



Inconveniently Bayou

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Category: Romance

Description: Becca has been the annoying girl next door since they were ten.

She'd gotten pretty at about aged fifteen. She'd gotten beautiful around sixteen-and-a-half—not that he'd been keeping track. Thank God, she hadn't gotten gorgeous until she was eighteen.

But she's always been annoying. Especially when she's calling him out on his B.S. And punching him in the nose.

Yeah, annoyance... that's what he's feeling when she comes down in one costume after another, showing off curves and all that skin, determined to attract some other guy's attention at the Halloween party.

But he's not so sure that's what he's feeling when he finally gives in and kisses this girl he's always thought of as a neighbor, maybe a friend, and his sometimes-conscience. And who he's now thinking of as mine.

This is the happy-for-now prequel to the full-length novel *Always Bayou*.

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inconveniently bayou

Beau Hebert realized almost immediately upon stepping into the Bollier family's kitchen that glitter was going to be his ultimate downfall.

Yes, glitter. The sparkly, seemingly innocent substance that people used to decorate things like arts and crafts projects, homemade Christmas and Valentine's Day cards, and, apparently, New Year's Eve decorations.

He'd spent the past two months believing it was pumpkin spice lattes that were going to be his undoing.

But no, it was definitely going to be glitter.

Glitter. And his next-door neighbor, Becca Bollier.

The girl who had moved in next door when they'd been ten. And had been the first person to tell him he was an asshole. And the first—and only—girl to punch him.

Both of those things had happened when they'd been ten too. Well, the first time.

Ironically, if there really was such a thing as having a devil and an angel sitting on his shoulders, giving him bad and good advice, Becca would have been the angel. She'd smoothed out his rough spots and kept him from becoming, mostly, an even bigger asshole.

Thank God—yeah, he knew that was ironic too—Becca hadn't gotten gorgeous until

she'd been eighteen and on her way out of town to college.

She'd gotten pretty at about aged fifteen; she'd gotten beautiful around sixteen-and-a-half—not that he'd been keeping track—but gorgeous hadn't happened until the summer they were eighteen.

And she hadn't turned into a woman who he couldn't be within ten feet of without wanting to run his hand through her hair and over the sweet curve of her ass until... well, about October twenty-seventh of this year.

Okay, exactly October twenty-seventh of this year.

When she'd been—ironically—dressed in a satiny red devil's costume that hugged her breasts and barely covered that sweet ass and had matching thigh-high red leather boots.

She'd walked into the kitchen in that thing, and he'd swallowed the bite of pumpkin muffin down the wrong pipe, shoved back from the table to try to keep from choking to death, and then spilled his pumpkin spice latte down the front of him and into his lap. And onto his sudden and extremely inconvenient erection.

He'd never drank a pumpkin spice latte before that day.

Or since.

But now, the smell of cinnamon, or pumpkin, or the sight of whipped cream, made him hard.

Which had also been very inconvenient considering that had happened five days before Halloween, and between October twenty-seventh and today, December twenty-seventh, there had been a lot of pumpkin, cinnamon, and whipped cream around.

But now, seven seconds after walking into Becca's mother's kitchen on December twenty-seventh, he realized it was glitter that was going to finally take him down. He didn't know how, exactly. He didn't know what he'd done to deserve this, either. But he had the sense he was in huge trouble. That was certain.

Everything was exactly as it had been two months ago. But bigger. And sparklier.

So much sparklier.

"Hi, Beau!"

"Beau! You came!"

"Happy holidays, Beau!"

Becca's three friends from college—Savannah, Toby, and Daniel—were sitting at the huge, oak kitchen table. The table that Beau had made with his own two hands. Exactly where they'd been sitting when he'd walked in to fix the garbage disposal they'd broken by putting pumpkin rinds into it back in October.

The table had been covered in pumpkins, pumpkin guts, and pumpkin gutting tools. The pumpkins were partway to becoming jack-o-lanterns and there were pumpkin muffins, pumpkin cookies, pumpkin cheesecake, toasted pumpkin seeds, and the fucking pumpkin spice lattes everywhere.

The whole place had smelled like he'd walked into a pumpkin pie.

And he'd been okay with that. He'd actually been happy. Hungry. He'd grinned.

After he'd fixed the disposal and told them to keep all the pumpkin rinds far from it, he'd taken a seat at the table, sampled all the treats—the pumpkin cheesecake had

been fucking amazing—and even been willing to try a pumpkin spice latte for the first time.

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He wasn't really the latte type. In any flavor. Certainly not that flavor.

But her friends had been so nice. And Becca had been dressed in blue jeans and a light flannel with her hair in a high ponytail and her glasses on and...she'd looked like regular Becca. Beautiful sure, but just Becca. Sweet, smiley, and a little nerdy—they were twenty years old and carving jack-o-lanterns at her mom's kitchen table and talking about the Halloween party they were throwing when they got back to LSU, for fuck's sake. She was just the girl he'd lived next to for ten years. And seriously, that pumpkin cheesecake had made him groan out loud.

Strangely, right after that groan, Becca and her friends had all looked at one another and Savannah had said, "Ask him."

October...twenty-seventh to be exact...

Toby nodded. "Definitely ask him."

Becca shook her head. "No. That's okay."

Daniel agreed. "You should. He'd definitely know."

"Yes, he's the best one," Toby insisted.

Becca looked at Beau. And sighed. "I know."

Beau paused with a bite of cheesecake halfway to his mouth. "Best one for what?"

“I just need an opinion on something,” she said.

Beau took the bite, chewed, swallowed, and shrugged. “Okay.”

Something he and Becca had done since they’d been twelve had been give each other pure, honest, no bullshit opinions about things. Even if those opinions were unsolicited.

It had started when his dad had died when they’d been twelve. The night after the funeral she’d brought him brownies.

Heartbroken and angry at the world, he’d taken a bite of one and said, “These are the worst things I’ve ever tasted.”

They had been. They’d been awful.

She’d punched him in the jaw and said, “Just because you’re sad doesn’t mean you have to make other people feel bad.”

She’d also gotten grounded for a week for being mean to the kid next door whose dad had just dropped dead from a heart attack.

But she’d been right. So, he’d taken her a peace offering two days later. He’d climbed the tree outside her window, knocked, and handed her a chicken and broccoli casserole.

She’d looked at it. And started laughing. “What am I supposed to do with this?”

“It will be a hundred times better than the brownies,” he’d told her. “But I didn’t make it. It’s from all the food people have been bringing us. Because I’d rather bring someone something good. And I know that I can’t make anything good.”

She'd shaken her head. "You're kind of an asshole, you know that?"

He hadn't. For the whole twelve years he'd been alive he'd been pretty sure he was awesome. That's what people had always insinuated. And told him. "You think so?"

"I do," she'd said with a nod.

"Why?"

"Because you know that I brought you those brownies to say I was sorry about your dad and to let you know that I cared. You know that you should have just said thank you and pretended they were delicious."

"I did say thank you," he reminded her. When he'd first taken the plate from her, he'd mumbled a thanks.

"And you should have just left it at that."

"You should know that your brownies are terrible though," he said. "Seriously," he added when she rolled her eyes and started to shut her window. "Wouldn't you rather give people good brownies? I mean sure, the idea is nice even if they suck. But having good brownies to eat in my room later that night would have been even better."

She'd just looked at him for a long moment. He'd looked back.

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“Fine. Yes. I’d rather make good brownies.”

He’d nodded. Of course she would. That just made sense.

“And wouldn’t you like to not be an asshole to people who are just trying to be nice to you?”

He’d thought about that. Yeah. He didn’t want people to think he was a jerk. “Yeah. I guess so.”

“If I make more brownies, would you try them and tell me if they’re good?” she’d asked.

“Yes. And I’ll be totally honest.”

“Okay.”

“And if I’m an asshole again, will you tell me?” he’d asked.

“Oh, definitely,” she’d said. Emphatically.

And she had. Over the next eight years they hadn’t been friends in the way of friends who hung out and texted all the time and told each other everything, but they always went to one another when they needed an unvarnished opinion about something. Or when they saw the other doing something that needed an intervention.

Like when they were fourteen and he’d started just ignoring the girl he wanted to

break up with instead of having a conversation with her. Becca had stomped over to his house and let him have it right on the front porch.

Or like when they were fifteen and overnight she'd started wearing the same baggy black hoodie Every. Single. Day. And her hair in a ponytail. And the stupid black converse tennis shoes she'd had since they were twelve. He'd gone over after twomonthsof her dressing the same way and told her she needed to knock off whatever crazy, emo shit she had going on.

He'd told her that wearing black made her look whiter than the inside of a potato—he had not been great at thinking on his feet at age fifteen—and that low ponytails in tangled hair made her face look too thin and kind of like a rat, and that her Converse were falling apart and they kind of smelled.

He'd actually had no idea if her shoes smelled. But she'd had them for three years and all of the shoesheowned for more than about six months definitely smelled, so he'd just assumed.

And her dad was the principal of the high school and her mom was a teacher over in Bad, the next town up the bayou, and so they had enough money to get her new shoes.

Dressing like that was stupid. He'd told her that too.

Then she'd told him that two months before, Remy Hodgin had tried to feel her up in the parking lot after school and told her she should consider his attention a favor.

So he'd also told her that listening to anything Remy Hodgin said was stupid. And letting his opinion take up space in her head when she didn't even like him being in her personal space wasreallystupid.

Of course, he'd also gone and beat the shit out of Remy right after that.

He wasn't sure which of all of the things he'd said had gotten her out of that hoodie and those shoes, but he'd never seen them again.

In fact, she'd come to school the next day in a cute yellow top and denim capris with sandals on her feet and her hair loose and falling in long spiral curls and he'd felt like someone had punched him in the stomach.

He'd really enjoyed watching Remy walk up to her in the common room with all the lockers and apologize to her. Publicly. With his black eye and swollen lip. And he'd really loved the little look she'd given him across the room that said she knew he was responsible for Remy's eye and lip.

The smile and the thank you she'd mouthed to him had made his gut clench in a brand new way than it ever had for Becca before. But he'd liked it.

Now, sitting at her mom's kitchen table, surrounded by pumpkin spice everything, his gut had clenched again. Because of Becca.

He just wasn't sure if it was a good clench or a bad clench.

She just sat, studying him, chewing on her bottom lip.

He took the opportunity to finish off his cheesecake. Then he set his fork down and said, "Okay, come on, what do you need an opinion about?" He glanced around the table. "That I'm the best one to give you?"

"It's about a guy," Savannah offered.

Becca shot her a frown. "It's not really about a guy. It's about a Halloween costume."

"But you want to know what a guy thinks about that costume," Daniel said with a smirk. "Because of another guy."

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Beau watched Becca. Her cheeks were a little pink now. "You're a guy. Why can't you give her the opinion?" he asked Daniel.

Maybe the costume she wanted to wear was super ugly. Or silly. For some reason other people in Becca's life had a hard time giving her their honest opinions. It was because she was sweet. He knew that. It was always hard to hurt the feelings of truly nice people. He supposed that for him and Becca it was different because she had no trouble telling him the honest truth as well. Even if it hurt his feelings. They'd established this relationship a long time ago and they both appreciated it. Telling the God's honest truth at age twelve was different than at age twenty, but because they had so much practice and because it had always turned out for the best, they both valued this particular role in the other's life.

"Yeah, but I'm not a guy like you," Daniel said.

Beau arched an eyebrow. "What's that mean?"

"It means that we need the opinion from a guy who has a lot of experience with girls trying to get his attention," Savannah said. She leaned over and squeezed Daniel's forearm. "Danny's awesome, but most girls haven't quite caught on to that yet."

"I was a total geek in high school." Daniel lifted a shoulder. "I'm growing out of it. Slowly. Late bloomer."

"Please don't grow out of it completely," Becca said. "Brainy guys are hot."

Beau slid her a look. Becca had hardly dated in high school. Actually, now that he

thought about it, he wasn't sure she'd dated at all in high school. And now that he was wondering about it, he wondered if she dated in college at all. And if so, what was her type?

She hadn't always been cute—when he'd first met her, she'd had crooked teeth and never seemed to know what to do with her hair and had been downright gangly—but she'd always been sweet and kind. Even when she'd been telling him he was an ass. She'd meant it to make him a better person.

She had, however, become cute around the time guys started noticing that stuff. And she'd definitely been beautiful when she'd gotten older. But yeah, he could see why Becca and Daniel had become friends.

Becca had been a nerd in high school. She'd been the smartest one in their class by far, and had always preferred books to people. She'd never gone out for any sports, had never tried out for cheerleading or dance squad, had never been in any school plays or musicals. She wasn't even a band kid.

All he ever remembered seeing her do was read. Well, and study. Which also included books. He knew she'd tutored some kids, including a couple of the football players to keep them eligible for the team.

He knew she'd been on the speech team at least once, though, because she'd delivered an impassioned speech about the nineteenth amendment one year in their social studies class as practice for the big state speech meet that, if he remembered correctly, she'd gone on to win.

He also remembered that she'd spent a lot of time volunteering down in the elementary school. She was now planning to be a kindergarten teacher. And it was the most perfect fit of anything he'd ever seen anyone do.

She was sweet, patient, passionate about education, loved books, and was great with little kids. Becca seem to fit into teaching the same way he fit into woodworking. And she'd been the one that had talked him into finally telling his mother that he didn't want to go to college in spite of the football scholarship and that he wanted to do an apprenticeship with a woodworker instead. Beau was never more at ease and sure of himself than he was with a huge block of wood in hand and a set of tools on his hip.

"And obviously I can't help her with what men like in the women who are seducing them," Toby said.

"Obviously?" Beau asked the other guy. "Why is that obvious?"

Toby laughed. "You're adorable. I obviously like boys, not girls. I can tell her when she looks stunning, but I don't know what's going to get a straight, pussy-loving man's engine running."

Wow. Toby had just said pussy-loving out loud. Okay, then. Beau focused entirely on Becca. "You're trying to get a straight, pussy-loving man's motor running?"

Now, her cheeks were not just faintly pink, they were bright pink. She was not someone he would have imagined saying pussy to before now. He kind of liked it.

"There's a guy. We have class together. I'm just trying to get his attention."

Savannah laughed. "She's got his attention. They're partners in their science lab. It's completely cute and cliché. But our shy little flower has established the fact that she's sweet and smart and a very good friend. Now she needs to let him know that she can be more than that."

Beau identified the kind of clench he was feeling in his gut now. Bad. If he didn't

know better, he would've called it jealousy. But he did know better. This is Becca. He wasn't jealous of this other guy. He was...concerned.

If he rejected her, he could make her feel bad. But worse, if he was a player, he could actually hurt her. Either break her heart or literally hurt her. Yeah, the clench in his gut was definitely a bad one.

"What's the guy like?" Beau asked. He was aware his tone was brusque now and he was scowling.

He knew because Becca scowled back.

"He's nice," Becca said.

"He's a lot like you," Savannah added. "Big. Lots of muscles. Hot. Probably has lots of female attention."

Beau realized Savannah probably meant all of that as a compliment, but he wasn't taking any of it that way. Becca didn't need a guy like him. She needed a nice guy. A nerd. A guy like Daniel.

"Why don't the two of you date?" he asked, gesturing between Becca and Daniel.

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They looked at one another and laughed.

"Because we're friends," Becca said, as if it was obvious.

"I love her. She's awesome. We just don't feel that way about each other," Daniel added.

"What way? She's beautiful, right?"

Daniel eyes widened, and he glanced at Becca. "Well, yeah. Of course."

"And you said you really like her. Like spending time with her. You know she's a great person."

Daniel nodded slowly. "Yes. To all of that."

"So what's the problem? You should take her to the Halloween party."

"It doesn't work that way," Becca said. "Danny and I are friends. We feel... friendly toward one another. We like each other. We enjoy hanging out. And yes, I think he's handsome. But that doesn't mean we have any chemistry."

"Yeah, the idea of kissing her just..." Daniel shrugged again. "Doesn't do anything for me."

Becca laughed. "Same." She gave Daniel an affectionate grin.

But Beau felt another clench in his gut. Becausefuck.

He and Becca were friends, based on all of those same things. In fact, they were not even as close as she and Daniel. They didn't hang out. He didn't go visit her at college. She had been home on fall break for two days and this was the first he'd seen her. Clearly she and Daniel spent more time together and had more in common. But Beau had known her for ten years. She really did know things about him no one else did. She felt comfortable saying things to him in a way no one else did. And yet, the idea of kissing herabsolutelydid things for him. Not welcome, but very obvious yeah-I-want-that things.

In fact, now he was thinking about it, he was having a very hard time not thinking about it.

Her lips would be soft. For one thing, she didn't spend time outside in the wind and sun getting them chapped and dry. For another, she was always using lotions and lip balms and body sprays. For a nerd, she'd always been really into girly things like that. Things that smelled good. And that were creamy and would make her skin soft and very touchable.

He would guess that her lips would taste very sweet. Like sugar. No, something even more specific. Like brown sugar or cotton candy. Or the sparkly purple and yellow sugar that had decorated the vanilla cupcakes that she'd made for her graduation party. Wow, talk about specific. Why was he thinking of that now? And how much better she'd gotten at baking since those brownies? But yeah, she'd taste like something sweet, and fun, and colorful, and light. Something that would make him smile even as his entire body was hardening and tightening and heating...

"Beau?" Becca snapped her fingers in front of his face. "Are you okay?"

He wasnotokay. He'd been fucking staring at her mouth and thinking about purple

sugar.

“Yeah.” He frowned. “I’m fine. I’m not taking you to this stupid party though, so I don’t know why you think I care about this costume.”

He shouldn’t care about this costume. But he did. He wanted to see it. And he didn’t want this other guy to see it. And he didn’t even have the first clue what it looked like.

She gave him one of her I-have-totally-failed-in-making-you-a-nice-person looks. He hated when she was disappointed in him.

“Never mind,” she said with an eye roll.

“Bec—” he started.

“No, come on, we need his opinion,” Savannah said. “Beau is the best one to tell you if Luke will like it.”

Beau hated Luke.

“But Beau is definitely not my type so why do I care what he thinks?”

He wasn’t her type? Really? Why was that? Because he wasn’t brainy? Because he had calluses and sweated somewhere other than the gym? Because he drove a truck out of necessity rather than because he needed to compensate for his tiny dick?

“Show me the damned costume,” he said, trying to sound bored.

He didn’t. He sounded pissed.

He didn't know what his growly response did to everyone else, but he liked the way it made Becca's cheeks flush and her eyes spark.

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“No. I don’t care what you think of it.”

“But you want to know if you can get a guy who has a lot of women vying for his attention goin’, right?” Beau asked. He leaned back and laced his fingers together on his stomach. Right above his belt buckle. Which was right above his fly.

Her eyes, predictably, followed.

“We don’t do anything for each other, but if your costume can get me goin’, then it’ll work on Lance, right?”

He was lying. Completely. Becca did something for him. Suddenly.

Fucking fuck.

Becca swallowed and pulled her eyes back to his face. “Uh. I guess.”

He smirked. She didn’t even correct his using the wrong name for this guy she was so enamored with.

“So show me.”

“She’s got three costumes,” Savannah jumped in. “A devil, a Greek goddess, and a woodworker.”

“Woodworker?” he repeated, sitting up a little straighter.

“It’s a construction worker,” Becca said. “It’s got a hard hat.” She wouldn’t meet his eyes.

“It’s got a sexy little tool belt,” Savannah said. “But you can’t pick that one just because of that,” she told Beau with a grin. “We can’t decide which one is best. You need to see her in each one of them and help us decide which she should wear to show Luke she can be more than his study partner.”

Beau draped an arm over the back of his chair, determined to look completely nonchalant about this. The one time Becca had come over to his house when he’d been working on a project and offered to help him sand some edges, she’d almost taken her skin off. She shouldn’t be a construction worker.

But could he give her an opinion on which costume would catch the eye of a straight, red-blooded man? Absolutely. Easiest favor she’d never asked. “Start with the devil. That seems most appropriate.”

Becca narrowed her eyes. Then she pushed back from the table and headed upstairs for her bedroom.

“Do you want to help us carve jack-o’-lanterns?” Toby asked.

Stabbing a knife into something? Sounded great. But he shouldn’t feel that way. He should not be worked up, worried, or wondering about Becca and this guy.

“Nah. I’m good. How about another latte?” See? He was totally cool. Just a guy having a pumpkin spice latte ...and he reached for a pumpkin muffin now...with some new friends.

Toby, who was a part-time barista at the coffee shop on campus, got up with a smile and fixed him another mug. He set it down and Beau took one sip before Becca

walked into the room.

Dressed as a sexy as fuck, if-that's-hell-I-can't-wait-to-go she-devil.

The dress dipped low in the front, clung...everywhere, barely covered her butt, included a pointed-at-the-end tail, horns, black fishnet stockings, and thigh-high red leather boots.

She stopped right in front of his chair, propped a hand on her hip, which pulled the skirt up just a bit more to show a flash of matching red panties, and said, "Well?"

That was when he ended up with pumpkin spice latte in his lap.

He shot back from the table, exclaiming, ironically, "Jesus Christ!".

Which caused him to start choking on the bite of pumpkin muffin in his mouth.

After he'd gotten the muffin crumbs out of his lungs and Toby and the fistful of napkins away from his crotch, Beau braced his hands on the back of his chair and met Becca's eyes. She still stood there, hand on her hip, watching him.

"No," Beau said simply. "Definitely not."

She glared at him. "Why not?"

"Because you want a boyfriend, right? Just one? And not just a one-night stand?"

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“Just because the skirt is short and the outfit sexy, doesn’t mean that I’m looking to get laid, Beau,” Becca said, her eyes flashing. “I think this costume is funny and it makes me feel confident and if I want to wear it, I should be able to without anyone taking any other messages from it.”

He nodded. “Sure. But does it make you feel confident? Are you wearing it just for fun? Or are you wearing it to get his attention? Because I’m pretty sure that’s what y’all have been tellin’ me this whole time.” He was aware he was gripping the back of the chair tightly and hoped no one else could tell.

Becca frowned and moved her hands from her hips to cross her arms. “That is what we said, yes,” she admitted.

“I think that you’re thinking about this one guy. Who’s probably been really nice to you. When he’s seen you in t-shirts and jeans. But Bec, I’m not sayin’ he should do anything about it or expect anything, but when he looks at you in that, he’s not gonna be thinkin’ about studying with you. Does that make you feel sexy and hot and confident and excited?” He paused. “Or does that make you feel nervous?”

He studied her face. He knew this girl. She was not a vixen. She wasn’t even much of a flirt. She didn’t have a lot of experience with guys. She didn’t party. She’d never had a serious boyfriend. If that costume made her feel sexy, great. She should wear the hell out of it. Pun intended. But he wasn’t so sure it would. Not when it came to a big party full of people she didn’t know all that well, who may or may not be drinking, and throwing caution to the wind.

Was he worried about her? Yes. But more, did he want her to go in there and actually

feel confident and have fun? Yeah.

“And how about the other guys in the room?” he asked, as she thought about what he’d said. “They’re all gonna notice you, honey. Again, not that they should do anything about it, or even say a fuckin’ word.” He scowled thinking about a roomful of college guys ogling Becca as she walked through dressed like this. “But think about how it will feel when they’re all lookin’. If that makes you feel sexy and confident and empowered, go for it. You definitely know how to take a man down with your words...and your fists... if needed.” He rubbed his jaw with one hand and gave her a half smile.

She returned it and his chest felt a little less tight.

“But, I’ll bet you’re gonna be uncomfortable and constantly pulling that skirt down to try to cover more of your ass—” His gaze dropped to the aforementioned skirt. And ass. “Or you’re gonna be fiddling with that top to make sure your tits are covered.”

He focused on those. And damn, they looked good. He’d been aware when Becca’s breasts had come in, but he hadn’t really appreciated them. Until now. “Or you’re gonna wobble on those heels.” He eyed the boots. And she would wobble on those. Even after she’d gotten rid of her ratty Converse, she’d still been a tennis shoes, flip flops, and flats kind of girl. And when the hell had this girl’s thighs gotten that toned and smooth and lickable?

Lickable? Shit. This was bad.

He made his eyes focus on hers again. “If you’re gonna look awkward and weird and like you’ve never had a sexy costume on before...” He trailed off because he knew everyone in the room knew she hadn’t. “Then you’re better off choosing something else because all the fidgeting and clumsiness will not be attractive.”

She frowned. But then she blew out a breath.

This is what Beau and Becca did for one another. The pure, honest, no-holds-barred truth.

“Fine. God, you’re such a jerk.” But her response lacked any heat.

He knew she appreciated him being straight with her.

And he knew that she knew he was right.

She turned on her heel and headed back upstairs.

Beau blew out a breath. Why was his heart racing?

Toby cleared his throat. Beau looked at Becca’s friends.

Daniel’s eyes were wide. Toby looked amused. Savannah had a knowing look on her face.

What did she think she knew?

“Do you need to...change your pants?” Savannah asked, her eyes dropping to the front of his jeans where they were still wet with pumpkin spice latte.

“I’m fine.” He jerked his chair back and sat. He needed to get this over with.

“More latte?” Toby asked.

Beau could have sworn the other man was trying not to laugh.

“I think I’m gonna stick with water, thanks.” Or beer. Or whiskey. A whiskey sounded really good right now.

“You were right. On all of that,” Savannah said as they all settled in around the table and got back to making jack-o-lanterns. Or pretending to as they all waited for Becca to come back down in her next costume.

Beau didn’t even pretend. He just sat and scowled. “All of what?” he asked.

“How she’d feel in that costume. She was focused on making Luke’s mouth drop open, but not the bigger picture. That costume wasn’t her. She would have felt uncomfortable for sure.”

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He studied Savannah. She was leaning in, seemingly concentrating on cutting a mouth into the pumpkin in front of her. "I'm gonna think she looks weird in any costume," he finally said.

Savannah looked up. "Yeah?"

"She's the most straightforward person I know. Costumes, pretending to be something she isn't, even for fun, don't really fit."

Savannah looked at him for several beats. "You sure that's the whole reason you didn't like that one?"

"She was practically falling out of it. Like I said, she would've been fiddling with it all night and actin' like a damned virgin who's never put on so much as a lace bra."

"Well she is a virgin, so I guess that makes sense," Toby said, absently as he painted something on the front of his pumpkin.

Beau's attention snapped to the other man. He felt his brows slam together. "What?"

Savannah shook her head. "You shouldn't have said that."

Toby looked up. "How does he not know that?" He looked at Beau. "How do you not know that?"

"Becca and I don't talk about sex," Beau said flatly.

Fuckinghell, she was a virgin?

But the next second he realized that of course she was a virgin. Who would she have become not-a-virgin with? He would have known about it if it had happened in Autre. Guys from Autre were generally good guys, with a few exceptions—like Remy Hodgin—but they were still guys. They talked. And if someone had gotten in Becca's pants, he would have heard, even if he wouldn't have wanted to. He probably would've bloodied another guy's lip too. That one might have been harder to explain.

He supposed he'd assumed she'd taken that step in the two years since she'd been at LSU. But he hadn't given it a lot of thought. Now that he was, he realized why he hadn't thought about it much.

He hated the idea. No guy would be good enough for her. Certainly not some college prick named Luke who was probably studying finance or some fucking thing.

"Well, you know Becca," Toby said, with a shrug. "She seems pretty virginal, doesn't she?"

He had no idea. He wasn't sure he knew too many virgins actually.

"The problem is, Becca is the type to only sleep with a guy she's really serious about," Savannah said. "And that hasn't happened yet."

Yep, she was totally that type. Becca was a forever girl.

"So she really does want to date this Luke guy? Not just hook up, right?" Beau asked.

Savannah nodded. "Yeah. She's not the one-night stand type. At all."

No, she wasn't. "That's not a problem," Beau muttered.

Her friends all looked over.

“It’s not?” Daniel asked.

“Her waiting to be serious about someone before sleeping with him? Hell no, that’s not a problem. You should all be encouraging that,” Beau said. “What kind of friends are you?”

Their eyes all widened.

“We’re supportive of whatever journey Becca wants and needs to go on,” Savannah told him.

Beau rolled his eyes. “Fucking some guy because he’s nice to her in science lab and she thinks she’s too old to still have her V-card isn’t a ‘journey’,” Beau told her, using air quotes around journey. Good God. “Journeys require a full tank of gas, a kickass playlist, and at least fifty bucks worth of junk food.”

He saw Toby’s mouth quirk up at the corner, but Savannah was looking huffy. “Look, Beau, I know you and Becca have this blunt-honesty thing going, but I don’t find your rudeness as cute as she does.”

He did not think Becca would describe his style as cute. “If you don’t like it, you know where the door is.”

She blinked at him. “You’re telling me to leave?”

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“This is how it is. Take it or leave it.”

“You could leave.”

“You’re on my territory.”

Savannah’s eyes narrowed and she leaned in. “The house or Becca?”

“I think you know.”

Toby gave a little gasp and Daniel cleared his throat.

Savannah held Beau’s gaze for another few seconds, then she nodded. “Yeah, I think I do.”

Beau felt his heart racing, but worked to not give away everything he was feeling. Protective and possessive were not typical feelings he had for Becca Bollier. But damn, they’d come on swiftly.

And it was clear that was exactly what he felt. He wasn’t jealous of her time with these three. He didn’t care if she spent time or shared secrets with them. It wasn’t that. But if they weren’t going to take care of her, then yeah, he would step in.

“Okay, how about this?”

He looked toward the doorway. And was really glad he didn’t have anything in his mouth to choke on.

Holy. Shit.

This time she was dressed in short,shortdenim shorts that cupped her ass, a fitted white tank top that cupped her breasts, ankle-high brown boots that probably cupped her feet just as nicely, and, sure enough, a tool belt. Oh, and a hard hat. He didn't care about the hat. Or rather, he couldn't focus on it. The belt kept pulling his eyes to the flare of her hips, which emphasized her narrow waist, which emphasized the curves of her breasts. In the tank her arms and shoulders were bare, her smooth, fair skin looking very strokable. And her legs... they were bare too, of course. Those lickable thighs looking even more delicious now.

She spread her arms, meeting his gaze. "Better?"

Worse. So much worse. Because this was a much more normal outfit. In the devil costume he could chalk his reaction up to one of shock and no-way-that-doesn't-work-for-her-at-all. But these were...shorts and a tank top. Ninety-nine point nine percent of the girls he knew had worn that at some point in their lives. Okay, not that tight and short maybe, but still. These were normal clothes. Hell, he'd probably seen Becca in shorts and a tank before. And they were definitely working for her.

But now he had new things in his head. Thoughts of virgins and college guys just out to get laid and no one looking out for her and...okay, how hot she looked. Hey, he was still a guy too.

"No," he said.

Becca sighed. "Come on. I won't be wobbling on heels." She lifted one boot and wiggled her foot. "I won't be constantly pulling this down to be sure it covers my ass." She turned and wiggled her butt.

Beau barely kept from groaning. He cleared his throat. "That looks like a major

wedgy waiting to happen.”

She faced him, arms crossed. “Don’t worry about my wedgies. What’s wrong with this one other than that?”

Well, she looked like...Luke What’s-His-Name’s next girlfriend. That was what was wrong.

“You’re gonna get a lot of attention in that,” he said.

“Isn’t that the idea?”

“Is it?” He met her eyes directly. Challenging her. Was that what she really wanted? If so, fine. “Let me put it this way,” he said after several ticks. “You’re gonna walk out of that party with a date. I don’t know if it will be Larry or not, but someone’s gonna offer. Probably more than one. Be sure about what you want.”

She held his gaze for a few more beats. Finally she swallowed. “Just look at the last costume.”

“Fine.”

Again, she hadn’t corrected his misuse of Luke’s name.

“How about carving a pumpkin now?” Daniel asked as Becca disappeared.

“Yep. That’d be great.” Beau took a knife and an innocent gourd and went to town. He was nearly done gutting the thing when she came back into the kitchen.

This time as a Greek goddess.

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And dammit. She was definitely leaving that party with a date. With whoever the fuck she wanted one with.

She was stunning.

The costume was made up of a long white dress that brushed the floor. It was cinched at the waist with a gold belt that matched the gold leaves that circled her head and the two bracelets that wrapped around her wrists. The bodice of the dress tied behind her neck, leaving her arms and shoulders bare and did show off some very nice cleavage, but it sure as hell covered up more than either of the other two.

He still didn't want her wearing it. Or going to that party at all. Or going out with Luke. Or even smiling at Luke. Or anyone else.

He blew out a breath. He was in really big trouble here.

"You're not going to trip over that hem, are you?" he asked, eyeing the bottom of the dress.

He couldn't just suddenly start babbling about how fucking gorgeous she was. She'd think he had a brain tumor. Though they had always told each other the full, honest, you-can-count-on-me truth. And the truth was...she took his breath away.

She lifted a foot, showing him the gold strapped flat sandal she wore. "Nope."

"And be sure you wear a bra. That material is really thin. Don't need to give Lars a nip peek ahead of time."

Both of her eyebrows went up. Her cheeks got pink again at the mention of her nipple, but she asked, “Are you saying you approve of this one?”

“Unless you’ve got a clown suit up there with super baggy pants this will have to do. Or maybe you could go as... a hippo or something.”

“Wow. Okay, so since I have no other costumes, particularly ones that will make me look ridiculous or like a huge animal, I guess I’ll go with this one.”

Beau nodded. “Okay then.”

“Okay.”

He set the knife down, went to the sink, washed his hands, dried them on a towel, then turned to the group. “Well, the disposal works and you have a costume that works, so I guess I’ll just get out of here.”

He was very aware of why his gut was clenching now.

He grabbed his toolbox and headed for the front door.

“Beau!”

He stopped, silently cursing, as Becca came running after him.

He turned in the front foyer. “Yeah?”

“Thanks. I know you don’t care about this and this seems stupid to you and it’s not what you came over here for but...” She looked down at the goddess costume she wore.

Beau's hand tightened on the handle of his toolbox.

She lifted her head and met his eyes. "I know I can always count on you to be honest with me, even when it's to tell me something is stupid, and that means a lot."

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

It meant a lot to him too.

"The party isn't stupid," he said. "And that costume isn't stupid. In fact, you're a fucking knock-out in it and Luke isn't going to know what hit him."

Yes, he'd used the fucker's correct name. This mattered to her.

Her smile was sweet and genuine and even a little shy. "You really think so?"

"Definitely. You're gorgeous. And that costume is the only one that's even remotely fair to him."

"Fair to him?"

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“The others would kill him.”

She gave a surprised laugh, then said simply, “Thank you.”

“Be safe.”

“Of course.”

“I hope you have fun.”

Then he turned and left. Because he’d just said the least honest thing he’d ever said to Becca Bollier.

December...twenty-seventh...

And now it was glitter.

The table where the pumpkin...everything...had been two months ago was now covered with scissors, glue, thick posterboard, various other craft supplies and so, so much glitter.

“Hey guys,” he greeted Savannah, Daniel, and Toby. “I, uh, got a text that Becca’s mom needed me to fix something?”

Please let it be the disposal again. Something easy. Or a faucet. In another room. Being in another room would be great. Or a lamp. In another room. Even better, I could just take that with me and...

“Oh, I think Becca texted you,” Savannah said.

“No. It was Maureen.” He really wanted it to have been Maureen.

“I think Becca might have just used her mom’s phone.”

“Why would she do that?”

“To be sure you’d come over.”

Beau just stared at Savannah. Had he been immediately aware that Becca was not in the kitchen? Of course. That was likely why the feeling of trepidation had been so strong. And immediate.

He was hoping she was just upstairs getting more...glitter.

No, he didn’t hope that. They didn’t need more glitter.

“Is she okay?”

“She’s...not sick or anything,” Savannah said, casting a glance at Toby.

Toby nodded. “She’s mostly, basically fine. But...she needs your opinion on something.”

Beau sighed. “That didn’t go so well last time.”

“You have no idea,” Toby muttered.

Beau frowned. “What do you mean?”

Had something happened at the Halloween party? He'd wanted to know how the party had gone for two months. He'd been telling himself almost every single day that it was none of his fucking business and he didn't actually want to know. But he'd been clinging to the idea that if Becca had a new, serious boyfriend she'd been seeing for two months and was madly in love with, Maureen would have told Heather and his mom would have spilled the beans at some point, and since he hadn't heard that, it must mean Becca was not on her way to becoming Mrs. Luke What's-His-Face.

And the fact that he'd been clinging to anything and actually keeping his ear out for gossip told him everything he needed to know about how he felt about Becca.

Of course, the fact that he hadn't been out with another woman since October twenty-seventh spoke pretty loudly as well. He'd tried. He'd been to a couple of parties, more than a couple crawfish boils, had hung out down at Ellie's bar, and gone out with his buddies Owen, Mitch, Zeke, Zander, and Fletcher Landry. Going out with those guys always meant there would be women around.

But he hadn't been interested in anyone.

He'd thought about, wondered about Becca the whole time.

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“What the hell happened at the party, Toby?” Beau asked. Okay, more or less growled.

“It...didn’t go according to plan,” Toby said. He gave Savannah and Daniel another one of those looks that said there was more to it.

“Meaning?” Beau pressed. Definitely with a growl this time.

“Luke didn’t ask her out,” Daniel said.

Oh, really. “Dumbass,” Beau replied.

Daniel nodded.

“Is she okay about it?” he asked.

“Well, that’s kind of why she texted you to come over,” Savannah said.

He felt his damned gut clench. He did not want to hear about this from Becca. He didn’t want to hear that she was disappointed or have her ask him what was wrong with her that Luke didn’t notice her. He could not have this discussion with her.

“What now?”

“She’s upstairs.”

“Is she...crying or something?” He’d never seen Becca cry. He wasn’t sure he could handle that.

Savanna smiled. “No. She’s not crying.”

He blew out a breath. Thank God. “So what then?”

“She has a new plan. And she needs your input.”

He already hated the plan. For one thing, he suspected it had to do with Luke. For another, he suspected it had to do with glitter. “Is that what this is all about?” He gestured at the table.

“We’re having a New Year’s Eve party,” Toby said with a grin, holding up a glittery cut out of a 2.

“Another party, huh?”

“Yep.”

“And is she inviting Luke?”

“Yep.”

“And she wants my opinion about what to do with him once he’s there, right?”

Toby and Savannah and Daniel all said, “Yep,” at the same time.

Well, hell.

Fine. He could tell her what to do with Luke. Nothing. A big fat nothing. Because he wanted her. He was going to be there on New Year’s Eve.

“Okay.” He started toward the hallway, but looked back. “Any lattes today?”

“Peppermint!” Toby said perkily.

“Great. Let’s do that.” What the hell? His whole life was changing right? He was going to tell Becca Bollier he was crazy about her. He might as well embrace peppermint lattes on the same day.

“You’ve got it.” Toby looked thrilled.

Beau climbed the steps to the second floor of the Bollier house. He’d been up here a few times to fix things for Maureen, but never with Becca. They just didn’t have that kind of friendship. It felt strange coming up here and heading for her bedroom.

“Bec?”

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“Hey,” she called from the second door on the left.

“They said you wanted to talk to me.”

“Yeah, come in.”

He stopped in the doorway. He’d seen her room in passing. He’d rewired a ceiling fan up here and fixed the faucet on the tub and he’d glanced in.

The room was just like Becca. Light, sweet, straightforward. She had a queen-sized bed with a yellow and green duvet and three pillows. No extra throw pillows. No extra blankets. Just the basics. There was a dresser with jewelry and a few bottles, books, and framed photos on the top. There was a tall bookcase in one corner, filled to the brim, with books stacked on top of the books shelves and more on the floor in front of it. Her bedside table had a lamp with a shade that matched her bedspread, an alarm clock, more books, and a bottle of lotion and a bottle of water.

All pretty and feminine but also just...straightforward.

“Hey,” he greeted, propping his shoulder against the doorjamb.

She gave him a smile. “Hey.” Then she spread her arms. “What do you think?”

She was wearing a midnight blue dress with spaghetti straps. It was simple, silky, clinging to her curves seductively but not tight. It made the blue of her eyes even more intense and her skin look even creamier.

He tucked his hands into his pockets so he could move his fly away from his I-love-that-fucking-dress cock. “So much better than the devil costume.”

She smiled. “This is for New Year’s Eve.”

He nodded. “You look absolutely amazing.”

His response clearly surprised her. Maybe because he wasn’t usually so nice.

“Thank you.”

“Is that it?” He pushed away from the door.

“Uh, no, actually.”

He stopped. “No?”

She wet her lips. “No.”

“What else do you need?”

“You were wrong.”

“About?”

“The costume.”

He frowned. “How so?”

“He didn’t go for it.” She shrugged. “Luke didn’t ask me out on Halloween. I think the costume was too sweet. He’s still been friendly and everything. We still kind of

flirt in class and stuff. I just don't think he got the message that I'm interested in more."

"If he didn't ask you out after seeing you in that costume, he's stupid." That was just a fact.

"I don't think he's stupid."

"Maybe he's just not into you."

Her eyes widened.

He shrugged. "It's possible, Bec. I mean, I can't imagine that's the case, but maybe he doesn't feel that way about you. Like Daniel." A guy could hope.

She frowned. "I don't...well, okay then. I want to know for sure."

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“You should just be upfront. You should ask him out.” He didn’t want that. At all. But it was the truth. If she wanted to know how this guy felt, she should just fucking ask him.

She nodded. “I think you’re right. I should be upfront with him. Find out how he feels once and for all.”

“Okay, then. Great. Good luck with that.” He started to turn away again.

“Which is why I need you.”

There was that gut clench again. A bad one. “What do you mean?”

“I need you for something. And I can’t ask anyone else.”

“I... Okay.” It wasn’t like there was a chance in hell he’d say no to her. Especially when she put it like that. “But me calling him up and asking him how he feels about you is kind of third grade, don’t you think?”

She laughed and came toward him, reaching for his hand and tugging him further into the room. “Yes, I agree. Let’s not do that.”

“Then what?”

She stood directly in front of him and pressed her lips together. Then she took both of his hands in hers and said, “I need to practice kissing.”

If Beau had been given a million dollars to guess the next five words out of Becca's mouth, those five would have never crossed his mind.

"Beau?" She looked up into his face with concern. "Did you hear me?"

He nodded stupidly.

"So, will you help me?"

"I—" He cleared his throat. "Define 'help'," he said.

Then he started praying. Though he wasn't sure if he was praying for her to say she wanted him to help her find someone else to practice with or if she wanted to practice with him.

Because both answers would kill him.

"I need you to let me kiss you," she said softly.

He blew out a breath.

Well, fuck.

His gaze dropped from her eyes to her mouth. Then to her cheek. His gaze traveled down her neck to her collarbone, then across her shoulder.

And he realized this was how glitter was going to be his demise.

Her skin was dusted with glitter. And that made him lift his hand and draw his thumb over her collarbone to attempt to wipe it away. And his touch made her suck in a little breath. Which made his gaze fly back to hers. And when their eyes met again, he

realized that he was definitely going to kiss Rebecca Jean Bollier.

And that was going to change everything.

“And then what?” he asked, his voice gruff.

“Tell me how to be better at it.”

A terrible thought occurred to him and his hand dropped away from her shoulder.

“Did you kiss Luke?” Had that fucker told her she was a bad kisser?

“No.”

He took a breath.

“Not yet.”

Bad gut clench.

“I want to be sure I’m good at it before I do.”

“That’s a terrible plan,” he told her.

She frowned.

“You showed up looking like a literal goddess, and he didn’t ask you out. Now you’re just gonna grab him and kiss him? Maybe you should ask him out for coffee or something first.”

“I’ve been flirting with him for four months,” she said, clearly exasperated. “New Year’s Eve is the perfect chance. There’s a good reason to just kiss him. And then I’ll find out how he feels about that. If he kisses me back, then I’ll know he’s interested. If not, then he’s not. And I can quit thinking about it.”

“You know the difference?” Beau asked, suddenly feeling downright annoyed.

“The difference?”

“Between just kissing him and him kissing you back?”

“I...think so.”

“You’ve been kissed before, right?”

Did he want to know this? No. Did he need to know? For some reason, yes.

To give her good advice. Sure. That was why. Or that sounded like a good reason anyway. If she'd never kissed a guy, then this was a different ballgame. It was one thing for her to have never had sex—and yes, he absolutely remembered that little piece of info from her friends in October—but to never have been kissed was entirely different.

“Yes, I’ve been kissed.”

“And did you kiss that guy or did he kiss you?” Beau pressed.

“Um...he kissed me.”

“Was it your birthday or mistletoe or another New Year’s Eve thing or was it a kiss on a date or what?” Was he torturing himself with this? Yes, he was.

“Kind of in between,” she said with a little frown. “It was the Fourth of July.”

“Someone kissed you on the Fourth of July?”

She nodded.

“Just out of the blue?”

“We were outside Ellie’s watching fireworks. He turned to me with a big grin and said that it was a little-known tradition to kiss a pretty girl whenever a really bright, beautiful firework went off. He said nothing would make the forefathers and all the soldiers who fought for our freedom happier.” She gave Beau a little smile. “How could I say no to that? I mean, I’m a good American.”

He rolled his eyes. “It was Zeke Landry, right?”

She laughed. “Yep.”

Zeke Landry was a good time, there was no question. He was also a shameless flirt. And full of bullshit up to his eyeballs.

“Who else?” Beau asked.

“Mitch Landry kissed me one New Year’s Eve a couple years ago.”

“Anyone who isn’t a Landry?” Beau asked dryly. He presumed that most girls in the parish had been kissed by at least one Landry boy at some point.

“Ben Watkins kissed me after the Homecoming dance our Junior year.”

What? Ben was already married to their Prom Queen. Who he’d knocked up at the Prom where she’d been crowned, incidentally.

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Beau shook his head. “Okay.”

“And that’s it.” Becca lifted one shoulder, blushing.

“Well then, yeah, you probably need some practice.”

Her moment of shyness vanished and she narrowed her eyes. “Maybe I should ask someone else.” She started to pull away.

He gripped the hand he still held and tugged her even closer. “Who else you gonna ask?”

“You sayin’ no other guys in Autre will kiss me if I ask them to?” She was clearly trying for haughty, but her voice was breathless.

“I’m sayin’ no one else is gonna tell you the God’s-honest truth about if you’re any good at it or not. You’ll walk away wondering. With me, you’ll know for sure.”

And it was going to be really, really good. He could feel it in his stupid gut that kept tightening whenever he was around her.

“And,” he added, his voice dropping to a lower, huskier note. “I’m willing to work on it with you until you’re good, so no worries.”

Her lips parted and her tongue darted out to wet the bottom one.

He almost groaned.

“Okay,” she said softly.

“But we need to cover the difference between kissing someone and that someone kissing you back,” he said, his gaze focused on her mouth.

She swallowed and nodded.

“So, kiss me, Becs.” His voice was gruff.

She hesitated, then leaned in, lifted her face, and pressed her mouth to his.

He felt the contact rock through him. It was a simple press of lip to lip, but damn. She tasted even sweeter than purple sugar. Her lips were soft and immediately everything in him itched to be against all of her. He wanted to bury his nose in her hair, run his hands all over her body, hear the soft whimperings and moans and gasps that he knew he could elicit.

Holy shit.

She pulled back a moment later. And stood, staring at him.

Yeah. He was pretty sure he was staring too. He made himself blink and nodded, hoping like hell he’d sound normal when he spoke. “Okay, so that was kissing someone.”

“Right.”

“Now do it again.”

They both knew what was coming.

He could hardly wait. His palms tingled. His cock twitched. His gut clenched. A good clench.

She wet her lips again, then took a tiny step forward, drew in a little breath, and put her mouth against his.

He let her kiss him for about three seconds.

Then...he kissed her back.

He let the low growl at the back of his throat sound. One arm wrapped around her waist, tipping her back slightly while the other moved to cup the back of her head. He slid his fingers into her hair as he pressed her closer, belly to belly. He tilted her head, fitting their mouths together more fully, then he licked his tongue over her bottom lip.

She gasped softly and he tasted the tip of her tongue with his as he turned her and walked her back until she bumped into her bedroom door. He cupped her face with both hands then and her hands moved, sliding up his arms to link behind his neck.

He urged her mouth open and his tongue stroked along hers. She sighed as she went up on tiptoe to get closer. He changed the angle of his head, wanting to taste her more fully.

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He felt her fingers in his hair, the way her tongue met his, the way she arched into him. He knew it was all instinct. None of this was any kind of seduction on her part. And it was all so damned sweet. And hot.

And...he didn't want any other guy to have any of this.

He pulled back, holding her face, and looked into her eyes, both of them breathing hard.

"That is a guy kissing you back," he told her gruffly.

She nodded, her eyes wide.

"I promise, you'll know when it happens."

After a long moment of just drinking her in, he let her go, stepping back and tucking his hands into his back pockets, sucking in a huge lungful of oxygen. He wanted to run his hands all over her. He wanted to lay her out on her bed and kiss every inch of her.

He wanted to do a hell of a lot more than that.

He needed to reign this in.

She smoothed her hands down the bodice of the dress, pressing them into her stomach. Finally, she blew out a breath. "Well, holy crap, Beau."

He gave a short laugh. “Yeah.”

One corner of her mouth tipped up. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” He gave her a nod. “I did a lot of the work though.”

She snorted softly. “Right.” She ran a finger over her lower lip. “But...it means I have potential.”

Fuck. So much potential. And he wanted to help her discover it all.

“I think you’ll go far,” he agreed. “But, I don’t think you have time before New Year’s Eve.”

“You mean to get good enough to kiss Levi?”

“Y—” Wait, had she just used the wrong name for Luke? He narrowed his eyes. “Yeah.”

“So, you’re saying I definitely should not kiss him on New Year’s Eve?”

Beau gave her a nod. Or ever. But they could start with New Year’s Eve. “That is absolutely what I’m saying.”

“But now that you’ve showed me how good it could be, I want to kiss someone on New Year’s Eve.”

He saw the look in her eyes. And his gut definitely clenched. In a very, very good way.

Becca didn’t want to kiss Luke What’s-His-Name anymore.

But this girl was definitely getting kissed on New Year’s Eve. And as many other

eves...and mornings and afternoons...that she'd possibly let him.

“I think a New Year's Eve kiss can be arranged. But,” he added, stepping close again and pulling his hands from his pockets. “We should probably practice some more before that.”

“I was hoping you'd say that.”

She grinned and went up on tiptoe and he caught the sparkle from the glitter on her cheek just before his eyes slid shut and his lips met hers.

* * *