

“Urg, not Brandon. Dude is driving me nuts.”

“You guys should fuck and get it over with.”

Robbie flips me off. “I’d like my dick to stay attached, thanks.”

We toss the ball for a few more minutes in silence before he breaks it.

“Why do I have the feeling there’s more to your sudden opinion change on toga parties?” he asks.

“Why do I have the feeling there’s more to your face?” *Oooh, good one, Doomsen.*

“Ah, so there is.”

“Nope.”

“Is your mystery lay going to be there?” he asks.

And of course he’s got it in one. “No idea what you’re talking about.”

“Fine,” he grumbles. “I’ll be a good wingman and come with. But when it turns out to be a total fail, I get to say I told you so.”

“Deal.”

Zeke and Brandon agree to come with us as well, Brandon more enthusiastically than Robbie. At least with the party off-site, he can enjoy himself properly instead of making sure everyone is following the rules.

Though with Robbie there too, his chances of relaxing are fifty-fifty.

We do the whole predrinks thing at the house, and some of the other brothers join us before heading to wherever their plans take them for the night. I’m high from our home game win, my shoulder is still sorta sore from a decent hit I took in the last quarter, and the adrenaline hasn’t fully left me. Every time I think about seeing Bailey, both of us a bit tipsy, I’m hit with another surge of anticipation.

I’m like, ninety percent sure he still wants to hook up as badly as I do.

And if he’s not at this party, I’m gonna have to find someone else to take this weird edge off. I draw the line at thinking about a guy for longer than a week, so it’s already been way too long.

The toga party is being held at a share house a few blocks from Greek Row, and depending on how the night goes, there’s a high chance the neighbors will call the cops before it has a chance to get started.

Though, if the cops *do* get called, no one is going to think twice about me darting off in another direction to them. Hopefully with Bailey in tow.

He’s like this incessant itch, sitting too deep under my skin to scratch.

The share house is a total dump, but there’s booze on offer, so I fill up my cup and exchange a look with Zeke while Robbie and Brandon bicker about whose toga is more historically accurate.

Spoiler: neither. They’re made out of fucking sheets.

There are a few familiar faces in the crowd, but I’m about to write this party off as a bust when I spot Charles. My gut flips.

“Hey, Zeke,” he says, nodding at the rest of us. “Didn’t catch you last weekend.”

“Huh, really? No idea why.”

Maybe the fact Zeke spent most of the party dodging him so Charles wouldn't get the chance to whine about my prank.

The skeptical look on Charles's face proves he knows that. “Anyway, I thought we should get together and set a few parameters for this year.”

“Parameters?” Robbie laughs in his face. “You guys are a fun bunch.” He raises his voice. “Fuck the beer keg, we've got parameters!”

“Does he ever shut up?” Charles asks.

“Nah, it's what we like best about him.” Zeke stands a bit taller. “Might have to pass on that conversation though. I'm just, like, *super* busy ...”

“Obviously.”

“Great seeing you again though.”

Charles shakes his head. “Monday at four. Kappa or Sigma House?”

“Like hell am I giving you an open invitation into our house. And yours always smells kinda funky. Cafe?”

“Sounds good.”

I backhand Zeke's chest. “You really held your own there.”

“I've got him right where I want him.”

Charles narrows his eyes. “Anyway ...”

Before he can walk off, I hurry to ask, “Who else from your house is here?”

“Only Lucas and Jordan.” He eyes me. “After what you did last week, we won't be leaving the house empty in a hurry.”

“Look at you, learning from your mistakes. Though I have no *idea* what you mean.” First rule: deny, deny, deny. Now that I know Bailey isn't here, I'm more than happy to expedite Charles leaving. “How *was* your pledge though? Did he piss himself? Should I send him a care basket?”

“I thought you didn't know what I meant?”

“Lucky guess.”

“Bye, assholes.” Charles leaves, Zeke's mimicked “*bye, assholes*” following after him.

And like that, I'm ready to go.

So much for my plan to find someone else to fuck. All I know is that the people here aren't cranking my interest, the beer suddenly tastes watery, and *fuck me* the squealing coming from outside is irritating.

“Gonna hit the head,” I mutter as I leave. But instead of finding a bathroom, I drop my cup onto the nearest flat surface and walk right out the

front door. Sure, I feel bad about leaving the guys there after dragging them with me, but they're grown adults who can leave when they like. Plus, if I tell them I'm ditching now, they'll want to know why, and those three are persistent assholes.

Besides, I'm not heading home. Nope. I want to see Bailey. Which is a stupid move on my part, but hey, I spend most of my week getting hit in the head, so no big surprises there. I'm beginning to suspect Bailey is my "guy who got away," and I'm not gonna be able to shift him from my mind until we've shared mutual orgasms. Clearly, the quickest way to move on is to work on making that happen, stat.

That's gotta be the reason why I find myself sneaking along the side of Kappa House at midnight with no prank in mind.

I'm on the lookout for any lingering frat members who might be watching the house. After all, it's Saturday, my preferred night for devilry, but it's also about three hours earlier than I normally show up.

The lack of people out doesn't reassure me though, so I set my stealth skills to one thousand and pause at each bedroom window to pull myself up and peer in. Unlike Sigma House, where all the bedrooms are on the second floor, Kappa has all their single rooms ground level, but as the house is raised on piers, the windows are just above head height. So if Bailey is the money monster Zeke said, he's bound to be in one of these. Maybe I'm completely wasting my time and he's gone out somewhere else, but that won't stop me from trying.

The first few rooms are a bust. Either empty or have the curtains drawn. It's lucky that some hardworking guys have already removed all the shit we put on the windows because I would have been pissed if I cockblocked myself.

There's a soft glow coming from one of the windows up ahead, so I bypass the ones between and reach for the ledge. Slowly, I lift myself up until I can peer inside and ...

Bingo!

The sight of his hair gets me so excited, I lose my grip and slip. My legs buckle, and my hip hits the ground hard.

"Motherfucker!"

Oops.

There's movement inside, and a moment later, Bailey appears, probably worried about some creeper lurking outside his window.

I want to reassure him it's only me, but now I think of it, that probably isn't a whole lot better.

My suspicion is confirmed the second he sees me, and his eyes narrow to a glare.

He reaches out and cracks the window the smallest amount.

"What are you doing, Chad?"

"Cringing in pain."

"Right." He tilts his head, looking skeptically along both sides of the small walkway between the house and the fence, and it takes me a minute to work out what he's looking for.

"No, no. It's only me."

Bailey studies me a moment more before sliding his window all the way open. "If you're here for some dumb prank—"

"I'm not. Swear it. Now budge over."

"Wha ..."

I grab his ledge and pull myself up again, this time managing to get high enough that I can cross my arms on the windowsill. We're face-to-face and so close I can make out the freckles on his nose, even in the low light. "Ah, hi."

"Hey." He glances around again, and his paranoia makes me laugh.

"I swear it's just me. Not sure if that's a good thing or not, but ..."

His attention falls back on me, and it finally looks like he believes I'm not here for nefarious reasons. "What are you wearing?"

"Long story." I pluck at the toga. "You don't think it looks good?"

His stare drops, lingers on my chest. I want to puff up like a peacock and put myself on display for him.

"Why are you here?" he asks instead of answering.

"I'll answer why. I actually have amazing reasons for doing the things that I do, but for right now, can you back up a bit so I can come in? This is sorta uncomfortable."

His lips twitch. "Oh, the old 'uncomfortable windowsill' line, huh?" He steps back. "I don't trust you in my room, but you can sit on the ledge."

"Good enough for me." I walk my way up the cladding on the house and plop down on the timber sill. "Much better."

Bailey grabs his desk chair and straddles it beside me, which of course only reminds me of when it was *my* lap he had between his legs. "Well, now you're comfortable, are you going to answer my question?"

“Question?”

He lifts his eyebrows like he’s not going to play my game. Turns out Bailey is a hard-ass. Can’t we both pretend like this is a normal thing people do?

“Ah, yes. Question. Right,” I say.

“I’m dying to know what this *amazing reason* you’re here is.”

“Someone’s a smart-ass,” I point out.

“Someone’s creeping in through my bedroom window at midnight like my own personal Edward Cullen.”

I snort. “Please. I’m so much hotter than that dude.”

“Truth. But at least he was up-front about why he was so creepy.”

“Would we call it *creepy*?”

“We would.” He’s almost smiling. “And you’re avoiding the question.”

“Never. I’m just super interested in this *Twilight* obsession of yours. So interested, in fact, I demand you rate every single character from all four movies in order of hotness. I can wait.”

“*Chad.*” A laugh bursts from him as he stands again. “Tell me why you’re here, or I’ll push you off.”

“Threatening violence? Sheesh. I’m hurt. A guy can’t even peer into another guy’s window in the dead of night anymore. What is this world coming to?”

“Okay, goodbye.” Bailey grabs my arm, but before he can push me, my hand closes over his.

“I wanted to see you. Happy?”

He blinks in surprise. Which is hilarious when I’m literally sitting here in his window when I could be a hundred other places. Come on, Bailey. Get a clue.

“Gonna tease me?” I ask dryly.

He slowly shakes his head as his hold on me loosens. We watch each other warily for a moment, and with the way his head is tilted, I can only make out one side of his face. His lips are a perfect bow, and I want to trace them with my tongue.

Bailey clears his throat. “How badly do you want to get laid?”

“Is that an invitation?”

“You don’t give up easily, do you?”

“Hey, normally I do. This persistence is coming as a surprise to me too, dude.”

He catches his bottom lip with his teeth. "I'll make you a deal."

Deals are fun. "Yeah, of course."

I'm on edge for what he's going to say.

Shared BJs and never see each other again?

A bit of secret frottage?

A quick window jerk-off in exchange for more shit from my house?

That's about the only one I wouldn't agree to. Maybe. I think.

Bailey grabs something on his desk, and I watch from behind as his hand moves for a moment. He's wearing sweats and a long-sleeved T-shirt and it might be fall but it's not cold yet. It makes me want to point out that I naturally run warm, so if he's into sleeping naked, I've got him. No chills when I'm around.

"Here." He steps closer and holds out a piece of paper.

"What's this?"

"My number."

My gut swoops. "You're giving me your number?"

"If ..." He tugs it out of reach. "You promise never to call me *dude* again."

Huh. Not what I was expecting, and yet ... I'm oddly excited by his offer.

I chuckle. "Done."

My hand closes over the piece of paper, and we both hesitate, warm skin on warm skin, my fingers stroking softly over his wrist.

He pulls away. "I'm going to bed now."

"I could join you."

"Sure."

Wait, *what*? "Seriously?"

"No." He grins. "Get out of my room."

I grumble the whole way back to the ground, not giving a shit who hears me. Bailey appears overhead, leaning on his crossed arms, and he looks so relaxed I want to scale the house again and kiss him.

That might be pushing it though.

"Text me," he says.

"You're so gonna regret that." I press a kiss to the paper as I back up. "You think I'm irresistible now, just wait until—*oomph*." I collide with the fence so hard it sends a jolt of pain through my already sore shoulder.

Bailey's soft laughter makes me frown.

"Wow. You're mean after midnight," I complain.

“I’m sort of like Cinderella. Except instead of turning into a maid, the lack of sleep makes me nasty as fuck.”

“I like this princess version of you.” When his face falls, it reminds me of something. “Your last name is Prince, right? Well, I guess we’ve found your new nickname.”

“Don’t you dare.”

I pretend to punch something in my phone. “Sorry, you’re saved under Princess now. First nicknames are sacred.”

“Well, that sounds like bullshit.”

“Hand on heart. Our relationship won’t survive if I change it now.”

“I take it back. Call me dude again.”

“Too late.” I turn and start to walk away. “Sweet dreams, Princess.”

BAILEY

CHAD: *WHY DOES YOUR HOUSE ALWAYS SMELL SO FUNKY?*

Me: *As opposed to the sweet smell of sweaty jocks and testosterone?*

Chad: *Exactly*

Me: *Lucas is obsessed with scented candles. Sometimes his choices are ... not great*

Chad: *Another mystery solved*

I smirk as I pocket my phone and finish packing up from class. Since getting my number, Chad has been texting me on and off for days. None of his messages are for any reason or all that flirty, but every few hours, I check my phone and there he is.

His plan here is still unclear—whether he wants to get laid, if he’s luring me into a false sense of security over this dumb game—but the way these nothing-messages are making me smile is ridiculous.

I’m smarter than this.

I don’t get giddy over guys, especially immature ones who are only going to make life difficult.

There’s an impromptu meeting happening in the living room when I get home, and when Lucas glimpses me sneaking in the front door, he silently beckons me to join them. My default reaction is to groan, but I hold off.

Make an effort, Bailey.

I tuck my bag beside the couch and take the spare spot next to him.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

“Plotting how to get back at Sigma.” He looks far too excited. “We’ve gotta make them pay.”

I shift in my seat. “That sounds ... ah ...” My phone vibrates in my pocket, and the timing almost makes me laugh. I wouldn’t put it past Chad to have cameras in here. Why, yes. I *do* doubt how ethical he is.

Funny how that works when you show up at someone’s bedroom window and scare them half to death.

I’m itching to pull my phone out and check my messages, but with Lucas right there, it’s too risky. So instead, I tune in on what Charles is saying.

“Since Zeke refused most of my offers to de-escalate this rivalry, we’re stepping it up. If you can’t reason with them, rumble with them. We’ve got to give Chad Doomsen a taste of his own medicine.”

My stomach flips at his name and then sinks when everyone around me starts to mutter it, the name drenched in distaste.

“Now, we need to come up with ideas that aren’t dangerous but will show them they’re idiots to try and mess with Rho Kappa Tau.”

“We could tie all their bedroom door handles together so they can’t get out,” someone says.

Charles shakes his head. “We’d need to be in the house to do that.”

“Superglue all their shit to the ceiling?”

“A glitter bomb?”

“Hot sauce on their toothbrushes?”

“The whole ‘fish in the air vents’ bit?”

Jordan is madly taking note of the ideas as Charles nods. “These are a start. I think most have been covered at some point, but they’re classics, so if there’s nothing better—”

“We could combine them?” My mouth moves before I can stop it, and I end up the sole focus of ten of my brothers. But Chad’s thing about the smell in our house has given me an idea. “If you zip-tie the trigger on an air freshener can, it’ll go off continuously. Throw a few of those in the house, and take the doors out of action. They’ll turn on the fan to clear the smell, which we can cover with glitter, and when they go to clean it up—*bam*. Vacuum is superglued to the ceiling.”

A stunned silence follows my words.

“Damn, Bailey,” Lucas says. “You’re a criminal mastermind.”

Was that going too far?

Charles points my way. “Yes, that. That’s what we’re going to do.”

“Still need to get inside for that,” Jordan points out.

“We’ll work out the details. But those Sigmas will be washing glitter out of their asscracks for days.” He rubs his hands together. “Good meeting. Everyone think about logistics and put ideas in the team chat. The *Kappa* chat, not the Greek one. *Do not* mix them up.”

That would be embarrassing, detailing our whole plan for all of Greek Row to read. I make a mental note to change the colors of the chat or something because I’m not going to be *that* idiot. Especially when, as the meeting wraps up and some of my brothers slap my back over the idea, it seems like I’m making progress with them.

“What are you doing later?” Lucas asks.

“I’ve got an assessment due soon, so I’m going to finish that up.”

“Ah, okay. Right.” He nods like the question was totally casual, but he’s not meeting my eye, and suspicion starts to creep up my spine. “Maybe we could grab a coffee tomorrow?”

“Uh, maybe?”

“Okay.” He lets out a relieved breath. “Happy studying.”

Is Lucas ... *asking me out*? Well, why not? No way am I the only queer guy in this fraternity. But more importantly, has he somehow guessed I’m gay, or is his interest coincidental?

I’m about to suggest that maybe we can go grab takeout together later when my phone vibrates again, and suddenly, seeing whatever dumb thing Chad has texted me this time is more important.

“I’ll catch you later?”

Lucas agrees, and then I’m off, sliding my phone from my pocket.

But instead of Chad, it’s my family chat.

Mom: *I don’t think we’ll be able to make it up there this weekend*

Dad: *YOU can’t make it up there. I’m still fine to go*

Mom: *We’ve been over this, if I’m going to her birthday, so are you*

Dad: *But she’s YOUR mom. Why am I being punished?*

Rachel: *Sorry, Dad, you knew what you were getting into*

Me: *I second that ^*

Rachel: *Of course you do, big brother*

Dad: *Dammit, Bailey, you’re supposed to be on my side*

Me: *I don’t remember reading that fine print*

Dad: *Fine. I don’t think we’ll be able to make it up this weekend*

I kick the bedroom door closed behind me and close the conversation. I love my family, but I’d been hoping for another message from Chad. Sure, I could always text him first, but I’m not sure where I’ve landed on trusting that he’s actually interested, and I don’t want to get too invested. I’m a smart guy, and while my brothers would maybe, probably, not care about my being gay—hell, maybe not even about me hooking up with a Sigma—they will care it’s Chad. He’s really made a name for himself.

I open back to our messages and scroll up ... and up ... and up? Geez, how many messages have we sent in only a few days? It probably doesn’t help that I lay in bed texting him until midnight last night.

Yikes. What was that I said about not getting invested?

Even as I tell myself to close out of the messages, I can’t. Instead, I snap a photo of my desk, textbook lying open, and send it to him. My gaze strays

to my window, and I remember him sitting there the other night. All dark hair and strong, stubbled jaw and happy eyes.

Another hour passes to radio silence, and I want to shake myself for being so stupid and texting first. I can't concentrate on my work, and every minute I spend trying to ignore my phone eats at me. Yeah ... this isn't good.

Then, an hour and thirteen minutes later, my phone vibrates.

Chad: *What up, buttercup?*

I force myself to wait a few minutes before replying.

Me: *Studying, you?*

Chad: *Just about to shower this sweat and testosterone off me*

Me: *Otherwise known as Eau De Sigma?*

Chad: *The patron smell of my people*

I smile as he texts again.

Chad: *So ... tomorrow is Friday*

Me: *Finally covering days of the week in class, are you?*

Chad: *Well for that, I'm not going to finish my thought*

Me: *Aw ... did I hurt your feelings?*

Chad: *You did. I'll accept an apology—this time. Next time you'll need to kiss me better*

Me: *You're ridiculous*

Chad: *Say 'sorry, Chad'*

I'm laughing as I type, *Sorry, Chad.*

Chad: *That's better. Now. Friday. The end of the school week, the start of the sacred days of debauchery*

Me: *Your weekends are a stark difference to mine*

Chad: *They don't have to be. Let's hang out*

Me: *For a night of debauchery?*

Chad: *Wow, I never expected you to be so forward. But fine. If that's what you want. I guess I'll let you see my D*

Me: *I don't think that's a great idea*

Chad: *Afraid you won't compare? I get that a lot. Don't worry, I'm completely average and unremarkable*

I snicker. *You're hung like a horse, aren't you?*

Chad: *Guess you'll have to complete a thorough inspection to find out*

Me: *Not happening*

Chad: *Why, do you want a dick pic instead? What kinda guy do you think I am?*

Me: *You're actually going to try and tell me you're not the dick pic type?*

Chad: *Never sent one. Hand on heart*

Me: *Uh huh*

Chad: *Not for a lack of offers though. I'm more than happy to share my junk around but no one's ever interested*

Me: *Are you offering them a completely average and unremarkable dick pic? Because that could be your first problem*

Chad: *Shit. That's where I'm going wrong*

Me: *Might I suggest giving it a name? "You wanna see my Pee-wee Herman" will probably get you at least one yes. Bonus points if you dress him up with a bow tie*

Chad: *... Pee-wee Herman*

Me: *He's a comedian. Tell me you've heard of him*

Chad: *Now I've looked him up, I have. Are you sure this is Bailey Prince's number? Because I gotta tell you, if I'm texting some eighty-year-old horndog who STILL said no to a dick pic, I'm about to get some self-confidence issues*

On a total whim, I turn on my camera, mess up my hair a little, and try to take a selfie that isn't completely horrible. Luckily, shadows are my friends.

Chad: *Damn, princess. Now I really wanna see you*

I stare at his words for so long, he writes back before I can.

Chad: *But I won't push. I get it and I'm sorry. I really am trying hard not to think about you*

That confession fills me with conflicting emotions. On one hand, he's thinking about me, and that swarms my gut with butterflies. On the other hand ... he's trying not to. What if he succeeds?

And knowing that replying with anything other than "good plan" would be stupid and unfair to the both of us, I can't help typing out, *I'm trying hard not to think of you too.*

CHAD

TWO WEEKS PASS IN A MASH-UP OF TRAINING, CLASSES, WORK, DRINKING, AND texting Bailey. He still hasn't agreed to meet up, and I'd think he was totally not interested if he didn't keep messaging me back. Sometimes he even texts first, and there's nothing that makes me happier than when his name lights up my screen.

Plus, tomorrow, we're both going to be at the same charity event. Every now and then, the college puts on these swanky as fuck parties. I get to put on a suit and get done up to the nines, and I feel like a million bucks. Normally we're the ones volunteering to work at these things while houses like Kappa show up with pockets full of donations, but as part of the football team, some of us scored invites in order to draw a crowd. College football for the win.

But until then, I've got the whole afternoon off. I'm caught up with doing the bare minimum for school, and I'm thrumming with that uncontrollable need to have fun.

I leave my room and thunder down the stairs.

"Yo, Zeke?"

"In here," he calls from the living room.

"Do we have any latex tubing lying around?"

He thinks for a moment. "Think we used the last of it for that beer bong the other weekend. Why?"

"Prank idea."

Zeke holds up a hand. "That's all I need to know. Why don't you call Raymond? He's at work today. He can bring some home."

"Good idea."

I organize for Raymond to grab twenty feet of it as well as the insert of a mop bucket and then send Carter out to buy as many water balloons as he can get his hands on.

By the time Raymond gets home, Carter, Robbie, and I have filled up a wheelbarrow and five buckets of water balloons, and we leave some of the other guys to keep working as we carry them around the front.

"What's the plan?" Robbie asks.

"Let's thread the tubing through that wringer part."

"Huh?"

I grab the mop bucket and detach the little circular part you squeeze the

mop in to wring it out. “This.”

“Following.”

“Then we’ll need the pledges to hold either end, while you and I alternate pulling it back and launching those balloons at Kappa House.”

Robbie’s broad smile has an evil tinge to it. “Think they’ll clear the whole street?”

“Only one way to find out.”

From where we are on the front lawn, we can see all the comings and goings at Kappa House. There are only seven houses on both sides of the street, so I think we’ll make the distance easily.

The only things missing are lounge chairs and beer. Robbie and I duck back inside to fix that oversight, and by the time we make it back to the front, everything is set up and ready to go. I drop my recliner on the lawn and flop down on it, kicking out the footrest.

“Robbie, you’re up.”

He starts to direct the guys when I glance down at Kappa House, wondering if Bailey is there. What are the chances he’ll be the first person we see outside? Or that he’ll need to go somewhere while we’re bombing them?

I subtly get up from my chair and move closer to the house, out of earshot of the others. Then I hit Call.

“Chad?”

“That was fast,” I say, trying not to get all twisted at the sound of his voice. “You were waiting by your phone for me, weren’t you?”

“Considering you’ve never called me before, that sounds plausible.”

“So here’s a completely unrelated to anything and totally random question: What are you doing right now?”

“Studying ... you’re not going to ask me what I’m wearing next, are you?”

“For someone who doesn’t want anything to happen between us, you’re quick to encourage me flirting with you.”

“What ... no, that wasn’t—”

I glance back at where they’re set up and cut through his adorable rambling. “Listen, I’m gonna need you to stay in for the rest of the afternoon.”

“Excuse me?”

I debate how much to tell him. On the one hand, I want to have fun and drench some Kappas; on the other, I don’t want him to be one of them. But if

he warned *me* about a prank, the first thing I'd do is tell the rest of my house.

"Chad?"

I clear my throat. "Can't say. Just trust me?"

"Fore!" Robbie shouts, and I glance back in time to see him launch. The water balloon shoots out way faster than I imagined and sails through the sky. It totally misses the guy crossing the Kappa lawn and explodes on the road, but it makes the distance.

The guy glances our way in confusion, but the pledges are already readjusting their aim while Robbie reloads.

"Chad?"

A peel of laughter leaves me. "The front yard isn't safe today."

"Is this where I remind you land mines aren't what I'd call 'harmless fun'?"

"Geez, stop. I'll never live up to your high opinion of me."

He sighs. "Go have your fun."

"I will. And I can't wait to see you tomorrow."

I quickly hang up before he can reply, because the last thing I want is for him to say he doesn't actually want to see me. That's a way to break a dude's heart.

I join the others, and we spend the afternoon shooting the shit and shooting the *shitheads*.

"Fuck off, Doomsen!" The Kappa dude bolts for the house, a large wet spot on the back of his shirt.

That's at least the third time I've heard those same words today, and *aww*, they warm my soul.

All in all, it's not a bad way to spend the afternoon.

Bonding with my brothers, throwing back some beers, and enjoying the late afternoon sunshine.

A long sigh comes from behind us, and I tilt my head back on the armchair to see Brandon there with his hands on his hips. "Did any of you put your half brains together and bother to check if there are Kappa bitches with latex allergies?"

I share an *oops* look with Robbie.

"Blame the pledges," I say.

"What the hell did we do?" Raymond asks.

"Why would I do that?" Brandon asks. "Those idiots do what you tell them to."

“Exactly. Autonomy and all that. Take this as a teachable moment.”

Brandon lifts his eyebrows at me.

“Fine. Does anyone in their house have a latex allergy we should know about?”

“No. And you’re lucky they don’t. This way, only Zeke will have to deal with Charles’s bitching. I would have been pissed to have to hear about it as well.”

I wave my arm at him. “You’re welcome.”

“Wait,” Robbie says in a voice that makes it clear he’s about to ask something stupid. “Are you saying I have to check in with you before I fuck someone? Because I gotta say, dude, asking a chick I’m banging if she has a latex allergy is a mood killer.”

My phone vibrates against my thigh as a message comes through, so I block out Brandon and Robbie’s bickering.

Bailey: *Thanks for the head’s up. Kinda feel like a traitor now though, which I blame you for completely*

Me: *Hey, you made your choice. Now you have to live with it. Does make me happy though that you put me before your brothers*

Bailey: *Yes, because that’s what happened. You do realize if I’d told them to be careful, I would have had to mention how I knew and that would have opened up awkward questions for the both of us*

Me: *The golden rule: deny everything!*

Bailey: *Not so sure that’s healthy, Doomsen*

Me: *Funny, my doctor says the same*

He doesn’t text back, which isn’t unusual for him. Just when I think we’re getting into some friendly banter, he disappears on me. It’s like he only writes back for exactly as long as he needs to, then leaves me hanging.

Does he realize that’s making me want him *more*?

There really is something to this playing-hard-to-get thing.

And Bailey Prince has it down to an art.

THE DEAN AT WEST HAVEN U IS HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH PHILANTHROPIC endeavors that will make him look good to the board. This year, the focus is on literacy program scholarships for kids who’ve had it rough, and out of all

the things he's normally raising money for, this one isn't so bad.

We had an away game an hour from here, so by the time the bus gets back and I head home to change into my suit for tonight, I'm sore and almost wishing I could stay in.

Almost.

Then I picture stealing Bailey away tonight, and some of my energy comes surging back.

I'm not a star player by any stretch of the imagination, but I'm good enough to have been invited tonight. Dean Hutchins uses athletes as draw cards to entice as many donors as possible, and while a lot of our house are there to be put on display and schmooze people with money, most of the guys from Kappa *are* those people with money.

Usually I spend my night wooing all the old ladies or screwing with members from Kappa, but tonight, I'm going to be on my best big-boy behavior.

Because *technically* Bailey is one of the people I'm supposed to schmooze, and I'm surprisingly up for the challenge.

Other parts of me are up for the challenge as well, but it's getting ahead of itself there.

While I'd jump through hoops to hook up with the guy again, after his texts ranging from vaguely interested to flirty, I'd settle for an actual conversation.

Then I'll try to get into his pants.

Bailey's told me that we *shouldn't*, but until he tells me that he doesn't want to, I'm going to keep seeing where this thing goes. I'm nothing if not an opportunist, and there's no way I'm gonna let a potentially mind-blowing hookup slip through my fingers.

After I'm dressed, I hunt down Zeke, and we head over together.

The event is being held in one of the old houses on campus, where the dean entertains his most exclusive guests. It's the type of place that has a fireplace taller than me, polished hardwood floors, windows so large the curtains have probably been there since before my grandparents were born, and textured wallpaper covered in patterns.

The first person we see when I walk in is Ms. Olsen, and Zeke nudges me.

"Your cougar has been waiting."

"She always is."

I joke, but I love her. She's seventy or something with lavender hair and a sharp tongue.

"Old lady Olsen," I say as I approach her.

She pulls me in to kiss my cheek, the scent of her musty perfume washing over me. "Oh look, it's the frat boy. Been to any keggers lately?"

"Frequently. How's knitting club?"

She sniffs. "Actually quite enjoyable."

"What?" My laugh is too loud for the room. "You've actually started going? I thought—and this is a direct quote, by the way—'I will only consider knitting if I have great need to utilize the needles for murder.'"

"Turns out there's a distinguished gentleman who runs the class and has specific taste in woolen blankets. Ask me how I know."

I pretend to shudder. "In my mind, you leave these parties and head home to bake cookies."

"I've never baked a cookie in my life. Except that one batch I tried with pot in it."

"Let me guess, the seventies?" All her stories revolve around the sixties and seventies, and I've gotta say, people think the youth of today are wild—we've got nothing on the boomers.

"Last month, actually. In the seventies, I was pretty enough that I didn't have to bake my own cookies."

"Maybe your knitting gentleman will step up."

A satisfied smile crosses her face, and I wish I could bleach it from my memory.

"Better be careful, Chadwick—"

"Still just Chad—"

"—I'll make an honest man of him and have to rescind my offer to be your sugar momma." She wraps her arm through mine, and I pat her hand.

"Somehow I'll ..."

My eyes lock on Bailey, who's already watching me from across the room. He's wearing a matching suit in a dark blue check pattern with a black shirt, and he looks ... fucking edible.

He's all long thin legs, smooth jaw, and bedroom eyes.

I lick my lips, and a smirk twitches on his.

"Huh."

I jerk my focus back to Ms. Olsen. "What?"

"I get it now."

“Get *what* now?”

There’s a playful twinkle in her eye that worries me because when she has that look, I don’t know what will come out of her mouth next.

“Why you never took me up on my offer. I mean ...” She waves a hand over her long gown, and for someone in their seventies, she *does* look good. But as much as I might like her, I’m not that kinda dude.

“Your point?”

“You’re a homo.”

My eyes snap wide, and I quickly look around. “You know, I don’t think the people across the room heard you.” Even though I joke, I’m a fraction worried what her reaction will be. She’s normally cool, but you never can tell who’ll turn out to be a dick and who won’t.

“Relax, Chadwick.”

I snort but don’t bother correcting her this time. Apparently, *Chad* is too douche-y of a name. “I take it you’re not gonna start trying to convert me to Christianity?”

“Please. Sodomy is a good time.”

“Jesus fucking Christ.”

She lifts a perfectly lined eyebrow. “Now who’s trying to convert whom? You know, your beau reminds me of a young man I met at Woodstock. Beautiful, regal-looking ... with a gorgeous Asian girlfriend who welcomed me into their relationship with open arms. Hell of a weekend.”

Whenever she talks about Woodstock, I have my doubts. “What happened to the wild hippy who tried to recruit you into a cult?”

“Died, I presume.”

“And the tall blond who you could have sworn was a Danish prince?”

“Even if I knew, I couldn’t tell you.”

“Uh-huh.” My gaze roams back to Bailey. His head is bent as he talks to Lucas.

Ms. Olsen pats my arm. “Go enjoy your boy. You’ll have to introduce me later.”

“Not a chance.” I kiss her goodbye. “I’m trying to make a *good* impression here.”

She laughs as I leave her and make my way toward Bailey. I’m stopped a couple of times, by the dean, and some donors, and members of the faculty, but thankfully Bailey doesn’t move from his spot.

And the closer I get to him, the more my brain starts to go completely

fucking blank.

BAILEY

I EYE CHAD AS HE CROSSES THE ROOM, SHAMELESSLY EYE-FUCKING THE SHIT out of him. He's wearing the same suit he wore the night I met him, and while it's obviously not custom, he fills it out in a way that's drool-worthy.

The past few weeks of messaging back and forth have been fun, but it's sort of a removed type of fun where I can flirt and smile like an idiot and not worry about the consequences. There's no risk when I'm reading his words through a screen.

I hadn't counted on how those messages would change things when I saw him again.

With Chad here in front of me, all that banter suddenly holds much heavier meaning than it had a few hours ago. Now I'm imagining those words coming out of that mouth ...

I suck down a breath and force myself to stop thinking with my dick.

Otherwise, I can guarantee I'll be naked with him in an hour.

And I've been doing so, so well to resist.

Just as Chad reaches me, his gaze flicks left to where Lucas is standing. "Hey, doucheus."

"Doomsen," Lucas says. "How does it feel to be the party's cheap show dog? You going to do tricks for us all later?"

"I'm always *doing* tricks, but I prefer a more intimate setting." He smirks. "You gonna jerk off alone later? It must be hard when there isn't a single person at this party who gives a shit you're here."

I cut in before they can throw any more useless barbs at each other. "Is this supposed to be a dick-measuring contest? Because you're doing it wrong."

Chad laughs, flipping something in my stomach.

"Come on, Bailey," Lucas says as he nudges me. "The more distance you put between yourself and a douche like Doomsen, the better. Trust me."

I know Lucas believes that, and I know it's Chad's fault that he believes that, but ... I don't care. "Thanks for the advice." I catch Chad's stare. Hold it. "You'll both have to excuse me. I need the bathroom."

I leave them, not bothering to glance back and check if Chad got the message.

If he doesn't follow me, it'll be for the best. But if he does ... dammit,

I've been so in control, but the second I saw him, my *other* brain took over. I told myself I'd be strong and resist those adorable brown eyes. It's the smart thing to do. He's just another guy.

There are at least a hundred guys at this party, and chances are a fair few of them would swing my way—Lucas has asked me to grab food with him three times now—so it would make sense for me to cut ties with Chad and focus on what's available. The problem is, the ones who are available are more focused on who I am, which leads to clingy partners. I've seen it before. Guys who bang Bailey Prince and suddenly get possessive and overbearing. Who want a *relationship*.

Well, maybe all I want is a mouth around my cock and no regrets the next day.

Chad doesn't seem like the type to want to settle down anytime soon, whereas Lucas screams commitment. That reasoning almost sounds convincing to my own ears. It has nothing to do with the fact he's sexy and funny and I want him, consequences be damned.

It's also only a matter of time before someone starts questioning who I've been messaging nonstop, and I'm sure that once we hook up, those messages will dry right up.

Which is for the best, obviously. Even if it doesn't feel like it right now.

I make my way casually down a long hall, past an ornate bathroom, and farther down into the darkness of the house. There's an old maids' kitchen that looks empty, and on the opposite side of the hall, large doors open into a parlor. Huge windows let in silvery moonlight, bathing the old furniture in a magical glow.

But more importantly, it's completely empty, making it the perfect place to get my dick sucked.

I slip inside, then stand in the shadows, watching the other end of the hall. I'll give Chad five minutes to sneak away, and if he doesn't, that's it. I'll take it as a very clear sign we're never supposed to hook up.

Arousal starts to pool in my groin, and damn I hope I don't have to walk away disappointed.

Barely two minutes later, Chad appears.

I recognize his shape a split second before his face is visible, and I watch him wander along before pausing to peer into the bathroom. An adorable perplexed look crosses his face, and for a moment, I consider not giving myself away, but my cock gives an insistent twitch, so I lean forward and

quietly whistle.

His head jerks toward the sound, and when he sees me, his face splits under his grin.

Goddamn he's handsome.

Chad barrels down the hall, closing the distance between us quickly. He pushes me back into the room and closes the door behind us.

“Hey.”

“Hi.”

He swallows. I watch the force of it work his thick neck. “You look ... fuck, you look sexy tonight.”

“Should I be concerned that I have to go to this much effort for you to think that?”

“Nah.” Chad hesitates, then reaches up to stroke my cheek. “You have different stages of sexiness.”

I back up to perch on the back of a chaise lounge. “Yeah, you need to talk me through that one.”

“Will it get me laid?”

“Depends on how you answer.”

“Fine. So before, you were sexy, refined Bailey. When I saw you in your room, you were sexy, sleepy Bailey. The party where we met, you were sexy, flirty Bailey. But right now, you're sexy, needy Bailey, who also wants to point out how hot I look too.”

“Why though?” I blink innocently up at him. “When you're here to do it yourself.”

“Eh.” He shrugs. “I guess Pee-wee Herman and I will walk right back out that door.”

I snort back a laugh and reach forward to snag his belt loop before he can make a move. Then I tug him close. “Feeling insecure?”

“I dressed up for you.” He pouts. And normally I'd get total clinger vibes from a line like that, but Chad isn't subtle. He's easy to read, and his teasing is coming through loud and clear.

“I didn't think about you once while I was getting dressed.”

“What about when you were naked?” he asks.

There's barely any room between us, so when Chad steps forward, I have to part my legs to give him room. It leaves me looking up at him in a way I normally wouldn't, and I have to admit it's a complete turn-on. Chad is barely taller than me, but he's at least twice as wide, and I love how he makes

me feel small.

I'm going to love it even more when all that bulk is on his knees for me.

"Do you want to talk?" I ask, tilting my head back to see him properly.
"Or do you want to do what we're both here for?"

"What *are* we here for exactly?"

"I'm worried you're living up to the dumb jock stereotype for real if I have to spell it out for you."

"Just want to make sure we're on the same page here. Consent is important."

"I've lured you away to a dark, deserted room. Please take that as my consent."

His big hands swamp my cheeks as he holds my face. "What changed?"

I internally cringe, not wanting that question but knowing it's fair. I might tease Chad about being a dumb jock, but he's perceptive. "It's been too long since I hooked up, I need it, and for some reason, I can't move on to anyone else until I've had you."

His face lights up. "Oh, really?"

"Don't read into it. It's extremely inconvenient for me."

He chuckles as he leans down to brush his lips against my ear, hand dropping to my neck. "I haven't even thought about hooking up with anyone else either."

A tiny hint of worry passes through me that maybe I've misread Chad, that maybe he's not the man-whore I took him for, but it's way too late to turn back now. I shiver at his breath on my ear. "One time, then," I force myself to say.

"Agreed."

"We can make each other come, then go back to forgetting the other person exists."

He pulls back, frowning, and I'm waiting for him to disagree when he nods instead. "Agreed."

That word makes relief swim through my veins. "Good. Now I want you on your knees."

Chad groans. "As much as I want that, people are gonna start looking for me soon, and I don't want to have to rush."

"We've been gone maybe ten minutes."

"What can I say? I'm a popular guy."

I moan in protest. "I need this over and done with. Fuck, I'm so hard."

“All for me?” An evil look crosses his face as he slides his hand up my thigh to cup my dick. “You *are* hard.”

“You going to try and tell me you’re not?”

“No way. Pee-wee Herman likes you.”

I cringe. “Okay, I’ve changed my mind. You have to stop calling it that.”

“But I’ve never had someone name my dick before. It seems disrespectful not to play along.”

“I give you full permission to disrespect me.”

“I’ll take you up on that.” He leans in, and my lips tingle in anticipation. He’s a breath away, lips about to brush mine ... when he steps back. “Later.”

“Are you goddamn serious?”

“Leave the window unlocked for me.”

“Maybe I’ve changed my mind.”

“Yeah, right.” He turns, halfway to the door, and drags his gaze over me. “Come here.”

“Don’t wanna.” And it’s less of a “want” and more that walking with my erection trapped behind these tight pants will be uncomfortable as hell.

He crooks his finger at me. “Come here, Princess.”

God I hate that name, but when he says it, all deep and husky like that ... my feet move before I’ve given them permission.

He watches me hungrily, and once I reach him, he grabs my tie and tugs me against him. Then his lips are on mine. All at once, I’m thrown back to that night in his room, needy and claiming, strong, scruffy jaw under my palms, hot, confident tongue pushing into my mouth. Chad keeps hold of my tie so I can’t get away, then runs his hand up under my blazer to splay his palm over my lower back. The heat from his touch seeps through my shirt.

I press closer. My grip tightens as I kiss with as much force as he’s using, wanting to draw it out, wanting to ensure he wants me as much as I want him. He tastes like bubbly and smells like Tom Ford cologne, and when I finally resurface for air, blinking myself back to the present, I’m leaning back, Chad looming over me with dark eyes and puffy lips.

Nerves tingle through my body.

“Still think you’ll change your mind?” he rasps.

I almost beg him to blow me here and now, but what he’s hinting at, taking our time ... maybe he’s onto something.

“I’ll sneak out within the hour. I don’t think anyone is home.”

“Leaving Kappa House unmanned wasn’t smart last time.”

I tug on his bottom lip with my teeth. “With you here tonight, it was a calculated risk.”

“You know how to make a guy feel special.”

“You think that’s something? Boy, do I have some surprises in store for you.”

Chad groans, kisses me again, then rips himself away. “Don’t leave me waiting.”

He leaves the room, and I spend far too long standing there, trying to get my dick to deflate before I head back out. When I rejoin the party, Chad is nowhere to be seen, and it takes all of my self-control to wait the full hour before I follow him.

CHAD

I DON'T TRUST THE KAPPAS TO HAVE LEFT THE HOUSE UNATTENDED, SO I FAKE sick and sneak out of the party early, then spend time scoping out their house. The good thing about being the resident pest of Sigma House is I always have an excuse for being around, and that excuse shouldn't lead me back to Bailey. There's no reason for anyone to assume anything about us, and I like it that way.

When he mentioned tonight would be one and done, at first I wanted to argue, but it fits with my aim to be a total slut bag this year. Once I get him checked off my list, I can move on to the next person.

Sex is something I can find with anyone. The thing I will miss is our texting. But maybe we can still have that. Possibly.

I'm not willing to question him about it and have tonight not happen though. I'll save it for later.

Besides, maybe I only enjoy the messages so much because I'm hoping they'll lead where I want them to. Once I've gotten my rocks off, the whole charm of them might disappear too.

We can only hope.

I hate complicated. I hate overthinking.

My life is a series of spontaneous decisions, and I don't plan on changing that up now.

As soon as I see Bailey arrive home, I make my move, darting down the narrow side of the house to his window. A lamp or something flicks on, and then he appears, looking down at me like he knew I'd already be waiting.

Considering I'm a horny, red-blooded male, it wasn't much of a stretch.

Bailey slides his window open.

"You're sorta like Rapunzel," I say, reaching up to climb in.

"This feels far less wholesome than a Disney movie."

I chuckle, and when I swing my legs inside and stand, he's closer than I anticipated. Normally I'm more than confident when it comes to hooking up, but there's something about Bailey that always makes my tongue stumble over what I was gonna say. I'm happy to be the dumb jock most of the time, but when I'm around him, I want to prove that I'm more than that.

For, umm, the night.

Sure we're here to get each other off, but I sorta want him to like me as

well. Where everyone else has a set impression of me from all of our years living on Greek Row, for him, I want different.

Which is not something I'm gonna think about.

"So, what do you want to—"

"Shh," I cut him off.

He snorts. "You've made me wait all night for this. Sorry if I'm a little impatient."

"Like I said, we're not rushing things. We're doing this the one time, so we're gonna do it properly."

"I didn't realize there was a *proper* way to have sex."

"Clearly you've been doing it wrong, then." I lift a hand to run along his jaw, loving the feel of his soft skin under my fingertips. "We're not planning ahead, we're just going to let things play out. Do what feels right and enjoy ourselves."

"I don't think I've ever *not* enjoyed a quickie." Bailey presses his hard-on against my thigh.

I cluck my tongue. "So impatient."

"So *horny*. Which is completely your fault. That kiss before you left? Were you trying to kill me?"

I can't help feeling smug. "Just making sure you didn't think about leaving that party with someone else."

"Like who? *Lucas*?" He throws the name out there like it's completely unthinkable, but ... he came up with that name a bit too easily.

I stiffen. "That was specific."

"I can't be sure, but I think I'm getting vibes."

"Vibes?"

"Yeah, like maybe he's asked me out a few times, but I could be reading into that too much and seeing things that aren't there."

I haven't heard anything about Lucas, but Bailey doesn't seem like the type of guy who wouldn't know when he's been flirted with. He picked up on my intentions pretty damn fast, though I wasn't exactly trying to hide it. My jaw tightens as I think about Bailey and *Lucas* going out, because I can't see it.

"What's that look?" he asks.

"What look?"

"The one you're wearing. Your nose is all screwed up."

I force my face to relax, even as Bailey laughs.

“Ooh, you don’t like the sound of that.”

“I’m not jealous,” I hurry to say, which makes him laugh more. “But you can do better than Lucas.”

Bailey’s voice drops into a flirty tone as he pushes me back toward his bed. “Like a big, strong football player who can take care of all my needs?”

“Hell yeah I can.” Now this is a conversation I can get on board with.

“Who says I was talking about you?”

I loop my arm around his waist and drop back onto the bed, pulling him down on top of me. “I’m confident in my abilities.”

“I guess I’m about to find out.”

I push all thoughts of asshole Lucas out of my brain and focus on the man in front of me. I’m gonna take care of his needs so hard, he’ll never forget tonight. A slow, filthy smile starts to spread across my face as I slide my hands down his back and grab his ass. It’s a juicy handful, and trying to figure out what I want to do tonight feels like being at an open buffet with a limit.

I roll so I’m on top, and Bailey immediately parts his thighs for me. Neither of us makes a move at first, just lying there, breathing the same air, noses almost touching, drawing out the moment for as long as possible.

Even in the darkness, I can see the freckles on his nose.

“So pretty ...” I breathe.

Bailey squirms. “Less talk, more sex.”

“Why don’t you like me complimenting you?” I’ve noticed it a few times now.

He groans and tilts his head back. “This isn’t what I signed up for.”

“What did you sign up for?”

“A hot hookup. We don’t need to make small talk, you know.”

“So ... what? You want me to treat you like a piece of ass?”

“Sure.”

Irritation flickers through me. “Fine.” So much for taking my time and enjoying myself. Like, I’ll still enjoy it because my dick is hard and Bailey’s hot, but mentally, wow. Yeah, I don’t like that.

I start to pop the buttons on my shirt, and Bailey hurries to help, but when I try to shrug it off, I get all caught and twisted and ... “Shit.”

Bailey chuckles and leans up to push it from my shoulders. “You’ve gone all tense.”

“I’m trying to show you a good time.”

“Uh-huh.” He reaches for my belt. “Are you annoyed?”

“Nope. I’m about to get off. Nothing to be annoyed about.”

His hands still. “Chad ...”

“Less talk, more sex.” I go to kiss him, but he pulls back. It takes everything I can not to sigh. “Gotta say, I’m getting mixed messages here.”

“I feel like I’ve said something wrong, but we both agreed to sex, didn’t we? Is this going to be weird?”

I catch myself from rolling my eyes. “Dude, I—”

He shoots me a warning look.

“Sorry, *Princess*, I’m not going to fall for you if that’s what you’re asking. But this isn’t a quickie in a bathroom stall. Why shouldn’t hookups be hot and fun?”

“Umm, I guess?”

“You never had a laugh while you got your dick sucked?”

Bailey gets moving again and pushes my pants off. “That doesn’t sound like a good blow job.”

“Disagree. Sex doesn’t always have to be serious.”

His dark lashes narrow, and he leans in, lips brushing against mine. “Maybe not, but when you’re so turned on by the other person that all you can do is feel, there’s no better experience.”

“Okay, fair point.” I grind my cock into his thigh. “Maybe this will be a quick one after all.”

“No, no, you wanted to play.” He pushes me upright. “I want to see you completely naked.”

I glance down at where my cock is straining against my boxer briefs and want to argue I basically am anyway, but instead, I shove them down and kick them off, and then I’m standing in front of him, totally bare.

His stare trails over me, taking in every inch of skin.

“What’s that bruise from?” He nods to the one on my side, which looks considerably bigger than it did earlier.

“Bad tackle today.”

“Huh.” He licks his lips, stare resting on my cock. “Just as average and unremarkable as you said.”

Even though there’s a teasing note to his voice, I frown. “I’m thinking I don’t like that joke anymore.”

“Would you prefer if I told you it’s the biggest I’ve ever seen?”

“Yes. Might help if you choke on it a little too.”

He lifts an eyebrow, and it disappears under the curls that have flopped down over his forehead. "I think that can be arranged."

"Good. But can you get naked first? I'm not self-conscious or anything, but this feels weird." He's still completely dressed, but as I go to reach for his top button, Bailey grabs my hand.

His eye contact is sudden and unwavering. "No."

"No?"

His gorgeous pink lips twitch. "Feeling vulnerable?"

"A bit, yeah." Even as I say it, goose bumps race over my skin, and my dick gives a hefty twitch. Apparently, I fucking like that. Being naked and exposed, while he teases me with needing more. "On second thought, I think I'm okay with it."

"Good. Now you're going to stand there and let me play with you."

Another twitch. Another big, dumb *yes* from my cock. I step closer. "Gladly. But if you wanted to concentrate all your energy between my legs, I wouldn't complain."

Bailey's head is level with my abs, and as I watch, he leans forward and runs his tongue along the groove between them. "Your muscles are a work of art."

I squeeze them tighter, wanting to show off. "They're happy to be appreciated."

He hums, lips brushing soft kisses along my gut until he reaches my V. His tongue dips down and follows the groove to my groin.

"*Fuuuck ...*" I breathe. My hand automatically finds his hair, but Bailey pulls back.

"Can I do something?"

"What?"

He stands up and rests a hand on my chest. "Just stay right there."

I try hard to do what he says as I hear him move around, and then his warmth covers my back.

He takes one wrist and pulls it behind me. Something silky wraps around it. "Can I have the other?"

My head drops back, and I hurry to comply. "Tell me I won't regret this."

"Don't you trust me?"

"When there's every chance this is a prank to make me look like an idiot? No."

"Somehow I think tying you up to take naked photos of you would be

considered a form of hazing.”

“Yes. That. Which is totally against frat code and would be super cruel of you to do when my poor dick just wants to be played with.”

“I wouldn’t worry. There’s nothing idiotic about how you look right now.” Bailey chuckles and tightens the tie at my wrists. “How’s that?”

“Good.” I test it out. “But now I can’t touch you.”

“Obviously the point.”

He drags featherlight touches over my skin as he moves back in front of me again. His lips find my throat as his fingers trail down my spine before coming to a rest on my hip. He’s humming as he kisses me, tweaks my nipple with his free hand, licks a wet stripe from my collarbone up to my ear. My body is thrumming, and if I had my hands free, I would have pushed him to his knees already, which makes this equal parts frustrating and hot. I’m not used to giving up control. The types of chicks I go for let me take over without complaint, so this is ... different. And according to my leaking cock, it’s *good* different.

Bailey’s mouth finds mine, and as his tongue pushes past my lips, I let out a long, deep moan. I need this bad. Why have I left it so long to hook up? I’m hyper-responsive to his every touch, pushing forward to deepen the kiss, to take from him what I want.

He pulls away abruptly and starts to attack my neck with wet kisses that he continues down my pec to my nipple. He nips at the pebbled skin, and they draw tight under his attention as he continues his path south.

He’s holding my hips, thumbs rubbing against my hip bones, tonguing the grooves between my muscles until he reaches my groin.

“Please ...” I beg. “I need your mouth.”

Holding eye contact, he runs his tongue over my slit. “Still think this is funny?”

I’m quick to shake my head.

He smiles, and then his eyes flutter shut as he starts to lick long stripes up my length. “I love this.”

“What?” My brain is struggling to turn over and decipher his words.

“Cock. The smell, the taste, the warmth.” He holds it against his cheek. “Mm ... *fuck*.”

Goddamn that’s hot. “I thought you didn’t like bush,” I say, referencing the first conversation we had.

“Trimmed hair on the guy I’m with is sexy.” His voice is rough. “I don’t

like it on *me*.”

He dives on my dick, and it’s so unexpected I almost nut right then.

He pulls off suddenly. “You need to keep it down.”

“You mean I wasn’t already?”

“I don’t think a high-pitched whine counts as quiet.”

“Ah. Shit. Sorry.”

“You’re forgiven.” He tongues my slit with a cheeky grin, then starts to blow me in earnest.

Gone is the teasing. He gags himself, sucks hard, licks around the head, and deep-throats me again. One hand rolls my balls in his palm, while the other closes around my base and works me with fast, shallow jerks. I’m trying so hard to hold back and not start fucking his face, but it’s almost impossible when he looks up at me. His eyes are unfocused, cheeks hollow, chin and lips covered in spit. His black curls are begging me to grab them and mess them up.

I’m already imagining blowing my load all over that crisp black shirt of his, when Bailey pulls off, sucks my balls into his mouth, then goes back to sucking me. He’s humming and squirming in place, the outline of his erection obvious through those tight pants.

“I wanna touch you,” I whine. And when I start to thrust, it’s completely out of my control.

I need to get closer, closer ... I’m almost there. My grunts are starting to sound needy, desperate. I know I need to be quiet, and I’m trying, but *fuck*. The things he’s doing with his tongue are unreal.

Bailey’s mouth closes tight, and he starts to suck with purpose.

“I’m close ...” I warn.

He pulls off. “Give it to me. Every drop.”

Yesss. He’s back just in time to catch the first spurt of cum as sweet orgasmic relief crashes over me. My head drops back as I hold in a groan, hips jolting with a few more half-hearted thrusts into the delicious heat of his mouth. It’s too much. So good. And when he’s finally drained my balls and I have a chance to catch my breath, Bailey pushes me to my knees.

He reaches into his pants with a shaking hand and pulls out his cock, and I have barely a second to admire it, long, pink, with a swollen head—the whole area completely fucking hairless—before his fingers card through my hair and he pushes my face toward it.

I automatically open my mouth, ready, wishing I had a chance to tease

him like he did me. The tip slides past my lips, and at the first salty taste on my tongue, my whole body relaxes. It's been too long since I did this, and I've only ever given head a few times in my life, but Bailey doesn't give me the chance to doubt my skills. I relax and let him use me. He thrusts into my mouth, not bothering to be gentle, and it blows my mind that I've never tried this before. I want to touch him and can't, and it's driving me crazy. It heightens every feeling to a thousand when all I can do is kneel there and take it as he uses my mouth to make himself feel good.

His panting grows louder, his grip tightens in my hair. "Do you ... swallow ..."

I never have before, but that's not going to stop me now. I force him deeper, nose burying in his groin, and Bailey cries out.

His legs go tense around me, and he's pulling my hair so tight tears prick my eyes. His cock jerks as he starts to come, each thick spurt hitting my throat in a totally foreign way. I try to swallow it all, but I'm caught off guard by how much there is, and it dribbles out of the corners of my mouth.

Bailey drops back on a long sigh, releasing my hair and leaving little prickles of pain behind.

I pull off and chuckle. "Good?"

"Oh, yeah."

I lean over to wipe my mouth on his pants, then lick his cock clean. When I stand, wrists still bound, I thank fuck for the muscles I've worked so hard on, because I'm able to do it without stumbling and looking like a loser. I drink in Bailey's long body, still fully clothed, and decide as hot as that was, I'm not leaving here until I've seen him naked. It only takes one solid tug of the tie around my wrists to get it loose enough to wriggle free, and then I climb up over him.

He gives me a lazy smile. "Still here, are you?"

"If you think I'm not looking for a round two, you're crazy."

He laughs, eyes sweetly crinkled, and doesn't fight me when I start to unbutton his shirt. He's pale and smooth, and I bury my face into his soft belly. Then I strip off his pants and underwear. When he's finally naked, I stand there and admire him. So beautiful. I don't tell him that, though, because I know he won't accept it.

"All right, move over."

He wriggles to the side of his bed, and I climb in after him.

"We'll have a quick nap, then we're going again."

“Deal.” He snuggles into my chest, and his eyes fall closed. “Once more should do the trick.”

Or twice. We’ll see.

All I know is there are a lot of ways to get off, and I want to cover as many as possible with Bailey. I palm his soft ass cheek as my eyes close, and I consider grabbing my phone and setting an alarm, but I drift off before I do.

BAILEY

THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS IN THE HALL OUTSIDE MY DOOR IS MY ALARM clock every morning. I squeeze my eyes tighter, then give in and blink them open against the morning sun. I didn't close the curtains last night because when Chad—

Oh no.

I jolt upright and turn to the sexy man spread out beside me. His hands are tucked behind his head, and his smile widens when he sees I'm awake. "Do you know you snore?"

"What are you still doing here?"

He ignores me. "Not a cute snore either. It sounded like a pig. And not, like, a piglet, but one of those big mommas."

I narrow my eyes. "Thank you for that information, but don't you think you should be gone already?"

"Yeah, hours ago. But I woke up five minutes before you and could already hear people out there. Somehow I didn't think you'd want your brothers seeing me do the walk of shame from your room."

I cringe. "I can't believe we fell asleep."

"I can. You're all warm and cuddly."

I toss another glare his way. "This isn't funny."

"Didn't say it was. But no amount of panic will rewind time, so, eh."

"Eh?" I toss a pillow his way. "It's easy to be calm about this when we're not in your house. Unlike you, I'm new here. I'm trying to *make* friends, not ostracize them."

"You're off to a good start. I can say with complete confidence that you were *very* friendly last night."

A laugh slips from me. "Somehow I don't think I can use those skills on my brothers."

"What about *Lucas*?" There's something in his tone that gives me pause.

"What about him?"

"You think he's been asking you out—sounds exactly like the type of chummy business he'd be on board with."

Yes, I am certainly detecting tone. "Possibly. I guess I'll wait and see."

I'm not expecting it when he wraps a warm arm around my waist and pulls me back onto the bed. He rolls so he's half on top of me, weight

pressing me into the mattress, and I melt.

“Wait and see all you like—poor Lucas is going to have to deal with being second. Every time you’re around him, you’re going to be all, *Chad is funnier than you, Chad is so much more interesting than you, Chad has big muscles and a monster cock and sucks dick better than you ...*”

“Should I be concerned that you know how both you and Lucas suck dick and have somehow managed to compare the two?”

He shrugs. “I’d be willing to put money down. I’ve got good instincts.”

“I’ll make sure to report back, then.”

A muscle in his jaw ticks, but he quickly covers it. “Well, since I can’t exactly sneak out now, it looks like our one night has turned into a whole night *and* day, so ...” He shifts so his hard-on presses against mine. “I’ll have to make sure that I leave you with no doubt who’s more skilled at making you come.”

Before I can argue that thought, he thrusts against me, and all need to play things cool goes out the window.

“I guess we did agree to once more.”

Chad spits into his palm and reaches down between us, wrapping his hand around our cocks. I lean up and kiss him, biting and licking and nipping as he ruts against me until we’re both spilling over his fist and onto my stomach. He drops his head to my chest, lips brushing over my collarbone. “Is being sex drunk a thing?”

“If it’s not, I’d say there’s a good argument for it.” I run my hand through his hair, feeling warm and sated and light. “Just how drunk do you think we could get if we keep doing that all day?”

He laughs softly. “Ah, shit.”

“What is it?”

“I’ve gotta get to work.”

Disappointment hits my gut. “You can’t call in sick?”

“Sure. I can’t see my boss taking issue with me wanting the day off so I can come my brains out.”

“Well, you wouldn’t say that, obviously.”

He pretends to gasp. “Lie for you? You might be sexy, Princess, but you’re not sexy enough to corrupt me. *Yet.*”

Chad climbs out of bed, and there’s nothing I can do but clean myself up with the boxers I was wearing last night, then roll onto my side and watch him.

“If I had muscles, would I be sexy enough to lie for?”

He looks surprised I asked. “Nah, you’ve got to give the rest of us a chance.”

“What does that mean?”

“You’re gonna make me say it?”

“Sure.”

“Fine, I’m not embarrassed.” He leans down on the bed, face near mine, his boxer briefs the only item of clothing he’s managed to pull on so far. “I think you are so fucking perfect. Your face, your body ... the way your eyes flutter when you come. You’re hot as hell and you know it and I know it, so that’s me done feeding your ego.”

Okay, I wasn’t expecting all that. I play it off like it’s nothing. “My ego’s now incredibly satisfied, thank you.” I smile as I lie down on my front, hands propped under my chin as I watch him finish dressing. “How do you plan on getting out of here without being seen?”

“Dunno.” His large fingers work to secure his buttons. “I probably won’t, but it’s all good. The last thing people are gonna suspect when they see me creeping around the house is that I’ve come fresh from a hookup.”

“That’s true.”

“And as insurance, I’m taking this.” Chad picks up a clock I have sitting on my dresser.

“Go for it.” I’m not telling him that it’s new and hasn’t got any points assigned. “Then I won’t feel bad for taking that.” I point to his lamp.

“You haven’t given it to Charles yet?”

“Nope.” I don’t meet his eye. “It was a bit sneaky, so I’ve been on the fence about it.”

“I could grab it and run now, you know.”

“I know.” Neither of us makes a move.

“But, I mean, a hundred points. I know if we had a new brother and he stole something worth that much, I’d probably supply his booze for the next week.”

“Well, I am incredibly concerned about where my next drink will come from, so you better leave it there.”

“It’s the charitable thing to do.” Chad leans down and kisses me slowly. “Figured I deserved one more.”

“No disagreements from me.”

He tucks the clock under his arm, crosses to the window, and peeks

outside before opening it. “Okay, well ...”

“Yeah. It was good.”

“Just good?”

My lips twitch. “I’ll be sure to tell Lucas you’re the best I’ve ever had.”

“That’s better.” Neither of us says anything for a beat. “Right, well, see ya around.”

“See you.”

Chad jumps out of the window, and I hear him move quickly away. I’m sad to see him go, because of the orgasms, of course, but we can both agree it’s better this way. Chad Doomsen is out of my system now, and I can go back to studying with the occasional anonymous hookup to take the edge off. Despite what I said, I have no plans to take Lucas up on his offers, friendly or otherwise.

KNOWING CHAD IS AT WORK TODAY, I ORGANIZE FOR MOM AND DAD TO meet me at a cafe around the corner from Deja Brew. Rachel is with them this time, and it’s nice she’s taken the weekend away from her friends to come and visit. Even with four years between us, we’ve always been close.

“This is different,” Mom says as she takes a seat opposite me. Unlike Deja Brew, this place is a chain coffee shop with generic booths and plain tiled floors, baristas more intent with getting through the lines of customers than being friendly. I hate it. But there’s no way I could face Chad in front of my parents after this morning. I don’t trust him not to make it weird.

In fact, I’m almost certain he’d do it on purpose.

“I felt like a change,” I say.

“Of course.” Dad’s lips quiver. “Nothing to do with a certain barista, I’m sure.”

“No idea what you mean.”

But Rachel smells gossip, and she pounces on the topic. “Barista, what barista?”

“No one.”

She scoffs. “Really? Mom and Dad get to know about the barista, and you’re going to keep your favorite sister in the dark?”

“You’re my only sister, and I’d *still* argue you’re not my favorite.”

She pulls a face, and Mom laughs. “I’ll show you on the way back to the car.”

“No,” I groan. “Please don’t go anywhere near that cafe.”

“But what if I’m thirsty?”

I point at the display of bottled drinks in the fridge by the counter. “What a coincidence.”

“I don’t know.” Mom shrugs. “It is a *long* walk back to the car.”

What did I do for them to torture me like this? I can already picture Mom and Rachel, faces pressed to the glass window as Mom points Chad out to her. Talk about awkward and embarrassing all wrapped into one. “I’m begging you here.”

“Fine, I’ll let it go.” She winks at Rachel.

“I saw that.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Jesus fuck, Chad’s going to be glad he’s rid of me by the time those two are done.

“So, *Dad*, only family member who apparently doesn’t hate me today, what’s new?”

“This place.” He looks around and frowns. “I don’t like it.”

“Is everyone out to get me?”

“I don’t understand why we couldn’t go to the other place. Did something happen with the barista guy?”

“Chad,” Mom interjects.

“Yes, Chad. What happened?”

I pick up my menu and pretend to be engrossed in the options.

“*Chad?*” Rachel says. “What a douchebag name.”

“He *is* a frat guy.”

“So are you,” she points out. “Now, are you going to tell me what happened with the Chad, or will I suddenly need to pee right outside Deja Brew.”

These people, I swear. “Why do I love you all again?”

“It’s a misjudgment on your part,” Rachel agrees.

“Whatever ... oh, look, they do bagels.” Distract, distract.

“I’d prefer that cheesecake they do at the other place.”

“And I’d prefer not to discuss my sex life with my family, but looks like we’re all up for disappointment today.”

“Ah, yep.” Rachel nods sagely. “Sex will do it. What happened? Things

got awkward afterward?”

My whole face feels like it's on fire. “Not having this conversation.”

“Yes, Rachel, you're too young to be talking about sex,” Dad says.

She gives an amused snort that makes him do a double take. Just as he opens his mouth to say something, he abruptly shakes his head. “No, nope. I don't want to know. New conversation topic.”

“Oh, sure, we can change the subject when *you* want to,” I throw at him. Almost tempted to keep it going to prove a point.

“Benefits of being head of the family.”

“Uh-huh. Sure you are, dear.” Mom pats his arm absentmindedly. He doesn't bother to argue because we all know that if anyone calls the shots, it's Mom.

Thankfully, we get through ordering with no more conversation about my sex life or Rachel not being the virgin Dad thinks she is.

It's not until we're eating that Rachel says, “No present for Mom this week?”

Heat floods my face again. “I'll have two next week.”

“I've told you, I don't need anything,” Mom says.

“And I've told you, I like surprising you.”

“So why didn't you, then?” Rachel pushes.

“You don't stop, do you?”

“Just curious why you're blushing so hard.”

“I'm not blushing. There's no reason except it's been a busy morning.”

“Oh, *really?*”

“Should I be worried about why you're so interested in my sex life?”

Rachel grins evilly. “Ah, busy morning with *Chad*, was it?”

“Someone, kill me now.”

“Leave Bailey alone,” Dad says. But it's more a reflex than an order.

“Of course.”

Thankfully I get through the rest of lunch without having to endure more teasing, and I've almost put Chad out of my mind when I pull up back home and find a message from him. I open it reluctantly, hoping he's not going to say he was busted creeping out, but I find a photo instead.

A photo of my family and Chad smiling widely around a table at Deja Brew.

Motherfucker.

CHAD

MY SHIFT AT WORK GOES FAST. I'M PUMPED. MY MOOD AT A TEN. SPENDING the night with Bailey was exactly what I needed. I keep getting hot as hell flashbacks of his mouth on me, and it makes me pop wood at inappropriate moments. Like, when his parents and sister stopped by.

I'm whistling as I smash out coffee after coffee, and my coworker Misty keeps giving me these amused smirks.

"What?" I ask when we've finally slowed down enough to catch a breath between orders.

"Someone got laid last night."

"Sure did." No reason why I'd deny it. "I've been putting the work in for a few weeks now, and it paid off."

"Chad Doomsen paying attention to some girl for a few weeks? She must be hot."

"*He* is." I wink at her surprise. "I mean, come on. Not like I can keep all this for one gender, can I?"

"My mistake." She laughs. "And good on you for putting in the work."

I hum in agreement, but it tastes like a lie. Truth is, talking to Bailey is hardly work. He's quietly assertive, tries to keep his distance, but every time he slips, it draws me in even more. Add in his cocksucking abilities and the guy immediately jumps to the top of my hookups list.

But that's done now.

Over.

Time to move on and chase some new tail or whatever.

My phone vibrates in my pocket, and I have to resist pulling it out straightaway. It's been an hour or two since I sent Bailey that text, and I'm embarrassingly desperate for it to be him writing back. Thank fuck for work and keeping busy to prevent me constantly checking my phone.

Misty takes her break, and I'm the only one left up front for half an hour until my shift ends, so I can't even duck out to take a look. The minutes tick by mind-numbingly slowly.

By the time Misty is back to take over, she's barely tied her apron properly before I'm stripping off mine.

"Later." I head down the hall to punch out, then grab my phone and—
Zeke.

That fucking fucker.

Zeke: *Can you run Bro-motions night? I've got a paper due tomorrow I need to fix*

Well, shit. I've got a test on Tuesday I was planning on studying for, but Zeke takes Bro-motions every week, so I can tap in this once for him.

With the rise in mental health issues, and most dudes thinking they need to bottle shit up, Sigma Beta Psi brought in Bro-motions nights. We're here to support our brothers, and it's not mandatory for anyone to show up, but we make sure we've got a safe place for people to talk about what they need to.

I let him know I've got this, then swing by the store to grab some chips and shit that I'll claim back once I'm home. Talking emotions is hungry work.

When I'm back to the house, I hand off my receipt to Zeke and then head to my room since we don't start until eight.

I throw myself on my bed, surprisingly awake considering the late night and early morning. It's taking all of my willpower not to pull out my phone, but considering my self-control is jack shit, I fail.

Our messages fill my screen, and I take in the image I sent him earlier. Did it freak him out? I didn't mean to do that. I'm not actually sure why I sent it, other than a sneaky suspicion that I wanted a reason for us to start chatting again.

The sex is done with, but there are no rules that a bro and another bro can't blow each other's minds and then hang out and be totally cool about it.

Do I follow up the picture with a message or take the hint?

Yeah, right. I'm not too cool to message a guy the next day.

Just as I'm about to text him, dots appear on the screen, telling me he's writing something. My gut flips over, and I quickly sit up and shove my pillows behind me.

The dots disappear, then reappear, then disappear again.

After a few minutes of nothing else, I call him out on it.

Me: *Thinking real hard over there about what you wanna text*

Bailey: *And the only reason you'd know that is if you were doing the same*

Me: *Please. We both know I don't waste time by thinking. I was about to message you again when I saw you going back and forth about sending me the perfect message. I get it. I'm a hard guy to impress*

Bailey: *Sorry about my family*

I'm surprised he doesn't take the opportunity to put me in my place, but this is ... something. A reply? An opening to a conversation? I'm way too excited to find out.

Me: *Nah, they made the day interesting*

Bailey: *I feel bad for you if they were the interesting part of your day*

Me: *Well other than their visit, I was elbows deep in coffee grinds and memories of you sucking my dick*

Maybe it's pushing things, but I can't help myself. No point playing coy when we've both drunk each other's bodily fluids.

Bailey: *They are good memories*

Me: *Agreed*

Bailey: *I guess I'll see you around*

Ah, no. No, no, no. That isn't how this is supposed to go.

Well, it is what we agreed on, but I'm not ready to end it so soon.

But what do I write back to that?

Me: *Still happy to be one and done?*

Bailey: *It's for the best*

Me: *Right. No, totally*

Bailey: *Why can I hear disagreement behind your very agreeable words?*

Me: *Just ... it's a bit of shame. But maybe we could keep talking? You said you don't have many friends yet and we could be friends*

Bailey: *Yeah, that'd go down well with my brothers. 'See you guys, I'm grabbing lunch with Chad'*

Me: *We can have code names for each other. You're princess and I'm ...*

Bailey: *Pee-wee Herman?*

Me: *I thought that was my junk? Might get a bit confusing. You'll be all "I wanna see Pee-wee" and if I don't know which one you mean, things could get awkward fast*

Bailey: *True. Could always go with Johnny Bravo*

Me: *Should I be concerned by how quickly you came up with that?*

Bailey: *Probably*

Me: *So we keep chatting then? Just use code names?*

Bailey: *I don't think it's a good idea*

I try not to feel too disappointed since he's been clear about the arrangement the whole time. It sucks, maybe more than I was expecting with the pressure hitting my chest, but I balls up and reply.

Me: *Okay then, I'll see you around*

I watch my screen for an embarrassingly long time, but he doesn't reply. It doesn't get to me. It doesn't.

So we had some fun? So what?

He doesn't owe me anything.

I'm sorely tempted to send something else, anything, but instead, I put my phone away.

I grab a quick dinner, then start setting up the living area, ready for whoever needs to get some shit off their chest. Hell, maybe I'll take a turn tonight.

But probably not.

What am I gonna say? The dude I hooked up with won't talk to me anymore, even though it's what I agreed to? They'll tell me to go out and find someone else to stick it in.

I'm Chad Doomsen. I've never had issues hooking up before.

There's a trickle of people who show up, some who live in the house and some who don't. Carter pokes his head in and laughs when I tell him what we're doing. Unsurprisingly, he doesn't stick around.

We end up with about ten guys, plus a couple who live here are hovering in the doorway, ready to jump in with support if it's needed.

Not much else to do on a Sunday night.

Champers goes first. Says he thinks his woman is cheating. After the initial, obligatory rounds of "fuck that bitch," people start to offer real advice. I'm not here to overrule anything, just to make sure that none of the advice is dangerous or stupid and to add that extra layer of support from the house executives.

Robbie is worried he's going to flunk out. He failed his last two chem quizzes and has a meeting with his professor tomorrow. Larken jumps in with the offer to go over the material with him.

Miles is missing his family back in Tennessee.

Pete's boss is cutting back hours, and he's worried about making dues.

I kick back in my chair as my brothers talk openly, and watch them together. It's a totally judgment-free zone, and it feels good to know my brothers have something like this. Tomorrow, they'll all be back to their idiot selves, but tonight, we put our serious hats on and talk.

"What about you, VP?" Robbie asks.

"Nah, I'm all good," I say. "You know me. As long as I have football, you guys, and enough beer to make questionable decisions, I'm easy."

“Typical Doomsen,” Pete says through a smile. “What questionable decisions have you made lately?”

I rub my arm, not sure whether to say. “Well, my hookup last night left me with a whole lot of questions, if that’s what you mean?”

Larken sniggers. “Stick it in the wrong hole?”

Robbie whacks Larken on the back of the head. “Fuck off, you animal. There is no wrong hole.”

“So, what was the problem, Chad? She toss you around?”

And this is why I didn’t want to say anything. I’ve never lied about my sexuality, but I’ve never outright confirmed anything either. And the idea of denying it now ... I clear my throat. “Tied my wrists up, actually.”

Coward.

“Bondage. Hot.”

“It was.”

“She a Greek girl?” Robbie asks.

My tongue swipes my bottom lip. “Nah, they’re, ah ... from outside the row.” Double lies. Wow. I’m on fire.

I’ve literally never hated myself more.

“Seeing her again?”

“No.” *Him. Himhimhim.* “No plans to. That’s what’s got me questioning.”

“Do you want to?” Larken asks.

“I think maybe. They’re”—fucking *he*’s—“pretty cool.”

“She a parents’ type?” Robbie asks, surprised. “Doomsen found a chick worthy of him?”

I stare at Robbie for a moment, trying to figure out how to answer. I’m not ashamed. I’m not. I also think my brothers are better than I’m giving them credit for, because there’s no way I’d be blackballed or anything for being bi—the Bailey factor is a whole other story though.

I force myself to shrug. Totally casual. Nothing to stress about here. My throat definitely isn’t trying to stick to itself to keep the words in. “Actually, there’s no chick. He’s a dude, and I can’t stop thinking about him.”

Silence.

Fuck.

It’s suffocating.

I hope it’s only that they’re still processing or none of them want to be the one who talks first.

Finally, Robbie leans back on the couch and extends his arms along both

sides. “I’ve hooked up with a dude before.”

That really shouldn’t surprise me. “You have?”

“Yup. I mean, not on purpose. Pretty sure I’m straight and all, but he was gorgeous and dressed up, and by the time I got his skirt off ...” Robbie holds up both hands. “Bit of a surprise, but I just went with it.”

I crack up laughing. “Of course you did.”

Brandon whacks the back of his head. “How do you know they weren’t a trans chick, dickhead?”

“How do you think?” Robbie snorts. “I’m a gentleman. I *asked*. Sucking dick actually wasn’t the worst thing I’ve ever done.”

Brandon starts to choke on air.

“What about you, Dooms?” Robbie asks, turning the attention back to me. “Did you know they were a guy first?”

“I did.”

“You gay, brother?”

“Nope. Bi.”

Robbie nods. “So back to my original question. He the meeting-parents type?”

“Probably. But he’s not interested.”

“Damn. Guy must think a bit of himself to be turning you down.”

The vibe in the whole room relaxes. Conversation moves on.

No one mutters shit about me or makes things weird.

But then, I always figured my brothers would be cool.

I know they’re going to start watching who I’m hanging out with though, trying to pick who the guy is, so it’s probably a good thing Bailey and I called it quits.

Silver linings.

Even if it doesn’t feel like it.

BAILEY

ACCORDING TO LUCAS, RHO KAPPA TAU DO WICKED GARDEN PARTIES. I would never have described a garden party that way, but if there's something I've learned since transferring, Greek life here is different to what I'm used to. It's all about tradition, and with all the fraternity and sorority houses so close together, it's a tight-knit community. Who apparently think garden parties are something to get excited over.

I help my brothers set up outside. We've got one of the largest blocks on the row, so we've rented a huge tent filled with tables, set up a dance floor, and have servers coming later to make sure everyone is supplied with enough alcohol to drown their morals in. The party goes from the afternoon right through the night, and I have a feeling that no matter how sophisticated my brothers try to make the event, shit is going to get messy.

"It's looking good, huh?" Lucas asks, squeezing my shoulder. "I swear each year it keeps getting bigger."

"Will it get busy?"

"Wall to wall. Because it's something different and everyone gets to dress all fancy, people want to be seen here. It's not some Sigma rager full of cheap beer and glory holes."

"You say glory holes like it's a bad thing."

Lucas smiles softly and meets my eyes. "I doubt you need anonymity to get someone to suck your dick."

I quickly look away. Maybe I don't need anonymity, but I prefer it. I don't point that out to Lucas, though, because it's not something he'll ever need to worry about.

Or me, apparently, because it's been weeks since I hooked up with Chad, and I haven't made moves to try with anyone else.

And tonight will be the first time I'll come face-to-face with him since then.

I've picked up my phone a few times to text him. Talking doesn't have to equal sex if I don't want it to ... but there's a high chance I would want it to, which is why I've held back.

That, and I don't want to know about all the people Chad's hooking up with. There was a photo in our group messages last weekend, and he was in the background, kissing some sorority girl up against a wall. I spotted him

right away, and my mood plummeted.

Sure, this whole thing was my decision, but I reserve the right to feel petty about it anyway.

It's not like I'm unaware of his reputation.

It's not like that wasn't my exact reason for hooking up with him in the first place.

It's not like I haven't known guys like him before.

I'm just usually better at not getting involved with them.

"All right, house meeting," Charles calls out, so Lucas and I trail after him. He gives us the rundown on how the party is going to go and that under no circumstances do we let a Sigma enter the house with King of Thieves at stake.

Like he needs to point that out to anyone when they're all as hard-core about it as each other.

I'm trying to join in and get competitive, but there's still a divide there. Some days, when I'm looking at Chad's lamp—actual lamp, and not a euphemism—I wonder whether I actually *want* to make friends. It's the whole reason I stopped this thing with Chad before it turned into more than it is, but I haven't made a move to do it.

What's the point of denying myself hot sex if I'm not going to follow through on the reason I'm walking away?

As soon as the meeting is over, I head to my room and grab the lamp.

Even with Chad telling me to do it, it doesn't feel right to hand it over.

"What's this?" Charles asks.

I turn it upside down and show Charles the logo and number on the bottom.

He starts to laugh. "Shit, Bailey. How did you get your hands on that?"

I'm expecting the question, so I go as vague as possible. "I can't give away all my secrets, can I?"

"Lucas, check this out!" Charles holds up the lamp. "Bailey came through big."

Lucas frowns as he takes the lamp, staring at the number. "How did you get this?"

I shrug. "Just sneaky. I'm going to go get ready."

As I walk away, I swear I can feel their eyes on me. Hopefully word gets out quickly and it does exactly what Chad says and helps people warm to me. And if not, oh well. I tried.

The garden party might be fancy, but it's still themed. Of course. This theme is Spring Time, even though we're in fall. Apparently, people show up wearing floral print or flower crowns, grass skirts, and strategically placed feathers and shells.

It takes me way too long to settle on an outfit, but I end up pulling on a button-down with a subtle palm tree print that matches my shorts. I shave my legs, hoping it draws attention to my calf muscles, and spend way too much time fixing my curls.

I'd like to say I'm doing it all to feel good, but if I'm honest, I am one hundred percent hoping to look good enough that Chad can't help approaching me.

Even though I said not to.

Urg. How can I expect him to be interested when I don't even know what I want?

I pick up my phone to text him. It can be anything. Asking if he's coming tonight, seeing how he is, but after a few weeks, there's every chance he's moved on already. The evidence is clearly there. How awkward to have to face him after sending a text that he doesn't write back to.

Yeah, no.

I'm not putting myself through that.

When the time rolls around for the party to start, I'm already a few drinks in and feeling a good buzz. No matter what happens tonight, I'm determined to have fun. And as every beer slips easier down my throat, I become more and more sure I want that fun to be with Chad.

Regrets can wait until tomorrow.

About half an hour after the start time, people begin showing up, and Lucas was right. Everyone has some sort of floral or outdoorsy theme going on. I keep one eye on the entrance to the backyard and one on the party as I do my best to fit in with my brothers. Most have heard about the lamp, and since then, I haven't had to source my own drink yet. I'm always surrounded by them, being pulled into their conversations, and I almost wish I could tell them to go away.

It's not until the white tent is stained the deep red of sunset that I see my first hint of Sigma House. Two guys called Robbie and Brandon arrive, both dressed in grass skirts, Hawaiian shirts, and flower crowns.

Charles catches the eyes of one of our pledges stationed outside the back door of the house and nods toward the Sigmas. His signal for *they're here, be*

alert.

Like we're some kind of top secret spy organization.

I snort and drain my glass as the hairs down both arms start to prickle. I notice Chad before he sees me. He's wearing the same bright floral-print shirt as Robbie and Brandon and bright red shorts. Bright red *tight* shorts that cup his ass and show off his thick legs in a way that should be illegal.

Fuck, he looks good.

What the hell was I thinking by calling it off?

He strolls through the yard like he owns the place, and I can't drag my eyes away. He doesn't make it obvious that he's seen me, but there's something in the way he's carrying himself and purposely looking everywhere but in my direction that makes me think he might have. People are drawn to him. Magnetized by his larger-than-life personality. I want to be one of them, but I hang back.

I'm not desperate. I could pick up if I wanted to.

My stupid, dull little ego keeps feeding me those lies.

It doesn't take long for him to be surrounded by a group of sorority sisters, all hanging off his every word. Even without being able to hear him, I can tell he's flirting. The extra touches, long eye contact, excessive laughter.

I clench my jaw.

Give.

Me.

Attention.

I leave the tent and cross the yard to where Lucas is standing by a table, pouring alcohol into a red cup. So much for classy.

"One of those for me?"

He smiles and hands me a drink. "It can be." He grabs another cup and pours a drink for himself.

"I thought you guys organized servers for these."

"We"—he gives me a pointed look—"organized servers for the food and fancy booze. The hard stuff is BYO."

Vodka isn't usually a favorite of mine, but that's not the point here. I tap my cup against Lucas's. "Bottoms up."

We take a long gulp, and then we both stand there in a semi-awkward silence. His gaze shifts to something over my shoulder, and he takes a small step closer. "Hey, did you hear that apparently Doomsen came out to his brothers the other week?"

“He ... what?”

“Yeah, bi or some shit. Wild. I never would have thought a guy like him would admit to liking dick.”

“Why? Because he’s a jock?”

“No, because he and Robbie Harrows used to have a tally on how many chicks they’d slept with in a month.”

I wrinkle my nose. “Gross.”

“Yeah. And they were up-front about it, so it’s not like anyone didn’t know what they were getting into, but see what I mean? Total womanizers.”

“Well, apparently Chad doesn’t discriminate about who he’s -izing.”

Lucas shifts. Gaze darting to me and away again. “What, umm ... what do you think about it?”

At first I’m sure he’s calling me out on Chad, but there’s a slight flush to his cheeks that makes me think otherwise. “What do you mean?”

“Well, ah, what do you think? About, you know, LGBT stuff ...”

Yikes. I hadn’t planned to come out to anyone, but I was also never planning on lying. “Considering I’m gay, I think it’s cool.”

“Oh.” He blinks at me. “Yeah, umm, me too.”

Oh no. His soft smile widens, and I’m uncomfortably aware of the way he’s looking at me. Like this shared secret somehow ties us together.

Before he can say anything else, I step away. “That’s awesome. We can share stories sometime.” And in my hurry to get away, I turn and run headfirst into someone. Hands grab me before I can fall on my ass, and a familiar voice hits my ears.

“We’ve got to stop meeting this way.”

My mouth goes dry, even as I pull out of Chad’s hold. “Uh, hey.”

He doesn’t answer. His brown eyes trail over me slowly, taking everything in, and it takes physical effort not to react. Then his gaze flicks to Lucas and back to me again. “So what are you two chatting about over here?”

“None of your business, Doomsen,” Lucas says in a bored voice. “Did someone frisk you before you walked in?”

“No need. I know the rules.”

Lucas leans toward me. “Chad thought it would be smart to let off firecrackers last year. The presidents at the time had to sign an agreement that we wouldn’t target each other’s parties.”

Chad shrugs. “Everyone makes mistakes.”

“Mistakes don’t usually shut down a party though, do they?”

Chad does such a good job looking innocent that it's a struggle not to laugh. "I'm not sure I'd call it a party, considering I had to let them off to liven things up in the first place."

Lucas shakes his head and angles himself between me and Chad. "Come on, Bailey, let's go and find Jordan." His hand rests on my lower back, and I stiffen as he tries to steer me away. Without looking, I can feel Chad watching us.

I don't want him to get the wrong idea, but it's not like I can say anything in front of Lucas. That will make him suspicious. As the distance from Chad grows, I glance back over my shoulder and confirm my theory. His eyes are narrowed, gaze centered on Lucas's hand resting on my back, and it reminds me of his tone when I'd joked about hooking up with my housemate.

Interesting.

I wanted his attention, and I've got it.

But do I want it at the expense of making him feel jealous? I didn't like feeling that way when I was watching him with those sorority girls or when I'd seen the photo of him kissing one of them.

I've tried denying my attraction to him.

I've tried keeping my distance.

It isn't working.

So maybe it's time to try something else.

CHAD

I THROW BACK A SHOT OF VODKA, PURPOSELY NOT LOOKING IN BAILEY'S direction. He'd been serious about Lucas, then? Here I was thinking we were all jokes, but this doesn't feel like a joke to me.

The taste in my mouth from thinking about those two doing it is worse than this vodka. I throw back another shot, then do a lap of the party.

We've hit the time of the night where the champagne glasses and mini quiches have disappeared and been replaced by jelly shots and party favors.

And jelly shots go down way too easily. I'm buoyed with the boosted confidence alcohol gives me and the burning drive to snap Lucas's hand. It's a dangerous combination, and you can bet your ass that if I had any firecrackers, I'd be setting off every one of them.

I'm repeating the mantra of *respect Bailey's wishes* as I join a bunch of drunk sorority sisters on the dance floor. The more distance I keep between us, the better. Touching him before was too hard, and I won't be doing that again.

The girls are hot as hell, tits out, asses you can bounce a quarter off, but like with everyone I've made an attempt with lately, there's something missing. I'm supposed to be in prime hookup time, but my fucking brain is stuck on Bailey. Since we hooked up, I've made out with a few women but ended up going home alone. And don't even get me started on guys. I can't look at another dude.

It's getting irritating.

I glance back toward Bailey and find him watching me, finally detached from Lucas's grabby mitts. Keeping eye contact with him, I loop an arm around the nearest girl and pull her back against me. She doesn't break a beat as she throws her arms around my neck and grinds her ass into my junk. It does nothing for me. And maybe for the first time in my life, I feel a bit sleazy.

Bailey cocks his head, narrowed stare dropping to my hand on her stomach that I immediately slide to her hip. I'm not sure if it's to push her away or pull her closer, but I grip tight, trying to at least make it look convincing. To make it look like he hasn't got this stupid hold over me that I can't shake.

His eyes flick back up to meet mine, and a corner of his mouth tilts up in

a grin. Then he abruptly turns, says something to Lucas, and heads for the house.

I watch him until he disappears inside, then thank the girl for the dance and follow him.

Pledges are stationed at the back door, so after a quick check behind me to make sure no one is watching, I duck down the side of the house. The narrow walkway is starting to feel familiar as I approach Bailey's window, hoist myself up, and slide it open.

I check the room before I creep inside, but it's empty, and I try not to let that get to me. It's probably too much to hope that he'd be here waiting.

Whatever.

I'm not above sneaking through the house. If they have people watching the doors, then there probably won't be anyone inside hanging around, and if they are, I'll claim King of Thieves and be thrown out. Easy.

I just hope with that option, Bailey doesn't hear about it and realize I was creeping after him.

I crack the door to the hallway and hesitate, trying to decide which way to go, when I hear his voice in the kitchen up ahead.

"... use the bathroom."

Bingo.

My footsteps are quiet as I creep along the hall, and when he ducks into the bathroom without seeing me, I jog the final few steps. The door is already locked.

Shit.

I'm antsy as I wait, prepared to make excuses if anyone else walks down here. The toilet flushes, the water sounds like he's washing his hands, and a few seconds after, it shuts off.

Come on come on come on.

The lock clicks, and he opens the door.

Bailey starts in surprise. "What are you—"

I push him back inside, slide through the gap, and quickly close and lock the door behind us.

"Bailey."

He looks amused, which is a good sign, right? "Chad."

"Fancy running into you here."

"The bathroom in my own house that you've obviously had to sneak into? It *does* seem like an unlikely coincidence."

“A good one though, right?” I clarify.

“It depends.”

“On?”

“Whether you’re here to maul me.”

“And if I was, would we call that good or bad?”

He dodges the question. “I thought we agreed to call this off.”

I step closer. “Yeah, I’m not known for making smart choices, so we can’t rely on my judgment.”

“And mine?”

“Yours is ... misguided. I get your reasons, but no one has to know.”

He catches his bottom lip with his teeth, and fuck it’s adorable.

“Come on, Bailey.” My voice drops.

He crosses his arms and leans his hip against the counter. “What happened to that girl you were dancing with?”

“Who the fuck knows. I couldn’t even tell you who it was. I was too busy watching you.”

“And the one you hooked up with last weekend?”

It’s my turn to cross my arms. “How do you know about that?”

“I have eyes, and you’re avoiding the question.”

“Shit ...” I drag a hand back through my hair, tired of playing games. “Not avoiding, just embarrassed. I’ve kissed a few people since us, trying to make things happen, but ... I can’t ...”

“Can’t what?”

“I can’t stop thinking about you.”

Bailey closes the distance between us. “Why?”

“Why what?”

“What is it about me that makes me any different to all the other people you hook up with?”

“Ah ...” How the hell do I answer that? “I ... well, I really like you.”

His lips purse, like he’s not happy with that answer, so I keep talking.

“It’s too hard to put my finger on it. We don’t know each other very well, and yeah, I think you’re hot, but I also like talking to you. It makes me all nervous and excited, and I’ve missed not having that.”

Bailey takes a long breath. “I’ve missed it too.”

“So can we please, *please* talk again?”

“Sure.”

I heave a sigh of relief, and before I can stop myself, I reach up and trace

his pouty lips. “I promised myself I wouldn’t do this.”

“What?”

“Touch you.”

His lips twitch beneath my fingers. “Why is that?”

“Because now I’m struggling to stop.”

Bailey knocks my hand away, then brings our mouths together. My groan is long and low as I finally taste him again. He backs me into the door, long body slotting perfectly against mine, and I cup his face like he’s glass. Or an illusion.

“I was so pissed off when I saw that photo of you kissing someone,” he murmurs into my mouth.

“I wanted it to be you.”

“I wanted it to be me too.” His lips are soft against mine. “Why are you so addictive?”

“Me? Fuck, Bailey, I—”

My words are cut off by a pounding on the door. It’s loud in my ears, and Bailey immediately pulls back and covers my mouth with his hand.

“What?” he calls.

“Hurry up in there, I need to piss.”

Charles.

Bailey’s eyes widen to match my own. This ... isn’t good.

“Shit,” he mouths.

There’s only one tiny window, which I sure as hell won’t fit through, so I guess it’s into the shower I go.

The curtain is pulled halfway, so I leave it in place and step around it, then press myself against the tiled wall.

“You okay?” Bailey whispers.

“Relax. If he catches me, I’m stealth stealing, and you never saw me.”

“Think you can get to my room?”

“If it takes me all night, I’ll be there.”

He looks like he has to drag himself away, and I get it, I don’t want him to leave either, but it won’t take me long to get back to him.

He thanks Charles for being patient as he leaves, and it almost makes me laugh. The only thing that stops me from slipping is the knowledge that if I’m caught, it’s going to take even more time to get to Bailey.

So I stand there, hidden from Charles, listening to him hum while he takes a leak.

And, fuck, even his peeing is boring.

How does Zeke deal with him?

After the longest few minutes of my life, Charles washes his hands and walks out. Only, another brother walks in, and then another.

I don't know if I want to laugh or cry, and I'm starting to think that giving myself away might be better than having to listen to one more Kappa piss, and then the room is empty.

I make a break for it, only pausing long enough to pick up the soap dispenser and check underneath.

Easy ten points.

I tuck it under my arm and then dart down the hall and around the corner to Bailey's room.

My heart has kicked up a notch as I dart through his door and slam it behind me.

"Took you long enough," he says. He's lying back on his bed, shorts showing off enough thigh to make my mouth water.

"Apparently every brother in your house needed the bathroom. Haven't they ever heard of a tree?"

He snorts. "Sorry we're slightly more civilized than you Sigmas."

"Less initiative, you mean. If it was *me* waiting on *you*, I'd be naked by now."

Bailey chuckles. "I figured you'd want to do the honors."

"I can work with that too." I place the soap dispenser on his desk and point at it. "Mine."

The lamp he stole from me is gone, so if he's handed it in, we're going to need those ten points. It also means he traded it to make friends, so should I be pushing this?

He pops his top button.

Annd that's a yes.

I rid myself of my shirt and climb up the bed until I'm hovering over him. His smile is beautiful, all soft and genuine. I kiss it. Because I can.

"I want to do this again," I say.

"Uh ... isn't that what we're doing here?"

I shake my head. "After tonight. Can we see each other again? Text?"

"Shouldn't we worry about tonight first?"

"But I need to know if I should make the most of it. Because I wanna touch you and get you off fast, but if it's the only time, I'm going to take

things slow.”

His fingers burrow into my hair. “Considering we failed at the one-time-only thing, I have a feeling tonight won’t be enough.”

“Thank fuck.” I might not be able to answer Bailey’s question about *why him*, I just know that my body’s reacting to him in a way that’s completely new and different for me.

And I don’t hate it.

This year might not be going the way I thought it would, but as far as direction changes go, I’m not complaining.

I reach up to touch his face, and when my pulse kicks up, this time it’s not for fear of being caught but from excitement. I stroke his cheek, his neck, my fingertips trailing over his collarbone down to the center of his chest.

I pop the button there.

Then the next one. I keep going until his shirt is undone, and I unwrap his mouthwatering body.

“Kiss me,” he says.

I shake my head. “It’s been too long since I’ve seen you naked.”

My attention moves to his shorts, and I make quick work of them and his boxers.

Bailey stretches his arms over his head and smiles lazily at me.

I lean back on my heels and lick my lips.

He’s all wide, slender shoulders, a narrow waist, long thighs, and lightly shaped calves that are so sexy they make my balls ache. His cock is red and hard, resting against his gut, and when I drag my gaze away from it to his face, I can’t help myself.

I surge forward and kiss him.

Bailey’s legs come up either side of me as his fingers dive into my hair. He matches each moan, each stroke of my tongue, as I try to keep us connected and wriggle out of these damn pants at the same time. It’s slow going, but the minute they’re off and I line our cocks up side by side ... bliss.

“Lube?”

He rolls under me to reach for his nightstand and retrieves it.

“Have you used this with *Lucas* yet?” I ask.

Bailey sniggers. “Careful, you’re sounding jealous again.”

“Don’t act like you don’t like it.”

“It’s definitely an ego stroke I like, but not enough to make you suffer. Lucas hasn’t had the privilege of seeing my lube.”

“What about his?”

“I haven’t seen his either.” Bailey’s voice is teasing. “I haven’t touched anyone since you.”

I cringe. “I wish I could claim that.”

“Me too. But since you’re determined to discuss this when we could be having sex, did you, uh, do anything other than kiss anyone?”

“No.” I quickly shake my head because at least that’s something I can deny. “I didn’t want to.”

“Wow, you’re *really* into me.”

My teeth find his shoulder in a playful nip, and when he laughs, his lips curl up in the corners and his delicate neck arches back, and goddamn he takes my breath away. I wrap my hand around us both, and his laugh abruptly cuts off.

“Mm ... maybe I’m really into you too,” he says.

“That’s better.”

“Or your dick. You or your dick. It’s a fifty-fifty ratio at this point.”

I thrust into my fist, and Bailey’s words die on a moan. Damn that spurs me on. I love making him feel good, I love the silky skin of his cock against mine, I love the little noises he makes and his grasping hands and the way his legs close around me, anchoring me in place.

My thrusts pick up in urgency as I lower my mouth to his throat. He tastes like bodywash and a hint of salt. Masculine. Delicious.

“We’re not falling asleep tonight,” I manage to warn him.

“No?”

“Nope. We’re gonna test out how quickly we can get it up again, and again. I want to blow you. And I want your mouth on me. And then I want both of our mouths on each other. At the same time.”

“Yes.” Bailey grunts. “That one. Now.”

“Now?”

He squirms underneath me, and I reluctantly let him go and pull back. Bailey pushes me onto my back, then grabs some tissues to give us both a quick wipe over, and I suck in a breath as his hand closes around my cock to remove the lube.

“Get your mouth on me,” I whine.

Bailey kisses my lips. “Like that?”

“Bailey ...”

“Maybe you should learn to be more specific.”

“Fine. Your mouth, on my cock. Now.”

“Better.” He nuzzles my jaw, then turns and straddles my head.

Fuck yes. His cock hovers right in front of my face, hard and leaking, and as Bailey guides his dick toward my lips, I meet him halfway.

My mouth closes over the swollen head, and Bailey gasps, giving a little thrust. When all I can feel is his hot breaths on my skin, I can't take it anymore. I reach down to grab his hair and press his face closer.

His tongue flicks out and laps at my slit, running slow, wet patterns over the tip. Mm ... yes. My eyes drift closed, and I let go of Bailey's hair to palm his ass cheeks instead. Damn he's got a sexy ass. So full and round and jiggly. I squeeze it as I take more of his cock into my mouth, humming around the hard length. I'm clumsy and still nowhere near as pro as Bailey, which he demonstrates when he leans forward and takes me into the back of his throat. I almost choke, it feels so good.

I want to make him feel the same way. So even though I'm being overambitious, I tilt my head and take his cock like a champ. I coax his hips into a steady rhythm as spit builds in my mouth. His precum is salty, and it makes my head fuzzy to know he's this turned on for me.

Every bob of his head brushes his curls against my thighs, and I can't stop running my hands from his smooth ass down along the silky shaved skin on his legs and back up again.

I'm trembling, I feel so good. So full of him and this pleasure pumping through my veins.

Bailey starts to suck harder, making my dick throb, and I pick up the pace too. I gag on him, lick and suck and take every thrust. I love his taste. I love this closeness.

His head buried between my thighs as he feeds me his cock.

I feel amazing, want more. My arms close around him until he's flush against me, and I can barely pull back for air. Who needs oxygen when sex feels this good?

My hips start to get in on the action as I suck one of my fingers into my mouth alongside his dick, then reach around to slide it between his ass cheeks. I go slow, waiting for a sign that he's not okay with it, but Bailey groans and spreads his legs wider, giving me better access.

Yes ...

Fuck, yes ...

I find his hole and start to massage the skin, working him looser until I

breach him. He presses back, forcing me deeper, and when I'm finally in far enough to stroke his prostate, Bailey starts to lose control.

He thrusts into my mouth out of rhythm and clearly not holding back. I try to keep up with him, to make him blow. I want to taste his cum again. While I finger his ass, I reach for his head, then hold him in place while I fuck his face.

All my senses are in overdrive, nerves humming, dick ready to shoot. It feels so good I'm struggling to hold back, to keep my brain from exploding and devolving into the messy, incoherent state it becomes after an orgasm, but Bailey's muffled moans and the slippery suction he has around my dick are making it impossible to stave off.

He needs to come first.

I relax my throat and force his cock down it.

The moment I gag around him, his dick gives a jerk, and then he's coming. I gulp as much of it down as I can, chasing his cock as he tries to pull back and rubbing his prostate through it, until his body turns to jelly and he slumps against me.

Bailey's hand wraps around the base of my cock, and he starts to stroke me hard and fast, sucking on the tip. My eyes roll back as relief crashes into me. Tingles race from the base of my spine to my balls, and then I'm letting loose, grunting through my release.

My chest is heaving when I start to check back in and find Bailey looking down at me.

"Tell me I blew your brains out."

My laugh is shaky, and I nod. "It definitely feels that way."

He kisses me, and my taste on his tongue ... fuck, it does something to me. Something primal and claimy, and instead of hating it, I'm addicted. I want more.

"That was just the appetizer," I warn him. "We've got a lot of ground to cover tonight."

BAILEY

THE LAST FEW DAYS WITH CHAD ARE AMAZING. WE DON'T GET TO SEE EACH other much, but his filthy or flirty or funny texts blow up my phone with zero chill. He's busy a lot, but it feels like every time I check my phone, his name is there waiting for me.

I send a text as I sneak out the front door of our house.

Me: *Almost there*

Chad: *Ten-four, good buddy*

I smirk at the reply, then hurry up the dark street and around the corner to where Chad is waiting by my car.

"Ten-four?" I mock, hitting the button to unlock my car. Chad quickly darts inside before anyone sees him with me, and I slide into the driver's side.

"We're being all cloak-and-dagger. We've gotta have secret codes and stuff too."

"Okay, but when did we join the military?"

"If I'm honest, I don't know what it means, it just sounds cool. And now you've called me on it, I'm feeling a whole lot less cool, so thanks for that."

"Anytime." I switch on the car and pull away from the curb. "Where are we heading?"

"That way."

I snort. "My eyes are on the road. You might want to be more specific."

"Ah ... left? Yeah, left."

I throw on my blinker and turn the corner. "Where are we going?"

"Down to the waterfront. I figured we'd grab some food and have dinner, and since we didn't want to be spotted by anyone, we can have our date on the hood of your car."

"How high school of you."

"You think I had a car in high school? I'm only at WHU because of the scholarship."

Ouch. I love putting my foot in it. "Sorry, I—"

He laughs and waves me off. "It's all good."

"Is the scholarship for football?"

"Yep. I'm not smart enough to get an academic one."

"I'm sure you're—"

"Bailey." He reaches over to squeeze my thigh. "You don't need to do the

thing where you feel awkward about what I don't have and try to boost me up with empty words. I'm not saying those things to make you feel bad or whatever. I didn't have a car, and I'm *not* smart enough for a scholarship, but they're not bad things that I want you feeling sorry for me about, because I really don't care."

I shift awkwardly. "I guess it's my default to boost people up."

"That's pretty cool."

"But you're saying not to do it, so now I'm confused."

Chad's hand doesn't move from my thigh, the warmth from his palm seeping through my shorts. "Boosting people up is awesome, but it's pointless when you're having to lie to do it, you know? Like saying I'm smart when I'm not does nothing."

"It feels weird."

"I get that, and maybe other people are different, but I love my life. I'm not looking for sympathy."

"Okay." I pull up at the Chinese place Chad has directed us to, and he runs inside to order. I wish I'd gotten to it first, but when he climbs back in the car with containers full of food and I suggest I should have paid, he waves me away.

"I can afford to treat you to thirty bucks worth of takeout."

"I just—"

"This is one of those times you're allowed to not argue." He gives me a grin that makes my stomach swoop. He has perfectly straight, white teeth, except for one incisor that overlaps the tooth beside it. His eyes are huge and brown, the perfect definition of puppy dog eyes, but when he smiles, they get all crinkly in the corners, and his hands are huge, with long, thick fingers. I can't stop flashing back to having one of those fingers inside me.

"You okay?" he asks.

"Sort of wishing we stayed in now." My voice comes out raspier than I mean it to.

We catch eyes, and heat flares between us.

"As much as I love having sex with you," he says. "And I do. Like, a whole lot. I also want to get to know you, and it's sorta hard to have a conversation when my dick is in your mouth."

"I think you underestimate my multitasking skills."

Chad clicks and points at me. "We'll be trying that out later. But for now, drive, Princess. I'm starving."

It's the worst name, but I don't bother asking him not to use it. As annoying and ridiculous as it is, I like that it's a thing only we have.

Chad directs me to a parking lot on the water. He's brought a large blanket that he spreads over the hood, and then we climb up and set out the containers between us.

"Where'd you transfer from?" Chad asks.

"The University of Vermont. I wanted to be closer to my family."

"Where are they?"

"New York. It's why they can drive up most weekends."

"It's cute you're close with them."

He squirms. "Shut up. Nothing about me is cute."

"*Everything* about you is cute."

"This is one of those situations where you don't have to lie." I'm feeling smug about throwing his words back at him, but Chad reaches over and tugs one of my curls.

"Maybe I used the word 'cute' because I'm trying to be cool and play hard to get. If I go around calling you beautiful all the time, my dude-bro card will be revoked."

I try not to show what the compliment does to me. "I think you're already in danger of that by taking me on a waterfront picnic."

"Nah." Chad shakes his head. "Romance is frat as fuck. Scaring off the guy you're interested in, not so much."

"I'll have to remember that." It's taking all of my willpower not to laugh at his serious tone. "What else is frat as fuck?"

He starts ticking off on his fingers. "Nights out with the brothers, TJ Crew, being real with each other—none of that wait three days to call bullshit, being bi—" He winks at me.

"What about gay?"

"Definitely frat, but *not* frat as fuck."

My lips twitch. "My mistake. Carry on."

"Accepting people for who they are, blow-up kiddie pools on a hot day, pranks on Greek Row, and taking pictures with your guy's family."

"*Your* guy's?"

"In general. Totally not referring to a specific event."

"Of course not." I watch as he opens the containers and hands me a metal fork.

"Where did this come from?"

“The house—we had to buy more after you guys stole them all. Better than plastic forks, but there’s not much I can do about the containers.”

“True ...” I eye him, not sure what I expected Chad to be like outside of messages and the bedroom, but this definitely wasn’t it. I turn the fork over and find a tiny number one on it. “This is coming home with me.”

“What? No way. Dates are off-limits for King of Thieves.”

“That argument would be valid if we hadn’t already stolen something every time we’ve met up.”

“Okay, you’ve got me there.”

We trade stories back and forth about our lives back home. Chad’s from Georgia—all over with the number of times they’ve moved, but most recently Atlanta—and he has twin sisters, who his parents had when he was in high school. They’re six, and adorable, and I smile as he flicks through his phone, showing me photos, clearly proud as hell of them.

“They’re never going to join a sorority,” he says.

I tilt my head. “You’re going to stop them?”

“Sure will.”

“The only teenage girl I know is my sister, and if I tried to tell Rachel she couldn’t do something, she’d want to do it more.”

“I’m their cool big brother. They’ll listen.”

“Maybe *now* you are. But by the time they’re ready to rush, you’ll be like ... thirty-something.” I nudge him. “That’s ancient in teen girl years.”

His frown is adorable.

“Okay, I’m listening,” I say. “Why don’t you want them to join Greek life?”

“I don’t want asshole frat dudes treating them like ass. They’re little queens, and they deserve to be treated that way.”

“See, normally here is where I assure you that everything will be okay, but ... you wanted me to be real with you, right?”

“Yes ...”

“I’d say most of us are total shitheads as teenagers. Maybe they’ll be lucky and escape that, but there’s a high chance they’re going to want to have the full college experience. Drinking, frat parties, hooking up ... it comes with the territory. You can’t protect them from that.”

He scowls and sets his phone aside. “I don’t like the thought of that.”

“How do you think I feel? Rachel graduates high school this year, and when I look at her, all I see is my kid sister.” I pretend to shudder. “I’m so

glad I'll be out of here by the time she hits college."

"I'm not." Chad rubs his jaw. "I want to be there to protect them."

"They wouldn't want you to. I'd say instead of trying to get them to steer clear, you should keep setting the example of the type of guy—assuming they swing that way—they should be aligning their standards with. Kind, fun, dedicated, insightful."

Chad shifts closer. "What else?"

"I have plenty more I could say, but they're probably things your sisters don't need to know about you."

"Lucky they're not here." He pushes the food aside and slides over so he's right next to me. "What other things?"

I tug my bottom lip between my teeth as I look him over. "Sexy. So fucking sexy. Your face and your body, but also your confidence." I lean in so my lips brush his ear. "And the way you let go in the bedroom. I love how you go with the flow and want to make me feel good."

Chad groans and pushes down on his groin. "Maybe this whole talking thing is overrated. I take it back. I want to stay in and have sex."

My face presses into his shoulder as I laugh. "The other night wasn't enough for you?"

"Not even close." Chad hooks his arm around my waist. "I hope you're ready for marathon orgasms every weekend, which will be totally all your fault."

"Am I supposed to feel bad?"

"You should take pity on my dick. I'm going to turn into a necromaniac."

I blink at him. "Umm ... *please* tell me you mean nymphomaniac? Because one of those things I'm okay with. The other might be a deal breaker."

"Wait, what did I say?" His deep voice squeaks with confusion.

"I think you told me you want to have sex with dead people."

He recoils. "Oh, no. Definitely your thing, then. And—" His eyes narrow at me. "—what do you mean 'might' have been a deal breaker? I've gotta say, that's a hard limit for me."

"You *are* really hot."

"Good argument."

I rest my head against his. "And we're officially the shallowest people on earth."

"Nah, pretty sure the shallowest people on earth don't know they're

shallow.”

“Isn’t that stupid?”

“Seems like the same thing to me.”

Good point. We finish eating, leaning against each other, laughing and talking smack and laughing even more. Chad’s an easy person to hang out with and an easier one to like. He’s ... genuine, and for someone to not set off my bullshit radar, they have to be ridiculously down-to-earth. He teases me, and even though he knows who I am, and I should probably be careful since he doesn’t come from money, I just ... can’t. I’ve met a lot of greedy people who only want to be around me because of my family, and either Chad’s a great actor, or he’s not one of them.

And in a rare move for me, I decide to lean toward the latter. Give the benefit of the doubt. It’s a huge jump from my usual suspicious nature, but it fits.

I’m able to relax and not second-guess every word out of his mouth, and I fucking like it. I want more of this, and it’s shit that we have to sneak around like this, late after his practice on a Tuesday night just so we can see each other.

There has to be a way for me to see him and for my brothers to be cool with it.

But things are still early days between us, and until I know if this is the real deal and not some short-term hooking up, there’s no point pushing for anything other than what this is.

Because what this is feels pretty damn good.

And I want to see where it goes.

CHAD

“ALL RIGHT, FUCKERS, LISTEN UP!” ZEKE YELLS FROM WHERE HE’S STANDING on our front deck. “We’ve got five hours before we have to meet back here. Any items back past the time limit don’t count, and we only include what’s on the list. Other than that, the only rules are not to be dickheads or dangerous. Today is about fun. Any questions?”

There aren’t, because we’ve all filled our pledges in, and you can taste the competition on the air. Everyone wants to get started already.

All of Greek Row is gathered on the grass out the front of our house and the one next door, ready for our annual scavenger hunt. I’m pumped. I love this day. It’s cool, but the sky is a clear blue without a cloud in sight, like Mother fucking Nature herself is blessing this sacred competition.

I’m on our front deck with the rest of my house, all of us wearing high-vis construction vests and hard hats, ready to start working on a plan of attack as soon as we have our lists.

My gaze creeps across the lawn toward where Kappa House are, even though I’ve been trying my best not to look. They’re all wearing bright pink tutus and have sweatbands around their heads. Bailey’s black curls are a mess around it, his cheeks are flushed pink—either from the excitement of today or catching me watching him, who knows?—and he looks so goddamn adorable, I’m itching to pull out my phone and take a photo.

I realized last night that I only have the selfie he sent me ages ago, and he doesn’t put up many on social media. I need more. Time to rectify that.

A spark of inspiration hits, and I jump up onto the handrail of the deck, holding on to the awning above for support. Then I start taking random photos that prompt cheers and raised hands. I take a group shot, then start snapping one of each house, getting more and more random until ... I point my phone in Bailey’s direction and get the shot.

How’s that for smart?

I’m feeling clever when I jump back down and angle away from my brothers to inspect the image. The smart-ass is wearing a small smirk, like he knows exactly what I’m up to, and—I scowl. Lucas is inside the frame, throwing up a peace sign and begging me to punch him in the face. I zoom in, screenshot the picture minus Lucas, and delete the original. Much better.

It goes to show how much Bailey distracts me that I hadn’t even noticed

Lucas standing with him in the first place.

I'm not jealous because that would be dumb. Bailey told me he has zero interest in Lucas, so that's awesome, but knowing Lucas wants in on my man and not being able to tell him to back off doesn't sit right.

And ... well, *my man* might be a stretch. We've hooked up again, and we text a lot, and I'm starting to really like him, but dating in secret feels like a lot of work.

Every time we start talking about what this is or what we're doing, we both steer the conversation away. It's easier like that. And considering we'd first agreed that nothing else would happen, I'm happy to go along for now.

I startle as Zeke slides a piece of paper in front of my face.

"You're up, VP."

"Hell yeah." I snatch it from him as the rest of the house gathers around. Zeke and the other presidents are the ones who set the tasks, so they don't get to join in today.

I give the list a quick scan. There is the easy shit like lawn ornaments and visiting certain sites, taking a quarter from the fountain on campus. Then there are embarrassing tasks like buying adult diapers and doing something humiliating that need to be filmed.

We've got this. Between Robbie, Brandon, and me, we've got the embarrassing things covered—I'll buy a jumbo pack of diapers and call for a price check over the PA if I have to.

Then my eyes snag on one item we've done before but I've never given much thought to.

Kiss someone from another house.

The answer is simple: kiss a sorority sister. But I haven't got my reputation around here for playing it safe, and a fun idea is starting to form.

I could totally tell Robbie I'm going big, get him ready with a camera, and then haul Bailey into a kiss. It'll look spontaneous and random, the guys will get a laugh, and I'll get to kiss him in front of everyone.

My grin eats my face.

Fucking perfect.

Our house splits into five groups. Each one has someone in charge of communicating with the other teams and someone in charge of looking after the items and getting back here okay. Then we have one group assigned specifically to sabotage the other houses. If we get into one of their videos, the video is void. If we can make off with their shit, it's added to our tally.

Every person on the row takes the competition seriously, and I goddamn love it. When I graduate, all this goes away. It's into the world of nine-to-fives and minimum wage, so for right now, I throw myself into life at a hundred and ten percent. If people think that makes me a troublemaker or an asshole, so be it.

I don't ever want to leave this place with regrets.

"Everyone clear?" I ask the guys, and we all split off.

Carter and Raymond are staying behind to watch the house with Zeke, because days like today, where everyone is distracted, are golden opportunities to stealth steal. I'd be doing it if I didn't want to miss out on the fun.

I leave with Robbie, Brandon, and two other guys. For once, Robbie's old dude pants, with more pockets than I can count, actually make sense.

"All right, ladies, what first?" Robbie asks, rubbing his hands together.

"I say we go for the big points. Let everyone else focus on the small shit."

"Love that plan!" He whacks Brandon's chest with the back of his hand.

"Go get your sex doll. I'll piggyback her around until we find a place for her photo shoot."

I glance at the list and read, *Take a photo of a sex toy somewhere random.* Huh. Well, okay then.

I'm expecting Brandon to argue when he ducks back inside and comes out a few minutes later with a blow-up doll.

"Wow."

He laughs. "Don't worry, I don't use her. Robbie hung her in my room as a gag birthday gift. She lives there now."

"Thought it would scare off your hookup," Robbie mutters as they tie the arms around his neck, and he grabs the legs.

"Fuck, at least put your vest around her. She's showing off way too much back here," I say.

Brandon takes off his vest and puts it on the doll, and then we're ready to go.

Most of the other houses have already disappeared, including Bailey, but we've got most of the day to get through the list. The problem is, we end up spread out all across campus and the surrounding neighborhoods, so there's a very real chance I won't see Bailey at all.

As I jog alongside Brandon and Robbie, I sneakily pull out my phone and text him to see where he is.

Bailey: *Nuh uh. You're the enemy today*

Me: *Cheeky boy. I just need to see you real quick. Promise it'll be a few seconds and I'll be out of your hair*

Bailey: *Need another photo? Don't think you were subtle*

Me: *You looked so cute, you can't hold that against me*

Bailey: *I won't, but my trust in you is temporarily suspended today. You're up to something, don't think I'm not on to you*

Me: *Probably fair. You're smarter than I gave you credit for*

I pocket my phone, and we get to it. Worst case, we'll leave the kiss until last, and when we all get back there, I'll grab him right before the time comes to an end. It's risky, but I'm up for the challenge. I just have to make sure no one else from my team does that one first. And there's a very high chance they will—who would pass up a chance to hook up with a hottie?

Not me.

Which is why I've gotta track my sexy guy down.

We throw some ideas around on where to put *Sally* as they tell me the doll is called. The dean's flagpole is one option—actual flagpole, not euphemism—and hanging from the middle of the quad is another, but I want something good. Something that will make our photo voted the best for bonus points.

“Oooohhh,” Robbie says, spinning to me. “Deja Brew.”

“You want coffee?”

“Nah, man. Let's take her in there, put your apron on her, and have her serve me at the register.”

It could work. “My boss is cool, but is she *that* cool?”

“Make a call. Come on.”

Might as well, I guess. It will give us a chance to grab a branded glass from there too—so long as I promise to return it.

I call my boss and explain what we're doing, and she says if we can get there in the lull before the lunch rush starts, then we can do it. The three of us have never run so fast in our lives, and that includes yesterday's football game when the score was down to the wire.

Misty is behind the counter when we arrive, holding up my apron. We pass off the doll to her as I hunch over and try to catch my breath.

She eyes me. “I thought you were supposed to be fit.”

“We ran the length of campus to get here.”

Brandon tilts back his hard hat and wipes the sweat from his forehead.

“This photo better be worth it.”

Robbie pats him on the back with a big, heavy hand. “We got this.”

I end up crouching behind the counter, holding the doll’s arms out, while Robbie pretends to pay and Brandon takes the photo. We do a few poses, including one where she’s lounging across the counter, before people start to trickle in the doors, and Misty kicks us out. I shove a tall glass coffee cup in one of Robbie’s pockets, and we leave.

And it’s on our way back to campus that I see a bright flash of pink.

A group of Kappas is up ahead, and I bite back a grin at the mess of black curls I spot.

“I think I’ve had an idea for one of these other ones,” I say.

“Oh yeah?”

“Brandon, what does a Kappa hate most?”

He shrugs. “Us.”

“Get your cameras ready, gentlemen. I’m about to piss a whole lot of them off.” And get Bailey’s mouth on me a whole lot earlier than I thought.

“Ready when you are,” Robbie says, holding up his phone.

I make a show of cracking my neck and rolling out my shoulders.

Here we go.

I break into a jog, thankful none of the assholes have spotted me yet, and when I reach them, I hear someone ask, “Doomsen, what are you—”

I loop an arm around Bailey’s back, bury a hand in his hair, and kiss him.

Even though it’s all for show, his lips on me feel *right*. It’s fucking wild how perfectly his body fits against mine. I want to kiss him properly, to sweep my tongue into his mouth and feel his own, but I keep it simple.

Well, simple *and* dramatic.

Our lips mold together as I bend him back over my arm. Our kiss lasts a second ... two ... three, then four. He doesn’t push me away, but I wish he would because it’s nearly impossible for me to end this.

BAILEY

IT'S ONLY WHEN CHAD'S FRIENDS START HOOTING AND CHEERING THAT I remember myself and pull back. Chad's eyes are bright, and he looks like he's trying not to laugh. We share a small smile before I'm yanked away from him.

"What the hell was that?" Lucas asks.

"Item number fifty-four." Chad holds up the list and points to a random spot. Then he winks at me. "Thanks for the easy points, Princess."

I force myself not to react.

"What happened to a little thing called consent?" Lucas pushes.

"Funny," I say. "I seem to remember you thinking it was hilarious when Jordan hooked up with that sorority sister an hour ago."

"That's ... this is ..."

"It's fine," I cut him off. "It's just a game, right?"

Lucas angles his body toward me. "You sure you're okay?"

I'd almost laugh at his concern, because I can tell he's being genuine, but I also suspect it comes from jealousy more than anything else. "Yeah, all good."

Lucas nods, then gives my arm a squeeze. I notice Chad tracks the movement out of the corner of my eye, and I decide that I really need to have a chat with Lucas. Since the whole coming out to each other thing, he's been getting more handsy than usual. He's a nice guy, and maybe if Chad wasn't around, I might be interested, but I'm not. And I owe it to him to be clear about that.

Chad grabs Lucas's shoulder and pulls him back. "It almost sounds like you want to pucker up instead, sweetheart."

"You wish, Doomsen." Lucas shoves Chad off him.

Chad and his friends start to back up. "See you guys back on the row. We really appreciate you helping us win."

They jog off, and I watch them for a second when Jordan says, "Was that a blow-up doll?"

"Gross." Lucas sneers.

I cover my laugh and fall behind the others to pull out my phone as we head to the next task.

Me: *What was that?*

Chad: *A kiss. Was it okay? You're not mad?*

Me: *Definitely not. I think Lucas wants to hit you though*

Chad: *The feeling is mutual*

Me: *There's no need for it to be. I'm going to talk to him later and tell him I'm not interested*

Chad: *A sneaky kiss AND you putting that douche in his place? Is it Christmas?*

Me: *He's not a douche. He's actually nice, you just don't like him because he wants in my pants*

Chad: *Sure, remind me of that fact when I'm already tempted to come back there and kiss you again*

Me: *Once wasn't enough?*

Chad: *It never is*

I chuckle as I tuck my phone back away. There're still a few hours left of the scavenger hunt, and we tick off as many items as we can. Lucas is in touch with some of the other teams, and while I'm having fun and enjoying myself, these guys take it more seriously than I was prepared for.

"So, what exactly do we win with this thing?" I ask as Jordan takes a selfie with the fountain on campus and tucks a coin into his backpack.

"Bragging rights," he says.

"That's it?"

"And the Heroes Hunt trophy."

"Heroes hunt?"

Lucas nods. "Yeah, it's what the scavenger hunt is officially called, but no one uses that name anymore."

"Right. So, you guys get super intense about winning bragging rights and a trophy."

"Correct."

I shouldn't be surprised.

"Only, it's not exactly a trophy anymore," Jordan adds.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the Sigmas won it like two years ago, and they broke the trophy while they were celebrating, so they glued the remaining pieces to a dildo."

"A dildo?"

"Yep. Haven't you noticed it hanging next to their front door?"

I can safely say I've never noticed a dildo hanging by the entrance to Sigma House, not that I ever have a reason to go there. If we win this

illustrious totem, will we also have to hang it over the front porch? I'm not sure I want to be walking past that every day. But hey, frat honor is a big thing to play for ... I guess.

Time is moving slower since that kiss though, and there are no more messages from Chad, which isn't a surprise when he's basically a man-child for events like these. A few weeks ago, that would have been a massive turnoff, since I've never understood people who take the fraternity thing too seriously, but ... well, first, there's nothing serious about Chad. And second, seeing his uncontrolled excitement for everything? It's ... nice. Different. And when that excitement is focused on me, it's hot as hell.

He lives in the moment.

I'm always five plans ahead.

I've always been comforted by forward planning, but that kiss spiked my adrenaline in a way that nothing other than being with him has done in a long time. Instead of worrying about people seeing us together and mitigating the risk, I'd relaxed into what was happening and forgot to stress about the implications.

Chad is supposed to be all about scratching an itch.

I'm not supposed to have fun with him.

I'm not supposed to crave him when he's not around.

I'm not supposed to fall asleep with a smile on my face from messaging him all night.

This isn't going exactly to plan.

The frustrating thing, though, is I don't actually know *how* it's going. We don't talk about it, and while some of that is my fault because I have no clue what I want, it's also stressing me out not to have direction. I'm not a go-with-the-flow kind of guy, so trying to match Chad's level is a challenge.

"Still can't believe Doomsen did that," Lucas says, falling back to walk with me while the others go on ahead.

"Yeah, random."

He frowns. "I suppose. It sort of seemed like he targeted *you* though."

Yikes. This isn't a conversation I'm interested in having. "Maybe because he doesn't know me, so that made it easier? I don't know."

"Could be it." Lucas flashes me his crooked smile. "I, umm, felt weird watching you with him."

Discomfort slivers down my spine as I realize we're about to have *that* conversation. Well, at least that will make it easier for me to turn him down

without having to bring it up myself.

“Because it was Ch—Doomsen?”

“Nah,” he says quickly before changing his mind. “Well, yes, but not only because of him.”

I swipe my tongue over my lips. “Look, I—”

“Bailey, just ... I want to say ...” He laughs awkwardly again. “This is hard to get out, but I didn’t like it because I wanted to be the one doing it.”

Oh no. There it is.

Trust me to make friends with the one guy in the house who wants to hit on me. Getting out of this with our friendship still intact is unlikely, but I want to try.

“Huh.”

Yeah, I need to do better than that.

I clear my throat. “That makes sense.” I cringe because that response isn’t any better. Before I can lose my nerve, I spin around and block Lucas’s path. “I’m sorry, like, a lot. But I don’t feel that way.”

His tan cheeks immediately get taken over by a red flush. “Oh. Yeah. Cool. No, totally, that’s totally fine. I get it.”

Lucas looks like he wishes the ground would swallow him up, and honestly, I feel the same. His awkwardness is rubbing off on me to the point where I can’t even pretend to feel normal about this.

We start to walk again, but my mind has gone blank.

“Think we’ll win today?” I ask, trying to steer things back to regular conversation and not images of us sticking our tongues down each other’s throats.

“Ah, probably not.” He manages a light tone, but it’s clear he’s not feeling it. “I can’t remember the last time our house did.”

“That sucks.”

“Yep.”

Goddamn, I’m not cut out for this. The thing is, Lucas is good-looking. If we weren’t brothers from the same fraternity and he was a random I met out, I probably wouldn’t think twice about hooking up with him. But he’s the kind of guy I can’t get a read on properly. Where I can tell without having to ask that Chad doesn’t give a shit who my family are, I don’t get the same vibes from Lucas.

He doesn’t strike me as the type to have ulterior motives, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t a subconscious part of him after the status of being friendly

with me.

The conversation is done now though. Hopefully it doesn't ruin our friendship, but if it does, that can't be helped. I don't owe him feelings just because he thinks he feels something for me. He barely knows me.

Sigh. I want Chad.

He'd know what to say to boost me up, but there's every chance he's busy doing a striptease in the quad or breaking into the dean's office.

I mean, I didn't actually look at the list, but those are things I'd assume he'd do for fun.

Half an hour before the cutoff, we start to make our way back to Greek Row. It's still early afternoon, and the presidents who stayed behind today have set up on the Beta's lawn and are manning the grills. The smell of meat and onions fills the street, and I follow my brothers to grab some food since we're back well within the time limit. The only people who aren't back yet are Chad and the guys he was with, but when it's five minutes until cutoff, they come tearing down the road, Robbie still wearing that ridiculous blow-up doll on his back.

They pull up close, chests heaving, and Chad catches my eyes and lightly nudges my jaw with his knuckles as he passes where I'm standing. He regroups with the rest of his house.

Lucas scoffs. "He's playing with you."

He is, but it's not like I can point out that I like it, is it?

So instead, I wait until no one is paying me any attention and text that I need to see him.

His reply to meet me out the back of Sigma House comes immediately, and with everyone concentrating on eating and tallying up our points, I'm able to slip away.

I don't see Chad leave, but he's disappeared before me, and as soon as I step into their backyard, he stoops down to grab me around the thighs and hoists me into the air.

"Fuck," I gasp and scramble to grab his shoulders.

"Hey, cutie."

"Put me down, you idiot."

His hold loosens so I can slide down his body until I'm level with his smug face. "On a scale of one to ten, how much does Lucas wanna kill me right now?"

"Hard eleven. But I'd say we're on even footing."

“Oh yeah?”

I cringe. “I told him I wasn’t interested.”

Chad eyes me for a second. “Would you be if I wasn’t around?”

“That’s a dumb question because you are.”

“I just mean—”

I laugh and brush his lips with mine. “I know what you mean, and the answer is no. I don’t hook up with my brothers. You done talking about Lucas yet? Pretty sure that’s not why we’re here.”

His gaze sharpens. “Why are we here?”

“For this.” I shove him against the side of the house and kiss him. It’s everything I wanted from the one earlier and more. His hands cup my face, and I press a thigh between his, coming into contact with his hardening cock. “Damn, you feel good.”

He nips my bottom lip. “I wanna see you tonight.”

“My room?”

“I don’t know, it’s only a matter of time before I’m caught sneaking around there, and then that option will be gone.”

“I could ... get a hotel room?”

He pulls back, looking surprised. “Could we? I have sweet fuck all money though, so it’d be on you. Is that against dating code or something? Shouldn’t we both throw in?”

“Nope. You paid for dinner the other night; this can be my turn.”

“You sure?” His warm eyes blink at me sweetly. Having a guy ask for me to pay *should* be sending up red signals or feel sleazy, but ... it doesn’t. He’s not apologizing for not having the money, or making excuses, or making me feel used. Like he said the other night, it’s a fact that he doesn’t have money, and he doesn’t want pity for it.

I made an offer, and Chad is taking me up on it. Simple as that.

“I’m sure. I selfishly want to spend the whole night with you without you having to sneak out the next morning.”

Chad kisses me again. “In that case, I’m sold. Text me where and when and I’ll meet you.”

“What about the party tonight?”

“It’ll be insane. No one will even notice we’re gone.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

He scoops me back up again, running kisses over my neck and making me squirm from how it tickles under his stubble. “Now, let’s go back so I can

be crowned winner, and tonight, you can congratulate me.”

“Is that how it’s going to be?”

“We’re basically a sure thing.”

I grin as my feet hit the ground again. “And how do you want to be congratulated?”

Chad squeezes my ass, and his voice drops so it’s deep and rough. “I’m sure we’ll come up with something.”

CHAD

IT'S NO SURPRISE TO ANYONE WHEN WE WIN. THE KAPPAS ARE PISSED, WHICH makes it that much sweeter, and then Bailey's message comes through with a hotel and room number, and it puts me on top of the damn moon. There are still two hours until the time he said to meet, but after the text, I don't see him again.

The celebrations start early, and we haul that damn trophy down and pass it around like it's made of gold. I don't drink though. Not with the night ahead I have planned, because when Bailey didn't shoot down my very obvious suggestion, I have to assume he's on the same page as me.

If not, I'll find out soon enough.

I'll be happy with whatever as long as we're naked.

I'm on cloud fucking nine as I tell Robbie I'm going to take a leak but head to my room and pack a bag instead. Most of my hookups are spontaneous—I haven't dated anyone since high school—so this whole planning to go out and see someone is new and different. I'm pretty sure I have butterflies, which is another first for me.

I'm not paying attention as I throw a random assortment of clothes into my bag, then zip it up and head out. Tomorrow morning, I have an 8:00 a.m. class that I'm definitely going to miss because I plan on staying in that room until checkout.

The hotel Bailey's booked us into is one of those semi-fancy chain ones that looks like a pile of glass and cement. I bypass the valet and park my beat-up old wagon in the parking lot around back before shouldering my bag and heading for the elevator.

He checked in about ten minutes ago, and as I glance around the lobby as I cross it, I can't help the excitement of us having this secret. At the thrill of being busted, even though all the people we know are likely writing themselves off back at the house.

Two minutes later and I'm knocking on the door of our room, butterflies bursting into a hurricane in my gut while I wait.

What is it about this guy?

Why does he make me feel all stupid and uncool? Like I don't wanna talk around him because I'm scared the next words out of my mouth will scare him off?

Then Bailey opens the door, and all those nerves somehow get worse while settling at the same time. I stare at him, taking in his gorgeous face.

“Two hours?” I groan. “Were you trying to torture me?”

He gives me that pretty smile, grabs a fistful of my T-shirt, and pulls me into the room. The door slams closed.

I back him into the wall.

“We could have met sooner,” he says, “but I had things to attend to.”

“Things?”

His smile morphs into a smirk. “If I’m going to congratulate you properly, I needed to prepare.”

I can feel my forehead crumpling under my confusion. “What do you—”

Bailey snorts. “Let me guess. You’ve never bottomed before?”

“I don’t—” Bottomed ... prepared ... “Oh ...”

He wraps his arms around my neck. “You tops make me laugh.”

“Am I top?”

Bailey lifts a dark eyebrow. “Would you ever bottom?”

“Dunno.” I shrug and wrap my arms around him. “Never given it much thought. Maybe though. Probably. I mean, I should try it once at least, I guess.”

“You went from not knowing to being ready to bend over *really* fast there.”

“I’m all for trying new things. Do you top? Would you do it?”

He looks like he’s trying not to laugh. “Uh ... I have topped before. And if you wanted to try it, I’m in—”

“That’s what he said.”

Bailey rolls his eyes. “But maybe you should take more than a second to think about it?”

“Sure.” It doesn’t bother me either way. “But as you’ve probably noticed, I don’t tend to think things through too deeply. It sounds fun, so let’s try it sometime.”

It takes him so long to answer, I start to feel self-conscious. “You’re pretty incredible, you know that?”

It occurs to me that other than telling me how sexy I am, Bailey doesn’t give out compliments often. My gut swims. “Umm ... thank you? And also, why?”

“You’re so confident in yourself. Like, you know what you want, so you go for it. You don’t get bogged down in details or stress or overthink, you

just ... do. I wish I was more like that.”

“You’d be the only one. Those things are the reason most people on the row hate me.”

“Actually, I think the reason has more to do with you pranking them and causing general mayhem than anything else.”

I think back over the last month or so and figure he might have a point. “Yeah, maybe. Good times.”

He buries his face into my neck, warm breath fanning over my skin. His lips follow it. Soft, sure, waking goose bumps and making my body hum.

I pull back, running my hands along his arms until our fingers are linked, and then I walk backward, pulling him into the room.

“This is awesome,” I say. The room has a huge bed, a small area to sit and watch TV, and a door to the bathroom on the other side. The most important thing is it’s private. We could be in some backwater motel, and as long as it had a bed, I’d be happy.

“I was surprised how much was available at the last minute.”

“Will your parents care that you shelled out all this money?”

“Nah.” He hesitates and then forces himself to keep talking. “Especially not if I tell them who I was with.”

That shouldn’t make me as happy as it does. Like there’s sunshine deep in my gut. “I *told* you, all the old chicks love me.”

“Wait until I tell my mom you called her an old chick, and I can promise that one hundred percent will not be the case.”

“I don’t even think that would work. I’m adorable.” I sigh like it’s too much to deal with.

“Delusional is more like it.”

“Would we call it delusional when it’s fact though?”

“So humble too.”

“You *just* told me you liked my confidence.”

“Confidence not conceit.” Bailey nudges me down onto the bed, and I drop my bag at the foot of it. Then he slowly takes his time climbing up to straddle my thighs.

A desperate little noise comes from me. “My mistake,” I say, struggling to hold on to the thread of conversation. He makes me so dumb for him. As soon as his body fits against mine, I want to forget about everything and let myself feel. I’m barely human, just a bundle of nerves waiting for him to set them all on fire.

His fingers creep up my chest, skim my nipples, rest against my neck.
“What are you thinking about?”

“How much I want you.”

“And how much is that?”

“Enough that I’d do basically anything right now.”

Bailey tilts his head. “Oh really?”

I’m quick to nod.

He chuckles, dropping his forehead to mine as his fingers reach my jaw.

“I think we also need to teach you the word limits.”

“Maybe I need to teach *you* the word ‘naked.’”

“Lucky for you, I already know that one.” Bailey stands and stretches his hands over his head, showing off that long, lithe body. My eyes drop to the sliver of pale, smooth skin running along the top of his pants, and when I glance back up, he’s watching me like that was totally on purpose. I run a finger over it, and he shivers. The sight makes my cock thicken behind my zipper.

I reach out and pop the button on his jeans as Bailey peels off his T-shirt. His light eyes have darkened, making my pulse creep higher as he watches me while he strips out of his clothes. When he’s standing there in only his boxers, I’m met with the mouthwatering sight of his hard cock tenting the material and revealing the tiniest glimpse of skin through the opening in the front.

“Fuck.” My head drops back. “You have no idea what you do to me.”

Bailey climbs back onto my lap, hands closing behind my neck, chest pressed to mine, lips at my ear. “Tell me.”

“You make me hard.”

“You make me hard too.” His voice holds a teasing note.

“But it’s more than that.”

He hesitates. “What do you mean?”

“You’re like the sun.”

“What?”

“It’s like, I know I shouldn’t look, right? But I’m curious and always thinking about you, and whenever we’re in the same place, I can’t help moving closer.”

He stiffens in my arms, but I don’t stop.

“I know looking will hurt, but I do it anyway, and every time you blow me away. I want your warmth, your attention, and whenever you’re around,

you make everything so much brighter.”

Bailey’s fingers tighten briefly in my hair before he pulls back, eyebrows knotted.

He swallows. Stares.

I shift under him, wondering if I should have kept my mouth closed instead of spilling all that. Was it too much for him? Am I pushing too hard?

Did I just call him *the sun*? Is that a thing that happened?

Okay, actually that was definitely fucking dumb, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he gets up and leaves.

Way to be smooth as a fucking pothole.

My cheeks are burning as I open my mouth to laugh it all off, but before I can get a word out, Bailey attacks me.

With his mouth.

BAILEY

GODDAMN CHAD.

When I first laid eyes on him, I never would have dreamed up the kind of guy he is. He's everything surface-level I assumed, but that's only part of him. The fun guy who's loud and drinks and plays football and wants to hook up disguises this guy who looks at me in awe and calls me the sun.

My heart is belting out a rhythm behind my rib cage as I push him back and kiss him. I can't help myself. I can't hold off.

Tonight was supposed to be a slow tease, something fun and casual, but goddamn Chad ... I pull back, my lips feeling raw and his swollen, and we stare at each other. Just looking and drinking each other in.

He reaches up to tuck a curl behind my ear, and I lean into the touch. It's powerful, this emotion swimming through me, and I don't pause to focus or try to name it; I just go with it. Following the need to be closer than I am.

His fingers brush my nose. "These freckles kill me."

"I hated them growing up."

"And now?"

I lift a shoulder in a shrug. "They get guys' attention, so I guess they're cool."

I'm jolted out of my comfort when Chad flips us so he's on top. His big body presses me into the mattress, making me feel swamped and secure and about a million other things I shouldn't.

"Your freckles aren't what got my attention. Only part of it."

"Have you figured out what did yet?"

"Obviously I thought you were hot. And you had this snarky edge to you that I liked. You took control when we were together, and you weren't interested in more, and then you bailed and left me with blue balls, and I couldn't stop thinking about how you felt on top of me. So hot. Then with the messages, I got to know you better, and you're actually really fucking cool."

"You're really fucking cool too," I admit. My fingers find the hem of his shirt, and I start to push it up. "This is in my way."

He drops a kiss on my cheek, then pushes onto his knees to shed his shirt and undo his pants. He shoves them off, then lies back over me, grinding his hard cock into mine.

I sigh in relief at the contact, even through two thin layers of clothes.

“How are we going to do this?” he asks.

I grin, glad we’re getting back to the sex and putting a pin in all the talking, which I started but wasn’t ready for. Chad giving voice to what it was that attracted him to me helped settle that tiny voice of doubt in my head though. It helped prove my theory that he is in this for *me* and not my last name.

“I brought a certain tie with me that—”

“Yes.”

“You like being tied up.”

“It’s so hot. Do it.”

I laugh and push him off me, then grab the tie, along with some supplies from my bag. There’s nowhere on the bedhead to tie him up—probably on purpose—so I grab a chair and carry it over to set beside the bed.

“Sit.”

He scrambles to listen, and if he thinks being tied up is hot, it’s nothing compared to seeing this jacked man comply with my every word. It’s something I could easily get used to.

Chad plonks down onto the chair, thighs spread wide, and watches me walk behind him. I wrap the tie around one wrist, then the other. It’s not too tight, and he could easily get out of it again, but I don’t want to actually restrain him, just give the illusion of it. It’s so much hotter to know that Chad is holding back.

“Mm ...” He bounces his legs a few times, and I’m not sure if he’s jittery because of excitement or nerves.

I walk back around in front of him, and the sight of him makes my cock twitch. Chest flushed, nipples pebbled and hard, dick standing straight up and leaking a wet mark onto his boxer briefs.

The need to get him naked is too strong. I go to my knees between his thighs and reach for his underwear.

“Up.”

His hips lift, and I’m able to slide them off, and then I’m staring up at him, completely naked.

I shake my head. “And you think I’m sexy.”

We lock eyes, and Chad’s tongue swipes over his lips. “I’m suddenly regretting this tie.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because I really need to touch you.”

I smirk. "Isn't that the point?"

My gaze drifts over the plains of his body, shamelessly drinking in every muscle, until it comes to a rest on his cock. He manscapes, but he's still hairy, and I fucking love it. I only wax everything completely because I like how it feels. I press my face between his legs, inhaling the smell of sex and feeling goddamn dizzy from it. I lick his balls, so heavy and full, and I can already envision him coming inside me so vividly, I have to squeeze the tip of my cock to get it to settle down.

"This is going to be interesting," I mutter.

"Why?"

"Because I'm ready to explode."

"I bet you can pace it." His voice sounds rough, which isn't helping my problem. "I need inside you."

"I need that too." I stand and drop my boxers so fast, my cock slaps back against my stomach. I ignore it, focusing only on Chad and getting as close as possible to him.

He brings his thighs closer, and I straddle him. My hands find his hair, and I tilt his head back until he meets me in a searing kiss. His warmth, his tongue, the taste on his lips, it sends scorching hot lust through me until the warmth gathers in my chest and builds until it's almost unbearable.

I break the kiss to lean over and grab the condom from the bed. Chad watches my movements as I roll it down his cock, then squeeze some lube into my hand. I cover two fingers to reach behind me and use the other hand to coat his dick.

At the first stroke, he drops his head back, breathing deep.

"Feels ... so good ..." He moans.

"I know." My eyes are glued to my hand on his cock, watching every stroke, the hard length swollen and purpled even through the condom. I stretched myself earlier while I was prepping, so it doesn't take much to work myself back open, and as soon as I'm stretched enough to slip my fingers inside, I start to grind back against them.

"I wanna see ..." Chad says. "Turn around. Please."

I consider for a moment telling him no, but it'll be even more of a tease for me to show him what he can't touch. So I stand up and turn, brace one hand on the bed, and bend at my hips. I have no idea what it looks like, but I can hear Chad squirming, and the chair scrapes forward.

"*Shit.*" His voice goes high-pitched. "Shit, shit ... Now. I need you right

now.”

The begging is music to my ears, and I keep stretching myself, keep the distance between us, until Chad’s breathing is short and hard, his hips are jerking, and he grits out, “I’m about to break this fucking tie.”

I try for a self-satisfied expression, but I’m so turned on, I’m not convinced I manage it. I approach him again, take hold of his length, and position myself over him.

“Kiss me,” he pleads.

My lips find his as I slowly impale myself on his cock. A loud groan rumbles in his chest, and I keep pushing down until he’s fully seated inside me, pubes brushing my ass. Chad’s kisses are desperate, hungry, and he gives a tiny thrust, almost like he can’t help himself.

My hands close over his shoulders, and I pull back, dragging my lips from his. “I’ve got you.”

My ass squeezes tight as I lift and sink down again. Chad stutters out a noise, and I press closer to his body, needing the closeness, the connection, in a way I’ve never felt before. We’re forehead to forehead, eye to eye, breathing in each other’s breaths as I start to move properly. I can feel my ass jiggle each time it comes into contact with his thighs, and when his cock passes over my prostate, it shoots sparks through my limbs. His thrusts try to match my rhythm, skin smacking against skin and joining our pants and desperate curses.

The glide of my cock against his stomach isn’t enough. The nerves in my ass are begging for more. I bounce frantically, chasing my orgasm that wants to take hold but can’t. I need to touch my cock. Need to grip it and stroke until I come.

But I know the second I do that, it’s all over, and I never want this to end.

My thighs are shaking with the effort as sweat beads over my skin. I’m on autopilot. Feel like I couldn’t stop if I tried. Chad is hitting everything inside me I need, but I’m still desperate for more.

Apparently, so is he. His moans sound like half sobs, and his thrusting is getting stronger.

“Fuck, Bailey. Fuck, fuck, I need more ... more ...”

With a massive grunt of frustration, he rips his arms free, lifts me off him as he stands, and shoves me around to push me face-first onto the bed. His warm body blankets mine, hot breath hitting my neck and making me shiver. Then Chad shoves his cock back inside, pins my hands under his own, and

fucks me.

I grip the blankets for dear life. His grunts are loud in my ear, matching every one of his hard and unrelenting thrusts. I take the pounding he gives me until I'm practically cross-eyed. He owns me. I can't fight it.

Chad reaches around, and his hand closes over my cock. It's the exact pressure I need, and the second skin hits skin, I can't hold back. My balls draw tight, and then my cock jerks with the force of my release. Spurt after spurt covers his hand.

"Yes ..." Chad hisses. His hips stutter, lose rhythm, each thrust shallower than the last until he stiffens on top of me and goes still. His breaths are deep and heavy, and when his cock stops twitching, he collapses on top of me.

We're silent for a moment, and then I start to chuckle. "Really couldn't help yourself, could you?"

"If you had the same view I did, you'd understand. I had to touch you." His lips brush my shoulder. "I'm beginning to think I'll never not feel this way."

Nerves dance over my skin. I know I need to say something. Maybe tell him I don't *want* him to not feel that way. But even if our friends were understanding, there's still the whole reminder that college is ending and we live hours apart. I don't know what his plan is next, because we don't focus on the future when we're together. We talk about our right-nows, and it helps to pretend like this thing doesn't have an end date.

Maybe we never should have started to begin with.

But if I'm the sun, he's the moon. Beautiful and awe-inspiring. So pure and vibrant. Outshining the stars.

Feeling vulnerable, I let him slip from my ass, then turn in his arms and bury my face into his chest. I don't want to think. I want him to take that away and leave me in a place where all I need to do is hold him close and let myself feel good. I *ache* for him, and he's right here.

I don't like it.

But I don't want to give it up either.

When I'm finally ready, I squirm higher until we're facing each other and drop a kiss onto his nose.

"Then don't," I whisper.

"Don't?"

"Don't get over me. Don't try to get past this. It's basically the dumbest thing we could do right now, and I could name a million reasons why we

shouldn't, but let's be dumb together."

"Are you ..." He stares for a moment. "Are you saying you want to date me? Like, actually."

"I want *you*. Does it matter what we call it?"

Chad's gorgeous face breaks out into a grin. "Nah, just want to clarify." He squeezes me tighter. "I've never had a boyfriend before."

That word makes me shiver. "Say it again."

"What? Boyfriend?"

I kiss him. "You're my boyfriend."

"I am." Chad laughs. "So much for my epic year of slutting around."

"Was that really your plan?"

"Yep. Just goes to show why I shouldn't try to think ahead."

I tug a lock of his hair. "It's not too late to run, you know."

"Of course it is."

"Why?"

"Because now I've met you. I couldn't run if I tried."

CHAD

I HAVE A BOYFRIEND. THAT'S WILD. AND I'M GONNA CLAIM THAT IT'S FRAT as fuck, no matter what my brothers have to say about it.

Not that anyone has anything to say about anything, because I haven't told them about Bailey. The more time that passes, the more I'm convinced they won't actually care, but I have no scope to compare that to, because no one has ever dated a Kappa before. Two years ago, there was a brother who dated another's sorority-ex, and it caused an awkward divide that no one liked. I don't want to be the cause of something like that. Forcing everyone to pick sides is decidedly *not* frat, and it twists me up that Bailey might be the reason some of my brothers turn on me.

I really, really like him.

It wasn't part of the plan, but I'm done giving a shit.

The real problem is Kappa House's opinion of me. Not Sigma Beta Psi, but me specifically. And yeah, I brought that on myself, but it's not like I ever could have imagined I'd be dating one of them.

I've been trying to behave myself for Bailey's sake. My pranks have gotten small and boring, but if I wasn't doing *something*, people would get suspicious. Greek life has never been so quiet. Or dull.

Even though we're still sneaking around, that's starting to lose some of the sparkle too. I talk to him on the phone every night, and we sneak off at parties or to secluded corners of campus, but we haven't reserved a hotel room again, and organizing a date around my practices or games, fraternity duties, and his study sessions is becoming a pain in the ass. Plus, after two weekends of away games followed by work, I'm beat. At one point, we go a full six days without even running into each other.

So yeah, the first few weeks were exciting.

Now I'd prefer to be able to have an actual boyfriend who I could do whatever the hell I wanted with.

Bailey: *Are you assigned to the food drive?*

I pull up the house calendar and see that it's coming up on Thursday. I'm not assigned. Instead, it's Robbie, Carter, and a sophomore that doesn't house with us.

Me: *Nope. Afternoon off*

Bailey: *Damn it*

Me: *Why?*

Bailey: *I was thinking if we both did it, we could volunteer to be the ones to drop the food off and go out together afterward*

Now *there's* an idea. It's been so long since I've been able to touch him more than a hurried jerk-off or blow job—and those things are great, no complaints—that I want to follow through with his idea.

I fire off a text to Zeke, asking if any of the guys want the night off. We all have tight schedules with our coursework, fraternity duties, and sports commitments, so I'm hopeful. A minute later, his response comes in.

Zeke: *Sure, Tim will cover for you on the petition next week.*

Bonus. I love talking to people, but harassing them into signing whatever petition is the current hot focus on campus bums me out.

I pull up Bailey's messages and text back.

Me: *I'm in. Is it my turn to organize something?*

Bailey: *I've got it covered.*

I'm more excited for this food drive than I would be under any other circumstance. Sure, I love helping out, and it feels good to give back, but at the same time, does my selfish reason for stepping in negate the good I'll be doing? Thank fuck I don't take philosophy, so I get over that line of thinking quickly.

Instead, I get through the days with our late conversations and a quick kiss in the science bathrooms between classes.

The number of times I almost sneak down to his house and creep through the window is ridiculous, but he's right that it's only a matter of time until we're caught. The one time I got desperate enough to try it, Charles was sitting on the front porch, and I'd had to keep walking. His suspicious eyes followed me until I turned the corner around the block, so the only choice I had was to pinch a water gun from the Epsilon's backyard around the corner and return to drench Charles from head to toe.

It was only after I got back home, laughing and out of breath, that I realized that probably wasn't the smartest move.

When I told Bailey I don't plan ahead though, I'd been serious. It's not that I actively avoid it; I just find it hard. The second an idea pops into my mind, I'm driven by the need to execute it immediately. My excitement turns to adrenaline, and next thing I know, I'm running from another dumb thing that I probably should have thought through.

I'm a thorn in Brandon's side.

I can imagine it's only a matter of time until I'm a thorn in Bailey's.

Until then, I'll do what I do best and focus on the fun we're having now.

The pledges from each house in charge of the food drive have been busy this week posting about it on social media, handing out flyers, and putting notices up all over campus and the surrounding neighborhood. It's a warmish day for mid-November, maybe in the mid-fifties, and the sky is a clear pale blue.

I'm wearing jeans and a hoodie unzipped over my T-shirt, and it's like Robbie and Carter coordinated with me because they're in the same.

Apparently, Bailey doesn't agree with me on the temperature because when I catch sight of him at his booth next to ours, his cheeks are stung red and he's wearing a coat and wool scarf. As usual, he looks incredible. I want to bundle him up in my arms to keep him warm.

We work side by side for most of the day, barely acknowledging each other, even as my body is humming for him. Lucas is working by his side, which doesn't surprise me but *does* irritate me, considering Bailey made it clear he isn't interested. I low-key feel for Lucas because I know how incredible Bailey is, but that doesn't mean I'm going to be cool if he doesn't back off soon. And when he laughs too loudly at something Bailey has said for the hundredth time today, I can't help myself.

"Working next to the fucking chuckle brothers today, aren't I?"

"The who?" Lucas asks, side-eying me.

And sure the reference is old, and I only know it from my dad, but the point was clear. I haul another full box of canned goods off the counter and place it in the back of our booth before I turn back to them. "Kinda weird that charity work gets you so amped up, Lucas. Might want to flirt a little louder, dude—the guys across campus didn't hear you."

His face goes red as his eyes narrow. "Since when is it your business what I do?"

"Since I'm having to work next to you for the next hour, and I'm goddamn sick of the phrase *oh, Bailey, you're soooo funny.*" I pitch my voice high, even though Lucas sounds nothing like it.

He crosses his arms, wearing a coat similar-looking to Bailey's and probably equally as expensive. Normally I don't give a shit what things cost, but looking from him to me, and yeah, it's pretty obvious which of us looks like they belong next to Bailey. I shake my head because I'm not getting caught in that trap of thinking.

“Careful, Doomsen,” Lucas says. “You almost sound jealous.”

I snort. “Believe me, I have nothing to be jealous about.” My gaze darts to Bailey’s, who’s clearly amused, before I turn my back on both of them, not wanting to give anything away.

Robbie nudges me as I join him again. “What was that about?”

“Nothing.”

“Sure thing, brother.” At least he sounds amused.

“You know I can’t stand that Lucas guy.”

“I don’t know that at all.”

I can feel him eyeballing me, so I hurry to change the subject. “We got a good haul today.”

“We did. I’ll go and load it all in my car soon so I can head off as soon as we’re done. You guys will be okay with breaking down the booth, won’t you?”

I shift. “Actually, I was going to drop it off. I need to head to work for something anyway, so I figured I could do both at the same time. It saves you from having to go out of your way.”

“You think your beat-up old wagon can handle the extra weight?”

“It’ll be fine.” Even if I have to get out and push the damn thing, I’m delivering this food.

Thankfully, most people dropped off their donations to us earlier in the day, so by the time things wrap up at six, I’m good to go. I ignore Bailey as I leave, not wanting Lucas to see me paying him attention again. That guy is already a pain in the ass; no point giving him a chance to suspect anything.

When I pull up out the front of the food bank, I only have to wait a few minutes for Bailey to pull in beside me. He’s alone, thank fuck, and he climbs out of his car and rounds the hood to meet me. It’s a lot colder now, and I’m regretting my decision to only wear a hoodie today.

Bailey tugs at one of the cords. “How do you manage to make this look so sexy?”

“It’s because you’re a horndog. I can’t be held responsible for your filthy mind.”

“Uh-huh. Sure.” He quickly glances around and then pushes onto his toes to press his lips to mine. I immediately pull him closer, partly for his body heat, and partly because I don’t get this enough.

“Damn ...” I say when he pulls away.

“What?”

“I’m not finished.” I tug him closer again, and Bailey laughs against my mouth.

Freezing cold fingertips caress my cheek. “I’ve missed you too.”

I sag back against my car. “I thought the whole secretly dating thing would be a whole lot more fun than it is.”

“Did you think we’d be like ninjas?”

“*Totally* pictured ninjas.” I love the sound of his laugh, but it cuts off way too soon.

“Yeah, I know. It sucks.” He drags his teeth over his bottom lip. “Maybe ... maybe we should tell people.”

“Yeah?” I perk up, but the hope dies the second I see the indecision on his face. “No. We really don’t need to. I can be patient.”

“It would help if you didn’t super-soak my house president the other day.”

“Yeah, I might have some regrets about that.”

A small chuckle. His forehead hits my shoulder. “It’s not like I didn’t know what I was getting into when we started this.”

“Truth. Maybe you’re the stupid one.”

“Can’t argue there.”

“Okay, let’s get this shit inside, then you can sex me up and take me out.”

He squints. “I have no idea what you’re picturing, but it’s definitely wrong.”

I stack my boxes to take inside, then help Bailey with his. We’ve already checked dates and made sure everything donated fits with the list the shelter gave us, so I don’t bother waiting for the staff there to go through it all.

I wave off their thank-yous as we leave as fast as possible without being rude about it. Then Bailey and I walk down the street to grab dinner.

“If anyone asks, we can say all the charity work made us hungry,” I say.

“I’d rather say I was on a date with my boyfriend, but sure.”

Thankfully there’s no one familiar inside, and the server leads us to a table away from the front windows. We don’t hold hands, which sucks, but this is so much better than anything else we’ve done together lately that I turn my focus to the positives. Like the breathtaking guy sitting across from me.

“You’re staring.”

“Can’t help it,” I tell him honestly.

His shrewd eyes find mine as he shakes his head. “We’re so not going to be able to keep this secret for long.”

“Why? I’m trustworthy.”

“Because you might be able to get away with not saying anything, but you don’t need to with words. The way you were looking at Lucas today ...” He bites his knuckle like he’s trying to hold back his amusement. “He’s backed off a lot. I thought you might like to know.”

“Not from where I was standing,” I mutter.

“Don’t be jealous.”

“I’m not.”

He lifts his eyebrows, and he doesn’t need more than that to call me out.

“Fine. Maybe I was.”

“Maybe ...” he mocks. “Should it be this adorable to me when you get all pouty?”

“I do look good when I sulk.”

“And even better when you suck.”

I groan. “It’s been way too long since I’ve been able to do that.”

“Agreed.” He fusses with the menu for a moment. “Did you say next week is your bye week?”

“Yup. Really looking forward to the weekend off.”

Bailey doesn’t answer at first, but I can tell he’s bouncing his knees under the table, and I smile at his nervousness.

“What are you thinking about?”

He huffs a laugh. “Umm, maybe ... well, I was planning on going home for the weekend to see my family ... maybe you could come?”

“You wanna do the whole meet-the-family thing with me?”

“That ship has been and sailed despite my every effort to avoid it.”

“Yeah, but that was some random guy meeting them. This time I’ll be meeting them as your boy ...” I trail off, realizing that maybe he only meant as friends.

Bailey hurries to nod. “Definitely as my boyfriend. If that’s cool with you.”

“Shit, yeah. I can’t wait.”

“You didn’t have anything else planned?”

“Nothing I can’t cancel.” I don’t think drinking with my brothers counts as plans when it’s what we do most weekends.

“Okay.” He tucks his hands under his arms, looking nervous but relieved. “This is going to be very weird for me.”

“Why?”

“I’ve never brought a guy home before.”

“And you’re sure you pick me? A big, dumb jock? Probably not the best first boyfriend choice you could make, but we’ll roll with it. I’ll try to make things as pain-free as possible.”

He’s grinning, and he props his chin on his hand as he looks over at me.

“What’s that look?” I ask.

“You’re right.”

“About?”

“I never would have imagined I’d be bringing a jock home to meet my family, but the rest of your sentence is total bullshit.”

“Feel free to go on.”

“You *are* the best choice. You’re the *only* choice.” Bailey’s cheeks tint pink. “And I can promise you they’ll make it painful, but there’s no one I’d rather face the torture with than you.”

BAILEY

“HEY, MAN, DID YOU GET THE GROUP TEXT?” LUCAS ASKS AS I’M LEAVING my room, bag over my shoulder.

“Which one?” I’d noticed a lot of activity blowing up the Rho Kappa Tau chat, and I’d mostly ignored it, which wasn’t hard when my family chat has been blowing up just as much.

Safe to say the morning you’re leaving to drive home with your boyfriend is *not* the time to tell them you’re bringing said boyfriend with you. My sister has sent through so many “chad” GIFs I can’t keep up.

“Your prank,” Lucas says. “This weekend.”

I tune back into the conversation. “Which prank?”

“With the air freshener cans and the glitter. Most of the jocks will be away, and Saturday night there’s a massive sorority party that the ones still here will be going to. We’re going to sneak in and set everything up, then when they’re back Sunday night, it’s go time.”

“First, that wasn’t my prank. You guys came up with it. I only suggested combining them.” I’m well aware I’m already running late in picking Chad up, so I pat Lucas on the shoulder as I pass him. “Second, I’m heading home, so you’re on your own. Good luck with it all.”

“Wait, you won’t be here?”

“Nope. I’m going to see my parents.”

“But it’s *your* prank.”

“It really, really wasn’t. I’m sure you guys will execute it perfectly.”

Lucas swings his arms, looking uncertain. “Yeah, of course. Hey, maybe I could come with you one weekend? Just as friends, obviously, but a weekend away could be fun. They live in the city, right? We could visit and then go out one night ...”

A weekend away? Or a weekend with the chance to meet my dad? I give him a tight smile. “They don’t like strangers around. Have a fun weekend.”

He gives me a half-hearted wave as I leave. I hate that I feel bad for constantly telling him no, because he is a good guy, but good guy or not, constantly trying isn’t the way to get my attention. Especially not when Chad has already stolen it.

I pull up in the parking lot of Deja Brew fifteen minutes late, and Chad jumps in the car, holding two coffees.

“Hey.” I exchange a soft kiss for my drink.

“You taste like toothpaste,” he says.

“Well, I’m about to taste like caffeine, so it’s lucky you got your kiss in first.” I cringe. “Shit, I need to get Mom something.”

“What do you mean?”

“Every weekend I grab her something little. I’ve already forgotten once, I don’t want to do that again.”

Chad goes quiet, then stuffs his coffee in a cup holder. “I’ll be right back.”

I watch him jump out and disappear back into Deja Brew. He’s gone a few minutes before he returns, carrying a bag of Deja Brew coffee beans. “Will this do?”

“Those are perfect.” I stare at the bag for a second before I grab the front of his T-shirt and haul him into a longer, deeper kiss. “Thank you.”

Chad’s smiling like a fool when he pulls back. “Maybe it’ll help cover for how damn nervous I am.”

“You’re nervous?”

“Basically pissing myself.” He leans forward to turn up the air. “I barely slept last night and spent way too long trying to figure out what to wear today.”

My gaze sweeps over him, and while he’s not wearing anything too different than usual, I can tell he’s made an effort. Instead of his usual hoodie and skintight jeans combo, he’s wearing a denim jacket over a Henley, and his chinos are dark blue.

“You look edible.” I reach over to squeeze his thigh.

He snorts. “I hope your parents don’t think that.”

“Hey ...” I wait until he looks over at me. “I know they’re going to love you, but even if they don’t, it’s not like that will change my mind.”

“It definitely will. You guys are close, and that’s awesome. So don’t worry, I’m going to be the most brownnosing boyfriend you’ve ever had.”

I throw the car into reverse, marveling at what a sweetheart he is. “Trust me, don’t do that. They already think you’re awesome.”

He nods like he’s trying to convince himself, and it might not be nice, but I like that he’s nervous. This clearly means enough to him to feel that way.

“I was thinking while we’re in Greenwich, we could take the train into the city and hit up a gay bar one night?”

“Fuck. Yes,” is his immediate reply. “I’ve never been to a gay club, but I

can't think of a better way to spend the night. Other than being naked, of course, but once we're done getting hot and sweaty on the dance floor, we can do that too. This is gonna be awesome."

I laugh at how excitable he is. "There's one condition though."

"Which is?"

"When all those queer guys start hitting on you, just remember who you're there with."

"Right back at you," Chad says. "Only checking though, you do understand *you're* the hotter one in this relationship, right?"

"Maybe if the guys are after twinks, but even then I'm too tall to be desirable."

He makes a disbelieving sound in the back of his throat. "I wish I could take out my eyeballs and let you see yourself the way I do."

Goddamn, he's sweet. "Now there's a romantic thought."

"I *am* known for being a lover, not a fighter."

"No, you're known for being trouble." I send a grin his way to find him grinning right back. "Try to rein in your need to cause shit this weekend, and everything will be fine."

"You mean I *can't* TP your dad's car?"

"Only if you're not planning on making a good impression. The Bentley is his baby."

"A Bentley?" Chad whistles low. "Triple-ply is it, then."

"What have I gotten myself into?"

Chad blows me a kiss as he slides on his sunglasses and turns my radio up.

It's only an hour's drive to my parents' weekend place in Greenwich, and as I pull up to the guard at the main gate of the community our house is in, Chad leans forward and turns the radio off.

I give my name, and we're let through, but without the constant background music, the car is ... silent.

I glance over at Chad, whose mouth is hanging open.

"So ..." he starts.

"So?"

"You're, umm, rich." His voice goes up at the end, making it sound more like a question than a statement.

He's being weird. "The Bentley didn't give it away?"

"No ... I *knew* you had money, just ... not like this."

“My *parents* have money.”

“Right, that makes sense.”

“But this life is going to be basically handed to me.”

“Oh.” He falls quiet, and I’m not sure what to say. I’ve always been uncomfortably aware of people using me for my money, but I’ve never actually experienced being judged for it. And right now, that’s how I’m interpreting Chad’s silence. He has this sweet line across his forehead as he inspects the large estates we drive by.

I gnaw on my bottom lip, wanting to say something. To maybe brush off what he’s seeing and reassure him that it doesn’t mean anything. I have to remind myself that money only means nothing to the people who have it, and I’ve seen how hard Chad works.

Finally, he gives this hollow laugh. “I think I’m having one of those stupid moments again.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you’re with the Kappas, so I knew you came from money. Like, enough that your parents were probably paying for college and your dues, but ... this ...” He shakes his head, still looking bewildered. “This doesn’t feel like regular rich to me.”

I shift in my seat, weighing my words. “Well ... no. This is ...” I swallow. Awkward. That’s what this is, and it occurs to me I’ve never had to explain all this to someone before. They hear my last name, and from the circles we’re in, they basically calculate my net worth from that. “What you’re looking at is the top one percent. My dad is in banking, but where most work *in* banks ... he owns it. Well, majority shares of it.”

“Right.”

“Is this weird?”

His voice is slightly off when he replies. “No. Wait, yes. This is very weird. I didn’t realize my boyfriend was basically a gazillionaire.”

Billionaire, but I don’t point that out. “I don’t think that’s an actual number,” I tease.

He waves a hand toward the closest house we can see. “Whatever *that* thing is worth isn’t a number. Hell, whatever is probably in your bank account isn’t a number to me. Anything over a few thousand and it’s all white noise.”

“I get that.”

“Why aren’t you in the Ivy League?”

I cringe. “I’m not going to lie, I had a place there if I wanted it. But I needed to get away from where people automatically knew who I was, which is how I ended up at UVM. And now WHU is as far as I wanted to go from the city. Are you okay?”

“Sorry.” He wipes his hands on his thighs. “I think I’m freaking out a bit.”

“Can I ask why?”

“I ... I don’t know. I mean, you could have warned me. No wonder your parents didn’t give a shit about the hotel room.”

“That, and they didn’t know.” It was my money, and I can do whatever the hell I want with it.

He drags a hand through his hair. “They ... they’re so normal.” He picks up the bag of coffee beans. “I feel like a real idiot for these.”

“Don’t. She’s going to love them. Really. And my family, they *are* normal. We have money, but Dad’s careful not to let that go to our heads. And when we almost lost Mom ... it definitely threw into perspective how pointless all that money is without the people you care about.” I slow and pull into our driveway, following it all the way down our property to the main house. The driveway loops around a large hedge sculpture, then leads to a five-car garage.

I can feel Chad staring again.

The house is large and white with navy roof tiles, and from the back, we have an unobstructed view of the water. I like the New York apartment, but I love it here.

We spent a lot of time here during Mom’s treatments and her recovery.

I switch off the car and turn to where Chad still looks shell-shocked. “In case it wasn’t clear before,” I say, trying not to squirm, because emotions don’t come easily to me, “*you’re* someone I care about. I don’t bring just anyone home to my family.”

He grabs my hand and presses a kiss to my knuckles. “Okay. Yep. I’ll try to be cool.”

“Since when do you need to try?”

We both climb out and grab our bags, and I can tell Chad still doesn’t feel any more relaxed than he did before we talked. His broad back is bunched up tight, and his knuckles have turned white around the bag he’s carrying.

“Want to dump our things first or go find where the others are pretending like they don’t know we’ve arrived?” If I know my parents and Rachel,

they're all dying to come out and pounce on us.

He hesitates. "No point putting off the inevitable."

"That's the Chad I know."

His smile comes easier this time as we follow the voices into the main part of the house.

Mom, Dad, Rachel, and her best friend, Sierra, are all sitting in the living room. The large doors along the back wall are closed against the cool breeze blowing in off the water, but the view is breathtaking, even for my thousandth time seeing it.

"Hello, family," I call and watch them make a show of acting like they've only just noticed us. No one's winning any Oscars here.

"Bailey, Chad, how was the drive?" Mom asks.

I tell her, "Fine," as Dad jumps up, way overeager, to shake Chad's hand.

My family? Play it cool? We don't know the meaning.

All eyes are on him, which I can tell is making him uncomfortable. Then Rachel props her chin on her palm and bats her eyelashes. "Hey, *Chaaad*."

Her voice is over-the-top flirty, and I can tell he doesn't know how to take her. I don't have that problem, though, and waste no time flipping her off.

"Mom, Chad brought something for you." I nudge him and nod at the bag of beans he's holding on to for dear life.

"Oh, yeah. These are for you, Mrs. Prince."

She eyes him. "Are we really that scary?"

Chad clearly doesn't know how to answer when his gaze cuts to me. I step closer and wrap my arm around him, propping my chin on his shoulder. "He's a bit nervous."

"Why?" Dad asks. "You planning on running out with the good china?"

"Umm ..."

"He's messing with you." I press a kiss to the pulse point in his neck in an attempt to get him to calm the hell down. "My family need to work on their sense of humor."

Dad starts to laugh. "Sorry, poor joke. Bailey, why don't you show Chad where you guys will be sleeping and take him for a tour. We'll work on our manners while you're gone."

Chad shakes his head, like he's coming out of a daze. He hurriedly steps forward out of my arms and gives Mom her gift. "For you. Sorry, I'm being weird. Bailey didn't tell me about ..." As though he can't work out the

words, he gestures around him. I find it way cuter than I probably should.

“That we’re stinking rich?” Rachel supplies.

I glare at her to shut it, but Chad points in her direction.

“Yup, that. I’m still adjusting.”

“Fair.” She shrugs. “We’ll only judge you for it a little.”

It’s like I can see Chad thawing before my eyes. “I’d probably judge me a bit more than that, but give me an hour and I’ll be good.”

Mom gives him a soft smile. “We want you to feel comfortable here.”

“I can guarantee that will never be the case.”

“Naw.” I grab his hand and tug him close again. “You don’t feel comfortable with me?”

He snorts. “Why do I feel like any answer I give is a trap?”

“Because you have good instincts.” I kiss his cheek, not caring that I’m being all PDA in front of my family. Sure, I’ve never brought someone home, so they’ve never seen this side of me, but I don’t care. Chad is my someone. He makes me happy, and I like kissing him, so why would I keep that from myself?

When I pull back, my big, bashful idiot is red behind his tan.

He clears his throat. “Maybe I need that tour now.”

I’ve barely got him out of the room before he drops his bag, backs me up against the wall, and kisses me stupid.

Yep. It definitely feels like he’s more comfortable here already.

CHAD

EVEN AFTER SLEEPING ON IT, MY HEAD IS STILL SPINNING. PROBABLY FROM spending the night resting on a pillow with what-the-fuck-ever thread count. It felt like a cloud. Bailey's bed is huge. And from where I'm lying with him tucked under my arm, all I can see is water out to the horizon.

He snuffles, then stretches out, long and lean like a cat.

"Morning."

He smiles sleepily up at me. The early morning light coming through the massive windows makes his freckles stand out more than usual. Little brown splotches over his nose and under his eyes. I want to take the day memorizing every one of them.

"How are you feeling?" he asks.

"Relaxed, actually."

"No more freaking out?"

Surprisingly, I'm not. "Your family are awesome."

"But ..."

"It still hasn't sunk in. I feel like I'm in a resort, not someone's house."

Bailey leans in and gives me a soft kiss but backs up before I can go after more. "If you marry me one day, we can have a place just like this."

I crack up laughing. "That's a strange thought. Chad Doomsen, richer than God."

"It could happen," Bailey says, a defensive tinge to his words.

I turn so we're face-to-face. "Let's get this clear. If we ever get married, it has nothing to do with any money we might have. I don't want you to think I'm like that."

"I know." His face softens. "It's actually one of the most attractive things about you. You really don't care about money."

"Well, I *care*. You know, so far as covering bills and making sure I'm not struggling, but anything more than that is ..." I don't want to say excessive, because I don't want him to think I'm judging. I'm not. From what I've learned about his dad, he actually *does* work hard, and he doesn't hoard all his money for himself. He's set up a fair few programs to do with money and shit for people from backgrounds who couldn't otherwise afford it. He has scholarships and funds medical research and a bunch of other things Bailey was explaining that go right over my head. Apparently, they have a team of

people who research areas in need and assess what needs to be done for improvements. They're passionate about that stuff.

I might not understand this house, or a massive apartment in New York, or bank accounts that reach fuck if I know amounts, but I do know they're good people.

"Wanna have some fun before we go down?" Bailey asks, hand dipping low on my gut.

I roll on top of him. "Do I ever."

We rut together in a frantic need to get off, like we didn't come our brains out last night, but getting this time with him is something I'm not going to take for granted.

Being together like this, taking the time to talk and get to know each other, is incredible, and with each conversation, I'm falling more and more for him.

This thing is quickly bypassing crush territory and heading for something serious.

Something that makes boyfriends feel like playing pretend.

Everyone is already awake when we get down there, and if there's one good thing I can thank this house for, it's that it's big enough that no one would have heard us last night. And we were not quiet.

"Morning," his mom, Victoria, says as we walk in. "Coffee's on. It's delicious." She winks at me, and maybe she's only saying it to be nice, but hell if I care. Bailey and I help ourselves to a cup as his dad, Alistair, looks up from his phone. "What are you guys planning today?"

"Gonna take a train into the city," Bailey says. "We might go out tonight and stay at the apartment."

"Sounds good."

And what's better than a huge house where we don't have to be quiet? Being completely fucking alone. I'd worry if I thought his family would find it rude that we're taking off, but they don't seem to mind.

Well, his parents don't.

"No fair," Rachel says. "We wanna go."

"You're in high school," Bailey points out to her.

"I can pass for twenty-one. Take us with you."

"We're going to a gay club, and you're not gay."

"I think Dad would prefer that, right, Dad?"

He snorts into his coffee. "Not on your life. Nice try though."

Thank you, Papa Prince. I need some solo time with my guy.

We spend most of the day hanging out at the house. Swimming in the heated pool, playing shuttlecock—heh—with his dad, which I fudge my way through. Rachel, Sierra, and I cook lunch, while Bailey makes mocktails for the girls and something red and deadly for us.

It's a good time, and I try not to get too ahead of myself by picturing this happening regularly in the future, but I like his family.

So much that I'm almost disappointed when we grab enough shit to last us the night, pack it into one bag, and head out. We'll see them briefly in the morning before heading back to school, and I have to kick the feeling that this could be the one and only time we get to do this. It's a dumb thought, and I'm not going to start stressing about the future now when I never have before, but Greenwich is like a holiday away from real life. I couldn't imagine coming back here in the summer, spending all day every day by the pool, overlooking that view.

When we board the train, I pretend to take a long, deep breath of the stale air. "Now *this* is what I'm used to."

Bailey rolls his eyes at me and pulls me into a seat. He sits, cuddled into my side, and we're mostly quiet on the way into the city. It's nice. Peaceful.

He spends a good part of the trip scrolling through his phone, sending the occasional text.

I press a kiss to his head and murmur, "Who are you talking to?"

"Just our house chat."

"Oooh ..." I pretend to make a grab for his phone. "What Kappa secrets are you hiding from me?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" He hurries to close his phone as I yank him close and gently nip his neck.

I pout. "Boyfriend privileges."

"There's no such thing. What do you always say? Brothers before lovers?"

"I don't think I've ever said that."

Bailey grins. "It's killing you not to know, isn't it?"

"Little bit."

"I'll give you a hint. It ranges anywhere from a chore schedule to plans for total world domination. Anything you guess in those parameters will be close."

"Someone's feeling clever."

He hums. "I enjoy teasing you."

"My guess is you guys are planning some lame prank that will go balls up, and then I'll have to show you how it's really done."

Bailey blinks at me for a moment, and that's all the confirmation I need.

"Knew it."

"If you say so ..."

"Oh, I do say so." I pretend to crack my knuckles, even though they don't actually do that. "I am a top detective. A master of mysteries."

"Just ask you?"

"Damn right."

Bailey chuckles and slips his phone away, and damn I'm curious, but I'm not going to push. If we're going to do this without pissing anyone off, the fraternity stuff needs to stay separate.

It takes over an hour to get into the city and a bit more to get to Bailey's apartment. It's a penthouse, which is no surprise, but walking in still gives me that same feeling of being completely overwhelmed. Maybe I'd get used to this eventually, but I doubt it.

We shower together, and I blow Bailey before he returns the favor. The freedom we have here is amping my libido up to insane levels, and if I wasn't so eager to head out and show off my boyfriend, I'd be insisting we stay in and fuck.

I don't ask Bailey if he's been to this club before, because I don't really wanna know. The important thing is he's never been there with *me*.

"This is going to be fun," I say as we get ready.

"You excited to see how many guys are going to be all over you?"

"Just saying, I'm ready to prove my theory right that you'll be the dude magnet tonight."

"Will you be okay if other guys dance with me?"

I shrug. "Sure. I trust you. We both know who we're there with and that we're exclusive, so that's cool, right?"

He licks his lips. "I trust you too. And I actually think it might be hot to see you dancing with a group of sweaty men."

"Pity," I say, dancing to a silent bass. "I only wanna dance with you. It'll be all those other guys who get to watch us together." I pull him against me, hands on his waist, hips grinding into his as I turn us to face the bathroom mirror. "See how good we look together?"

Bailey shivers against me as I kiss my way along his neck. "Keep going

and we won't make it there."

"Damn it." I wrench myself away, and then we have a few shots before heading out.

It's cold as shit, so we order an Uber to drop us there and then freeze our nuts off waiting in line to get in.

The bar is a thousand percent warmer than outside, which is a relief because I seriously thought Bailey would catch hypothermia in those tiny shorts. He tucks himself under my arm as we walk in, and we both stand off to the side and take in the room.

It's dark, with flashing strobes and loud music. The dance floor is sunken in the middle of the room and already crowded with people.

Hell yeah.

I don't bother getting a drink since I already have a nice buzz and instead steer Bailey right for the dance floor. It's humid, and the bodies around us are radiating warmth, so I whip off my shirt like most of the guys around me and tuck it into my jeans as Bailey does the same.

Then I pull him close.

My arms wrap around his back as I hold his lithe frame against me, bare skin against mine, somehow so fucking intimate even in a room full of people. We're jostled from all sides, and both of us are grinded on at one point or another, but I've only got eyes for him, and the way he's looking at me is the same.

We're glued together, hands exploring, stares locked, and I bet my smile matches the one he's wearing. We dance so long, we're both sweaty, and when Bailey turns in my arms to link his hands behind my neck, another guy immediately closes in.

He keeps his distance enough that I don't feel like decking him as he dances with us, looking like he's completely lost in the music.

Bailey arches his mouth back to my ear and yells, "I need water. Want one?"

I nod, and he slides out from between us and disappears into the crowd. The guy barely notices as he moves closer, still dancing with me, and what the fuck, might as well.

It's fun. I dip him and spin him around, almost knocked out by the fairy wings he's wearing. He reminds me a bit of Robbie with his height and that gut, but he's laughing and seems like a fun time.

Eventually he kisses my cheek and moves off, to be replaced by another

guy, and another. I'm loving the attention until someone closes in behind me. The muscular arms are definitely not Bailey's, and the aggressive way he thrusts his hard-on against my ass takes my mindset from fun to fuck off.

I try to shove him back when his arms close around my waist, and all I can think is that if I turn around and hit this guy, it's night over.

Starting a brawl on the dance floor isn't a romantic end to the night.

I've almost reached the point where the risk of being thrown out outweighs the need to get him off me when Bailey appears.

The look on his face is almost evil as he reaches for the guy's hand and does something that immediately makes him jolt away.

"What the hell?" the voice roars in my ear.

I turn in time to see him step up to Bailey and manage to catch his chest before he gets too close. "Touch him, I dare you."

"Yeah, touch me, I dare you," Bailey taunts.

I go to throw him an amused look when I'm shoved from the side and almost knock Bailey over.

Not. Fucking. Cool.

But before I can react, Bailey sidesteps me and does some kind of karate chop thing to the guy's throat and kicks out the back of his knees. He drops, gasping for breath, and the people around us barely notice.

But hot damn.

I notice.

Seeing Bailey bring down that roid rager is making my pants uncomfortably tight.

He brushes back the damp curls on his forehead, takes my hand, and leads me farther onto the dance floor.

"Umm ... is he gonna be okay?"

"Other than a bruised ego, he'll be fine."

"Second and more important question, where did you learn to kick ass like that?"

"Every good little gay boy should know how to defend himself."

"Damn, Princess ..." I reach for his waist and pull him against me, rocking my hardness against his thigh. "That was so fucking hot."

His hands wind around my neck. "Turns out, seeing you dance with other guys isn't as hot as I thought it would be."

"It was fun until that last asshole."

"I know, I was watching."

“Oh, really?”

“You looked like you were enjoying yourself, and then I saw your expression when that guy closed you in ...” Bailey clenches his jaw. “Made me stabby.”

“We might have to role-play that later.”

He starts to laugh, leaning down to rest his forehead on my shoulder. When he sighs, I feel it through his whole body. “I laugh a lot with you.”

“Good. I like seeing it.”

“I smile a lot with you too.”

That prompts me to smile even wider than I was before, and I cup his head, fingers running through his sweaty hair. “Yeah, I know what you mean.”

“You’re fun.”

“Well, you’re fun *and* stabby. That might be my favorite combo that I didn’t even know I liked.”

He snuggles into me, and I let my hands trail up and down his back. Whenever someone tries to join us this time, I shake my head, and we’re left alone.

We dance for what feels like hours, lost in each other. I’m surrounded by his warmth, the delicious smell of his sweat, the soft glide of his skin against mine. I like being surprised, and Bailey’s been my biggest surprise so far.

I’m falling for him, and it doesn’t scare me.

I’m falling for him, and I *want* to be. Not only that, I want to fall faster, harder. No safety net.

And when Bailey pulls back and his gorgeous blue eyes meet mine, I get my wish.

I’m in free fall.

BAILEY

NEW YORK ISN'T WHERE I WANT TO END UP ONE DAY, BUT I DO LOVE COMING here. The noises of the city dull into a background of poor choices and endless fun, and Chad's hand in mine anchors me in a place that is so easy to be lost in.

It's cold, but with our jackets and the residual heat from dancing all night, we decide to walk the few blocks back to my place. By the time we step into the elevator, I'm frozen through, and Chad's actually shaking.

My laugh is barely audible as I step into his arms. "N-not a sm-art choice."

"I b-lame you. You're su-pposed to be the sm-art one."

We both cling to each other in a shameless attempt to steal the other's body warmth.

"J-just a warning," he says, voice dipping low. "Now I'm starting to w-arm back up, the blood is flowing to a part of me that's been aching for you all n-night."

Nerves swirl in my stomach at the promise in his voice. Dancing up close to him has been the biggest tease, and as much as I've been able to ignore the want and enjoy our time out, there's only so long I can put off the need to hump his leg.

Like I'm, uh, doing right now.

Chad's hands close over my ass, and he hauls me tighter against him, coaxing my hips into a faster motion as he presses his leg between mine.

I whine. We're not even in the apartment yet, and I know full well that if he pulled out my cock, I wouldn't stop him.

"I need to fuck you," he says, and I'm quick to nod. Damn, I need it too.

I'm about to tell him to kiss me when the elevator dings and comes to a stop. The doors open, and just as I'm about to drag Chad into the apartment, my feet disappear out from under me as he scoops me off the ground and throws me over his shoulder.

"What are you doing?"

He slaps my ass so hard I cry out. "You were moving too slow."

"The doors were barely open."

"Bailey, I think you're underestimating how much I need to be inside you." His voice is still doing that low growl thing that's going straight to my

balls.

Chad isn't all talk either. His long strides eat the distance between the living area and large, open kitchen, where he throws me down on the counter. No sooner has my ass hit the marble than he's tearing off my jacket and shirt.

"Too many goddamn clothes."

"You can talk."

He makes quick work of undoing my shorts, then lifts me again and yanks them off.

"Supplies?" he grunts.

"In your wallet. I stashed some lube and a condom."

He pulls the wallet out and grabs both packs, then pushes his jeans and boxer briefs down his thighs. He tosses the lube at me. "Get yourself ready. Fast."

I greedily watch him give his cock a quick stroke while he tears the condom packet open with his teeth. I hurry to do the same with the lube. I use most of it to smear over my fingers and start working them inside as I hand the rest back to him.

Chad's cock is fucking glorious, even more so when he drizzles the remaining lube over it and starts long, slow strokes. His eyes are locked on my ass, and as I start to finger and stretch myself, he bites the knuckles of his free hand.

"Does that look good?"

He groans and squeezes the fat head of his dick. "Shit, you need to hurry up."

"No manners?" I tease, even as my own cock starts leaking.

"Please. Please, please, please fucking *please* hurry up."

I pull my fingers out, figuring that has to be enough. "See where being nice gets you?"

Chad steps between my legs, grabbing one thigh to wrap around his waist and closing his other hand in my hair. "There isn't going to be anything nice about the way I fuck you."

He releases my leg to grab his cock and steer it toward my hole.

I shiver, anticipation running hot through my veins, the temperature from outside completely forgotten as Chad finds his target and starts to push inside.

His grunt is rough gravel in his throat as he sinks inside my body. The stretch is more than I'm used to with my quick prep, but it makes everything

feel more heightened. I plant my foot on the counter, spreading myself wider, and Chad uses the opportunity to slam home.

I hiss, and his arm winds around my back.

“You okay?”

“Uh-huh. Need you.”

He rolls his hips deliciously deep. “Fuck, baby, you too.”

My mouth finds his, all soft lips and warm breath, and he immediately opens for me.

His kisses are searing, claiming, forcing my mouth wide from his position towering over me. A desperate noise catches in his throat, and he starts to move. He pulls back, and then his hips snap forward as he sets a punishing pace, fucking me so hard I scramble to grab the edge of the countertop to stay in place.

“Get back here,” Chad grumbles into my mouth, hand closing over my hip.

His pace is perfect. He makes my whole body thrum, and I’m quickly losing my mind and devolving into that staticky place on the brink of an orgasm, where I’m not aware of anything but the nerves in my ass and the desperate tingling in my balls.

He turns me inside out. I love this, being owned so completely I can barely remember my name. My lips trail mindlessly over his scruffy cheek, dipping to the soft skin beneath his jaw, tasting salt and *him* and making my head spin.

Chad’s flipped the dynamic of our first hookup, still almost totally dressed while I’m spread out naked before him. It makes me feel deliciously filthy that he couldn’t wait long enough to get naked.

The bruising hold on my hair disappears as Chad straightens and spreads my legs out farther. His lips are swollen, eyes glazed, as he uses me, wrecking me completely.

The need building in my veins is begging me to grab my cock, but I can’t release my grip on the counter. I’ve leaked a puddle onto my stomach, a string of cum stretching from my slit to my belly button, and the arousal plaguing my balls has them drawn tight.

And then Chad adjusts his angle, and my prostate that was humming with pleasure is brought alive. He stabs it with every thrust, and I drop back onto the counter, still gripping the edge with everything I have, wanting to pull away and beg for more. My thighs are quaking, toes clenched tight as the

pressure building at the base of my spine pushes me closer ... closer ...

“Ah, *fuck*.” I arch off the marble, and my orgasm crashes into me. Wave after rolling wave of pure bliss hits my system, and I start to shoot, hands free, cock jerking with every spurt of cum.

“Oh, shit.” Chad grunts. His fingers bite into my hips as he grabs hold and fucks me through it, grunts getting louder and louder until “*ahhh*,” his whole body goes stiff and his cock starts to twitch.

We’re both panting hard as I finally release my stiff fingers from their hold.

“Did ... did you just ...” He sounds adorably confused. “I didn’t touch you.”

“You didn’t need to.”

“I made you do that?”

I start to laugh, drunk with the relief flowing through me. “Given how good you fucked me, I’m more than happy to let you claim it.”

“I thought that was a myth,” he says, voice choked with awe. “Holy shit that was hot.” He strokes a hand over my mostly soft cock and groans. “I wanna do that again.”

“Yes. Let’s practice. Over and over until we get it exactly right.”

He matches my dopey smile. “Maybe you can teach me.”

I arch an eyebrow. “You still want to try bottoming?”

“Hell yeah. *Especially* after seeing you come without touching yourself. You looked that blissed-out, I couldn’t hold back.”

Chad slips out of my ass, and I push myself to sitting, only now realizing how uncomfortable that was. It’s official. Good sex overrides everything else.

“How about you get naked, then we clean ourselves up and go to bed? Normally I’d want a second round, but I’m not sure if I’ve got anything left in me after that.”

As though agreeing with me, he yawns widely. “Yeah, I think I’m crashing. What time is it?”

“After three.”

“That’ll do it.” He helps me down and gives me a long, lingering kiss before resting his forehead to mine. “Maybe it’s the sex talking or the tiredness kicking in, but ... I, umm, I’m glad we did this.”

“Started dating?”

“Took the weekend together. I don’t know when I’ll be able to get away again, and with us having to keep this a secret, it might be a while before we

can see each other properly like this. And if there's anything this weekend has taught me, it's that everything is better with you. I ... I want to give this thing my all and see where we end up."

My chest is so full of his words and how much he obviously means them. I laugh, feeling lighter than air. "We're getting married, remember?"

"Damn, how could I have forgotten?"

"Awestruck. I get it."

"Someone clearly wants to lock me down. Maybe I should have taken you to a gay club before now. Your boyfriend is hot property."

"I didn't need a gay club to tell me that."

We lean into each other, not wanting to separate. And for all my joking, I feel the same way he does. I want to ride this out, I want us to last, I want to see us make it after graduation when the odds are stacked against us.

And to do that, we need to do what Chad said and give it our all.

We can't do that in hiding.

So even though I'm nervous, and I'm not confident in how the fallout will go, it's obvious to me what the next step is.

"We need to come clean."

"What?"

I shrug in his hold. "It's the only way to do this. If we're serious, we can't hide anymore. We're adults—we shouldn't be letting some dumbass rivalry dictate our lives to the point I can't even spend time with you when I want to."

His kiss is swift, full of relief. "You sure?"

"Definitely."

"Okay then." He grins. "I'm in."

CHAD

WE HAVE A LAZY MORNING OF CUDDLING AND HANGING OUT BEFORE WE HEAD back to Greenwich. It's super boyfriend-y, and I'm here for it. Bailey and Chad. Prince and Doomsen. I mentally cringe at how close that sounds to "Prince's Doom" and then tell myself to get over it.

So maybe I'm a fraction worried about how it's going to go down when we're back, but it's mostly for Bailey's sake. I'd warn him against rocking the boat at home and ostracizing himself, but he can make his own decisions, and if he's sure, I'm not gonna try and talk him out of that.

Plus, I want this. To be us.

The sooner we tell people, the sooner they'll get over it.

My brothers will think it's weird, but knowing some of them, it'll become a joke that we all laugh over later. Me, falling for a Kappa. So if things get too nasty for Bailey, he can always spend his time at our place. The others have their girlfriends there constantly, so I can't see how this will be any different.

On the train ride back, Bailey slumps down with his head on my shoulder, and I hold him close beside me, listening to him tell stories of how he grew up between the city and the Greenwich house. Then I tell him about our place in Atlanta. I'd never class us as poor, because it's not like I went without as a kid, and my parents are happy, but with the house comes a mortgage, and with the car comes a loan. They're both paying off student debts *still*, and I fully expect that to be the life I'm heading toward.

No matter what's going on with me and Bailey, his money is his. I want to make my own way, otherwise how can I feel like my own complete person outside of our relationship?

His family are still at the house when we get back there, waiting to have lunch with us, and unlike the first time we were here, I'm way calmer around them.

Victoria and Alistair treat me the same way as they're treating Bailey, Rachel, and Sierra. Like I belong here with them, which isn't something I ever would have imagined when I stepped foot in here on Friday.

I'm reluctant to head back to school, and I'm feeling the same hesitancy coming from Bailey. Lunch goes for way longer than it should, and then we spend some time outside before we head up to collect our things.

“You okay?” I ask him.

“Yeah, fine.” Even his answer sounds distracted. He must be nervous over having to tell his friends he’s dating the street menace, and I kinda wish I’d controlled myself all these years so he wasn’t in this position, but also if I had, I wouldn’t be me.

And Bailey really likes this me.

It’s afternoon by the time we leave, and when Bailey pulls up in the parking lot of Deja Brew, he turns off his car. I turn toward him, surprised to find him staring at his phone, small line marring the pale skin between his dark eyebrows.

“Seriously, what’s up?”

“Nothing.” He shakes whatever that was off and smiles. “Want to grab some coffee before we head back?”

I narrow my eyes. “You nervous or ... is this something else?”

“What was it you told me? ‘The front yard isn’t safe today.’”

“You guys are planning a prank?” I go to reach for my phone when Bailey’s hand closes over it.

“You made me keep quiet, and we weren’t even dating then.” His blue eyes are all big and pleading, and how the hell do I say no to him when he looks like that?

“I have to,” I whine.

“No, all you have to do is come and have coffee with me, and by the time we get back, you will have miraculously missed it all.”

Shit. This is exactly what my brothers will be worried about when they find out about him. Me being forced to choose between them and my boyfriend. To them, the decision should be easy. Hell, a month or so ago, it would have been. I’d be out of this car and on the phone.

But now ... I make a noise in the back of my throat. “What kind of prank?”

“Just an inconvenient one.”

At least that doesn’t sound too bad. It’s not like the Kappas have never pranked us before, and thankfully, their ideas tend to be shit in comparison.

“When are they doing this dumb prank?”

“Half an hour.”

Against every cell in my body, I nod. “Fine, let’s get those coffees.” I comfort myself with the fact that his house will be hoping to get me with their dumb idea, and Bailey’s stopping that from happening.

We're both putting each other first.

I kinda like it.

Us against everyone else.

I'm jittery as hell through coffee though, and Bailey keeps laughing at the way my legs are bouncing.

"Trust me, you'll be happy to have missed it, and then you get to organize a prank in retaliation, which we both know you're excited for."

"That's true." I grin at him. "Maybe I won't even give you the heads-up this time."

"Ooh, those are fighting words."

I think we both know that would never happen. I'm oddly protective of my man, even though *he's* the one who can effectively kick ass, while all I can do is throw my heavy fists around.

Bailey watches me as he slowly finishes the last of his coffee, then sets the mug down with a large, satisfied "*ah*."

I glance at the time, and he relents.

"Okay, you can go now."

"Fuck yes." I sprint from the booth and have to jog back to drop a kiss on his head before I leave. It's not until I'm back in my car that I realize I might have fucked up by PDA'ing without checking who was around first.

Too late now.

Everyone will find out soon enough anyway.

I jump in my car that I left in the lot on Friday and quickly back out, driving the ten minutes home. While I wish I had more time with Bailey, I love getting back to the house, seeing my brothers and hanging out. It'll be a thousand times better when my boyfriend is there to do those things with me.

I hum to the radio as I drive through the U district toward Greek Row, but as soon as I turn onto the street, I immediately know something isn't right.

My brothers have filled the front yard and are covered in ... glitter? Which would be fucking hilarious—if it wasn't for the ambulance in the driveway.

My pulse spikes, and I hurriedly pull up to the curb and jump out.

"What the hell?" I ask, crossing the street toward where Zeke is standing. He's red, and not just from the copious sparkly shit clinging to him.

"Brandon," he says.

"What ..." I crane my neck around Robbie to see the two paramedics and Brandon in an oxygen mask. "Shit, is he okay?"

“I think so, but—”

Robbie spots me at that moment, and the look on his face ... he makes being glitter bombed look terrifying.

“Dooms! Let’s go.”

“Go where?”

“Those *fucking Kappas*, man. They’ve gone too far this time.” His voice is scratchier than usual.

This doesn’t make sense. Bailey said it was inconvenient, and yeah, the glitter is, but how does that lead to an ambulance and Robbie looking like he’s ready to kill someone? “What the hell happened?” I demand.

“They filled the living room with some spray shit and blocked all the doors and sealed the windows so we couldn’t get out. All I could hear was those assholes laughing while Brandon had a fucking asthma attack.” Robbie’s eyes are wild. “He couldn’t fucking breathe.”

“Until you broke the door down,” Zeke mutters.

“What was I supposed to do?” he shouts, rounding on Zeke.

I yank him back as Zeke lifts his hands. “Dude, it’s fine. You did what you had to.”

Some of the tension starts to leave Robbie, even as his breathing stays heavy. If Robbie wanted to get away from me, it wouldn’t take much, and I’m still ninety percent sure he’s planning to go on a rampage.

His fists are tight. “Those assholes have got it coming.” He takes a step toward Kappa House and raises his voice. “Hear that, assholes? You’ve got it fucking coming!”

I turn to see a group of them huddled on their porch down the end of the street, and my stare finds where Bailey is hovering in the middle of the yard, looking our way. This ... this is not good.

One of the paramedics approaches us, eyeing Robbie warily, but it’s not needed. Robbie deflates at the sight of him. “All good?”

The paramedic nods. “His breathing is back to normal, but he’s going to travel with us to the ER so they can monitor him for a few hours. As long as everything looks good, he’ll be back home tonight.”

“Thanks,” Zeke says, walking with them over to check in on Brandon.

I glance at Robbie. “You okay, man?”

“It was terrifying.” He scowls. “At first it was just coughing, but then he couldn’t stop, and he was making this gasping noise ...” A cringe races over his enormous body. “What were they thinking?”

“They weren’t.” I really hate what I’m about to say, but I need to damage control fast. “But we don’t think through our pranks. Brandon had to remind us about checking the medical records with those water balloons, remember?”

“But he still did his job. Where was their risk manager on this? Kurt should have never let this happen.”

He’s right, and if the way Bailey’s phone has been going off all weekend is any indication, this wasn’t a spur-of-the-moment prank. They’ve been planning this. And if they’ve been planning this, they sure as hell should have checked that they weren’t going to hurt anyone.

After the ambulance leaves, we reenter the house, and the living room looks like unicorn carnage. Glitter blankets everything, the living room door is splintered in the hallway, and air freshener cans litter the carpet.

Fuck me.

I go to grab the vacuum and find it superglued to the kitchen ceiling, which is just fucking perfect. Normally, I’d grudgingly appreciate something that stupid, but right now, I’m getting almost as pissed as Robbie. To top it all off, there is so much shit missing from the house that it’s clear the Kappas have stealth stolen hundreds of points’ worth of items.

This is not good.

This whole thing is a fucking clusterfuck.

And I’ve got this ball of dread sitting heavy in my gut that I didn’t pick up the phone and warn them. Bailey said it would be fine, and when I think about it, glitter bombing a frat is something we’ve all done. If Brandon hadn’t been asthmatic, it *would* have been harmless.

But he is.

And it wasn’t.

And my brothers—especially Robbie—are too far past reasoning to try and make them see it that way.

All I know is the plan for us to go public with our relationship is solidly on the back burner.

I check my phone as I head next door to ask if we can borrow their vacuum and find a ton of stressed-out texts from my boyfriend. He clearly sounds worried, and I get it, but I have to deal with this mess.

Being VP is all fun and games until shit blows up in your face.

I text him that I’ll call as soon as I can, then get to work cleaning. We manage to source a bunch of vacuums from across the neighborhood to deal

with all the glitter. My guilt is so strong that I can't even bring myself to make the pledges, Raymond and Carter, clean down the walls, but once I get started, everyone else chips in.

It takes a few hours for the house to finally look back to normal, but the smell is stuck to everything. We collapse on the floor and couches once we're done, and all I want is to go to bed, but Zeke and I wait up for Brandon.

It's another hour before we hear Robbie pull up from going to get him, and when Brandon walks inside, he looks almost back to normal.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, pretty tired though, so I'm going to head up to bed."

We wish him good night, and Robbie watches him all the way up the stairs before turning to us. "I got a call while I was out."

"Yeah?"

His jaw ticks. "Yep. I know who planned this whole thing."

"The Kappas. We already knew that."

"Yeah, but it was all one guy's idea. And he's officially made my shit list."

Zeke and I exchange a look. "Who?"

"That new guy. Bailey Prince."

BAILEY

CHARLES PACES BACK AND FORTH IN THE LIVING ROOM, HAIR A MESS FROM the number of times he's shoved his hands through it. The air is tense, guilt hanging heavy over us all.

"How?" Charles explodes again. "How didn't anyone think to check the list?"

"Kurt should have." Jordan shrugs. "In his defense, you didn't think of it either."

Our president scowls and swings back around to look out at the yard.

"Don't beat yourself up," Lucas says. "It's not like they couldn't open the windows. The dumbasses just didn't think of it."

The look Charles gives him silences Lucas immediately.

"Great idea, Bailey," someone says, and I have no idea who it is, but my jaw clenches so hard I swear I crack a molar.

"Great execution, moron," I throw back. What was that about wanting to make friends? Oops.

But what's the point? Everyone here is intent on blaming this on me despite having nothing to do with it since that meeting forever ago. I don't have the energy to argue. I'd been riding a high after my weekend away, and now I'm crashing hard. It would almost make sense to tell them about Chad now since it's not like I could make things any worse for myself.

For Chad though ... I get the impression the rest of his house will not be okay with what happened, and spilling about our relationship now isn't the best move. I hate that the tables have turned, but he was fine with staying a secret for me. Now I need to do the same for him.

Also, despite his message saying he'll call me, he hasn't yet.

That doesn't fill me with reassurance.

I'd like to think our relationship is stronger than some dumb rivalry, but the tension in the house at the moment isn't helping all the second-guessing.

And I *still* haven't heard from him.

Charles's phone goes off with a text, and we hold our breaths, hoping it's Zeke with an update. As much as those two claim they don't like each other, there's a mutual respect between them that I'm assuming comes from both being president.

He lets out a long exhale. "Brandon is home, and he's okay."

Like that, the tension breaks, and relief sweeps through the room.

“Don’t get too excited. He might be okay, but that doesn’t mean they won’t be reporting us to the dean.”

“Reporting us?” Kurt sounds outraged. “They’ve done a hundred times worse. We just got unlucky.”

“We were careless,” Charles argues, and I have to agree with them both. I’ve seen the air freshener prank pulled off a few times, and it’s always gone without a hitch. Of *course* Brandon would have to be an asthmatic, but we should have covered all bases first.

I feel sick.

“And none of you realized something was going on?” I ask.

Lucas shakes his head. “There was coughing, but we didn’t know it was anything bad until Robbie burst through the door like a damn cyborg. As soon as we saw his face, we took off.”

I don’t blame them. Robbie is enormous and terrifying on a good day.

My phone vibrates against my thigh, and after a quick glance at the screen to confirm it’s Chad, I tell the others I’m heading to bed. It’s not that late yet, but I need to get away. The guilt is stifling, and I don’t want to stick around for people to keep pointing fingers.

I close the door to my room behind me and text him back to confirm I can talk.

He calls right away, and the knot in my chest loosens.

“Hey,” I say, and hearing him breathe on the other end settles my anxiety.

“Hey.” The word is missing his usual warmth.

“You okay?”

“I don’t know. There’s ... there’s too much going on I can’t keep my thoughts straight.”

“I’m so sorry.”

He doesn’t immediately say anything, and I hate that I can’t see his face to read what he’s thinking. “Is it true? Was the whole thing your idea?”

Lead sinks into my stomach. “Do you hate me?”

He swears. “Seriously?”

“Look, the guys were throwing out ideas a month or so back, and I suggested a way they could combine them. They started planning it properly a week ago, but because of you, I stayed out of it.”

More silence. Slow breathing. It’s like I can hear him thinking as loudly as if he’d responded. “I don’t know what to do.”

“What do you mean?”

“Everyone’s pissed. Robbie is furious, and as soon as he gets some of the other brothers on board, they’re targeting *you*. Someone from your house has sold you out, and I have no idea who, but they’ve basically said you planned the whole thing.”

“That’s bullshit.”

“Yeah, sounds like it.”

“You believe me, right?”

“Of course.” His emphatic response at least helps to calm me. “I don’t know how to make the others believe me though, and some of these guys—mainly ones who don’t live at the house—I don’t trust for a minute. Some of them want hazing brought back in as the norm. They’re fucked. I’m seriously worried.”

“It’ll be okay. Give everyone a day or two, let things calm down, and then talk to them.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“You and Robbie are close, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, we’re tight. You’re right. I’m sure in a few days he’ll have calmed down.”

“Damn it,” I whisper through a laugh. “I guess we’re staying in the shadows a bit longer.” I can’t keep the ache out of my voice. The last thing I want is to tell people at the moment, but I need to. I need to be able to see him when things like this go down.

“Yeah ...”

“I’m sorry,” I say again.

Finally, he thaws. “Stop saying that. It’s not your fault. We’ll work something out.”

“Okay.”

“I miss you, Princess.”

My heart almost explodes with relief. “It’s been one afternoon.”

“Exactly. A *whole* afternoon. This is torture.”

“Just think, by next weekend, we could be having sleepovers every night. We’re playing the long game.”

“Yeah, we are.” He yawns loudly. “I’m going to go, but I’ll call you tomorrow.”

“Can’t wait.”

“Sweet dreams.”

“Good night. And, Chad? I miss you too.”

I KEEP WAITING FOR THE AIR TO CLEAR, BUT INSTEAD OF THINGS RELAXING, the tension ratchets up to the next level. A group of Sigmas stole Jordan’s bag and laptop when he was crossing campus the other day, and he had to fish them down from our roof. Jordan and Lucas retaliated by egging their pledges. We’ve had tires let out and curse words burned into the grass, and this morning, things have reached a whole new level.

I stand on the back deck and watch as Charles and Lucas attempt to get into our back shed. It’s wrapped in cling film, and the Sigmas have dragged our lawn sprinkler in there, turned it on, then taken the top part off the tap. All the things we store in there for parties will be destroyed.

Things do not look good. I hear Chad’s name passed around as often as Robbie’s, but I know for a fact he has nothing to do with it—for once. I have no idea how I’m supposed to convince my brothers of that though, because as far as they’re concerned, if something happens, it has Doomsen written all over it.

Charles has been trying to reason with Zeke to call off his boys, but it doesn’t look like either party wants to listen, and no matter how much Charles tries to put a stop to it, things are spiraling out of control.

I jump as there’s a loud *thump* on the roof directly overhead, then turn and walk back inside. I guess the daily rally of water balloons is starting early. Not the worst thing they could do, but ducking balloons and carrying an umbrella to my car every day is getting old.

Once I’m dressed, there’s a message waiting on my phone from Chad.

I’ve just spent ten minutes yelling at these dumbasses about the shed. I’m sorry. This is so fucked up.

I smile sadly. This week was supposed to be amazing, and instead, it turned to hell. Chad said Zeke is turning a blind eye to everything that’s happening, so he’s been taking control. I’d be willing to put money down the only reason for that is if we don’t deescalate things, we’ll have to hide for the rest of the school year, and that’s way too long to go without being able to date him properly.

I have no idea what to do, and neither does Chad. We haven’t risked

meeting up again, and I'm getting cranky at the lack of contact.

I shove what I need into my bag and head out.

"Class?" Lucas asks as I pass him in the hall.

"Mhmm."

"If you give me a minute, I'll grab my bag and walk with you."

I shake my head and keep walking. "It's totally fine. My car is around the block."

"You shouldn't be heading out alone, not with the Sigmas looking out for you."

I whirl on him. "How do you know they're looking out for me?"

"Whoa." He throws his hands up. "It's the gossip in the street."

I narrow my eyes at him, but he doesn't seem to be lying. "Grab your bag."

There's no point taking my annoyance out on the one guy who's on my side. We manage to make it to my car without being pelted with water, but once we reach it, we shouldn't have bothered.

The whole thing is wrapped in cling film so thick I can't make out the blue color, and the word *dickweed* is spray-painted all over it.

I'm too tired to deal with it. I can't be bothered fighting them. Even as Lucas starts to get fired up, I can't match his anger.

Instead, I turn on my heel and walk home.

I feel so goddamn alone.

And I'm lost on how we're going to fix this.

CHAD

WE'RE PUMMELED AT OUR AWAY GAME, AND SPIRITS ARE AT AN ALL-TIME LOW when I get back to the house. I can't help thinking back to last weekend and how perfect it was, and wishing I could quit the team already and go away with Bailey every weekend.

But there's no way for that to happen without saying goodbye to my scholarship and Sigma Beta Psi.

So I need to stick it out. And hope the others get their shit together.

I glance up from my spot on the couch when Robbie sticks his head in the living room. He holds up a bag of stink pellets. "You coming, Doomsen?"

"Fuck no."

A frown bristles his forehead. "I would have thought this shit was right up your alley. Normally you live for this."

"Maybe I've had a change of heart."

Robbie scoffs. "Great timing, brother."

He leaves with a few brothers trailing after him, and it takes all of my limited self-control not to go after them and drag them back inside.

"You really not gonna do anything?" I ask Zeke, who pointedly ignored the exchange.

"Like what?"

"You're president." I try to keep the annoyance out of my tone. "Put a stop to it—that's your job."

He tosses his phone on the table. "Oh, yeah. All those times I tried to get you to stop, how did that work out?"

I set my jaw.

"That's what I thought. They're not doing anything more than you've done since you rushed, so why the one-eighty?"

"I was never this bad, and you know it. A few times a month, that's it, not all day, every day. And I've never messed with their personal shit."

"That was going a bit far, but I talked to them."

"Clearly they're not listening. Do you know Jordan's laptop ended up smashing when he tried to get it down from the roof? He lost a bunch of his assignments. Jeopardizing someone else's class is so not frat, and I never would have gone that far."

"Who doesn't back their work up these days?"

“That’s really your response?”

Zeke scowls. “How do you know all that?”

“What?”

“About Jordan.” His gaze is suddenly laser focused. “I’ve spoken to Charles, but no one else in the house knew.”

I shift. “I’ve, umm, talked to people. Robbie’s tantrum isn’t exactly going unnoticed by the other houses.”

“You’re a shit liar, Chad. What’s going on?”

“I’m worried we’re going to go too far and the dean will hear about it.”

Zeke shoves to his feet. “You’re still lying.”

“Are you a fucking mind reader now?”

“Damn it, Chad, what is it? Did you do something? Or—” His face pales, and he takes a step back. “You were supposed to be back by lunchtime, and you weren’t.”

My gut sinks. “What are you saying?”

“Did you sell us out?”

“*What?*” The voice from the doorway makes me jump.

Of course Robbie’s back already. He’s looking from me to Zeke and back again.

“The fuck, Doomsen?” Robbie says. “*Did you?*”

It’s my turn to jump to my feet, partly from guilt, partly from anger at them jumping to that conclusion, and partly because I don’t like the two of them standing over me.

“You really think I’d do that?”

“What the hell else could it be?” Zeke asks. “You’re suddenly standing up for them and not getting involved. You know things you shouldn’t know, and you were miraculously not here when it all went down ...”

My face is heating up, even as Robbie’s expression morphs into anger. I can tell he’s jumping to the same conclusion, and I don’t blame him, because in a tiny part, it’s true. I didn’t warn them, but it wasn’t supposed to go down the way it did. If it was any other harmless prank, I would have gotten back and laughed it off with them.

“Brandon could have died,” Robbie says. He’s looking at me in a way I’ve never seen him look at anyone. “He’s your brother, and it’s sounding like you don’t give a shit. You’re more worried about those asshole Kappas than what happened to him. So I’m gonna give you this one chance to own up if you did something, because if you don’t, and I find out you’re lying, we’re

done.”

Fuck. I swallow, but my throat feels like it’s strangling me, and when I look from Robbie to Zeke, I can’t hold their eye contact.

I reach up to rub the back of my neck, where I’m burning up.

“Can you guys sit down?”

“Well, that doesn’t sound good,” Zeke warns.

“Just sit your asses down.” I wait for them to do it, then take a deep breath. “I didn’t sell you out, but I do have something to tell you that neither of you are going to like.”

I can tell Robbie is trying to channel his anger by the way his fists are clenching and relaxing over and over.

My tongue swipes over dry lips as I try to figure out how to tell them. This is the worst timing for it, and I haven’t run it by Bailey yet, so I have to hope that he was serious when he said he wanted to tell people last week because once it’s out, I have no idea how they’re going to react. But Robbie’s right. If I don’t fess up and they find out later, they’ll assume the worst.

“I’m telling you guys this because I’m not hiding anything, and I want to clear his name. That guy I told you about?” I look at Robbie, who nods slowly to confirm he remembers. “We’re dating. And we went away last weekend because we’ve been on the down low and we wanted to spend some time together.”

“He closeted?” Zeke asks, but before I can answer, Robbie fills in the blanks.

“He’s a *Kappa*?”

I huff out a breath and talk as fast as I can so they can’t cut me off. “I didn’t say anything, because I didn’t want to cause shit. You guys *know* me. You know I love antagonizing all those assholes, but then I met him, and damn it, I couldn’t stay away.”

“You *are* dating one? What the hell? And you expect us to think you didn’t know about this?”

I point at Robbie. “Fuck you. If I’d known what they were planning, I would have said something, but he never told me. Like I said, we were away the whole weekend, and he swore he had nothing to do with it.”

Robbie snorts. “They were all in on it.”

“He *knew* about it but didn’t know the details.”

“Yeah, right, that sounds legit.”

Zeke holds up a hand. “Who is it?”

“That’s the part you guys aren’t going to like.”

“Charles?” Zeke recoils.

“What the—? *No.*” He relaxes only slightly. I take a breath. “It’s Bailey Prince.”

Robbie’s on his feet before I can blink. “Are you shitting me right now?”

“Sit down.”

“Don’t you fucking tell me what to do. He’s the one behind this, and you’re going to stand there and talk shit about how he didn’t know.”

“He didn’t.”

“Bullshit.”

“He was there when they were talking initially and made the suggestion to combine the pranks they were planning, and then that’s *it*. He didn’t have any more to do with it because he couldn’t care less about this stupid rivalry.”

“Stupid? Coming from you.”

“Coming from *him*. All weekend they were planning it, and he kept silencing his phone. I was there—I saw him.”

“And now you expect us to believe you when you’ve been keeping this from us.”

I gesture at him. “Because I didn’t want all this shit to happen. We’re brothers, and I’ve never given you a reason not to believe me before. Are you seriously gonna turn your back on me now?”

“You didn’t see Brandon.”

“I didn’t, and I’m sorry it happened, but he’s fine. *He’s* over it. And now you have a choice. Are you going to put something that *could* have happened to him before me, or are you going to trust me like you always have and shut the fuck up about this?”

Robbie goes to say something again, but Zeke grabs his arm.

“How can you know Bailey’s telling you the truth?”

“Because I fucking love him.”

The words slip out, totally unconsciously, and it’s only when Zeke falls silent and Robbie’s head snaps toward me that I even realize what I’ve said.

I drop back onto the couch and bury my hands in my hair. Jesus fuck, it’s true. But I didn’t mean to tell them when I hadn’t even planned to tell him.

The couch shifts on either side of me, and a hand lands on my shoulder.

“Dooms?”

“I’m sorry.” I force back the frustrated prickling behind my eyes. “I’m just ... I don’t know what to do. This whole thing is messed up, and I know

he had nothing to do with it because we were planning on telling everyone about us last weekend. All we want is a chance to be together and be able to stop hiding, but now ...”

A hand starts to rub my back, and relief surges through me.

“I’m sorry ...” I mutter.

“Okay.” The gruff voice is Robbie’s. He hesitates before continuing. “Brotherhood means trust, so we’ve gotta trust you.”

I finally look up at him. “You’re not still mad?”

“Of course I am. Those Kappa dicks could have killed him, and I’m not okay with that. I don’t want them thinking they can pull that shit and get away with it.”

“You could have reported it.”

“You know that’s not our style. They’ve never reported us, and we’ve pulled way more shit than them.”

It’s true. There’s an agreement on Greek Row that we handle things ourselves unless it crosses the line to hazing. Fraternities and sororities can only continue to operate so long as they’re not drawing the bad kind of attention. “So what do we do?”

Both of us look to Zeke.

“What I don’t get,” he says, “is if you’re so sure Bailey Prince had nothing to do with it, why was Robbie told it was all him?”

“Yeah, that is strange.”

Robbie shrugs. “I heard it from Carter.”

“And where did he hear it?” I ask.

“Fucked if I know.”

I drum my fingers on my thigh. “Where’s Carter now?”

“Work, maybe?” Zeke answers. “Should we call him?”

“Yeah, I wanna know who’s spreading shit about my boyfriend.”

Robbie takes out his phone and calls our pledge. It takes a few rings, but he answers.

“Yo, Carter, what’s up?”

“Just finishing work, hold up.” There’s the sound of a door slamming in the background. “I’m in my car. What do you need?”

“Remember last weekend when you told me it was that Bailey Prince kid who organized the prank?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Where’d you hear that?”

There's a slight pause, like he's thinking. "Uh ... on campus, I—"

"On a Sunday night," I cut in.

"No, I mean, people were talking about it apparently, and one of my friends from on campus, like from my classes, they told me ..."

The three of us exchange looks.

"Where did they hear it?" Robbie asks.

"Look, man, you're asking the wrong person. I'm just the messenger."

Something isn't adding up here. I nod at Robbie, who thanks him and ends the call.

"That was odd, right?" I ask.

"I think so ..." Zeke's staring across the room. "I feel like he was lying, but I'm not sure why."

"Okay, I'll admit that was suspicious," Robbie agrees.

"Was Carter with you guys during the prank?"

Robbie thinks. "I can't ... Maybe ... It's a bit of a blur."

"He and Raymond were watching the house so I'm pretty sure they were both there," Zeke says.

Weird. So fucking weird.

Robbie turns to me. "I can't believe I'm about to say this, but maybe you should get your boy here. I don't trust him, but now I don't think I trust Carter either. And I'm gonna feel like a real dick if I've been gunning for the wrong guy."

"You better be prepared to apologize," I say, pulling out my phone. "Let's get to the bottom of this."

BAILEY

THE SECOND I ANSWER CHAD'S CALL, HIS WARM, LOW VOICE COMES DOWN the line. "I need you."

It makes me hum. "Fuck, I need you too. So bad."

Peals of laughter meet my response, and it takes a moment for me to realize I'm on speaker. My face floods with heat.

"I take it you're not the only one who heard that," I say.

"You'd be right. Say hi to Robbie and Zeke."

Robbie and Zeke? "Uh ... hi? Chad, a quick word?"

He switches me off speaker, and his voice sounds much closer this time.

"What's up?"

"*Me*, what's up? They're going to wonder why you're calling me."

"Oh, yeah, that. No, they know."

"They ... what?" I can't have understood him correctly.

"I told them."

His words are clear, but I'm sure I've missed a step. I pull back the phone and check the screen like it might have answers for me there. Nope. I press it back to my ear. "About *us*?"

"That we're dating, yes. I also told them the prank was only you initially and that you didn't plan anything last weekend."

"You're telling me you risked pissing them off with our relationship so you could clear my name?"

"That was part of it."

Despite everything that's been happening lately, that makes me smile. "Back to the part about how you need me?"

"Don't get me wrong, I definitely do need you like that, but for real this time. Any chance you can come over?"

I quirk a brow. "If it wasn't you asking, I'd for sure think I was walking into a trap."

"Like I'd let that happen."

"Maybe not you, but ... how do you know they're not planning something?"

"Because they're my brothers, and I trust them. But also, there's something going on with this whole thing, so we need you here to help us figure out what happened."

“What, with the prank?”

“Yeah. Can you come?”

“Of course.” We hang up, and even though there was nothing more to it than a prank gone wrong, I hurry to get changed and sneak out. The last thing I want is for anyone to see me visiting Sigma House right now. Besides, even if it turns out this whole thing was a messed-up plan and I’m still enemy number one, I’ll get to see Chad. The fact he told them about us with so much uncertainty going on is ... I don’t get it. I’ve held off for so long, not knowing how people would react, and there’s Chad walking headfirst into whatever repercussions come for him.

I don’t think I’ll ever get over the awe I feel for him.

Even knowing he’s waiting for me, I’m nervous as I approach. It’s late afternoon, almost night, and it seems like most people are doing ... well, whatever people do on a Sunday that stops them from being outside. No one from my house saw me leave, and as I reach the end of the street, I quickly look around before darting up the front steps and knocking on the door.

I’m antsy that I’ll be made to wait for a while, but barely a second later, Chad is there. His warm expression sends flutters through me before he tugs me inside and slams the door.

“Hey, beautiful.” His hug is tight and warm, and I lean into the comfort. The familiarity of his body, his scent, relaxes the knot in my stomach. Then he pulls away and takes my hand. “Come on.”

I’m led through the house, past rooms where people throw curious looks our way that kick up my nervousness again.

Zeke, Robbie, and Brandon are waiting in a back room, sitting around a table, and they all look up to stare as we enter.

Not awkward or anything. I fake a confidence I don’t feel as I meet Brandon’s gaze.

“How are you?”

“Recovered fine.”

The scowl Robbie throws his way is enough to frighten anyone, but Brandon just flips him off. I’d be ducking under the table if he looked at me that way because while Chad is big as in muscle, Robbie is just ... big. He’s one of the largest guys I’ve ever seen, and if that isn’t intimidating, I don’t know what is.

I’m suddenly very grateful Chad spoke up for me.

He takes one of the seats, and I pull out the one next to him, very

conscious of all the attention on us.

“Thanks for coming down,” Zeke says.

I glance quickly at Chad. “Yeah, that’s fine. Chad said you guys wanted help with something?”

He chuckles softly. “You look like you’re about to shit yourself, dude. Relax, we only want to talk.”

“Can you blame me when all I’ve heard for the last week is that you guys are out to get me?”

“Sorry,” Robbie grunts. “We were told the prank was all you, and I wanted to get you back so bad, but ...” His gaze flicks to Chad as well. “Doomsen vouches for you. So now we wanna hear your side.”

“My side?”

“Yeah. What happened? Because it was one of our pledges who told me it was you, but he’s conveniently forgotten where he heard that.”

“Okay, that is weird.”

“Right? So talk.”

“About what? We weren’t even here.” I pull out my phone and unlock it before navigating to the chat. “There’re all the messages they were sending about it. I didn’t write back to shit. We were, uh ...” How do I say fucking like bunnies without saying exactly that? “Busy.”

Robbie smirks as he takes my phone, and that helps break some of the tension. “*Busy*, right.” He starts to scroll through the message thread. I don’t feel bad showing it to him, because there’s nothing there they don’t already know. Despite what happened, it wasn’t malicious. All the messages are plans about who is buying what, the time they’re coming down, who’ll be on lookout, and who’ll do each part inside of the house.

I’m not sure what they hope to find.

“The house will be empty at ten,” Robbie reads aloud. “That’s not right. We had people here, didn’t we, Zeke?”

“Yep. The pledges were here all weekend.”

I lift my eyebrows. “No, they weren’t.”

“They were. I’ve already asked them if they left, and they said you guys must have snuck in while they were sleeping.”

“Well ...” I nod to my phone. “Apparently they had between ten and midnight to get everything set up.”

“There’s no way.”

“I’m only pointing out what the messages say.”

“He’s right,” Robbie says, tilting my phone toward Zeke. “It’s there. Lucas. We’ve got two hours to get in and out. Maybe one and a half if we want to be careful.”

“How the fuck did Lucas know that?” Chad asks, snatching the phone to look for himself.

At first, I think it’s his jealousy speaking, but actually, that’s a good question. How *did* he know? They’re all looking at me, and all I can do is shrug. “I don’t know.”

“Wait.” Chad looks up at me. “It says right here to make sure no one touches the windows.”

“Yeah, of course. We wanted to piss you guys off, not”—I gesture at Brandon—“you know.”

“But they were sealed,” Chad says.

I shake my head. “They can’t have been. Even after everything went down, no one could work out why you guys didn’t open them.”

“I tried,” Brandon argues. “That was the first thing I did after we tried the doors, but they were stuck.”

“They can’t have b—”

“I had to get a crowbar to unstick them,” Chad says. “They were glued.”

I lift my hands. “There’s no way that was us. Seriously. Charles was very clear.”

A long silence stretches between us all.

Chad’s the first to talk. “So someone glued the windows, told people it was all Bailey, even though we weren’t here, and then there’s this apparent two-hour window the Kappas knew about.” He looks pointedly at Zeke.

“Plus, your pledges lied,” I helpfully remind them. Maybe I should keep quiet about it, but I’m starting to get the impression that there was inside help. “Maybe you need to talk to them.”

“We already asked Carter,” Robbie says.

“So what about the other one?”

Zeke stands. “I think Raymond’s here. I’ll go get him.”

Brandon whistles when he leaves. “This is getting wild.”

“Yup,” Robbie agrees before nodding at me. “It sounds like you really weren’t involved, so I’m, you know, sorry.”

“Thanks.”

Chad grabs my hand and presses a kiss to the back of it.

“How are you smiling right now?” I ask him.

“Can’t help it when you’re around.”

Brandon groans as Robbie says, “Smooth, Dooms. You got gay moves, brother.”

“Gay?” Chad snorts. “I’ve got moves, period. You guys are lucky I’m off the market now.”

“Of course they are, sweetie.” I pat his hand. “Your snuggle game is strong.”

Robbie huffs back a laugh as Zeke returns, a younger guy with dark hair in tow. Chad settles back, arm flung across the back of my chair. This Raymond kid looks as intimidated as I felt when I first walked in.

The four of them aren’t exactly a panel I’d want to mess with.

Raymond’s eyes fall on me, and his gaze narrows. “What’s he doing here?”

“He,” Robbie says, “is Chad’s boy, and we asked him here. Just like you.”

“Yeah ... what’s, umm, what do you want?”

“What the fuck went down last weekend?” Chad asks, jumping straight on the attack. And yep, I’m very, very glad he’s on my side, because seeing someone as normally easygoing as Chad turn angry is an experience.

“What do you mean?” Raymond hedges.

“The prank. Apparently, Lucas said there was a two-hour window where everyone was out, but you and Carter said you were here the whole time.”

“We were—he’s lying.”

“Except it wasn’t only him who said it,” I add. “All the guys said they snuck in and out at that time.”

“You think anyone here is going to believe you?” he asks.

“Actually, he’s the one we do believe,” Zeke says. “Everything Bailey’s told us checks out, and everything Carter’s told us doesn’t. So you have a choice here. Either tell us what happened, or Carter will get the chance to. Whoever we find out is lying will be packing their bags.”

Ouch. Being a pledge is hard enough, but having your president warn you that you have one foot out the door?

“Fuck ...” he sighs.

“Whenever you’re ready,” Chad taunts.

Raymond glares at him. “It’s all *your* fault.”

“What do you mean?”

“Someone from Kappa told Carter you two were together. It’s a joke.

You guys go on and on about this rivalry, and the rest of us buy into it, then you do whatever the hell you want. Carter was pissed. Said this is why you're going soft. Then the guy from Kappa said Bailey somehow got his hands on high-point items from *your* room for King of Thieves and showed him photos as proof. What happened to putting your brothers first?"

Zeke holds up his hand before Chad can respond. "We'll come back to that. Who told Carter about them?"

"Can't remember his name. The blond guy. House manager."

"Lucas?"

Raymond clicks his fingers and points at me. "Yep. Him."

Chad's face goes tense. "That little fuck. I'm gonna—"

"So he told Carter about us," I say over Chad. "What does that have to do with it?"

"*Lucas* told him they wanted to prank Chad and make it look like it was you. Then you guys would break up and everything would go back to normal. All they wanted from us was to go out for a few hours, and I agreed—but I didn't know about that part until later. Carter said he'd be here and I could go and see my girlfriend! It wasn't until everything went down that he pulled me aside after and said I needed to stick to his story because we'd both end up in trouble for ditching the place." Raymond's knuckles are white where he's gripping the table. "How much shit am I in?"

"So much shit," Chad growls. I reach up to grab his hand and kiss him this time.

"But Chad wasn't here last weekend," I point out.

Raymond shakes his head. "It was all supposed to happen when he got back. Then one of the Kappas distracted us, and as we were chasing them down to get our lawn ornament back, the others crept in, and ..." He drops his face in his hands. "I'm so goddamn sorry, Brandon."

Apparently no one knows what to say because we all exchange looks over Raymond's head. I'm fucking pissed Lucas was part of this, but not surprised. So he wanted to break me and Chad up, did he? Well, joke's on him, because this is actually the thing that's brought us closer than ever.

I am the tiniest bit hurt, because I really did think he was my only friend in the house, but turns out that was all an act as well.

Carter, though, his part is going to hit the Sigmas hard. He lied and went behind Chad's back, basically offering the house up on a platter.

"There's still one thing I don't understand," Zeke says. "What about the

windows?”

“Windows?” Raymond echoes.

“Who sealed them?”

He looks legitimately confused. “The Kappas did ... didn’t they?”

Raymond seems to be telling the truth.

Does Lucas hate Chad enough to glue the windows shut? As much as he’s been a dick, I don’t feel like he would. But then the alternative is Carter selling out his brothers, which is equally as unlikely.

“Carter will be home soon,” Chad says. “I say we ask him, point-blank.”

“And if it was him?” I ask.

“He’s already betrayed his brothers,” Zeke says. “He’s out.”

Raymond pales. “And me?”

“You’ll go to a vote. You might not have known what was happening, but you lied. So good luck with that, dude.”

The look on Raymond’s face would make me feel bad if I hadn’t very nearly taken the blame for the whole thing. If Chad hadn’t spoken up, I would have.

The only reason they were caught out is because my boyfriend is a thousand times braver than any of them.

And goddamn I love him for it.

CHAD

INTRODUCING BAILEY TO MY BROTHERS AND CLEARING HIS NAME ALL AT ONCE isn't what I had on my Sunday night to-do list, but I can't say I'm not happy about it.

No, the thing I'm not happy about is that somehow news of our relationship got out first, and Brandon was hurt because of it.

I should have known Carter wasn't a good fit for us. Everything from complaining about our pranks being lame to laughing off Bro-motions night didn't sit well with me, and now he's gone and done this. He's the kind of dude who'd want to bring back hazing if he got the chance.

We leave Zeke to handle Carter and wait in the foyer, more than ready to escort that fucker out of the house. Raymond should be fine when the vote happens, and while I'm pissed with him right now, I also believe the poor bastard was dragged into this without his knowledge, so once I'm over being annoyed, I'll probably feel bad.

Until then ... I wrap my arm around Bailey's waist and pull him in close.

Robbie's watching us with folded arms. "I am really sorry, you know."

"We know," I assure him.

"But I'm still not happy with Kappas. Bailey's fault or not, all that shit still went down."

"Yeah, but you're taking it too far," Brandon says. "I'm fine, dude. Relax. It's not like we were ever friends with those guys anyway."

Robbie gestures toward Bailey. "Until now."

"We don't have to be friends," Bailey points out.

Dear, sweet, naive boyfriend. "You might be a Kappa, but you're an honorary Sigma now. These guys are gonna suffocate you."

"Hmm ... kinky."

My grip on him tightens. "Nope. Not joking about that."

His thin frame shakes with laughter, and I hold him close. "You guys are okay to deal with Carter, aren't you?"

Robbie's expression darkens. "Gladly."

"In that case ..." I tug Bailey after me. "We're going to bed. See you losers in the morning."

Bailey's hand squeezes mine as he follows me upstairs. "You want me to stay the night?"

“That shouldn’t be surprising to you. I’ll never be welcome at your place, but that’s cool, because you can sleep here literally whenever.”

“Wow.” He’s blinking prettily as I close my bedroom door behind us, looking a bit like he’s been smacked upside the head.

“You good?”

“Fine ... it’s just odd to think that we won’t have to sneak around anymore.”

“Well, you haven’t told your house yet.”

He snorts. “Please. Lucas already knows, and I’m not really friends with anyone else. I’m not going to bother announcing it. They’ll figure it out when they see us together.”

“I like that plan,” I say, reaching up to push his jacket from his shoulders. Then I pull back his shirt and kiss the bare skin at his neck. “You know what other plan I like?”

He hums in question, tilting his head to give me more access.

“The one where you fuck me.”

His eyes refocus on me. “You want to? Now?”

“When else?”

“Maybe sometime when your brothers aren’t listening in?”

I snicker and remove his shirt entirely. “I’ve lived with these guys for almost four years. There’s no privacy spared between us.”

“That isn’t helping convince me.”

“What about this?” I press my lips to his ear. “I need to feel your cock in my ass.”

His sharp intake of breath tells me I’ve got him. “That’ll do it. Do you have supplies?”

I cross to my bedside and pull out lube and condoms. “I’ve got you covered.”

“Literally.” His grin widens as he helps me out of my hoodie and T-shirt, then lets his fingers trail over my chest. I feel like a goddamn king when he looks at me the way he is, and the desire rushing through my veins is tinged with something new. Something softer, less desperate than usual, but every bit as intoxicating.

I sink into the feeling as we finish stripping each other out of our clothes. His skin is glowing in the moonlight from my window, hair an inky, glossy mess, and his freckles and eyes are bleached of color, stealing my breath and making me want to sink to my knees.

“How do you always do this?”

“What?”

“Make me fall for you a little more every time we’re together.”

Bailey reaches down and gives my swollen cock a long, teasing tug. “All I’m doing is taking you with me.”

I take his face in my hands and kiss him. Slow and long, I give him everything I have. Tonight, I’m going to treat him like the prince he is.

You know, instead of the filthy ho he *sometimes* is.

There are moments with him that I want to be hard and fast, but this time around, I’m gonna need him to be gentle with me. Is it going to hurt? Who fucking knows? But I’ve seen what being fucked does to him, and I want to get in on that action. The way he’s turned my cock into a steel rod proves I’m all in here.

I pull back and drag my teeth over his bottom lip. “How do you want me?”

He thinks for a moment. “Have you, uh, prepped?”

“All week I’ve been making sure to get in there in case, well, we get a chance for *you* to get in there.”

His hand presses lightly to my chest as he backs me toward the bed. “You play with yourself while you were doing that?”

“Not enough,” I admit. “Never enough time to use the bathroom properly.”

“Lucky we’ve got time tonight.” He tugs me into a hug, body pressing against mine, his cock leaking onto my gut. “Hands and knees.”

Well, that’s a position I’ve never been in myself. Well, naked, and with someone behind me anyway. Still, it’s Bailey, and I want to feel him pushing inside my body more than any kind of embarrassment that could creep up on me.

So I man up ... and bend over for him.

Bailey groans, and I jump as his hand cups my balls. “You’re mouthwatering.” He tugs on my sac. “Have you ever been rimmed before?”

I’m not entirely confident about the noise I make, but fuck. Rimming? The nerves in my ass come alive as though they’re singing their approval.

I clear my throat. “Can’t say I have.”

His free hand slides up my back, applying pressure to make me arch more. “There we go, just like that.” He shifts around, and I hold my breath, unsure what it—

Holy goddamn fuckstickles.

My arms almost buckle underneath me as Bailey swipes his tongue over my hole. Even though I knew it was coming, nothing could prepare me for the feeling of his warm breath ghosting over cold spit. I shift my legs wider, arching toward him, and I hear Bailey chuckle.

“Like that, did you?”

“I’m gonna need more conclusive evidence. Do it again.”

Thankfully, he doesn’t make me beg. His tongue licks a slow, wet stripe from my taint up to my hole, and *nrrrgh* I almost melt. I wish I only *almost* whimpered too, but nope, pretty sure that noise is actually coming from me.

Hey, I never claimed to be cool.

Turning into a whining puddle of need while your boyfriend is rimming you has to be frat as fuck, and if it isn’t, I’ll argue the point.

Every man needs to experience his hole being licked at least once.

When Bailey’s got my ass nice and wet, he starts to rub his thumb over my hole until I relax enough for him to slip it inside. It feels ... weird. But only for a couple of seconds, and the less I focus on it, the easier it is to melt into the feelings. The little nerves humming with pleasure, Bailey’s mouth, his slippery tongue, the way he keeps tugging on my balls.

I’m so horny, but my orgasm is still simmering in the background, held at bay by the intrusion in my ass that’s moving steadily from odd to hells fucking yeah.

It’s not until Bailey chuckles and pulls back that I realize I’m rocking onto his finger. “I’m going to start stretching you now. Still good?”

“Fuck yes, baby.” I hear the lid of the lube pop open, and this time when Bailey’s back, his fingers are slippery with it. He starts out with the one finger again, while he reaches between my legs and gives my cock some love. Every stroke is frustratingly slow and loose, but it offsets the stretch as he adds a second finger and uses them to work me open.

“You still good?” he asks again, but this time his voice is tight. The raw tone makes my cock throb, and I push back onto his fingers again.

“Yeah, I’m gonna need you to fuck me now.”

“Patience.”

“I’m all out of that,” I whine. “Just shove it in.” I don’t mean to sound as desperate as I do, but I can’t even feel embarrassed by it.

“Deep breath.”

I take one.

“Now let it out slowly.”

I follow his instructions, and as I’m letting out the breath, Bailey works another finger in me. I’ve lost track of how many of them fill my ass; all I know is there are entirely too many digits and not enough dick.

His grip on my cock tightens for a couple of strokes, and my eyes roll back in my head. My cock feels heavy, and my balls are already pulling tight, uncomfortably full and begging for release.

“You’re ready.”

I moan at the words. “Yes, yes, yes ... fuck me.”

Bailey withdraws, and I watch over my shoulder as he suits up, then taps my thigh to move farther up the bed. He climbs up and kneels behind me, and with one hand resting on the small of my back, the other positions his cock at my opening.

“You want this?” he asks.

“I think we’ve moved from want to need. Please ...”

I barely have the sentence out before he’s pushing inside. His cock splits me open, and I throw my head back, forcing myself to relax and take it all. For all the stretching he did, it clearly didn’t prepare me enough because my ass is feeling fuller and wider than I’ve ever managed to get it myself.

And while it kinda hurts—I think?—it also feels indescribably hot.

Like he’s taking everything he wants from me, fusing us together in the most filthy, delicious, needy way. It’s only me and him, and we’re joined together beyond anything I’ve ever experienced. Fucking someone isn’t like this.

I feel vulnerable and powerful and completely overwhelmed.

“I’m in,” he rasps.

I reach back to pull him against me and turn my head toward his. “Kiss me.”

He does. Unrestrained and messy, all teeth and tongue. He twists up my gut.

“I’m yours,” I whisper into his mouth. “I’m yours, all fucking yours.”

“I’m right there with you.”

“Good, now do it. Fuck me.”

His words are one long moan when he answers. “Gladly.”

Bailey straightens, planting his foot on the bed beside me and grabbing my opposite shoulder. Every one of his movements hits deep inside, and it makes me crave more.

His first thrust is slow, cautious, and while I love that he's making sure I'm okay, I suddenly know what he means about not needing it. Maybe it'll hurt if he goes all out immediately, but I'm past the point of caring. He's gotta abuse my ass already.

Every rock of his hips gets faster, harder, until he reaches a pace that settles that deep need in my balls. I push back into him, feeling like a total cock slut but not able to make myself stop, and when Bailey starts to reassure about how good I'm doing and how amazing I feel, it makes me light-headed.

Sex doesn't get any better than this.

Or at least, that's what I think, and then he hits my prostate, and all bets are off.

"Fuck!" I scramble to grab my cock, and before I can stop myself, I'm jerking off hard and fast, matching his thrusts, and vaulting myself into goddamn heaven with how indescribable this feels.

Bailey grabs my hips and starts to piston into me roughly, and the arm holding me up gives out. I hit the mattress face-first, and instead of stopping, Bailey readjusts and keeps pounding into me. He's sweaty, and his scent makes my hand move over my cock faster.

"I'm close," he pants. "So close."

He's still hitting that spot that's making my brain static, and all I can do is grunt in return.

I'm almost there ... almost at the edge ... almost ready to ... to ...

My balls tighten, and with a hip-jerking shudder, I unleash. My orgasm hits hard and fast, and I stroke myself through it, trying to drag it out as long as possible because the sheer fucking ecstasy is incredible.

"So ... tight ..." Bailey gasps, and then he slams inside and stills. His cock jerks with his release, and oh fucking hey, I love that too.

He collapses against me, front plastered to my back, lips skimming my hairline.

"That was ..." I start.

"Loud."

His response has me snorting. "What?"

Bailey groans. "That was so loud." He groans again. "I'll be surprised if every person in this house didn't hear us."

I wait for him to pull out before tackling him underneath me. "If they did, they're all going to know I'm one very lucky dude."

"Or stop me from ever stepping foot in this house again."

“Nah, you didn’t hear Robbie with his last girlfriend. I swear the walls were shaking. If anything, those horny bastards are going to be plotting how they can get them some of this gayness.”

Bailey’s laugh is so adorable, I can’t stop myself from kissing his scrunched-up nose. “Well, I hope so. I’m still not convinced they don’t hate me.”

I cringe. “Yeah, it’s going to be different for a while. I’m not sure when Robbie will get over it, but he’ll have to. And I’m pretty sure I’m going to get my ass kicked over letting you take shit for King of Thieves, so I’ve got that to look forward to as well.”

There’s no way Zeke will have forgotten that, and as soon as he’s done with Carter and Raymond, I’ll be next on his list.

“If it helps, even without that lamp, you guys have no chance of winning now.”

“Yeah, because of the prank. That our relationship caused.”

“Oh yeah.” Bailey falls silent.

“I think, if anything, that will only make it worse.”

“I can get the lamp back if you like? Pretend it never happened?”

I’ve lied to my brothers enough for one year. I shake my head. “Nah, I did it, I’ll face the consequences. Like you said, we have no hopes of winning, so ...”

It’s fucked, but it is what it is.

Losing King of Thieves sucks, but at least no one is actually hurt. Brandon’s okay, Carter’s being kicked out for being a dumbass, and I have my boyfriend, who I can see whenever I want.

Things could definitely be worse.

BAILEY

ME: *EMERGENCY MEETING 5PM*

I check the message I sent earlier and am attacked by nerves again. A bunch of my brothers said they'll be here, and now it's almost time, I have to gather every ounce of my limited courage and surge forward. Charles has been asking me what the meeting is about, but I can't bring myself to tell him.

Ever since Chad mentioned that he's going to get in trouble for the whole King of Thieves thing, I've been thinking. I want to fix it. All of it.

Us keeping things a secret allowed people to try and use it against us. My first step is coming clean to my house, and the second is telling them everything that went down.

Carter was removed from Sigma Beta Psi last night. It turned out he was the one responsible for gluing the windows closed, and he admitted to taking money from Lucas to leave. Even Robbie could concede that what happened was largely on Carter and his need for pranks that walked the line of what was right.

Lucas has pissed me off, but at the end of the day, he only went through with the plan we'd all discussed—with the addition of using my relationship to get entry into the house.

After coming clean, the next step is evening the score.

My brothers start to enter the room on campus we use for meetings, and I will my hands not to be so clammy. I can totally do this.

It's not until everyone is seated, Charles and Lucas eyeing me strangely, that I channel Dad and stand up.

"Hey, thanks for coming."

There're general murmurs of assent before they fall quiet again.

"I know you're all wondering why you're here, so I'll cut to the chase. I want to talk to you guys about Sigma House and the prank."

"Man, fuck those guys," Jordan says.

I nod. "They've been taking it too far."

"It was a prank," someone else says. "They pull that shit all the time."

"Yeah, but no one's been hurt before," another voice answers.

"Agreed," I quickly say before they can keep going. "But there's a lot of context surrounding what happened, so I want you guys to know the full

story.”

Charles shifts. There’s a frown marring his face, but he doesn’t look angry. “What’s going on?”

My gaze flicks to Lucas and away again. No matter how seemingly innocent he is, he played a part in this, and he’s going to own up too.

“The prank went off exactly as you planned except for two things. The house wasn’t conveniently empty at the time you set up, and the windows actually *were* sealed, which is why Brandon couldn’t get out. Things could have ended up a lot worse than they were.”

There’re more indistinct murmurs.

“None of us touched the windows,” Lucas insists.

“No, you didn’t,” I admit. “That was all Carter.”

“Carter?”

“The pledge you bribed to leave the house unmanned for two hours. The one you offered money—remember him now?”

Lucas is rapidly turning red. “Whatever he’s told you, it’s a lie.”

“I don’t think it is.” I shrug. “But he’s been removed from the house now, so I guess none of us will be able to clarify.”

Charles straightens. “There’s no way Zeke would have let one of his guys go without proof. But I don’t understand, why would he have sealed the windows?”

“Because he thought Chad was in there.”

“Chad?” Charles shakes his head, but Lucas’s eyes have widened like he knows what’s coming next. “But they love him. He’s like a king to them.”

“He was, until they found out he’s dating me.”

I expect an explosion of noise to follow that, but instead, a confused silence stretches out in its wake.

“I don’t ...” Charles looks around. “The two of you? Together?”

“Lucas told him the prank was planned for Chad and that you were going to leak it was me who organized it so we’d break up. It pissed Carter off enough that he glued the windows shut, and since he knew Chad wasn’t an asthmatic, he didn’t think anything of it.”

“Then it was all because of the Sigmas,” Jordan says. “They’ve been targeting us for no reason.”

“Are we all going to gloss over the fact Bailey is dating Doomsen?” Lucas pushes.

“Are we going to skip over the part where you influenced a guy to

basically try and haze someone?”

That shuts him up.

“At the end of the day, someone was hurt, and we all played a part in it.”

“Okay,” Charles says. “Agreed. But what does this have to do with ... anything?”

“The Kappas are going to back off how full-on they’ve been lately—”

“As they should,” Lucas says.

I point at him. “They originally wanted to refocus on targeting you since you’re the one who kicked this off, but I calmed them down.”

“Oh, I *bet* you did.”

I ignore the insinuation. “There’s only one thing left that’s pissing them off, and it’s why I asked you guys here. King of Thieves.”

“No.” Charles doesn’t even know what I’m about to say, and he’s already writing it off, that’s how seriously these guys take it, apparently.

“There’s still two and a bit months until Harmony Week, and where we’re currently sitting, there’s no challenge.”

“Good,” Jordan says. “We want to win this year.”

“But that’s my point. With how you guys got all that stuff, stealing it while Brandon was having an asthma attack, there won’t *be* a King of Thieves this year.”

“Fuck off, we didn’t break any rules.”

I turn to Charles because even though he doesn’t like the Sigmas, he’s always seemed to grudgingly like Zeke.

“I know we’re rivals. I know they piss you guys off. But at the end of the day, the rivalry only works because there’s a level of mutual respect. Do you really want to be the heartless guys who won because of what happened?”

No one answers. I watch each of my brothers glance at the guys sitting next to them.

“Can we trust that you’re not throwing us under the bus?” Jordan asks. “You’re dating Doomsen, for Christ’s sake. How do you know he’s not using you?”

“He’s not. We’re serious. And you can believe that or not, it’s up to you. This isn’t about me and my boyfriend though. It’s about your relationship with those guys. At the moment, the animosity is way too heavy for anything fun like this competition. If you still want it to go ahead, my suggestion is that we give back the things stolen during that prank. *Only* those things. It’ll be like an olive leaf, and then we move forward and this whole thing is

finally put behind us.”

“And my laptop?” Jordan throws back.

“You replaced it that day, didn’t you?”

“Well ... yeah, but it’s, you know, the principle.”

I lift my eyebrows, and he slumps in his seat.

“Charles?” I turn to our president to find him rubbing his jaw.

“I don’t know, Bailey ... They’re right. We didn’t break the rules.”

“So you’ll be okay with Zeke being shitty with you for the rest of the school year? For being the president in charge when King of Thieves ended?”

Charles glances at his phone, then crosses to stand next to me. “Okay, vote. Hands up for doing the honorable thing and giving the items back, along with smoothing things over so we return to the status quo.” He hesitates. “I also think we should all put in to cover the cost of the ambulance. Keep your hands down to keep the items despite the warning that they might mean nothing if King of Thieves doesn’t go ahead.”

I bite back a smile. Way to be on board without coming right out and saying it, Charles. There’s no way anyone could say no to that. And when we take the vote a couple of minutes later, some people keep their hands down, but at the end of the day, majority rules, and it looks like we’re giving their stuff back.

As the room starts to clear out, a few people stop by to chat with me and make sure that the Chad thing isn’t going to interfere with our competition, and I point out that if anything, it gives me an edge.

Which I fully plan to take advantage of now that our relationship is out in the open.

Charles waves Lucas over to us, and I watch him approach, shoulders hunched and wary expression on his face.

“What’s going on here?” Charles asks.

Lucas nods at me. “You’re not pissed he’s dating the enemy?”

“Enemy?” Charles presses his fingers to his eyes. “You know the rivalry is all a big joke, right? I mean, yes, we like to compete, but at the end of the day, they’re a group of guys, and we’re a group of guys. At the end-of-year boozier, no one cares about who’s from where because none of it is serious.”

The fight sags out of Lucas’s shoulders. “I know that, but Chad Doomsen rubs me the wrong way.”

“Is that my problem?” And maybe I should be nicer and try to smooth the whole thing over, but it’s not until I’m looking at him that I realize I’m

freaking upset about what happened. He pretended to be my friend when it was all a lie. I don't owe him anything just because he supposedly has feelings.

"I guess not. I just ... I don't understand."

"You don't need to. It's my relationship."

I can feel Charles's stare ping-ponging between us. "Will things be okay with you two?"

Lucas looks up hopefully. "Will it?"

"I'll be civil, but we won't be going back to being friends. Friends don't try to break up each other's relationships."

The hope slips off his face. "Okay. I deserved that."

I turn back to Charles. "You want to message Zeke to meet us?"

"Nope. The three of us are going to head home, collect it all, and deliver."

"Sweet."

"But, Bailey." Charles grabs my upper arm before I can leave. "I'm counting on you to get as much of it back as you can."

"Like a secret agent?" I grin. "Creeping around behind enemy lines? I can do that."

"Good. Make sure you do."

HARMONY WEEK

THREE MONTHS LATER

CHAD

I SMILE AGAINST BAILEY'S SOFT STOMACH AS I FINISH LICKING OUR CUM from his skin. His chest sinks under the long exhale he lets out as he reaches down to card his fingers through my hair.

"Morning," he says, voice scratchy with sleep.

I chuckle and prop my chin on his hip bone. "Morning is almost over."

"What?" He squints toward his phone but makes no move to pick it up.

Last night was Greek Street Meet, which is basically a cutesy name for a street party with way too many people and way too much booze. I'm feeling dusty this morning, and Bailey clearly feels the same way.

"Can't we just skip it?" he asks.

I gasp, pretending to be *shocked* to the *core*. "It's the day we've been working toward literally since the night we met. And I'm VP. I can't miss the most epic day of the year."

"Epic isn't how I'd describe today."

I laugh, kiss his hip, then get up and start to hunt down some clothes. Today the winner of King of Thieves is tallied and announced.

Today, Bailey is the enemy.

Since that prank almost three months ago, our houses are closer than ever. Yeah, we still have our moments, but overall, the pranks and reactions to them are good-natured, and them returning all our shit went a long way toward showing us they're actually decent guys maybe ten percent of the time.

Plus, Bailey and I have leaned into the competition hard.

The other day, I woke up to find my desk chair gone. He'd dropped it out of the window while I was sleeping and wheeled it down the road.

Smart-ass.

I fell a little more in love with him when I realized.

That's probably not a normal response.

After Bailey's dressed and ready to head out, I pull him to me for a kiss goodbye—and a quick search of his pockets.

As expected, he's shoved everything he can get his hands on in there, and I have to remove a notebook, three pens, and ...

"My underwear? They don't have points."

"Those were for me." He grins cheekily, taking them from me and

tucking them back in his pocket.

“I still don’t understand your fascination with wearing my boxer briefs.” I kiss him properly this time, then lean back to tug on a curl. “I feel like this competition has turned you into a kleptomaniac.”

He holds up his hands. “I will neither confirm nor deny.”

“What will you do when the competition ends and stealing shit isn’t encouraged anymore?”

He wrinkles his nose, crushing the pattern of freckles. “I’ll have to start lifting your stuff and keeping a little nest in my room. Like a bird.”

“And how will that help you over the summer when we’re living in the city?”

Things have gone so perfectly full steam ahead for us that we already have post-graduation plans. We’re going to New York, where Bailey will step into the role waiting for him at his father’s bank, and I’ll hopefully have some entry-level position lined up. I’d felt bad taking advantage of Alistair’s generosity at first. He has an apartment for me and Bailey to move into, and not having the kind of money to be able to pay my own way didn’t sit right. But the last time they’d visited, we’d had a heart-to-heart, and Alistair gently pointed out that we all start somewhere.

If I’m working hard and not being paid enough to afford rent, that’s the system’s shortcoming, not mine. And hard work—no matter what it pays—is never something to be ashamed of.

That flip in thinking helped make me feel better, and without the financial strain of needing to make rent, it means I’ve been free to look for something I’ll actually enjoy.

Mom and Dad were also uncomfortable with the plan until they met Bailey during winter break, but since then, they’ve been wary, but supportive.

Things are finally falling into place.

Bailey heads home, and I meet Zeke to start tallying up our King of Thieves hoard. We move quickly, wanting to get to the fun part of the day, and when Zeke texts Charles to say we’re done, Kurt shows up a few minutes later to verify, while Robbie heads down to Kappa House.

Then, it’s time to get ready and see my guy again.

Because, fuck, I can’t get enough of him, and it seems like there’s always something standing in our way.

First, being secret. Then football. Then when the season wrapped up, our focus turned to schoolwork. We’ve been busy and working hard, and with

Bailey's help, my mentality of C's get degrees has been challenged, and I'm starting to push a B in most classes.

I want to be the best version of myself, and Bailey is helping me see that.

With the money imbalance, I know I'm always going to be one step behind, but we're both determined to be equals in this relationship, and I can't wait for school to be over to prove that.

As soon as I see Bailey crossing the street toward me, I jog over to him and scoop him up in my arms.

He laughs. "Oh, no, it's been a whole two hours."

"See, you can pretend I'm smothering you, but that smile proves otherwise."

His eyes turn soft. "Maybe I sort of like it."

"An admission! I knew it wouldn't take long to break you."

"Yeah, it's only been ..." He narrows his eyes like he's trying to count.

"Six months."

"Shit." His eyes widen. "That long already?"

"Let me guess, every day with me feels like a dream. It goes too quickly. Time's flying because of all the fun we're having."

"Why would I ever need to compliment you when you do it so well yourself?"

I'm totally ready to throw out something smart-ass, when I pause. There's one thing I've been thinking about for a while now, one thing I'm positive of on my end, and while I don't need compliments from him, it would be nice to know we're on the same page when it comes to this.

I grab his hand and tug him from the footpath and away from the people passing. Then I swallow. It's not easy. Who would have thought saying a little word like *love* could be so damn hard?

But when I look at Bailey, it's all I can think. I've been in love with him for a long time, and I think he feels the same. After all, we're planning on moving in together in a few months.

So if that's the case, why am I so nervous?

"What's going on with you?" he asks.

Whelp, I'm killing this. If we ever decide to get married one day, I won't be the one doing the asking.

"Nothing, just ... I want to say something, and maybe I should be making this more romantic or whatever, but I also don't want to make it into a big deal ..." I cut off my rambling in favor of taking a deep breath. "I love you."

Bailey watches me for a second, which is a totally anticlimactic reaction to what I was expecting.

“Umm ... so, yeah.”

He bursts out laughing, and I change my mind. *This* is the worst reaction to get. “You ... you don’t remember?”

“Remember what?”

“You basically gave me that exact same speech last night but way more slurred.”

My head jerks back. “The fuck?”

“Oh yes. Your beer breath made up for the romantic timing too.”

“Shit.”

“I also loved the way you burped, then stumbled into the bushes to take a leak before I could even answer you.”

“I what ...” I groan and drop my head onto his shoulder. “How do you like me? Really?”

He chuckles, hands sweeping over my hair. “Are you going to sulk, or are you going to give me a chance to respond this time?”

“I don’t think I want you to. Because honestly, after that, I’m not sure I want you to return it.”

“Good thing it’s not your choice, then.” He steps back, so I have to straighten. “Because I love you too. And you won’t convince me otherwise.”

Something settles in my chest. I tackle him in a hug, attacking him with kisses, and I don’t let go until he’s laughing so hard, he can barely breathe. “Thank fuck for that.”

“You actually thought I’d feel otherwise?” Bailey’s fingers link through mine as we start to walk toward the tent that’s been set up for today.

“I hoped you felt the same, but that didn’t make it easier. I’ve known for ages, but I’ve been too scared to say anything. You make my feelings all messed up.”

“Good. Because you do the exact same thing to me.”

In just a few minutes, it feels like our whole relationship has changed. Nothing on the surface has, nothing physical either, but saying that one word makes it seem like we’re tied together in a way we weren’t before. It’s not him and then me anymore, and damn if I don’t want that feeling to last forever.

There’s a big turnout for the announcement, and I have to leave Bailey to join Zeke up the front, along with Charles and their VP.

The giant shield that gets engraved with each year's winners is in place between us, the plaques from the last few years gleaming *Sigma Beta Psi*.

I'm praying this year will be the same. That we'll take it out in a clean sweep.

Plus, I'm excited to get my fucking desk chair back.

No one knows who the winner is yet. Charles and Zeke have a piece of paper signed by the VPs and either Lucas or Robbie to confirm. But they don't know the other house's number. Until now.

"This year," Zeke says, "Sigma Beta Psi scored a total of one thousand, two hundred, and sixteen points. A new record."

Fuck yes. Considering a lot of those big-ticket items came from Bailey's room, I can't keep the smugness off my face. It's a record that will be nearly impossible to beat.

But Charles is smiling.

"And Rho Kappa Tau," Charles says. "Hit a new record also. One thousand, *four* hundred, and twenty-seven points."

My gut bottoms out.

"Looks like we're this year's winners."

Kappa House start to celebrate. Catcalls and cheers fill the tent before the telltale sound of alcohol being opened surrounds us, and while the disappointment starts to creep in, it's not as consuming as I thought it would be.

Then I catch Bailey's stare as he approaches.

"Sorry," he mouths.

Like that, I can't be mad.

Or disappointed.

Sure, the game is important to my college experience, but that's as far as it goes.

This man. This gorgeous fucking man who I can't stop from touching as soon as he's in arm's reach, he's my end goal. He's the reason I wake up with a smile on my face, and try hard in class, and am applying for jobs like crazy.

He's the one who fills my days with laughter and my nights with toe-curling orgasms.

Since I met him, he's been the *only* one.

And we're in love.

Now, if that isn't frat as fuck ... I don't know what is.

EPILOGUE

TEN YEARS LATER

BAILEY

IT'S WEIRD BEING BACK HERE. SEEING A FAMILIAR PLACE THROUGH A different lens. The last time my husband and I set foot on campus, there was no telling what came next. We had big plans and even bigger ideas. Some of them happened, and some didn't, but as I catch up with our friends, I realize that I couldn't be happier with our lives.

All it took was our ten-year reunion to give me that perspective.

"This punch tastes like ass," Chad says, holding one out to me.

"Should I be offended?"

"Rephrase. Your ass tastes ten times better than this punch that tastes like ... dirt."

"Well, after that ringing endorsement, I can't wait to get it in me."

Chad snorts and cups my ass. "I'll give you something better later."

I'm laughing into my punch as Robbie shows up, grinning broadly. Other than a few lines in his forehead, he hasn't changed. He still dresses like a dad, only now he has the excuse of actually being one. And even though Chad catches up with him monthly, they embrace like it's been years.

I eye them with amusement. "Anyone would think I have something to worry about."

"Chad's too corporate for my taste," Robbie says, jostling him. "And my better half might have something to say about that."

"Excuse me, have you seen my husband?" Chad asks. "I'll be corporate all day long if it means coming home to this guy."

Chad teases, but he loves his job. After hopping between entry-level positions, he ended up involved with a not-for-profit and has helped them expand throughout the country. The financial side of things was a contention point early on that we had to work through, and I'm so glad he decided to follow what made him happy rather than play into the toxic mindset of money equaling success.

Instead, I get to be treated to my husband coming home from work with a massive smile on his face.

He, unfortunately, has to deal with a stress head. As much as I also love my job, I constantly feel the pressure. I couldn't do it without Chad by my side.

"What do you think, should we swing by Kappa House after this and TP

their lawn for old times' sake?" Robbie asks.

Chad shakes his head, but I don't miss the way he eyes me like he's debating whether or not he'll be able to get away.

I point at him. "Don't even think about it."

"Yeah, no, of course not."

"I'm serious. We need to get home to Hercules."

Because of course, when you leave a frat boy to name your French bulldog cross something mutt breed, he gives it a Greek name.

"I knew we should have left him with your parents," Chad complains.

"Is this where I point out that *you're* the one who needed a fur baby?"

"Shut up."

"Should try some real babies," Robbie says. "Fuck me, those two are wild."

Chad shakes his head. "Nah, not for us. My twin sisters have turned us off having a girl ever, and Rachel's about to give us our first nephew, so we're going to have the coolest kid ever to spoil."

It probably doesn't help that I've been encouraging the twins to stir Chad up by listing all the sororities they're going to try and join when they're in college in a little over a year's time.

"Because you two can't be trusted together." I take Chad's hand. "My husband and I are going to dance."

"It's cute you think that'll keep us apart." Robbie blows Chad a kiss. "I'll have the TP waiting, sweetheart."

They love pretending to rile me up.

At least, I hope they're pretending.

It's probably better I don't know.

Chad takes my waist as we reach the dance floor, where at least half of the people here are already dancing, and I reach up to wrap my hands around his neck. My wedding band catches the light, and I feel my lips twitch.

"What are you thinking?" he asks.

"How weird it is that when we were last here, graduating, everything still felt so uncertain between us."

"And now?"

I shake him. "I hope there's nothing uncertain left."

He's smiling at me like a dope, and that look, so freaking pure and loving, still gives my heart a kick even after spending a third of my life with this man.

“I was never uncertain about you.”

“What?”

He shakes his head. “Even from that first night. I swear I looked at you, covered in dirt and leaves and sitting next to my piss, and I thought, yep. He’s the guy I’m going to marry.”

I lift my eyebrows. “Uh-huh.”

“And I bet that giant shiner I got a few minutes later is what did it for you.”

“Of course. Because who doesn’t love seeing a cute guy get slugged?”

“But it was hot how in control I was of the situation, right?”

I tilt my head. “We remember that night very differently, my dear.”

He chuckles softly, and I lean in to brush my lips over his.

“No matter how we started, you are hands down the best decision I’ve ever made.”

“Remember at our housewarming when you got so drunk you stripped down and danced on the table? I feel like that has to be close.”

I groan and drop my forehead to his shoulder. “Will you ever let that go?”

“Literally never. I still can’t believe we got through a whole conversation with Robbie without him bringing up that cute mole you have on your butt.”

“Shutupshutupshutup.”

Chad’s laugh is loud. “Fuck, I love you. Seriously. You are literally the world’s greatest person, and I get to spend my life with you. Goddamn.”

I smile where he can’t see it, but I squeeze him tighter. Chad has always been fast and free with his feelings, and he never fails to show me exactly how in love with me he is.

I turn my head to press a kiss to his ear. His skin against mine is so familiar. Like coming home.

Ten years has been nothing in the scheme of things but everything to me.

And later, when I watch my husband slip away with Robbie, Brandon, and Zeke, I don’t try to stop him.

He’s grown up a lot, and I love it, but Chad will always be a frat boy at heart.

And I wouldn’t wish for him to be anyone else.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with any book, this one took a hell of a lot of people to make happen. First, my cover designer Story Styling Cover Designs did a fantastic job on making this smoking hot cover.

Thanks to Sandra at One Love Editing for my amazing edits.

Lori Parks, you were a gem as always with my proof read and I always appreciate how timely you are with your work.

Thanks to my wonderful PA, Charity VanHuss for wrangling my scattered self on a daily basis.

Eden Finley, your notes and ongoing commentary were fucking incredible, and thank you for letting me pick your brain while talking absolute smack at each other. You're the bestest bestie I could ever ask for.

Louisa Masters, AM Johnson, Riley Hart, thank you so much for taking the time to read. Your support is incredible and I really appreciate it!

And of course, thanks to my fam bam. To my husband who constantly frees up time for me to write, and to my kids whose neediness reminds me the real word exists.