



Notorious

Author: *Valerie Ullmer*

Category: Romance, Adult, M-m Romance

Description: Connor Blake

Action star, beautiful soul, and all-around good guy. But also, the ultimate untenable dream.

When I, Ollie Bright, met Connor on a flight from New York to Los Angeles, I couldn't have guessed how much my life would change in that instant. After five hours of getting to know each other, although I'd no clue who he actually was, he invited me to stay with him along with giving me the honor of meeting his family. Despite being cast aside by my own parents, I found a place I belonged.

Until we shared a kiss so scorching hot, I built a future for both of us in my head. But in life, we all can't get what we want. I was content to be in his friend, with no knowledge of how he felt toward me.

Something changed when Connor left to go on set. The weeks apart allowed both of us to realize denying our feelings wasn't what either of us wanted. And as we figure out how to navigate our new relationship, something from his past threatened to upend his life and derail a new endeavor.

Will we find our happily ever after?

Notorious is an M/M romance between a romance writer and a Hollywood action star. It involves instant attraction, an amazingly supportive family, dreams realized, and an HEA.

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CONNOR

The script I'd received from my agent before I boarded the flight lay in my lap, untouched, as I tried to find the energy to read another shallow part playing the leading man in an unintelligent and boring action romantic comedy. On top of my frustration of where my career was heading, the beautiful flight attendant with curves in the right places who'd flirted with me when I boarded earlier left me alone with the promise of a drink, but I hadn't seen her in the last fifteen minutes. I stopped myself from pressing the call button when her excited voice grew louder as she drew closer to the front of the plane, cooing at someone.

Curious, I turned back in time to see the divider pushed aside and a nervous, fidgety kid hesitated when she displayed the open seat next to me. I appreciated beauty in all forms, and this man held my immediate fascination with his cherub-like face along with his cute, nerd glasses. An anthesis of the typical age of someone I went for, but something about the innocence of him drew me.

With medium length, wild dark brown hair curled on the top of his head, along with his button nose, and his wide, lushmouth, excitement sizzled under my skin at the prospect of debauching him. His skinner frame and legs that went for miles brought up images of them wrapped around my waist as I fucked him against a wall.

Wholesome, that was the word that came to mind as I pictured all the ways his body could use mine for his pleasure, and when I glanced back at his face, my heart jumped when noticed the freckles along his cheeks. The dream died as quickly as it

formed when I noticed him clutching his backpack to his chest like a lifeline, looking freaked.

When they stopped next to the aisle, my gaze hadn't moved away from Mr. Innocent, as I realized he wasn't a kid.

Fuck!

She started speaking, and I caught the last half of her question. "So, can he sit next to you, Mr. Blake?"

My head nodded before I'd even made the conscious decision to do so, and yet I huffed in annoyance when the guy made no advance to move into the window seat next to me. I raised my brow in question.

The man who captured my fascination said, "That's okay, I don't need an upgrade. Besides, he's settled in already. I can go to my seat at the back of the plane. I don't want to be a bother."

With a stroke of luck, I caught the gasp wanting to escape my throat at the deep voice coming from him. I cleared it, but the moment he turned his azure eyes my way, I almost moaned at having his full attention.

His eyes widened as his gaze moved over my face. The perusal almost like a caress, before he snapped them back up to stare into my eyes. But there was no recognition as he blinked at me before skimming lower, blushing when he caught himself, as I stared right back at him. His skin turned a lovely shade of peach and I had to find out.

"Am I familiar to you?"

Without breaking eye contact, he said, "I'm sorry, but no." His brows drew down as

he stared at me. And it was true. There was no recognition in his eyes.

I smiled and asked, “Window or aisle?”

At the question, he glanced back toward economy before he swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing, but said, “Aisle, please. If you don’t mind, I mean.”

Never breaking away from his expressive eyes and impressed by his over the top manners were cute, I slid over to the other seat.

“Um, thank you. It was kind of you to move after you had already settled in.”

He lowered himself into the seat next to me, brushing my arm as his scent of pine and lavender drifted over to me. But before I opened my mouth and asked all the questions, his movements became jerky and quick as he fastened his seat belt, tightening it with a yank. I winced, thinking about all the circulation he’d cut off from his lower half. When I made no move to copy him, he stared into my lap for longer than polite and then back up to my face.

My body heated with his motions that weren’t sexual, but seemed like a stroke of his warm, deft hands up my legs and torso. I found myself unable to pull away when his eyes pierced me, his brows furrowed, and a concerned expression morphed on his face.

“What?” I asked.

He cleared his throat before he asked, “May I please ask you to fasten your seat belt?”

A smile I couldn’t hold back broke free at the concern from the younger man. Thinking back, other than my mom and siblings, no one cared about my safety. They

wanted my money or the fame they garnered from being on my arm at the parties and events I was required to attend, but someone other than family, considering my well-being, was new.

Inquisitive beyond reason, I held out my hand and when the younger man placed his sizable palm against mine, awareness bolted up my arm and settled into my chest. I opened my mouth and croaked. Clearing my throat, I tried again.

“Connor Blake.”

Again, no recognition of my name registered on his face, and the tension released from my body in a relieved sigh.

“Oliver Bright. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Connor.”

“It’s a joy to meet you, too, Ollie. You don’t mind if I call you Ollie, do you? It’s only that Oliver is so formal and stuffy.”

As if drawn to every movement, I watched in fascination as his cheeks washed in a gorgeous peach blush.

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“My parents were nothing but formal, so if I can put as much distance between them and who I used to pretend to be, the better. So, yeah, Ollie, I like it.”

“No one else calls you that?”

Ollie shrugged and said, “My parents raised me in a small town which had little imagination, so I suppose no one ever considered anything but my formal name.”

The plane backed from the gate and I watched as Ollie’s knuckles grew white when he gripped the seat rests. His eyes darted from the flight deck, out the window to his left, before skimming over the other seats in first class, looking for what I could guess was the nearest exit.

My fascination with this man, which defied any explanation in my mind, had me offering him comfort or at least a distraction him from his fear.

“Is this your first time on a plane?”

“Yeah,” he shook his head then, “No, well, technically, it’s my second. I flew from Ohio to New York two days ago. But I was so tired, the nice flight attendant woke me when it was time to disembark the plane.”

Something about Ollie, being alone and so tired on a plane in a strange city, brought out protective instincts which laid dormant for years. The resourcefulness of the triplets as they grew meant I hadn’t needed to watch out for them for a long time. My sisters were both fierce and independent, and mama was safe at home. Besides, it was Sam, our eldest brother, who took on the role as protector in the family, so they were

unfamiliar, as I continued to be drawn to Ollie.

“Where did you stay in New York?”

“Um, I think it was called the Radisson Hotel. All I know it was next to the airport. I was grateful there was a shuttle, because as soon as I got into my room, I slept for a day and a half and before I went back to the airport to catch this flight.”

“And how did you get upgraded?”

“I... have no clue. As I boarded and searched for my seat number, Amy reached for my arm and said there was a spot for me up here. I tried to beg off, but she insisted.”

“It’s because at first, you come across as a lost kid.”

“At first?”

“Then you speak and that deep voice is unmistakable. Are you eighteen?”

Ollie shook his head, leaving his gorgeous, soft-looking hair to flop around. “I’m twenty-two. Last week, I graduated from Oberlin College with a degree in creative writing.” He paused before he swallowed. “Sorry, I offer more information than asked of me, and I’m working on stopping myself, but...”

He trailed off and shrugged.

Four years, he’s only four fucking years younger than me.

I pushed aside the appealing thought for another concern and I asked, “Why were you so exhausted when you arrived in New York?”

The silent pause made me worried I might have overstepped when he looked torn between an explanation and telling me to fuck off. Based on how nice Ollie was, the latter didn't even come to mind.

“Because we've only met, I understand your reticence about trusting me with your confidences, but I would never betray your secrets.”

A soft sigh escaped him, and he nodded.

“I'm relieved to tell someone, to be honest. My parents aren't open-minded. Cheryl is a religious studies professor and Robert teaches ethics. And four days ago, they found out I'm gay and kicked me out. I had time to grab a bag I'd already packed and my wallet, but Robert smashed my cell, reminding me he paid for it. Such a waste of money, because I don't mind not having a phone, but they could've traded it in or donated it. Anyway, they pushed me out and told me never to come back. The parting shot from Cheryl was that she'll be contacting her lawyer to remove me from all legal documentation.”

I listened to the entire story with my mouth hanging open, and still noticed the lack of emotion from Ollie, which worried me.

“Why do you call them Cheryl and Robert instead of mom and dad?” I asked.

“Oh, that's because when I learned to speak, they never taught me mom and dad. It was their first names only.”

“You seem...”

“Just fine with getting kicked out of the only home I've had without a way to contact anyone and a place to stay?”

“Yeah,” I mumbled.

“When you grow up with parents who never bothered with the child they brought into this world, you learn to fend for yourself. I think I’ve known most of my life I was gay, but after hearing their opinion of the subject of equal rights, I formed a plan to remove myself from the situation.”

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Not bragging, but being raised in a loving household with supportive parents and siblings, his indifference stunned me.

“There was no affection at all?”

A smile quirked the side of his mouth. “Until I was five, a nanny raised me, and then they hired Angel, who my parents referred to as ‘the housekeeper.’ The woman who loved me more than they ever could and was the one who looked after me when my school day was over. Angel introduced me to romance novels and when I was fifteen, she discovered gay romance. She smuggled me an e-reader and had books already downloaded on it. She’s the reason I’m a writer. When she gave me the books to read, she mentioned I read so many that I should be able to write my own. Having encouragement for once in my life, I did. Along with mailing her a check to help her transition into a new job and a note, she’ll find it when she arrives on Monday. I predict she’ll quit soon after she finds that I’m gone.”

There was a rebellious glint to his eyes, and I needed to understand his complete mindset. “Did your parents learn about your ambitions?”

Ollie shook his head, the smile turning up on his face. “They ignored me and left me to my own devices, unless there was some function or another where they needed their image maintained. But I started with short stories and writing prompts, but by the time I graduated high school, I’d written two novels. I attended college tuition free, so I took every literature, English, and creative writing class they offered while working on four other novels.”

Stunned, I stared at him. I started acting at eighteen after being discovered at a

photoshoot, but at sixteen, Ollie had written an entire novel.

“Do you write under your own name?” I pulled out my phone and connected to Wi-Fi before I glanced at Ollie.

“Sort of. I use my first and middle names, Oliver Jackson.”

I nodded and although I wasn’t an avid reader, other than screenplays, I wanted to read his books. As they downloaded, I asked a question that wasn’t my business, but curiosity won out.

“How did your parents discover you were gay?”

Ollie laughed and said, “It would be a great story if it were something salacious. But they, or rather Cheryl, took it upon herself to open my mail from a publisher and researched the company. They only publish LGBT romances. The letter included a layout of my books for their website.”

I studied him and despite the nervousness that shone from him in the beginning; he grew into a confident and proud man when speaking about his career.

“You don’t look too bothered by it?”

The same blush I was getting addicted to stained his cheeks and his mouth tilted up in a smirk.

“I used my parent’s careers in order to get a free education with the understanding they could discover my secret and ask me to leave anytime. The prediction came close to how I believed the confrontation would go because of the underlying anger whenever we interacted. It played out as it had in my mind. Well, other than destroying property. But I’m free now, so I can’t complain.”

Ignoring the way his half smile made my heart lurch and then beat hard in my chest, I continued with my imposing questions.

“You chose Los Angeles for a fresh start?”

“No, I didn’t choose it. There wasn’t a true destination in mind, and California seemed as good a place as any. However, when they kicked me out, I texted my friend from high school who knew about my home situation.”

I froze and blurted, “Should you trust someone you haven’t seen in years?”

Rather than being offended, Ollie’s eyes sparkled when he glanced at me.

“We’ve stayed in touch after being friends since elementary school. So yes, I trust her.”

Southern California was where I lived my entire life. Before my career took off, we lived in a decent neighborhood since my father worked as a doctor with his own practice. For many years, there was an all-encompassing sense of protectiveness for my siblings, but it’s waned over the years because of Sam’s constant need to be in charge. Yet, I found myself protective of Ollie.

“How will you get in contact with her if you don’t have a phone?”

“I have her address and she’s expecting me today.” He searched my face before he asked, “Are you close with your family?”

A scoff escaped my throat. “You can say that.”

At his confused expression, I continued.

“My mama, Valentina, and my three younger brothers all live with me. My older brother, Sam, lives in a condo and my sister, Emilia, in an elaborate bungalow, both within a mile of my house. Naomi has one of the guest houses behind the main one.”

“You have six siblings?”

A smile quirked my lips as I thought about them. “Yeah, it’s a lot of noise and a constant stream of people in and out of the house, never any privacy or secrecy with nosy teenagers and an overprotective mother hovering around at all times, but I wouldn’t change it for the world.”

The smile on Ollie’s face held a sweetness that spoke of innocence and joy as I told him about my life.

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“Um... what... and your father?”

Unable to stop the sensation, my chest tightened whenever I thought about my papa.

“Someone shot and killed him outside his general practice. They wanted his car and when he didn’t hand over the keys to his car fast enough... Yeah. The triplets turned ten a few days before it happened.”

Ollie reached for my forearm and squeezed, tears welling in his eyes, making them shine like the sun glinting off the ocean.

“I am so sorry for you and your family’s loss.”

Warmth and something unidentifiable pressed against my chest, making me feel noticed for what I’d been through in my life, not because of my looks or talent. Outside of my family, Ollie’s sweet nature and his demonstrative empathy made him the first genuine person I’d met in years.

My career and the business I found myself in didn’t allow for genuine connections. Most actors loved the art and some of those I’d met wanted to do their job and nothing else. Everyone I’d developed a cordial working relationship with dealt with insecurities, addictions, and other personal issues that caused anxiety. But the ones I counted as friends were honest and caring people. Society didn’t understand the drive and work it took to be an actor, instead seeking fame by being in the same vicinity as someone well-known.

The more time I spend getting to know Ollie, I believed that even if he learned about

my profession, it wouldn't change his view of me. Yet, I still hesitated to tell him the entire truth. Adding to the complication was my growing attraction to the man. It left me feeling unbalanced.

“So, is the plan to make it big when you arrive?”

I smiled when his head shook back and forth.

“Oh, no. I cringe when someone wants to take my picture, and if more than one person pays attention to me, I make excuses to leave. So no, I have no desire to be famous.”

“And you're going to keep writing?”

Ollie's face beamed. “Yeah, so far I've been lucky. My books have a loyal reader following and my publisher is happy with me. I have hundreds of ideas written down or rolling around in my head. Which is understated by epic proportions. It's something I want to continue as a career.”

Someone stopped next to the aisle, and we both glanced up to see the flight attendant smiling down at Ollie. “Would you like anything to drink, hon?”

He blushed and ducked his head. “No, thank you. But maybe Connor would like something?” He turned his bright eyes toward me, raising a brow in question.

She blinked and focused on me. “Oh, yes, sorry about that, Mr. Blake. Anything to drink?”

“No, thank—” I almost chuckled aloud when she forgot about me and focused her attentions once again on my seat mate.

“It was rude of me when I welcomed you on the plane. I forgot to introduce myself. I’m Amy.”

His brows drew down in confusion. It was obvious he already knew her name, but he didn’t know she was hoping to make herself memorable, which was why she repeated it.

“I’m Ollie.”

I loved how he’d adapted to his new nickname.

She purred in response. The smile dropped from my face and I readjusted in my seat as the flare of jealousy surged through me.

Then Ollie’s cheeks turned pink and all rational thought fled.

Ollie cleared his throat, and I leaned forward to hear him, before he whispered, “I don’t know if this is proper, but I have to tell you that while I’m flattered, I’m gay.” While he dropped his voice to say the last word, there was no hesitation.

Amy huffed out as she walked away, “Of course you are, honey. My luck with men is bad to none.”

“I’m sorry.”

Her head snapped back around as she stopped mid step. “Nope, nuh-uh, you have nothing to apologize for. I know you’re gonna break a lot of hearts.”

The look on Ollie’s face told me that her suggestion horrified my new friend.

“I hope not. I’d hate to think myself capable of hurting anyone like that.”

She smiled. “You’re a sweetheart. I came by to tell you we are landing in fifteen minutes. And give you a reminder to buckle up. But you’re already set.”

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With a wave, she disappeared behind the curtain toward the back.

“Wow, that was the shortest five and a half hours I’ve ever spent, and now I have to worry about the landing.”

I chuckled. “You didn’t notice take off. I’m sure you won’t notice the landing.” Before he could protest, I asked, “What’s your friend’s name, the one who invited you out?”

“Gracie. She moved out here at the start of our senior year in high school, but we kept in touch over the years. She works for an agent, or producer, or something like that, but I couldn’t keep track of the hundreds of things she does throughout a day. Her dream is to become a producer, but she’s happy where she is now, learning the ropes.”

“Cool. Why don’t I wait and see if you get in touch with her and if you can’t, we’ll try again tomorrow, and you can come and meet my family?”

“Oh, that seems like I would be intruding. If I can’t get ahold of Gracie, I’ll get a hotel for the night.”

I shook my head. “Trust me on this. If my mama finds out I let you stay in a hotel after telling her your story, and I won’t hesitate to tell her everything because I’ve been gone for six weeks and there isn’t much I keep from her, she’ll drag me out to find you, guilt you into coming home with us, and then feed you until you burst, all out of love.”

His response was unexpected. “She sounds wonderful.”

I raised an eyebrow and said, “You’d think so, but she has a way of getting you to spill all of your secrets from a simple look.”

They’d landed, but again, Ollie’s focus was on him and he’d missed it.

He leaned closer and whispered, “Like, what sort of secrets? Because I once lost the cat from my friend’s Monopoly board and had to sneak home, get the one from our game, and replace it. Luckily, he didn’t realize it was missing.”

It was a close thing not to lose it at his serious look. His heart was so pure. I wondered if he’d lose that innocence the longer he stayed in Los Angeles, and the thought alone made me sad.

Instead, I nodded my head and said, “Yes, things like that. When I was eleven and discovered the pleasures of masturbation, mama glanced at me during breakfast the next morning and I confessed all.”

His cute cheeks turned a shocking red before he choked out, “What did she say?”

“Both her and papa, right then and there, started a conversation about safe sex and consent. They stressed to each of us the need to respect our partners, recognizing that no means no, even in the middle of sex. Always ask, several times if needed, before you touch anyone, even as simple as a kiss on the cheek or a hand on their arm. Not everyone is okay with touching. Papa was adamant we learned to watch out for harassment and danger signs at a club or party, making sure we knew it was our responsibility to watch out for others. Mama made it known sex is natural and you and your partner need to be protected. All of it, with complete consent. There was never any shame about ‘the talk,’ especially after my friends complained about their experiences.”

Clearing his throat, he nodded. “I would have loved parents who cared enough to impart that information. Instead, I’m a twenty-two-year-old virgin who wouldn’t even know what to do if I found myself with a man, much less a man I’m attracted to, who wanted to touch me. But I know about consent.”

I swallowed and blinked when the plane stopped at the gate and the typical series of dings sounded throughout the cabin, letting us know we could remove our seatbelts.

“And to answer to your question, I would love to meet your family. If my plans with Gracie fall through.”

With what must have been a sappy smile on my face, I led the way off the plane and toward the baggage claim, happy with the thought of spending more time with the intriguing younger man.

But the moment the carousel buzzed into life, I heard a loud squeal. I turned in time to see a five-foot nothing woman launch herself at my new friend, wrapping her arms and legs around a happy, laughing Ollie.

Well... fuck!

2

OLLIE

I’d missed my friend in the years since she moved away, so I clutched her to me as much as she held on with all her strength. But I happened to glance over at Connor and felt my heart stutter in my chest. Regretful time with the fascinating man was now over.

Gracie sensed a change in my demeanor and slid down my body until her feet landed

on the ground. She took a step back and studied my face. When my eyes traced back behind her, she turned, curious, to study the man I thought I'd never forget for however long I lived.

As I waited for Gracie to introduce herself or take charge of the lack of conversation around her, she gasped and stepped back against my chest. I teased her during the years we grew up together about her five-foot stature, although I'd grown several inches to my six foot three height after she'd moved away. But her reaction to Connor surprised me. My manners kicked in during the awkward silence.

“Gracie, this is Connor. He kept me sane on the flight. He even invited me over to meet his family. They sound outstanding and supportive. Connor, this is Gracie, the sweetest friend I've ever had.”

Somehow, my words snapped them out of their staring contest, and they shook hands, exchanging pleasantries. Gracie's stunned expression disappeared as she turned back to me. She studied my face for a long moment before her growing smile turned into loud gales of laughter. I blinked at her as she bent forward, holding her stomach with one arm while she placed her left hand on her knee.

For a minute, I stood there, staring without an ounce of understanding why.

“Only you, Oliver, I swear, only you!”

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When it didn't seem her laughter would subside, I glanced up to see Connor smiling. But the air of closeness we shared dissipated when a beautiful woman approached him and asked for an autograph. As she snuggled her chest against his arm, I realized my breathing had increased and there was a tingling in my fingers.

It was obvious I hadn't recognized Connor, much less if his attraction leaned toward men, so I tamped down the unnecessary jealousy at seeing his smile directed at someone else and glanced at Gracie, while she wiped tears of mirth from her eyes.

"What's going on?" I asked.

She didn't answer before Connor reached us. "Why don't we grab your bags and get you settled with Gracie?"

At Connor's innocent statement, she gasped and clutched onto my forearm.

"I'm so, so sorry, Oliver. The city condemned my building and because I didn't have anywhere to live, I took a job and will be on location for the next two months."

My heart jolted as Connor pursed his lips and blew out a relieved whistle.

Shit, I shouldn't be looking at his lips!

"What?" Gracie asked Connor.

As though we'd been friends for years, Connor reached an arm out and draped it around my shoulders. I locked down my muscles and chanted again and again in my

imaginative brain that he wasn't mine as I prevented the gigantic shiver that wanted to overtake my body.

"This is great! Mama's going to be thrilled because now she gets to feed Ollie and baby him instead of me."

Gracie's eyes widened, but I couldn't tell which surprised her more; him calling me Ollie, or the actual invitation to his home. Despite the tension coming from Gracie, the tightness in my chest relaxed, knowing Connor's invitation was still on the table.

"Ollie?" She shook her head. "Never mind. I have a friend who needs a roommate. You can meet him tomorrow and when I get back, we can look for a place together."

"No, he's going to stay with me. We have plenty of room."

Gracie turned to Connor and squinted. "Despite me trying to get him to watch TV and a movie once in a blue fucking moon, some of them I think he'll enjoy, he's not interested. Which makes him ignorant of our world. He prefers reading or watching video game play throughs."

I scoffed. "It's obvious he's someone famous, an actor or a sports star... is that how you say it?" I waved my hand in a dismissive gesture. "He's signed three autographs since we've been standing here. Anyway... oh, great, our bags are here. Which one is yours?"

"Cornflower blue hardshell."

With a roll of my eyes at my protective friend, I left them behind knowing she'd needed to talk to Connor, and I joined the bodies hovering around the luggage carousel.

“First time in Los Angeles?”

Not realizing anyone was speaking to me, I turned my head and sucked in a breath as I spotted a man with perfect teeth and coiffed hair standing closer than necessary. Something about his smile creeped me out and when I spotted a blue suitcase, I said, “Yes, excuse me.”

I walked toward the end and plucked Connor’s bag from the spinning metal contraption, double-checking his information to verify I had the correct bag, before waiting for my own. A shiver passed over me, causing me to straighten to my full height, as the man I had no desire to speak to brushed his arm against mine. He held out a business card and said, “If you’re ever looking for work?—”

Gracie growled. “He’s not.”

An airport police officer grabbed the man’s arm. “I warned you about trolling here.” He yanked at the now snarling man away and I blinked my eyes at the contorted evil look on his face.

“I’ve seen him here, pretending to be a casting agent and promising work for the naïve. Then he’d trap them into work you don’t want to know about.”

Connor growled close to my ear. “That’s why he’s staying with me.”

I turned to my friend, and she shook her head, letting out an exasperated smile. Her next words released the ball of anxiety in my chest.

“I left my bag with a friend at the concourse since we’re leaving soon, but call me when you’re settled,” Gracie said.

“I don’t have a cell.”

“Professor Dee and Dumb?”

Unable to keep it inside, I laughed at the old nicknames for my parents, as she deemed them during our first year in high school. I nodded, and she pulled out a card with her cell number scribbled on the back.

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“Yeah, I figured when I couldn’t get a hold of you. Thank goodness I caught you when I did.”

She wrapped her arms around me in a hug, and I breathed her in as she squeezed back. “See you soon,” she said.

“Ready?” Connor asked.

I hesitated. “Are you sure?”

“Nice to meet you, Gracie,” Connor called out.

“If you hurt him...” she trailed off, but gave my new friend a wicked smile that promised pain. Connor laughed.

“Love you, Gracie,” I called.

“Love you, too, Oliver!”

Without answering, he grabbed my arm and pulled me along with his suitcase, giving me enough time to snatch my own in my right hand as he directed us to the pickup area.

We walked out the sliding glass doors to see a black SUV with tinted windows and standing by the passenger side back door was a man with dark olive skin, muscles upon muscles, and no smile. Of course, we walked straight toward him.

“Holy shit, does he know how to kill people with just his little finger? Or does he have one of those semi-automatic guns he can pull out and discharge in less than a second, leaving a man standing full of holes before his eyes roll into the back of his head and he keels over?”

Connor shook his head at my curious, manic, and delusional questions before he said, “Ollie, this is Thomas. Thomas, Ollie’s staying with us for the foreseeable future, so be nice.”

In an accent I couldn’t place, Thomas said, “When am I not nice?”

Connor scoffed. “I’ve known many who said you were mean to them.”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “There have been several so-called dates that needed saving from themselves.”

Not wanting to hear about Connor’s obvious rich history in dating, I asked Thomas, “Are you famous, too?”

The man stared at me with wide eyes before his face, a sculpted one with sharp cheekbones, full lips, and a piercing green gaze turned to Connor.

“He doesn’t know who you are?”

Connor sighed. “It seems not, and I don’t think he’s eager to find out.”

Thomas punched out a hearty laugh before his hand shot out. “It’s nice to meet you, Ollie.”

As I shook his hand, I said, “It’s nice to meet you as well, Thomas.”

“You don’t want to know?” Thomas’ curious question popped out before he pressed his lips together.

“I am curious, but he seems reticent to tell me, so I’d rather not until he’s comfortable with it.”

Connor squeaked, and when I turned to him, his eyes were wide and unblinking. While he processed what I’d said, I turned back to Thomas.

“Would it offend you if I created a character based on your likeness and made him the protagonist in a gay romance novel? I wouldn’t use your real name or your exact features, but seeing you gave me an idea for a story?”

The man shrugged and said, “It would be an honor.”

With a beaming smile, I nodded at him. “Great. Thank you.”

I followed them to the back of an SUV and slid my suitcase next to Connor’s.

Connor huffed and said, “I was on a flight with you for five hours and you never asked me to use my likeness.” His bottom lip stuck out as he crossed his arms, going into full pout mode.

I patted his arm and said, “Famous people are easy to recognize, even from a simple description, so I tend not to model my characters after them. I didn’t mean any offense by not asking you.”

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His startling smile was back, and he said, “Ready to head home?”

At his words, I became nervous. I nodded and slid into the back seat as Connor moved to the front passenger one. Even though it was my first trip outside of Ohio, I ignored my surroundings. I wondered how me, a tall, skinny, geeky man intruding into their lives, would affect his family.

The SUV stopped, and I blinked when my door opened and Connor stood there looking at me with his brows furrowed.

“If your family doesn’t like me or if I make them even the slightest bit uncomfortable, please let me know, okay?” Before he could respond, I continued, “My parents couldn’t accept something as ingrained as my sexuality. Where I come from, established queer couples still have to hide who they are because of all the hate they get.”

Connor gave him a sad smile. “You can find hate anywhere, but you shouldn’t let small-minded people stop you from being yourself. I’m pan and there are many people who don’t understand and chose not to learn. It’s their problem, though, not mine.”

“I’m bi and I’ve been told my life would be easier if I settled with a woman. If I’m with a man, then my choice makes me gay. But it’s a way for people to force you to conform to their beliefs instead of taking the time to educate themselves,” Thomas said.

“Your parents lost out of getting to know the real you, and that’s a shame for them.

Not you,” Connor said.

“Bringing home strays now, big brother?”

I froze, searching for escape routes, when Connor smiled and clutched my arm, keeping me from running.

“You’re about to meet the triplets. It’s hard to tell them apart, but don’t worry, they’re used to it.”

“Stop scaring him, Con,” a second, similar voice said.

“Yeah, we might like this one and want him to stay.” And there was the third, a more timid one.

Connor turned, and I followed his lead. My eyes widened as I took in dark, messy hair that matched all three men? Boys? But they had the same piercing hazel eyes as Connor, which made me relax.

I waved in my awkward manner and said, “It’s nice to meet you. I’m Ollie.”

The middle one of the group stepped forward and stuck out his hand, tilting his head from one side to the other, studying me for a long, silent moment.

“You look like an Ollie, but...”

“I seem like a nerd of the highest order, with my polo shirt, jeans, glasses, and loafers?” And I took his hand and shook.

His deep laugh took me by surprise. “Yeah. I’m Lyric.”

The other two stepped up together. “I’m Landon, and this is the youngest of the three of us, Linus.” He winked at me, and I raised my eyebrow.

“Landon is the family flirt and heartbreaker,” Connor growled.

Lyric laughed as he looped his arm through my own and dragged me into the house. He called back, “Mama’s in the kitchen with Emilia and Omi. Sam’s on his way, and none of them know about Ollie. This is gonna be fun.”

I tried to dig in my heels, but Linus latched onto my other arm and a hand, which I assumed was Landon, opened at my back and propelled me forward.

“Everyone will love you, Ollie. You’re so cute.”

“Um...”

Before I could voice my protests about waiting for Connor, I smelled delicious food the moment we stepped into the enormous house with modern furniture in creams and browns that brought out the splashes of bright colors on the tiled floor and the art of the wall. Besides several chandeliers dotting the hallway and led to what I assumed was the family room, there was natural light coming from the floor to ceiling windows. Before someone pushed me into the kitchen, I think I saw the actual Pacific Ocean. Along with my humiliation at gawking at my surroundings, my stomach rumbled.

Unable to contain a moan of mortification, despite my mouth watering, I glanced at Connor, pleading with my eyes to save me from whomever I might meet in the next few moments, but the heat banked in his eyes took me aback and I blurted out, “It smells wonderful in here.”

Connor nodded and cleared his throat. He tried to speak, cleared his throat again, and

said, “Yeah, smells like home.”

I smiled, but the roguish smile aimed at me from the sexiest man I’d ever laid eyes on made me clumsy and I tripped. Movement from the left made me turn, and I watched as the tiniest woman in history beam as she caught sight of Connor.

“Oh, you’re home and you brought a boyfriend!”

With wide eyes, I watched as Connor scooped the woman into his arms and laughed.

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“He’s a friend I met on the plane, mama. Ollie, this is my mama, Valentina, and mama, this is Ollie from Ohio. He’s a writer.”

“It’s lovely to meet you, Mrs. Blake.”

She surprised me when she pulled me down into a hug. “No Mrs. nonsense, you can call me mama, too.”

The simple acceptance of me had me blinking back the tears threatening to fall. When she patted my back as she released me, she caught my gaze and waited for my agreement. I nodded.

“Thank you.”

“What about your parents back in Ohio? Do they miss you?”

My head moved back and forth, and Connor, who stood closer to me than I realized, spoke near my ear, making me shiver.

“They kicked him out when they found out he was gay.”

She tsked aloud, and I watched something flash in her dark brown eyes I didn’t recognize before she said, “You have a genuine family now. No worries.”

I turned toward the triplets and as my eyes landed on the one who I knew would be trouble without boundaries, and said, “No flirting, Landon, I’m family now.”

He rolled his eyes, but with a smirk on his lips, he huffed out, “Fine.”

A loud gasp echoed throughout the room and I turned to see a tall, svelte woman dressed in an elegant bone-white pantsuit step toward me in slim heels that made me flinch. I kept my eyes on her feet because despite having the grace I’d only seen on the runway; I worried about her ankles.

“How did you know he was Landon?” She paused, turning back to look at her brother, before she continued, “Are you Landon?”

She received an eye roll from Lyric.

“How do you walk in those shoes? I’m very concerned about you.”

Wincing at my lack of brain-to-mouth filter, wondering if I’d offended her, only to see her throw her head back and let out a howl of laughter. She wiped the moisture from her eyes before she smiled at me. “I have a ton of experience. Now you?”

“Their personalities differ from each other, and that’s how I can tell.”

At the confusion in her eyes, I explained.

“Lyric absorbs the world around him faster than I’ve ever seen, and he’s not intimidated to be the first to jump into a situation because his curiosity gets the best of him. He stands with his spine straight and he’s always gathering information from people around him. Linus, he’s the quiet one, but not shy. He’s observant and empathetic, which is why he grabbed my other arm as Lyric dragged me inside, sensing my hesitation. He tries to hide it, but his face gives away how much he cares about others’ comfort. And Landon is the epitome of cool and popular. Flirting and being friendly is in his nature.”

Everyone in the room turned and stared at the three different men while I continued to peruse the house.

“I don’t see it,” the tall woman said, but instead of continuing her study of her younger siblings, she turned to me. “I’m Emilia.”

Before I opened my mouth, a graceful woman about a foot shorter than her sister appeared in front of us and she said in an ethereal tone, “I’m Naomi, but everyone calls me Omi.”

I smiled, liking both of Connor’s sisters. “Nice to meet you both.”

The front door opened and a frantic scratching sound echoed through the house before two beautiful black labs rushed into the kitchen.

“Sorry I’m late,” a deep voice called out.

Without thinking of my environment and the strangers who’d welcomed me into their home, I sank to my knees and smiled as both dogs danced around me, giving me licks on my face as I cooed at them. Soon, I sat down and when I straightened my legs, one of them laid his head on my thigh while the other curled close to my hip, her head on my stomach. Of course, I absorbed all the love and affection from the two that I could.

“There isn’t an animal or human who can resist you,” Connor said.

“When I get a place of my own, I’m adopting as many dogs as I can. Cat’s too, and?—”

“What the fuck?”

At the kitchen entrance, I noticed a man who had similar features to Connor, but everything from his height and build, taller and muscular, was the complete opposite. His stance alone demanded attention.

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“These two are the sweetest.”

“Ollie, this is my older brother, Sam.”

Sam, not as trusting as the rest of his family, crossed his bulky arms over his chest and asked, “Who are you?”

I squeaked when he narrowed his eyes at me. “I’m Ollie Bright?” Despite trying to sound confident, the statement came out as a question.

Much to my relief, Connor stepped toward Sam and said, “It’s a long story, and I’m sure someone will fill you in, but he’s my friend, I met him on the plane back from New York, and he’s staying with us.”

Emilia chimed in. “He’s the only one who can tell the triplets apart.”

The man dropped his arms to his sides, stunned.

“And both Charlie and Lucy trust him,” Linus said.

I glanced down to see both the dogs settled on my lap, snoring away.

Sam growled, and when I caught his eye, he tilted his head over to the triplets.

“Lyric is in the middle, Linus is on your right, and Landon on your left.”

The skeptical look remained until he glanced at his youngest brothers and they all

nodded.

“Holy fuck!” Sam mumbled.

“Language!” Shouted by most everyone in the room.

Sam shook his head. “How long have you been here?”

“One hour and twelve minutes,” Thomas answered as he strolled into the kitchen, standing close to Connor’s older brother.

Sam flushed and glanced back at me, but his eyes darted back to Thomas and I watched on in fascination as he sensed more than understood where Thomas was. I got a thrill watching the family dynamic play out, but this, Sam’s confused expressions as his body leaned closer to the bodyguard, was an interesting turn of events.

“Dinner’s ready,” Valentina shouted.

Connor held his hand out for me as the rest fled into the other room.

“What about the dogs?”

The man chuckled. “They’ll head to their beds in the living room or push their way underneath the table and lay at your feet.”

At that, I extended my arm and Connor helped me up; me being careful not to jostle the dogs too much.

“Thank you for... well, everything. I’m glad I met you.”

His answering smile warmed my chest in a way that nothing or no one else ever had.

“I’m glad to have met you too, Ollie.”

3

CONNOR

For hours after dinner, we sat together as a family and talked. Between Sam’s crazy schedule as an ER doctor, the long hours Emilia put in at her law practice, the demand for Omi to choreograph everything from stage plays to movie musicals, along with my shooting schedule, it was the first time in over a year that we caught up with all of us being in the same room. Because of this, we all stayed up, even the triplets. But they had the next day off for Memorial Day, so it was midnight before Mama shooed us all to bed when she noticed Ollie sagging in his chair.

After I helped mama clean and straighten up the kitchen, I offered Ollie his own cottage, the smaller one with two bedrooms behind the main house. I tried to sell it as added privacy to write, with the added benefit of a full kitchen for the duration of his stay, but I was off on my assumptions.

Instead of jumping on the offer, Ollie looked horrified.

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“No... um, that’s way too much, Connor. Is there a small bedroom out of the way I can stay in for the time I’m here with you? I mean, not with you, with you, but living... here?”

Flush with the possibilities his innocent words conjured in my mind, I jumped when someone cleared their throat.

“Why don’t you put him in the room next to you, Con? That way, he can come to you if he needs anything?” Landon suggested.

Ollie, not getting the sexual connotation from my little shit of a brother, blinked at him and said, “I would never want to be a bother, so a room out of the way is perfect. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, I wake up and write or take notes when I have an idea. I’d hate to wake anyone.”

One triplet hugged him, and based on Ollie’s earlier description of the three, I’d guessed it was Linus. “You’re not in the way, Ollie. Follow me. The room I have in mind will be perfect for you.”

As Lyric took Ollie’s other arm, they walked him down the hallway toward what I called in my mind the ‘tan’ room.” With antique wooden dressers and nightstands, along with an elegant desk facing the corner with two windows that would give him plenty of light for writing. It was perfect.

But when they entered the room, Ollie stopped in his tracks. I snuck around the group with his suitcase and placed it on the loveseat at the base of the bed. When I turned around, his eyes were wide and his mouth open as he took in the room.

“What do you think?”

Rather than answering right away, he nibbled on his bottom lip and looked at me with wide, pleading eyes.

“Um, isn’t it kind of... big?”

His question had my lips tipping up.

Lyric, or hell, it might have been Linus, scoffed and said, “You should see the bedroom Con claimed for himself. No one needs a full-sized sauna in their bathroom.”

Before Ollie talked himself out of the bedroom so close to mine, I said, “This is the smallest one we have. And yes, it’s closeto my room, so if you need anything, I’ll be right here.” I pointed down the hall toward the double doors.

His eyes widened, and I noted Ollie scandalized was a sight to behold.

Linus then took the bag from his shoulder and laid it on the desk. When he turned back, he said in a sweet, quiet voice, “I’m glad you’re here, Ollie. We’re gonna be great friends.”

Ollie’s face softened, and he pulled both my brothers into his arms and said, “Thank you, and I’d love to.”

With reluctance, I followed them out of Ollie’s room.

“Good night, Ollie, sleep well.”

“Night, Connor, and thanks again.”

His smile spiked my pulse, making me want things I shouldn't.

After the exhaustive day; the end of the shoot and the long flight home caught up to me the moment I was out of Ollie's presence. I staggered toward my bedroom and closed the door behind me, walking over to my bed as I shucked off all my clothes, before collapsing on the downy softness and closing my eyes. Blackness surrounded me as soon as I covered myself with a sheet.

It could've been hours, or days, later, but I blinked open my eyes in my darkened bedroom. I'm not a heavy sleeper, so when I noticed my surroundings, I realized a sound had woken me, but for the life of me, I couldn't identify it. The unfortunate side effect of consciousness was I was up for the day. A sigh of happiness escaped when I glanced at the clock and noticed it was closer to noon than early in the morning.

I threw on a tee and a loose pair of sweats, pressing the button to open the blackout curtains, and took a minute to adjust to the bright sunlight streaming through the windows. The triplets giggled right outside in the hallway and I opened the door to see them disappearing into Ollie's room. Frowning, I followed them.

"What are you three doing?"

Linus, I was getting better at finding their distinctive qualities thanks to my new friend, glanced up and said, "Ollie sleeps like the dead. You don't have to whisper. Besides, mama sent us up because she made a full breakfast and is worried about him not eating enough."

Ollie shuffled on the bed and turned to face away from us, but he didn't wake. As he hugged a pillow to his chest, he kicked the blanket, which exposed his bare back and the swell of his bare ass, and I fought to swallow against my dry throat.

“Okay, out!” I said as I pushed my brothers toward the exit, ignoring their loud complaints.

Once the door shut behind me, I turned toward Ollie and noticed he turned back toward me during all the commotion. His face was relaxed in sleep and he looked even younger without his glasses perched on his nose.

“Ollie, honey,” I reached out and shook his shoulder.

No movement or sound came from the younger man, and the heat coming off his skin seared my hand. I hesitated, but knowing he needed to eat, I caressed his arm, hoping a gentler touch would work. While Ollie didn’t move, I became hyper focused on the way his soft skin made me itch to explore more of him and craved to learn his reactions to my touch.

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My eyes examined the soft freckles dotting his pecs as my palms itched to open against his skin to see if everywhere was as delectable to touch. But when my gaze halted on the tuft of hair sprinkled on his lower abs leading down past the sheet, I stared, making out the cut of his hips and my dick swelled in my sweats. My mouth watered as every nerve in my body stood up and took notice.

That was when I realized how lecherous I was being and bit back a curse.

Fuck! Fuck! Fucking fuck! He's an only just a legal adult.

Well, that absurd notion flew out the fucking window when Ollie moaned what sounded like my name in his deep-as-sin voice and rolled onto his back.

I held my breath as his eyelids fluttered open. His azure gaze found mine and instead of freaking out to find me hovering over him as he slept, he smiled, stealing the last of my breath.

“Hi,” he breathed.

I was out of sorts and still breathing hard from the shock of my snowballing desire, making my body aware it had been a few weeks since I had anyone under me. But despite the flare of need, there was also a swell of affection; no other word for it, for this man. Yes, I acknowledged, albeit in my mind, that Ollie was all man.

“Hi, yourself?—”

I choked on the last word when his hand, his warm, soft hand, reached up and cupped

my cheek before he slid his thumb along my bottom lip. Despite my varied and vast encounters over the years, I'd never experienced the sudden swirl of both passionate desire and intense gratitude from a simple touch.

"You're so detailed," he whispered in awe as he continued with his slow, thorough exploration of my face with the pad of his thumb. Down my jaw line, over the pulse in my throat, and when my brows furrowed at his cryptic words, his fingers brushed against them, smoothing them out.

"Please don't frown," he murmured, "you're so beautiful. Good job, brain, for conjuring you."

Unable to keep my surprise inside, I cursed as I watched his eyes widen as they skimmed over my face.

"What?"

"Ah, honey, I hate to burst your bubble, but I'm real. Remember, we met on a plane yesterday and my family adopted you soon after?"

The adorableness of this man when he blinked, reaching out, and pressing a hand to my regrettable covered chest, had me clenching my fists at my sides, preventing me from reaching for him. Although I wanted to touch him more than my next breath, my fantasy disappeared in a puff of smoke when he jerked his hand back as though he'd touched flames. He scrambled backwards out of bed, hovered in the air for an absurd second, before hitting the floor with a thud, which made those protective instincts of mine surge again.

"Oh, shit! Are you okay, Ollie?"

His head popped up on the other side of the bed and his mouth twisted in a frown

before he stood, feet away, all his glorious naked beauty on indisputable display. I gasped and started coughing as I coveted the miracle that was before me.

“Yeah...”

Seeming more awake, his eyebrow quirked up, and when my eyes dropped to his naked and perfect form, his gaze followed. It appeared salacious, unable to direct my gaze to the wall, or, if I had any decency in me, toward the floor. Instead, I roamed over his wide shoulders, the muscular definition of his pecs and abs, and those fucking v-shaped cuts making my mouth water as I dreamed about licking him, tasting him. The man was the epitome of a hot-as-fuck nerd, and I wanted to take him apart with my hands and lips.

Without even breaking the spell, he glanced down, blinking, before reaching for his glasses, taking another look. He then screeched and yanked the sheet, which was tucked underneath the mattress, and the action jerked him forward, sending him sprawling on the bed and giving me the perfect view of his shapely ass.

Rather than continue to yank at the bedding, he gripped the edge of the comforter and rolled until he cocooned himself in it. He landed with his face pressed against the mattress, his glasses somehow intact, when the filthiest groan I’ve ever heard someone make outside a sexual situation reached my ears.

“How much can I pay you to forget this ever happened? I can even give you my first born if that’s required for you to erase every moment from your memory since I woke,” Ollie mumbled.

Emotions warred within me; lust, affection, protectiveness, and jealousy, which meant I took too long to answer. When he lifted his head up to peer up at me through his lashes, there was a look of concern marring his face.

“Was it traumatizing, you know, seeing me... naked?” He whispered the entire question.

“Fucking hell, Ollie! You’re one of the most gorgeous creatures I’ve ever laid my eyes on and you’re worried I’m traumatized? I’m not, by the way. You’ll see proof, especially if your eyes trail down...”

I was joking, but when his eyes leveled with my cock pressed against the material of the flimsiest pair of sweats I owned, they widened and another obscene sound escaped his throat before he blinked, his cheeks awash with a beautiful coral stain, as he buried his face in his hands.

The rush of lust left me lightheaded and throbbing, but it was his next innocent words which almost sent me over the edge.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t intend to... look. Did I make you uncomfortable? Do you want me to leave?”

The last thing in the world I wanted was Ollie anywhere I wasn’t, so I placated him.

“Ollie, you are family now.” I ignored his flinch and the way my stomach seized with the lie before I continued, “And like with my other siblings, there’s so much chaos around on most days that there’s no use getting embarrassed by something as small as seeing each other naked.”

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It broke my heart when his eyes fluttered shut and a flush of embarrassment deepened the stains on his cheeks. He nodded and with a grace I lacked at the best of times; he stood with the comforter wrapped around him.

“I’m going to get ready for the day. Thank you for waking me.”

His words were stilted and shaky, but before I could respond and find the words to reassure him he had done nothing wrong, he was behind the door of his bathroom. The click of the lock, along with the devastation on Ollie’s face, was more than enough to propel me back to my room for a shower.

When I stumbled downstairs, a band of tightness wrapped around my heart when Ollie, who sat next to Omi, giving her his full attention while ignoring my presence, made me stride past them into the kitchen, seeking coffee.

“Fuck!” I whispered under my breath.

I reiterated the sentiment when I left with a full plate of food and a mug of black coffee, ready to salvage the hurt I’d caused. But instead of the beautiful Ollie sitting with the rest of my family, he’d disappeared and five pairs of eyes glared at me.

“What did you do?”

I sat and took a bite, holding off the conversation for as long as possible.

Mama walked in from the kitchen with her arms crossed and her brows pinched as she stared at me. Shit! She hadn’t chastised me like this since I made the tabloids

when they found out about the foursome I had with porn stars during a weekend of debauchery in Las Vegas several years before.

“Nothing. He was embarrassed because I woke him up from a realistic dream and I reassured him it was fine.”

Sam wandered in and asked, “What’s going on?”

“Our dumbass brother here hurt Ollie and we’re trying to figure out what he did,” Emilia said.

“Good, maybe he’ll leave now.”

The entire room froze, and I growled at my older brother. I loved the man, and knew underneath the gruff, untrusting exterior, the man had a heart of gold, but this was pushing it too far. Before I could speak, Linus beat me to it.

“For fuck’s sake, Sam, stop being such a monumental fucking dickhead! Ollie’s done nothing to you,” Linus shouted.

Sam dropped into a chair and opened his mouth a few times, shocked at being chastised by a teenager. Instead of apologizing or waiting to be yelled at for cursing, Linus, followed by Lyric and Landon, left the dining room, each shooting both Sam and me dirty looks.

“Well, shit,” Sam breathed out.

“They have a point,” Omi said.

“What?”

She exchanged an exasperated look with Emilia, who shook her head and rolled her eyes before she turned back to us.

“It’s been three days since his parents kicked him out of his house with no phone and no idea if he’s capable of taking care of himself. On top of that, he’s flown across the country to start a new life. He’s worked hard for years to survive because he’s known of the possibility his parents would reject him, and they proved him right in the most atrocious way when they confirmed he was gay. And the friend he was supposed to stay with left because of circumstances out of her control. On top of all that, you, Connor, who have only acquaintances you fuck and wouldn’t know a committed relationship if it slapped you in the face, have done nothing but flirt with the kid and get his hopes up while you, Sam, have treated him like absolute shit for being invited here. Why do you think he wouldn’t be comfortable around us?” Omi asked.

There was nothing I could say to refute her observations. Abandoning my food, I headed upstairs to find Ollie sitting behind his desk, typing away, and the triplets nowhere to be found.

I knocked, unsure if I would be welcome, but the typing continued.

For the life of me, I never thought of myself as more important than anyone else. If I didn’t have my family to keep me grounded, the many rejections I received about staying in my lane as an action star and not branching out into more serious roles would have done the job.

And yet there I was, drawn to Ollie in a way I’ve never been with any other person before, yet dismissing him and his feelings as if I were a god to be worshipped, and then smiting him for doing what I wanted him to do. His gaze felt like a caress, and while it strummed my body in ways I’ve never felt before, I freaked out and took out my confusion out on the one man who wouldn’t have it in him to hurt anyone.

“Ollie?”

His head tilted to the side. “Hmm.”

Although his typing continued, I knew he was listening.

“I wanted to apologize for earlier.”

At my words, he turned around in his chair after I noticed he backed up his work and looked me in the eye.

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“There is no need to apologize. It was me who was half awake earlier and didn’t know what I was saying. However, I didn’t intend to make you uncomfortable. I’ll be more aware of my actions in the future.”

“You didn’t.”

“Oh, that’s good,” he trailed off.

I hated the silence between us and asked, “So, what are you doing?”

My breath caught in my chest as his wide smile overtook his face. “Oh, I’m outlining a new story. You know that one that came to mind when I spotted Thomas yesterday? I want to pair him, or his character anyway, with his best friend’s older brother. Whenever I have a new idea for a story, I take detailed notes until I have exhausted my thoughts. Then, I build the rest of the story based on those initial notes.

I laughed. “You want to pair Sam and Thomas together in your story?”

Not able to believe my attraction could deepen for Ollie, but when he blushed, I wanted to trace my fingers down his cheeks and feel the heat radiating from them. But I held myself back. Only by clenching my hands into fists.

“Yeah, have you ever observed them when they’re in the same room? Thomas is bold and expressive, and so is Sam, but the way he reacts to Thomas is out of character. He’s meek and stares at the man when he thinks Thomas doesn’t know. The story I have in mind doesn’t mirror their potential relationship, but I’ve never seen two people more compatible and also oblivious to each other than those two.”

“You think Sam likes Thomas?”

Without hesitation, Ollie nodded. “For years, I’ve observed people, so I can tell by the way they turn toward each other, even when they’re across the room. Also, Sam’s body relaxes whenever Thomas is near, which leads me to believe he holds in a lot of stress and only feels relaxed enough around Thomas to let go.”

“And Thomas?”

Ollie smiled, wistful, and it made me miffed he hadn’t yet smiled at me in that manner.

“The way Thomas’ body coils tight when he and Sam are close reveals a primitive need to protect what he believes is his. Yeah, I’d say Sam’s effect on Thomas is profound. If you both need protection, he’ll leave you in the dust.”

A laugh escaped, grateful Thomas, who’d become my friend over the years, would protect my family.

“I’ll let you get back to work, but how about tonight we binge on some video game play throughs after dinner?”

He beamed at me, making my heart start in my chest, and I only just caught his answer.

“I’d like that.”

With a nod, I strolled out of his room and shut the door behind me. I leaned back against it as I caught my breath. He’d gone back to being the old Ollie; considerate, and lacking any fire that sparked between us with our earlier banter. I’d known I fucked up when I made the family comment, but I hated to think I shut down his light

for good.

I wasn't a vain man, but I knew you couldn't make it in this business without being appraised for your beauty, physique, and charisma. People, more often than not, wanted to sleep with me because I was a movie star and I was rich as sin. And I invited their attention at every turn. Not to stay, but for one night before I disappeared the next morning.

But with Ollie, along with his genuine personality and happiness despite his circumstances, made me panic. When he blinked open his eyes, the surge to claim him, mark him as mine, overwhelmed enough the air became trapped in my chest.

I thought about all the times I would come to hurt him with my constant flirting, although it wouldn't mean anything to me. I knew it would to him. And the weeks and months I'd be gone from home, leaving him behind as I craved him. Would I be strong enough to avoid temptation? Could I be faithful to one person? Since the answer didn't make itself apparent, I would guess I could not.

But if it was Ollie who waited for me at home? What if he wanted me to be faithful, could I? Those questions were harder to answer.

Until I figured out what I wanted and how much of myself I could dedicate to another person, he was off limits.

4

OLLIE

The entire almost two weeks I'd been in the Blake family residence, I found both a new sense of peace and more than enough ideas and scenarios to write books for the rest of my life. Connor's family ingratiated me into their tight-knit group, and it made

me realize proper parents were the happiest when they allowed their children to find their own way in life.

Valentina turned out to be my biggest supporter; she sat in my room as she read my books while I created a new story using her oldest son as a proxy for my protagonist. There was nothing recognizable about Sam in my book, other than the way he reacted to Thomas whenever the older, muscular man was around.

And when I wasn't working, she was teaching me how to cook. I'd never thought it would be something I liked; because before I came to live with them, I threw together whatever was in the kitchen or warmed up leftovers my parents wouldn't eat. But the rhythm of the sizzling and bubbling relaxed me after a long day of being hunched over a computer researching and writing.

The triplets took me shopping during the middle of the week when they should've been with the rest of their senior class, celebrating the summer before the start of their last year in high school. Instead, they dragged me to Beverly Hills, which I balked at as soon as I spotted the designer boutiques. The thought of changing my look or even competing with Connor's crowd held little appeal, so the twins gave up on the pricer stores and we hit thrift stores instead. Soon, I found several graphic tees and jeans along with sweats, since I didn't have to dress up for my job, so I chose comfort rather than be fashionable.

I also asked them to help me pinpoint a friendly neighborhood for when I needed to move and room with Gracie, or live by myself in the worst-case scenario. But their horrified reactions made me change the subject, and instead, we spent the rest of the afternoon in Connor's movie room, watching the TV miniseries *Pride and Prejudice* with Colin Firth.

Holy hotness, Mr. Darcy!

Even things with Connor's older brother had changed. With Sam's recent schedule, he left for his shift at the hospital after dinner each night. He would drop off Charlie and Lucy at the house. I walked them around the neighborhood for an hour, listening to my gay romance audiobooks, before feeding them. It was perfect for getting out in the mild weather and meeting new people. After the dogs went to their beds in the basement, the rest of the family indoctrinated me into watching all the rom-coms I could.

And being with Connor as friends was easy. I reigned in the crush when he reminded me, similar to the way I teased Landon, that I was family and he had no interest in me. Although when he first said it, my heart fractured, and the words stole my breath for a minute. But knowing early on I hadn't stood a chance with him helped me not to weave dreams of forever around the man.

But what ended any hope that he might see me in a different light were the stories of Connor's many, many exploits with various people over the years. Despite him joking around with the rest of his family as they teased him, I spotted the pinch of his lips when the triplets would hound him, and the flash of dread whenever everyone started on the subject. Every time, my stomach dropped, and the conversation gave me a nauseous sensation, but it wasn't my place to step in to stop the teasing. Valentina would get upset, and the topic moved on, and both Connor and I were relieved by the change.

"Hey, what are we watching tonight?" Connor said as he walked into the kitchen, giving his mama a hug.

I shrugged. “It’s Lyric’s turn to choose.”

He chuckled as I replaced the lid on the pot containing the marinara sauce boiling away and turned toward the cabinets to get the plates. As I opened the door, Connor’s hand landed on my lower back and electricity surged up my spine. I bit my lip as he snagged a glass from the next cabinet over before stepping back and asking his mama a question.

I was ashamed to admit such an insignificant gesture that meant nothing to him made me feel off-kilter for a few seconds. Inhaling deep, I took the plates, pausing near the silverware drawer to grab the napkins and utensils, and hurried away to the dining room, where I found myself alone and able to breathe.

There had to be some way of getting over Connor sooner rather than later?

Yes, I’d appreciated the male form before, but I’d never desired a man enough to want him to be mine. For the longest time, I believed that the lack of candidates in the small town in which I grew up caused my stunted dating life. But based on the number of people I’ve met so far in Los Angeles, some of them gorgeous and by the looks of it, single and hinted at their interest in me, there wasn’t even a spark from me, much less the churn of desire I experienced the moment I sat next to Connor on the plane.

But that was okay. I’d find the man for me when the time was right. There was no need to rush.

Or so I kept telling myself.

If only he wouldn’t touch me all the time.

The house was gargantuan, and the size of the kitchen alone would fit in an entire

floor of an average apartment complex. And yet, whenever we were in the same room, I found him close and always... touching me. I wasn't complaining; not when his cologne, a mix of bergamot and lemon, calmed me while sending electricity pulsing in my veins.

I was used to denying who I was and what I wanted for the longest time. I figured if I couldn't have Connor, then I needed to put myself out there and find someone who might appreciate me, quirks, and all.

After dinner, we settled in the movie room waiting for the rest of the family. I took a deep breath and turned to Connor.

"What's the best way to find a date? I'm not talking about you, obviously, because you have no trouble attracting whomever you want. But for me, who is new to Los Angeles and dating? Do you have any advice?"

To say that Connor went from chill, leaning his shoulder against mine as he relaxed back into the couch, to vibrating anger in a split second was an understatement. He took a deep breath through his nose before he pinched his eyes shut and exhaled.

"What?" I asked, confused by his reaction.

"Why?"

My brows furrowed, and I asked, "What? Why do I want to date? Is it strange I'm asking you? Help me here if I'm going to understand your question."

A growl erupted from his throat before he said, "I... I just... I'm not sure you'd find someone not out for something in this town. Well, anywhere."

"But Connor, isn't trust earned? And that's why you date? You get to know the other

person, figure out if you're compatible. You don't jump right into a relationship and allow them into your life without finding out more about them. Besides, I'm not looking for anything serious. I could meet men my age interested in the possibility of more."

"You're going to sleep with them to find out if... no, you're too trustworthy, Ollie. And dating apps are the worst way of finding someone you're compatible with. It's like going to a gay bar and falling in love with the man who blew you in a bathroom stall. Which, I'm not condoning! At all!"

Before I could decide whether to laugh or cry, the triplets trotted downstairs and when they rounded the corner, Landon demanded, "Why are you shouting at Ollie?"

Despite being the consummate flirt next to his older brother, Landon was the most protective of his family. And somehow it extended to me, so he crammed his body between mine and Connor's and glared at said brother, ready to fight a battle for me.

"What are you doing?"

Landon's mouth turned down in a frown. Then, adding insult to injury, he shook his head.

"Trying to figure out why you're freaking out."

"Ollie wants to know about dating apps and how to meet someone," Connor said with reluctance.

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My cheeks burned as the triplets' gazes zeroed in on me.

"Yeah, I agree with Connor. You shouldn't date until you've toughened up a bit. Thomas will need to teach you self defense like he did all of us because although you're tall, I wouldn't say you have the muscles or technique to get out of a dangerous situation," Landon said.

There were more footsteps and when Sam and Thomas came around the corner, my heart leapt in my chest, especially when they sat down behind us, close together.

"What are we talking about?" Sam asked.

"Ollie, and why he shouldn't date? Well, at least until he can learn how to defend himself. Thomas can teach him."

"Sure, anytime you want to, Ollie," Thomas said.

"Thank you."

Sam nodded. "Yeah, that's a good idea, Landon. Maybe we'll bring whoever he dates around for Charlie and Lucy's take before we get that PI to do a background check on him. You can never be too cautious."

Another reason I loved the Blake family. Instead of reverting to not being able to tell the triplets apart, they'd each observed their brothers until each of them learned their distinct personalities. And the commentary did not embarrass me about my lack of a love life because I knew it came from a place of caring. I planned on it being a

private conversation, but since they all felt the same way, I'd give up on the idea of dating for the time being.

When I asked it, I figured my question would get Connor to stop treating me like a fragile flower in need of protection or... his. The touching, our late night talks, and the hope wavering in my heart that his jealousy and his resolve to stick close to me might mean something more than casual friendship put me in a dangerous place with the prospect of getting my heart broken.

"So we all agree that we safeguard Ollie until he's ready to take care of himself?" Connor demanded.

I huffed out a laugh. "I'm not naïve and I understand not everyone has the best intentions, but I can't be afraid to find my future someone. He might be out there, waiting for me."

"Um, based on the statistics, there is no such thing as true love and finding someone out there who is compatible with you and you with them is a hit-or-miss proposition. You're better off finding a friend with benefits type of situation and not getting your emotions involved at all," Emilia said.

She placed herself next to Landon, pushing Connor further down the couch, and I breathed out when the heat of his gaze moved away from me. Omi glided into the room wearing tights and a pink and purple tie dye shirt that matched her calm aura and plopped next to Linus, who she wrapped up in a hug. Then Valentina came with all the snacks for movie night. I stood and helped her distribute them, but as she took the seat I was in, Connor snagged me around the waist and pulled me next to him and I cut off the groan bubbling up in my throat.

"You guys chastise me for sleeping around with people who know the score and you're telling Ollie, our innocent, naïve Ollie, to trust a stranger enough to be a fuck

buddy?”

The room erupted in chaos at Connor’s harsh words, and I ducked down and covered my ears with my hands. I’d been in the room during these discussions, but I wasn’t a fan of loud voices. Enthusiasm and protectiveness radiated from the Blake family. As much as I integrated into their lives, something in my chest cut off my breath as it tightened in anxiety the louder they became.

In the melee, Connor reached for my wrist and pulled me to my feet as we walked toward the back of the room and out a side door I hadn’t realized was there. We took a set of steps up a narrow corridor and when he opened the second door; we emerged in the hallway right by the stairs up to the bedrooms.

“That’s cool, just like the movieClue,” I murmured. “Are there other hidden passages, like from a den to your basement torture chamber? Do you have a dungeon in your house?”

Rather than answering, he pulled me upstairs and into his room; the door clicking shut behind him. Intrigued, I couldn’t help but wonder why he’d whisked me away from the movie, and I studied him for a long moment. It appeared his hands were shaking as he gritted his teeth.

“You know they mean well,” I said.

“It’s not them.”

His statement was terse, before he began pacing back and forth, going into thinking mode. When there was something on Connor’s mind, he worked through it by pacing and talking to himself until he figured it out or asked for advice to clarify his actions. Knowing it would take a while, I walked over to the huge oak bookshelves and scanned the spines of the books.

I settled into the armchair near his bed and absorbed myself in a Betty White biography while Connor worked out whatever was bothering him. He'd open up when he was ready, but for the time being, I was in limbo.

Half way through the book, I blinked up to find Connor standing with his hands on his hips, staring at my mouth as if held the answers to all his questions.

“What?”

“You know I would never lead you on, right?” Connor asked.

“I'm not worried about you sending me mixed messages, if that's what you're thinking. Although, admittedly, I have a crush on you. I'm trying to work through it and while it dinged my heart a bit to hear, I'm glad I understand I had no shot with you. But in a way, it was good to find out early on when I was getting to know you instead of later when I'd confuse my feelings of friendship with more. When I grew up, there wasn't a lot of exposure to gay culture, except online, but how realistic is that? People invent a persona and very little of what they show is the real them. I'll get over it, and maybe someday be brave enough to find someone of my own.”

“Well... shit.” He ran his fingers through his dark hair, messing it up and making him even sexier than any man had a right to be.

“Aren't you going to ask me?—”

“Connor, if you want to give me insight on what has you tied up in knots tonight, I'll be happy to listen. But as a friend, I think you're stressing over nothing. I'm not hurt. And in time, I'll get over you. But dwelling on it won't help either of us. Look how much my world has opened up since I've been here. And although I never thought it would happen, I even think Sam likes me a bit.”

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He huffed out a laugh and sat down at the end of his bed.

“In all the years since I discovered what sex was, I’d never once considered being with someone for more than one night. It gives me hives if I stop and think about it. You’ll meet a man who will give you all you want someday. It’s just I think you shouldn’t dive right into it, especially putting a profile on an app or finding someone online.”

Glad to be at the end of the conversation, I closed the book and stood, nodding my head.

“Understood. Besides, I’m busy with my writing and I get all the social interaction I need with your brothers as they drag me around town.” A smile broke out on my face.

He blew out a relieved breath.

“Let’s go see what Lyric picked to watch,” I said.

Moving over to the bookshelves, I replaced the biography, making a mental note to buy it so I could finish it and turned, finding myself face-to-face with Connor. There was a flash of something behind his beautiful butterscotch gaze hidden behind his half lowered eyelids. I expected him to step back, to play it off as though there was something on his mind, but he didn’t.

I watched in fascination as he lifted his hand and cupped my cheek. His warm palm shot white heat through me and I bit my lip to stop a moan from escaping.

“What...”

He stepped closer until our chests touched, and the spark in his hazel gaze turned molten, swirling around and pinning me to the spot.

“I want to kiss you.”

“Um.”

In the realm of all the hopeless ideas I’ve ever had in my entire life, having Connor’s lips anywhere near mine took the top spot. It was hard enough moving on when his touch could set me alight, but the knowledge of how his lips would taste would haunt me for the rest of my days.

But then again, wouldn’t the torment be worth one kiss?

Yes. Fuck yes, it would.

“Okay,” I croaked out.

The next few minutes moved at a snail’s pace as I watched his face light up with a smile that threatened to make me fall a little more in love with him. But when his eyes flicked down to stare at my mouth, his playful expression turned into a feral one as his thumb stroked along the bottom of my lip, causing me to gasp.

“This is so dangerous,” he said, his voice low.

My throat constricted and, although I understood his words, the fear it provoked caused me to gasp and reach for him. Rather than back away and leave the room as I half-expected he would, he stepped closer and moved the one hand not touching my face down to grip my hip, holding me in place.

“I...” I cleared my throat and tried again. “It’s only a kiss. You have my word. I won’t make it into something it’s not.”

Apparently, when my body vibrates with a craving that I’ve never read about, much less found in the words I created for my books, I resort to mumbling random words hoping I’m making enough sense that the sole opportunity of kissing Connor Blake wouldn’t disappear before I made it a reality.

His fingers snaked under my tee and when I felt his warmth trace up the curve of my spine, I shivered, unable to hold back as fire ignited my blood, making me throb. My eyes drifted closed as he opened his hand on my shoulder, dragging the hot skin of his palm down my back, and I bit my lip to hold myself back from rubbing my hard cock anywhere against this man.

“Those fucking whimpers you make, and the ones you seem unaware of, drive me insane.”

Words ceased understanding as he pressed his lips to my throat. The moan I’d been holding in since he shut the door to his room, trapping us inside together, escaped without my permission. His hand tightened on my waist and the other slithered up to cup the back of my neck. When he squeezed, another embarrassing sound joined the first.

Vibrating with anticipation of a kiss that might never come and panting as though I’d run miles instead of standing here, waiting for more of Connor, I wondered if I wanted the kiss to come. My next breath became complicated as he leaned forward and pursed his lips right below my ear, lingering there as I clutched him tighter.

“Oh, oh!”

As long as he kept up with the physical contact, I floated on a cloud of pure desire

and need. We hadn't gotten to the kissing, and I suspected we wouldn't at this point. But as my heart thumped in my chest, I knew I wouldn't regret a moment of this. Life was for living and if I never met a man who made me feel a fraction of what Connor drew from me with simple touches and sure movements, I'd live off the memories and forgo the disappointments.

With significant force, I blinked open my eyes and surveyed Connor as he started with nibbles down my neck and across my collarbone. Everything about this man screamed erotic; from the way his hands never stopped exploring to the pure ecstasy on his sculpted face, including his half-lidded bedroom eyes. His touch set me alight; thrilled to experience it, even for a short while.

“Ollie?”

He raised his head and held my gaze, searching for something I couldn't understand. But my expression alerted him to my willingness because he leaned closer, giving me plenty of time to stop him, before he tilted his head. When his plush lips brushed against mine, I opened for him and shivered as his hot breath warmed my tongue.

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Something snapped in him and both of his hands cupped my face as he plundered my mouth, allowing me to savor him, absorb him into my being.

I whimpered, loving the control he had over me as our tongues tangled. Him, taking what he wanted from me and me, along for the ride as I memorized the sensations, his flavor, and the caress of his hands over my skin.

When he broke the kiss, we both panted. With great effort, I forced myself to let go of his clothing and not slide the material up and off the way I yearned to do. I'd promised, and it didn't matter at the hole widening in my chest, at the knowledge of never having this again. I smiled, grateful I hadn't missed out.

"Wow," I murmured.

Connor seemed dazed, confused when I spoke, but I closed my eyes, not wanting to see the regret when the reality of the situation made him aware of what we'd done.

His hands dropped away from me and with a loud, poignant sigh, I heard his feet shuffle toward the door before the finality of the soft click alerted me I was alone.

Despite my desperate need to cry, I pressed the palm of my hands against my eyelids and took deep breaths. Even knowing it wouldn't go further than this, I'd hoped. It should have alerted me to what a horrible choice it was, to know Connor as more than a friend. But did I regret it?

No, I didn't.

CONNOR

Was it possible to lose your mind from a simple kiss?

It was a question I kept asking myself in the two weeks since Ollie had been in my bedroom. The beautiful flush of desire along his cheeks and neck as my hands roamed over him, remembering the smooth skin against my roughened palms. And the kiss; the spark of connection I'd never found with any of the others I'd been intimate with, I couldn't shake. It kept replaying in the forefront of my mind during all my waking hours, taunting me.

Shit, and the last thing I wanted was to think about my past and the nameless men and women who I shared a bed with over the years to satiate my lust.

But as much as my mind wandered to... it, something else bothered me in the days that followed.

Ollie seemed to have erased from memory the intimate kiss we shared. He treated me like another friend; the way he did the triplets or Gracie. To him, maybe our kiss hadn't meant a fraction of the way it had me.

But it wasn't as if I stuck around long enough after to find out how he processed what we shared. One look at his swollen lips and the bliss making him glow, and I wanted him. To touch every inch of his body, find the areas that made him gasp as I took him apart. Because of the unknown, my mind had no problems filling in the gaps with images of him arching, screaming out his orgasm, and feeling him clench around my cock.

The questions swirling around in my brain demanded to understand what the moment

meant to him, tied with the ways I wanted to touch him, which led to scarier questions.

Could he picture building a life with me, sharing his thoughts and listening to mine? Did my past skew the way he saw me? Those and more wanted to push out of my throat after I experienced the hottest kiss in my entire existence.

But instead of asking him, or saying anything, I flushed when I recalled dashing out of the bedroom, finding the nearest bathroom, yanking down my pants, and coming on my hand after two throttling strokes.

A hunger consumed me before I had intimate knowledge of the way his lips pressed against mine and the pressure of his tongue as he explored. I steered both of us to the brink of madness because whenever we were in a room together; I touched him as though he were already mine. Instead of reining in my desire for him and helping him find a man to share his life with, I'd stolen a taste of him. From a simple kiss, my world changed, and I found myself in a revolving cycle of fighting a craving I could never satiate and wishing away all the constant fantasies of mapping out his entire body with my lips before taking him apart until he shouted my name.

His nearness made my fingertips tingle, and whenever his fresh scent invaded my senses, I tightened my muscles to resist the urge to pounce on him and taste him, confirming that his addictive mouth and his responses to me weren't an exaggeration in my memory.

It had even gotten to the point my family was giving me a wide berth. There was nothing wrong with me, but having Ollie glance my way without the affection glinting in his blue eyes hurt my heart.

But this was what I wanted. Wasn't it?

The triplets followed me upstairs after I got home from meeting with my agent, and I was almost, but not quite, relieved I would have distance from the situation soon. Rather than breaking off and going into their own rooms, they strode into my bedroom after me and slammed the door behind them.

For a minute, three pairs of narrowed eyes glared at me before I cracked.

“What?”

“We love you. Most of the time you’re a wonderful brother, but I’m going to set that fact aside to tell you if you fuck this up...” Lyric growled, cutting off the last part of his threat.

Landon shook his head, but the thoughtful one continued.

“We’ll find a painful way of making you miserable every day for the rest of your existence.”

“Linus!”

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Not answering me, he turned toward Landon when he laughed aloud before aiming his deadly gaze back at me.

“What did I do?” I asked.

Linus appeared to have more to say.

“For fuck’s sake, Con, you are the biggest fucking moron on the planet right now. We know something happened between you and Ollie, and considering you’ve made it a point of emphasizing the fact you two are friends and only friends, I can also assume you are the one responsible for the sadness we catch in his blue eyes when Ollie doesn’t know we’re looking. So, I’m going to ask again. What did you do?”

Admitting only in the recesses of my mind, I feared my brothers when they were protective of someone other than me or the family. But then, I was proud of Linus. He was the quiet and observant one, and I was seeing a new side to him, one as fierce and protective as Sam or Landon. He was a great defender, and I would be more proud of him. Only if his disdain aimed elsewhere.

“I kissed him.”

The disgust marred each face as they threw their hands up and started talking in the fast-paced language they shared whenever they became upset or wanted to speak without others knowing what they were discussing. I hadn’t heard it enough to interpret the times I’ve witnessed it, but their anger was toward me.

I breathed a sigh of relief at the text chime coming from my phone.

Spencer: Hey, Con? We're getting together tonight at Kaid's. You in?

Me: Who's we?

Spencer: Lee, Kaid, Lewis. You should bring Ollie.

Me: Yeah, sounds fun. Let me ask Ollie, and I'll text you on the way.

Shit, even my friends knew about whatever this was between me and Ollie, because I couldn't keep my mouth shut about him. Yes, I'd talked about him nonstop since he moved in with us and raved about our closeness, but I sensed there was more to Spencer's request, as though they were inviting us to Kaid's for a specific reason.

With my explanation cut off as all of three of them glared at me when I tried to explain, it shut me up. I abandoned my three brothers behind in my room as they plotted my death and followed the sound of the clicking and found Ollie at his desk, concentrating on the screen in front of him as his fingers flew over the keyboard.

Over the past few weeks, I'd read all of his books. Despite not being in love or even being in a relationship during his lifetime, the man captured the raw feelings and scorching sex shared between two men in love, and I read through his books as fast as I could. Even if the instalove was a little effusive for my tastes, I couldn't wait to read his next one. The knowledge of his next book containing traits of Thomas and my older brother's relationship didn't detract from my excitement at getting my hands on it as soon as possible.

I knocked on the doorframe and watched as Ollie's hands stalled over his keyboard and he blinked, pulling himself back to reality, before glancing over to see me in the doorway. His smile punched me in the gut, leaving me breathless for a short time.

"Hey, Ollie, I know you're busy, but do you want to meet some of my friends?" I

asked.

Something about his hesitation dimmed the smile on his face, and I wanted to reassure him.

“It’ll be great. Lee, Spencer’s husband, will be there and Kaid hired a new chef because he’s building muscle for the movie he’s filming and Kaid sings his praises. What do you think?”

He searched my expression for several seconds before his smile lit up his face and he jumped to his feet. There was a pause before he turned back to his computer, saving a backup of his work, then shutting everything down. As he glanced down, a grimace wrinkled his mouth and displaying the laugh lines around his eyes.

I was smitten. There wasn’t a thing about Ollie that I hadn’t taken notice of and not found endearing.

“Do I have time for a quick shower? I... don’t remember if I took one this morning and I refuse to meet your friends as this mess. So, I’ll be out in fifteen, okay?”

Without waiting for my reply, he strode toward the bathroom and when it clicked shut, my body shivered as I thought about following him and seeing what we could get up to in there. And that led to thoughts about his body wet as water sluiced over him, his eyes closed as he washed his hair... shit, and I was getting hard.

I glanced down and noticed the tee and jeans I had on and shrugged. It was hot, and I had no desire to change. Kaid wouldn’t have many people over to the house because of his limited tolerance with people.

Before long, we were in my Aston Martin DB12, speeding along the hills as we drove the short distance to Kaid’s. Because of Spencer’s problems with his old friend

Mason we'd all witnessed first hand, the three of us bumped up security surrounding our properties, not taking a chance.

I pulled up to the gate and pressed the buzzer. As soon as the camera flashed on and a stoic Kaid spotted my face, he buzzed us in. I pulled up behind Spencer's electric vehicle and turned toward Ollie.

"You doing okay?"

He nodded, and then his stomach growled. "I might be a little hungry."

With such an honest reaction, my face hurt as a laugh escaped me, thrilled I'd met this man.

"I'm glad the universe threw us together," I admitted.

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His answering smile warmed my heart.

As we walked up the circular driveway surrounded by trees and bushes, the house emerged in all its spectacular form. I wasn't quite used to the odd, spaceship-like glass and steel structure. More-so when Ollie observed the house, but didn't comment on it. Instead, he swallowed before he turned to me.

“Is what I'm wearing okay for the night? It's not like a party or anything?”

I shook my head. “Nah, just a small get together for dinner. No need to be nervous.”

He mumbled something as I rang the doorbell, and I caught the tail end. “... easy for you to say, Mr. Hollywood.”

The doorknob turned, and the door opened an inch before there was a slight struggle on the other side, and it clicked shut again. Ollie and I turned to each other, confused. In the next second, the door swung open and standing there in the foyer was Spencer, who draped himself over Lee's back while his gorgeous husband had an exasperated look on his face. Kaid stood off to the side with his arms crossed, shaking his head.

“Hey, Con,” Spencer said.

He wiggled his eyebrows as he kept moving his gaze from me to Ollie, who blushed under his scrutiny. Long seconds ticked by as they continued to stare until Lee huffed.

“Sorry, man, we have better manners than this. I'm Lee Atreus, Spencer's husband.

He's the man on my back because he sprained his ankle, tripping on nothing in the garden earlier today and can't walk by himself."

Spencer waved as though Ollie wasn't standing a short distance from them. Ollie gave them his genuine and happy smile and wiggled his fingers at them.

"Nice to meet you both. I'm sorry to hear about your ankle. I hope it'll heal soon, Spencer."

"Awww, you're so sweet." Spencer hopped down and pulled Ollie in for a hug.

"And this is Kaid," I said as I pulled Ollie away from Spencer.

He glanced over at Kaid and reached out to shake the man's hand. "Nice to meet you as well. Thank you for having me over tonight. You have a phenomenal home."

Before Kaid spoke, a gigantic muscular man in a chef's coat and tattoos peeking out of the skin along his neck and hands walked up and snagged Kaid's attention. I'd seen the man grumpy at the best of times, but something about this giant of a man melted my friend into a puddle of goo, and it seemed I wasn't the only one affected by a new man in their lives.

With a gruff voice that matched his stature, the man faced Kaid and said, "Dinner will be ready in fifteen minutes."

"And you're joining us," Kaid said, not leaving any room for argument. "Everyone, this is Lewis Gallagher. He's my new personal chef and friend."

Another round of hellos and I noticed Ollie's eyes trace over the man's tattoos, looking interested. Of course, with Ollie being his inquisitive self, he said, "It's nice to meet you, Lewis. Do you mind if I ask you an intrusive question?"

“I think I’d be okay with that.”

“Do you have tattoos... everywhere?”

He boomed out a laugh, and there was a distinct twinkle in his eye that made me uncomfortable. I recognized it because it happened every time Ollie met someone new and charmed them.

Lewis leaned closer and said, “Most of my body, yes. Maybe I’ll let you see them sometime.”

“Nope,” I declared, and once again pulled Ollie away and settled him against my side.

Kaid stepped closer to Lewis and instead of tensing, the bigger man leaned toward Kaid until their shoulders pressed together, giving him reassurances without speaking. At least my friend kept his objections silent, unlike me.

Not paying one bit of attention to my possessive nature, Ollie leaned forward and said, “I think you would make a perfect character in one of my romance novels.”

“I could see that,” Kaid said as he smiled up at his chef.

That opened the floodgates and when Spencer learned Ollie was a romance writer, he led him off toward the living room and they got into an animated discussion about story lines and why all of them lack what they tout the most, any amount of romance. Lee moved close to me, but instead of instigating the conversation, I waited for Lee to voice whatever he had on his mind.

“It’s weird, seeing you like this.”

I blinked, moving my gaze from Ollie's face, lit up and animated as he spoke about his favorite topic in the world, over to Lee, who stood there with a smirk on his face. All knowing was Lee. Or, most likely, just observant as fuck.

“What's that supposed to mean?”

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Lee chuckled and moved his gaze toward his husband and the man who meant more to me than I could even acknowledge in the private recesses of my mind.

“What I’m about to say is not a commentary on how you live your life. But before Ollie, you would have hit on Lewis to make Kaid jealous and thought nothing of it. And I believe this is the first time since we’ve become friends, where your focus is on one specific person and you aren’t your typical outrageous, flirty self. But everything you are makes you Connor and a great friend and I have to say I’m happy for you. You found your one.”

I was spluttering and couldn’t get my words past my lips as I stared at Lee with such astonishment. The man laughed at me.

“Come on, it shouldn’t be such a surprise,” Lee said, exasperated.

When I found my voice, I growled, “What?”

Instead of answering, he glanced at Spencer and Ollie, who were laughing together while leaning shoulder to shoulder, already fast friends. An unfamiliar sensation kicked against my chest and I realized my heart was pounding in my chest as I watched the pure happiness pouring from Ollie.

“I kissed him.”

Lee shook his head and asked, “Tonight?”

“No, about two weeks ago. You know what surprised the fuck out of me?” I asked.

He raised his eyebrow in question.

“It rocked my world while it hasn’t had the same effect on him. We’re great friends and he jokes with me, he hangs when we watch movies and I enjoy being with him while he’s writing, but he acts like nothing has changed between us. He has no clue he upended my entire world.”

“Fucking hell, Connor, are you blind? Do you not see how he stares at you?”

He waited for me to respond before he continued.

“No, huh? Well, it’s like you hung the moon and are responsible for the stars in the sky. I know the kiss affected him. And before you start, it has nothing to do with you being a movie star. For several months after Spencer and I admitted our attraction to each other, Spencer kept telling himself I wasn’t as interested in him because of my stoic personality. But I learned I needed to open myself up and tell him everything in my heart, because all things unsaid leaves room for interpretation and with us humans, we always see the negative in ourselves before we’re convinced of the truth.”

I nodded and said, “It doesn’t help that he knows all about my past, because my loving and intrusive family keep telling him all about my conquests. And come to think of it, he gets upset whenever it’s brought up. Hell, thinking about Ollie with another man, knowing he’s a virgin in all aspects of the word, well, it makes me manic.”

Lee chuckled. “Ah, man. Are you telling me you were his first kiss?”

I froze as the realization hit me. “Holy fuck, yes. I’m both panicky and proud all at once.”

Lee shook his head, giving me a smile as we moved to the dining room for dinner. Lewis made a luscious white cheddar macaroni with brie and spiced bread crumbs for a starter, then the main course; braised short ribs and the creamiest mashed potatoes I'd ever tasted, with roasted carrots and Brussels sprouts in a wine reduction, and for dessert, a delicate carrot cake with lemon and vanilla frosting.

Before long, I was in a food coma and enjoying the company of great people.

"Hey, sweetness, we should turn one of Ollie's romances into a movie," Spencer said during a lull in conversation.

Ollie turned a bright red and waved his hands around like he swallowed something spicy as he shook his head back and forth.

"You haven't even read any of my books... wait, have you?"

Spencer laughed and nodded. "Of course I have, especially since Con keeps bragging about how talented you are. We're finishing up with filming next week on a screenplay I wrote and then I think we should get together and talk."

"Oh, whoa. You wrote a screenplay, and it's going to be a movie?" He waited until Spencer nodded, a blush of pride on his face, before Ollie exclaimed, "That's fantastic! Congratulations!"

Lee smiled while Spencer giggled at the praise. As we all laughed, Spencer turned to his husband and said, "Can we adopt him and spoil him? He's so adorable!"

As I growled at the uncomfortable subject for Ollie, my protectiveness flaring, he laughed.

“I’m sort of on my own for the first time in my life and I enjoy it, but if I need advice, I promise I’ll seek you two out.”

“Good, you guys can keep Ollie company when I go on location next week.” It wasn’t a secret because I’ve been talking about the possibility every night at dinner. An epic action-adventure where I would be part of a larger cast, so I’d be gone a shorter time than if I was the headliner.

I was studying Ollie’s face and noticed the flash of sadness in his gorgeous eyes before he recovered.

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“Oh, that’s exciting. How...” he swallowed before he asked, “how long will you be gone?”

“Not long, three weeks. But the location is up north in Vancouver.”

Something stubborn flashed in his eyes and when he glanced back at me, meeting my gaze, he asked, “Should I take the time you’re away to find another place?”

“What?” I gasped.

“Wow!” Lee chuckled.

“Connor!” Spencer sounded outraged.

A chuckle and a hand on Ollie’s shoulder from Lewis did not make me jealous. I might have to tell myself that a hundred times before I get it through my head, but I took a deep breath and lied to myself.

“Huh, I thought I was clueless,” Kaid finished as he gave me a pointed look.

Ollie blushed hard when he realized he asked a private question in front of the group. He learned to be open with his opinions, especially around the nosiest family he’d ever met. But then, as I expected him to, he sat up straighter and a sense of determination overtook his sad eyes.

“No! If you want to find a place, I will help you when I get back, but until then, no.”

There was no way I was going to let him move anywhere. Fuck that idea.

At my outburst, I realized as soon as I blurted it out that it wasn't my actual business to control where Ollie lived, but I knew I said the right thing when the younger man relaxed back into his chair and gave me a small nod.

As I knew he would be, Ollie became ingrained in the group as quickly as Lee and Lewis had. He and Spencer talked about the romances they read over the years and despite Spencer being an avid reader of gay or male/male romances, he hadn't read any of Ollie's until I mentioned them.

"Thomas and Sam are cute together. I think that if Sam slows down a bit and lets Thomas spoil him a little, he'd be ready to marry that man. But I can understand why he is the way he is. His job isn't one where he can relax."

We moved into Kaid's living room and I snagged a spot right near Ollie as he continued with his conversation.

For the first time in a long while, I wasn't craving being in the spotlight and paid little attention to the discussions because the man next to me was the center of all my thoughts.

I moved past the panic of what our kiss meant and replayed the few minutes in time where he clung to me as I traced every inch of skin underneath his tee. The tips of my fingers tingled in anticipation as I watched his animated expressions.

Had I ever been as captivated by one person before?

There was a quick and simple answer.

No.

Like my family and friends pointed out too many times to count, I indulged in whatever felt good to me. If that was getting my dick sucked in a club by a random who I'd never see again, then so be it. I've fucked and been fucked in return, had multiple partners at the same time and believed that as long as there was consent and condoms, I was up for anything.

But my avid experience didn't compare to kissing Ollie. Hell, with Ollie, there was no rush to move onto the main event. I wanted to explore every single inch of his delectable body several times over, not once thinking about my dick, knowing his pleasure would be mine. The sounds I could draw from him, the reactions my touch would have on his body; would he arch toward me, needing more, before he opened his mouth and pleaded with me to touch him?

When his arm leaned into my chest, it was as natural as breathing to pull him tight against my body. Not needing to hold myself back, I pondered if I should press my nose to his neck and breathe him in for less than a second before I followed my desire.

His breath hitched in his throat as his hand spasmed on my thigh and I groaned against his skin.

When he whispered, I strained to hear him. "Please don't make me hard in front of your friends."

And that was the final straw.

I jumped to my feet, silencing the surrounding conversation. As I reached for Ollie's hand, which he slid into my outstretched one without hesitation, I hauled him against my side and wrapped an arm around him.

"Thank you for dinner, but we're going to cut out early."

Not being subtle at all, Spencer beamed at us while Kaid shook his head and stood.

“Spencer, call me when you’re feeling better and you can show me the production studio. Lee, thanks for the advice. Kaid and Lewis, dinner was delicious. Thank you for having me over. It was wonderful meeting you all,” Ollie said.

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Not giving anyone a chance to drive me out of my mind as they pulled Ollie in for a hug, I strode out the door and into the cool spring night, my grip tightening on Ollie.

“What—“

I pressed Ollie against the side of the car and cupped the back of his neck.

“I’m going to kiss you.”

“Um, well, yeah, I don’t know.”

My brows drew down in confusion, because as his words wavered on whether he wanted me to kiss him, his arms wrapped around my waist and he pulled me closer, where I could feel his sweet breath wash over my sensitive lips.

“What do you mean?” My question came out gruffer than I wanted.

“Do you remember when I said I wouldn’t get any ideas about our last shared kiss and where it wouldn’t lead? Well, I’m a big liar. Huge. I have several extraordinary ideas and if truth be told, your kiss went straight to my head, and now that I have them, you know, the ideas, I’m sure kissing you would be a mistake on your end. You shouldn’t encourage me.”

As I worked to interpret the jumble of words out of his mouth, which both encouraged and discouraged any more kissing, my entire brain blanked out at the soft press of his lips on mine.

OLLIE

My body vibrated, anticipating the video call connecting, wondering what Connor and I would talk about tonight. The intensity of our conversations increased since we shared the kiss outside Kaid's house the night I met his friends. Despite all the evidence to the contrary that our friendship has developed into something more, evidenced from our late night talks and texting throughout the day while Connor's been away filming, I refused to get my hopes up Connor might want more with me.

The night of our second kiss, our lips brushed, and it caused a physical need so great in me; it pulsed for hours after. But instead of leaving me with fleeting touches, he devoured me until Kaid's porch light switched off and then he drove both of us home.

A kiss consumed my thoughts during my waking hours before seeping into my dreams. I told myself in a mantra which was getting old, that the kisses didn't mean as much to Connor as it did me. I kept our interactions close to my heart and no matter when it ended between us, and it would, I'd never forget my time with him.

It was both torment having Connor so far out of reach where the temptation to jump his bones was out of reach, and a benefit of being able to wrangle my expectations of something more because of his absence. With the time I hadn't spent with the man on my mind, I finished the first draft of the book with characters based on Thomas and Sam, which took me in directions I wasn't expecting, but I loved the finished draft.

With my rolling thoughts distracting me, Connor's smiling face appeared on my laptop screen, and my heart jumped in my chest. Yes, it was dangerous. Romantic feelings for a man who could attract any man or woman he wanted should have warned my heart to stop yearning for him, but it didn't stop me from wanting him none-the-less.

“Hey, Ol, how was your day?”

I shook off the dangerous thoughts and smiled. These unfiltered moments were the ones I yearned for, because he talked to me as though I mattered to him.

“Good, I started outlining a new book and...”

Connor moved the camera, which landed on his gorgeous chest, and I choked on my tongue. As I kept telling myself, the man was my friend who showed me nothing but kindness when he opened up his home to me, introducing me to my favorite people in the entire world. Those who supported me as very few had been on my side before. I spent the next few seconds stumbling over my words before I swallowed hard.

“Ollie, please, I’m begging you, that look will be my undoing.”

Connor’s sultry voice was like a slap to the face, and my cheeks heated with a flare of embarrassment.

Fuck, I made him uncomfortable!

I pushed words past my throat, tamping down my embarrassment at being called out.

“Sorry. Anyway, I was researching artists and financial careers, which turned out to be boring, but since my book features the complete opposite’s attract scenario, it was a necessity.”

I continued to ramble so much that over the next few minutes; the conversation traveled from work to my observations about Sam and Thomas growing closer, despite Thomas being with Connor in Vancouver.

He groaned when my babbling spluttered out. “You have no clue, do you?”

I'm sure I looked confused as I stared at Connor through the screen. In the time I'd laid out what I'd done that day, he propped himself on the bed; the camera focused on the stark cut of his hips to his smooth chest, a wicked smile etched on his face.

“What?” I choked on my tongue in my mouth, before I cleared my throat and tried again. “What do you mean?”

Heat banked in his eyes as they roamed over my face, but before he could answer my question, there was a soft knock on his hotel room door and his brows drew down before he glanced at the door.

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“Oh, I didn’t mean to babble on when you have something else planned. I’ll let you go,” I said.

Half of me wanted to understand his cryptic question, but the part that still felt embarrassed would like to put time and space between us, so he’d forget how I stared at him with pure need flaring in my gaze.

“No, I’m not expecting anyone, Ollie. Hold on a sec.”

Connor propped the camera facing the rest of the room, including the door, and slipped on a shirt and a loose pair of sweats before answering the knock. He kept his body behind the door, which blocked me from his guest, but I noticed a pretty blonde woman poke her head in close to his. When he leaned back, she revealed herself to the camera wearing a trench type coat, her long hair draping halfway down her back, and high heels.

I’ve seen enough movies in the past several months to understand how this scene was going to play out, and yet it seemed so surreal as I held my breath and watched it happen, wondering if Connor would take her up on her offer.

“Yes?” He asked, sounding confused.

For a man who attracted every single type of man and woman on the planet, he sounded way too befuddled about the situation that presented itself.

“Hello, Mr. Blake. I’m Erika.”

He nodded, yet the frown that pulled down his lips when the knock came hadn't disappeared when he asked, "How can I help you?"

She shook her head and the gleam in her eyes brightened as she looked Connor up and down, which made me uncomfortable. "I was hoping to find you alone."

Her hand went to the sash of her trench and when she released it, dropping her coat, her beautiful naked form was there for all to see. She reached out and placed her hand on his chest, swaying her hips, wanting to entice him.

A choked whimper escaped my throat. Fuck! So much for keeping my opinion to myself.

"No!" Connor all but shouted, and turned toward the bed.

"What?" Erika sounded confused.

I sat, frozen on my bed, both hurt by what was playing out in front of me and unable to catch my breath and get my body to cooperate, because despite all the screaming inside my head to shut off the feed and hide under the comforter, I sat there, stunned speechless.

Was this how Connor's normal nights went? Both men and women would invite themselves in to his life and he took them to bed because of the opportunity presented?

But the air whooshed back into my lungs when Connor reached down, keeping out of her reach, and grabbed her coat from the floor. He held it out until she had no choice but to cover herself.

"I'm on a video call with my boyfriend, Ollie," Connor pointed at his phone, still

propped up near the bed, “and I’m not interested in anyone but him.”

“Oh, this is embarrassing. My friend, Tim, who is the front desk manager of this hotel, knows of my...well, never mind.”

Connor gave her a soft smile, not meant to entice her into bed, but one of understanding.

“I appreciate your situation. Trust me, I do. Ollie captivated me the first time I met him. Now, my feelings for him have only deepened. My reputation is that of a playboy, but I’ve grown to be a one person kind of man.”

“It’s sweet you found someone. I’m sorry about this, and thank you for being so understanding,” Erika whispered as she slipped through the door and shut it behind herself.

He flipped the lock and latched the chain before he strode back to the bed, picking up his phone. The smile he gave me sent a frisson of heat down my spine, and I beamed back at him.

“Wow, does that happen a lot?” I couldn’t stop the question from bursting out of my mouth, and I flinched as it came out. “Shit, not something I want to know. Forget I said anything.”

Connor chuckled and then sobered, and his frown made my heart hurt.

“What?”

“Yeah, if you asked me even a year ago if I was capable of this sensation of despicable envy, I would’ve laughed at the question. But the thought of a man who turned his attention to you, much less if he showed up in a coat and dropped it

revealing his naked body, hoping to take you to bed? The pressure bordering on pain in my chest became indescribable.”

He rubbed the spot above his heart while his eyes became stormy.

I leaned closer to the camera and caught his gaze.

“Hey, no, Connor. There wasn’t anyone before I met you and you are, and this is understating it more than a little, unforgettable. But, um, what you told Erika?—”

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“Of course you remembered her name,” Connor teased.

A laugh punched up my chest and I snorted before I slapped a hand over my mouth and leaned back against the pile of pillows behind me. I placed the laptop down and traced over his beautiful smile.

“To answer your question, no, I’ve never had someone come up to my hotel room while on location, hoping to sleep with me. I’m not saying I’m not a bit of a man slut?—”

“Con! No! Stop putting yourself down. Despite your family teasing you, you shouldn’t be ashamed for having a healthy sex life. And from what I know about you, and how Valentina and your father raised you, you ensured that all of those partners gave consent and were comfortable before anything happened, because that’s who you are. All your experiences combine to make you, you, and I like you, Connor Blake.”

His smile lit me up inside, and the following words made me lightheaded.

“I know what I’m about to say is not that much of a surprise, but everything has changed in my life since I laid eyes on you.”

Confusion, which stunned me into silence, made my face scrunch up in what was sure to be a goofy expression as I scanned Connor’s face.

“What?”

“Oh, okay, so it may not be apparent to you after all,” he said with a self-deprecating laugh. “How did you not know I wanted to pull you into my lap and kiss you breathless when the flight attendant brought you to first class?”

My brain stumbled to a halt before I blinked. And then blinked again.

“Um, maybe because this is real life and no one who is as put together and beautiful as you are would look twice at someone like me. I mean, there’s a little guilt because you walk around shirtless, not to mention stripping down to your underwear whenever we talk, and I trace every inch of your skin with my eyes because I can’t help myself. And I’m sure I’m not the only person to tell you this, but you’re, well, perfect.”

Connor laughed and shook his head. “I’m human and despite the image I allow the world to witness, which isn’t close to who I am, I have feelings and doubts.”

My brows drew down again. “Doubts about what?”

“You.”

His one word hurt my heart. “Oh.”

“You confuse me because, for once, I want something for myself that isn’t defined by a time limit or even common sense. Sex, while it feels good and who doesn’t want to have it as much as possible to get that high, doesn’t appeal to me if it’s not with you. But I also want so much more than time in bed.”

The frustrated expression on his face and the way his hand clenched into a fist as he spoke told me he wasn’t comfortable with these thoughts.

“Nothing has to change between us, Connor. I’ll always be your friend. Besides, you

have experience with not letting your emotions get involved. Maybe you see me as someone to take under your wing, and since I get along with your family, it's only natural you become comfortable with me."

He exhaled loudly and relaxed while his next words took me by surprise. "This shoot is taking far too long."

"You're coming home Friday. And the triplets told me you love being on location, as they call it. Isn't this project shorter compared to your other roles?"

"Yeah, but I'm tiring of being away from home all the time. Working with Spencer, Lee, and Kaid starting up this production company has been more fulfilling than any action movie role, which is the only work offered to me in the last five years. I would have loved to work on several other projects, including a romantic comedy, but they shot me down."

"There's nothing wrong with wanting something more substantial."

Connor swallowed and glanced away from the screen. "Yeah, it seems I want it in all different areas of my life."

Our conversation grew to a standstill as I watched the emotions play out over his face. I studied his expressions, and I'm a little ashamed to say the rest of his body. The swell of his pecs, the ridges of his stomach, and the muscles of his thighs as he flexed and relaxed his legs.

"I like the way you look at me when you think I'm not watching you," Connor growled.

A flush heated my skin, but when I glanced into his eyes, the desire banked in his gaze made me throb from head to toe. A whimper escaped me when his hand moved

from where it lay near his neck, brushing his fingertips along his collarbone to his sternum.

“What...” I cleared my throat, “what are you doing?”

“Ever thought about having phone sex with me, Ollie?”

And with that question, my brain shut down, my body pulsed with pure need, and I moaned aloud.

“Fuck, Ollie. You can’t moan my name like that.”

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I hadn't realized I did. "Then, fucking don't touch yourself while saying words. Fucking hell, I'm throbbing in my sweats right now and I'm going to fucking come without even touching myself."

The moan that escaped him at my unintentional words made me clench and dribble precome in my underwear. I arched my back and realized then I found myself prone on my bed without knowing how I moved into the position. The sensations running through my body were as strong as I imagined they would be if I were being touched by him.

And then the most far-fetched, implausible, astonishing pick a damn adjective thing happened. His left hand pushed down the waistband of the tightest, sexiest boxer briefs I'd ever seen. I tried to stop myself from staring when he revealed the tip of his cock, flushed red and leaking, but couldn't tear my gaze away, wanting more. Adding to the embarrassment, I whimpered when he freed himself, and moaned when the monstrous thing jumped up and slapped against his stomach.

For a long moment, I forgot the cornerstone of keeping myself alive and stared at him as he studied me.

"Breathe, cariño mío, breathe."

His words, whispered and tender, were my absolute downfall. With a harsh inhale, I clawed at my tee, ripping it off my body and jammed down my sweats, revealing I wasn't wearing any underwear along with the rest of my pale, naked form.

Connor's breath hitched before he let out a long, shaky moan and said, "Fuck me.

You've been holding out on me, Ol."

"You should talk. Your dick is beautiful; long and..."

I bit my lip as I ogled him, unable to help my eyes from roaming his entire naked form, before my words stumbled out of my mouth, "The girth would be amazing stretching me wide?—"

"Ollie!"

I watched in awe as precome dribbled from his dick and my mouth watered as I imagined the flavor exploding on my tongue. Would he be salty, sweet, a mixture of both? Unable to stop myself, I licked my lips, pretending a drop had landed there and I could savor his desire for me.

"What are you thinking about?"

A moan escaped my throat as my imagination inundated my brain with detailed images of all the places I would touch, with both my hands and my lips.

"All the ways I would find to make you come and the flavor that would burst on my tongue before I swallowed you down, and above all, the ways I can pleasure you until you fall apart."

His head bent back and he let out a groan, strangling the base of his cock as his balls looked as though they were ready for an intense release.

"Your voice, when you're not turned on, is deadly. But now, seeing your body flushed with need and your beautiful cock weeping as you talk about all the ways you want to pleasure me, I'm both selfish for wanting your intense concentration centered on me and turned on because I knew you'd be selfless, even in bed."

I huffed out a laugh. “I think you’re giving me too much credit here. With everything I want to do to you, I’m mindful of your pleasure, which drives me insane as I think about it. The sexiest thing I could ever see is you getting off from my touch. Your dick makes my mouth water and my hole flutter, anticipating how you’d stretch me open as you slide inside me. I’ve never even had anything inside me, but I’m drooling at the thought.”

Another dribble of precome and a deep groan made my breath catch, concentrating on his release, but I became distracted as his fingers spread liquid around, making his glorious cock glisten.

“I want to taste you. But not just milking your release with my mouth. I’ve researched sex a lot, it comes with my line of work, and I’ve always wanted to try something. Some people say it’s disgusting, but it’s a turn on when I think about it.”

“What?” Connor croaked.

“Rimming. Do you... would you let me?—”

“Holy shit,” his breath rushed out, before he whispered, “you want to?”

My eyes fluttered closed as I pictured Connor draped over the side of a bed, his head pillowed in his arms as I ran my hands along his strong, muscular back to his rounded ass. Kneeling behind him, my fingers would rub circles over his skin as he moaned in anticipation until I could stand it no longer and ran my tongue from his taint up and over his hole.

“Yes,” I hissed. “I want to explore every inch of your body, find all those places that light you up and repeat it over and over until your body gives in and you come down my throat, or on me, marking me. Fuck, if I could make you come, I could live off hearing you moan for the rest of my days.”

His back arched, and he hissed. “Fuck, cariño mío, I am going to fucking come.”

“What do you like in bed? From your partner?” I asked.

He gasped. “I’m not picky. Whatever feels good.”

“So I’d start with your nipples, scraping them with my teeth until the swollen nubs stiffened before I sucked them into my mouth and flicked them with my tongue. I’d bite down your delectable abs and trace my tongue over the cut of your hips until they shot forward, letting me know your throbbing, leaking cock needs attention?—”

“Unnnnggh, fuck... Ollie!”

Connor shouted and spurt over his hand, ropes of white milky come landing on his stomach and chest and I gasped in surprise, coughing on nothing as I watched the mesmerizing sight in front of me.

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“Fucking hell, Connor. I’ve witnessed nothing as erotic as your orgasm.”

He flopped back onto the bed and I watched his chest rise and fall with sharp breaths until his eyes met mine.

“Your turn,” he growled.

From his harsh demand and without touching my dick, I threw my head back and grunted when my release shot down my spine, squeezing my balls tight, and come spewed out of my pulsing dick over and over.

“That’s fucking hot. Fuck, you didn’t even touch yourself.”

I gasped and said, “You’re... voice. Can’t.”

“And now I’m thinking of other tempting ways I could make you come without a hand or friction on your dick. I wonder if I can make you come from being inside you, stroking your prostate with every thrust.”

He dropped his head to the pillow, and I noticed the happy, relaxed features as he gazed at me, half-lidded. They widened when I reached for my tee and swiped at the come on my chest and chin, relaxing back against my bed, naked and sated.

“Well, I hope that’s an incentive to hurry back.”

Connor sat up and whispered something I couldn’t quite hear, his intent gaze on my face.

“What?” He questioned.

“What I said earlier, about how I wanted to explore you and make you come? That wasn’t something to get you off. It’s something that appeals to me in ways I can’t put into words. But if you want nothing to happen past this, it’s fine and we can forget about it,” I said.

“No, the last thing I want is for us to go back. I’m pretty sure my body craved yours during our kiss in my room, where it took everything in my power not to throw you on my bed. But ever since then, I want you. All of you.”

Despite the seriousness of his expression, my smile kept growing as he kept talking, and my heart threatened to pound out of my chest.

“You have me.” My words reflected my unwavering commitment to truth.

“What if I want you as my boyfriend?”

Stunned silence met his question, and I searched his face as he waited for my answer.

“Uh... what?”

“You heard me, Ol. Although I’ve never had one before, I want you to be my boyfriend.”

Well, for someone who made a living by finding the right words, I forgot all of them, stunned.

“Um...” I cleared my throat and started again, “Connor, are you sure? I mean, if you want to wait to label anything between us, I’m fine with it. There’s no pressure.”

He studied my face as I stared back at him, wanting to know what he was thinking, but his gave nothing away. There was no tension in me because if he decided not to label the change in our relationship, I refused to be disappointed. To be honest, I never thought, despite our shared kisses, that Connor would want more than something casual with me, and despite his words, I still didn't.

"There you go again. You underestimate your appeal," he shook his head before he continued. "I've tried to think of you as a friend, despite you knowing me better than anyone else, including family. But all my excuses for why we wouldn't work, the reasons I shouldn't allow myself to fuck this up, don't matter in the end, because I've experienced nothing like this before."

"Like... what?" I choked out.

Pure happiness shone in his eyes as he smiled at me.

"Before you, I was ignorant to the fact I was half a person. Going through life thinking I was happy when I settled for what I knew was easy. But with you, I want to challenge myself. I can't guarantee that I'll be any good at being a boyfriend and thinking about someone other than myself, but I figure you or someone in the family will school me when I fuck up. And I will fuck up, you know that, right, Ollie?"

I swallowed as emotions clogged my throat, and I shook my head.

"We all do from time to time. But all I ask is that you talk to me. About anything. Like if you change your mind or decide you can't be in a monogamous relationship. As long as we communicate, there will be no misunderstandings and it lessens the likelihood we both get hurt."

A long, silent minute passed before his face softened and he nodded. "Agreed."

The rest of the night, we talked about any subject that came up and when Connor blew me a kiss goodnight, my heart swelled and I might have begged the gods for as much time with the man as I could get.

Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 7:55 am

Because in real life, movie stars who could have anyone they wanted don't settle for nerdy guys in glasses.

7

CONNOR

I finished with the film two days early after begging the director to shoot my last three scenes back-to-back late Wednesday night so I could catch an early morning flight. At first Kathleen wanted to strangle me, but when I explained I wanted to go home early and surprise my boyfriend, she had so many questions.

“Holy shit! You have a boyfriend? Where did you meet him?”

I smiled when I remembered our initial meeting. “I met Ollie on my flight back after my last movie wrapped in New York.”

“What, is he an older gentleman who's now your daddy?”

“Um, Kathleen, you need to stop watching gay porn, honey. He's four years younger than me, with no interest in kink. We just started dating.”

“You're being serious right now?”

“Um, yes.”

She shook her head. “No, I mean, you've met someone and you've committed

yourself to them?”

“Yes. Is it so out of the ordinary that?—”

The loud and hurtful scoff cut off my words, and then she rolled her eyes.

“I have never seen you with the same person twice. You are respectful of all your partners and even learn their names when most wouldn’t bother, so I’m a little surprised. But now that I remember the last few weeks and seeing the smile on your face when you talk about him, I’m happy for you. Good for you, honey. You’ll have to bring him to the premiere so I can meet him.” Kathleen said.

I hugged her a final time, thanking her for helping me out, and rushed to the hotel to pack for the flight. Thomas was less than impressed because of the early morning hour as he drove to the airport in our rental. But as soon as he’d downed a strong cup of coffee, which the hotel was gracious enough to provide both of us as we checked out, his mood improved.

“Did I mention I’m grateful that you wrapped up early?” Thomas asked.

“Has Sam been working himself into exhaustion since you’ve been gone?”

The smile on his face told me everything I needed.

But when we arrived home, the house was eerily quiet. Thomas’ phone dinged with a text and as he read it, his smile fell.

“Sam’s working a double shift. I’m going to take him some lunch and snag some time with him. You’ll be okay on your own?”

I nodded and walked up to hug my bodyguard and close friend. “I’m sorry I haven’t

said this earlier, but I'm happy you and Sam figured it out."

Thomas squeezed my shoulder and gave me a smile.

"Thanks. Go find your man."

With a laugh, I watched Thomas rush out and pulled out my phone, needing to see Ollie as soon as possible.

Connor: Hey, where are you?

Ollie: Hey, Connor. I wasn't expecting to hear from you until later. How's your morning?

Connor: Well, it was going well as I planned on surprising my new boyfriend, but he's not home.

There was a long moment of pure silence before my phone rang.

"What? You're home?"

"Yeah. I missed you, cariño mío."

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A sound, part squeal and part moan, set my body a light.

“You can’t say that aloud when there are people around me!”

I chuckled, not finding humor in the situation, but his voice deepened, which set off sparks throughout me.

“Where are you?”

“Oh, I’m at the school football field with the triplets. They are having a fun fair today in order to raise money for charity and they roped me into helping set up and then working a booth. The one with the under inflated balloons you try to pop with darts before you can win a prize. Well, I filled the balloons to capacity and volunteered to run it. Who would have known it would be one of the most popular games here?”

I heard the shrug in his voice and laughed. Ollie’s sense of rightness was one of the many reasons I was falling for the man.

“Hold on, one second, okay, Connor?”

“Anything for you, Ol.”

Ollie sat the phone down and he was rustling about and encouraging the player to win, which by the loud squeal a few minutes later, she did.

“I love it when the kids get to win. I make it harder for the adults, especially the assholes, but it’s a lot of fun.”

“Then I’m glad they talked you into it.”

I couldn’t help but feel a little eager to spend time with him, especially after our unforgettable discovery two nights ago. And in the light of day, there wasn’t a single part of me freaked out by the change in our relationship. If anything, I wanted to experience everything with the man who consumed my thoughts.

“Would you like some company?” I asked.

“Um, I missed you while you’ve been gone. But there are people everywhere and I don’t want you to be uncomfortable. Is Thomas with you?”

“No, he’s taking Sam some lunch and then spending as much time with him as he can.”

“Oh, no, I don’t want to be a bother. I’ll be home in about two hours.”

I loved how he already called our house his home. Something indefinable warmed in my chest.

My mischievous side came through, and though I wouldn’t take a chance with Ollie’s safety, I wasn’t expecting any trouble from a crowd of high schoolers. Besides, the triplet’s friends learned of me back in their freshman year.

“Don’t worry, *cariño mío*, I have a disguise that works every time. I’ll be there soon, and you won’t even recognize me.”

Before Ollie could protest, I said a quick goodbye and hung up. I rushed upstairs and dug in the back of my closet for the variety of baseball caps I kept for this reason alone. In reality, a pair of sunglasses, dark ones shading my eyes, and a baseball hat with a pair of jeans and a long sleeve distressed tee shouldn’t work as a disguise. But

Kaid, who was notorious for not being spotted out and about, gave me the tip after we worked together and it's never steered me wrong.

I rushed down the stairs, running into mama coming from the garage with bags of groceries, which I took from her and put on the kitchen counter.

"Where are you off to in a hurry?"

"The school. Ollie's running some booth there and I'm going to meet him."

This took my romantic mama by surprise. "Oh, why?"

Unable to keep the smile off my face, I said, "Ollie agreed to be my boyfriend."

She beamed at me and patted my cheek. "Good, it's about time. Just be careful when you're out in public. Thomas isn't with you, and you're smart, but sometimes people won't take no for an answer."

"Always, Mama. We'll see you later." I pecked a kiss on her cheek and waved as I sailed out the door and into my Range Rover. It was the least conspicuous car I owned.

It took twenty minutes to get to the triplet's high school and finding a place to park was a bit of a pain. When I managed it, I let the noise and laughter lead me toward the bustling football field. It was amazing how much effort the school and the students put forward. Several booths lined the sides of the football field, along with a dunk tank and a strongman game. Across the way, local restaurants setup craft tables featuring full menus of a variety of foods, all of which smelled divine.

It took a minute to locate Ollie, but when I heard the peal of laughter from a group of children, I veered toward the sound. So far, my disguise worked and when I reached

the area where I spotted my man, who was handing a little girl a stuffed pink and blue dragon, the joy on his face stilled the world around me.

It'd been a brief span of time since I left home for Vancouver, short compared to my usual location shoots. Despite not wanting to give Ollie the wrong signals before I figured out for myself what I wanted, I video called him every night, unable to stay away from him. The picture of happiness radiating from the screen was nothing compared to real life, and the one thought alone made me realize how much I'd missed him.

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Although it was a lousy spot for self-reflection, I searched my memory for anytime in my life where another person brought out absolute joy in me. My family, because we're so close. But with someone I found attractive and wanted more than one night with, I couldn't say that I have. Not even my first kiss, or any sexual encounter since then.

Lust, the primal inclination I've experienced with my other partners, paled compared to the overwhelming exuberance of seeing the man who wiggled his way into my heart and, most impressive of all, my thoughts. I was an expert at compartmentalizing different aspects of my life. Work, sex, home and family. Never once had any the encounters I had interceded into my private life. Because the people I slept with understood where they stood with me, and I spelled it out before we even touched.

Nothing more than the one night together.

While the truth was I lusted after Ollie, there was also a tentative bond between us building. And rather than freaking out about the possibility of being tied down to one person, a little reminder that the person was Ollie I was falling for and my mind and body relaxed. I found myself intrigued with every aspect of our dynamic and wanted to rush. Take him to bed, get him so addicted to me he never wanted to leave me.

And that was the crux of the issue.

The heathen inside me craved the idea of debauching Ollie. As I claimed him with my mouth, hands, fuck, even the hope of him coming inside me, me inside of him, and it opened up a side of me I hadn't suspected existed. The possessive asshole whose body throbbed with a sense of need as I imagined Ollie clinging to me as he

sought to sate himself by using me for his pleasure preened whenever I remembered all the sexy moments we shared through a video screen.

But there was the overwhelming sense of protectiveness as well. I wanted to be the man he turned to when he had good news to share, the one he came to when sadness overwhelmed him and he needed a shoulder to cry on. It wasn't something I'd ever wanted before, but to be there for Ollie would be a privilege, not a burden or an inconvenience I once believed happened between couples.

Maybe it'd been so long since I thought about how mama and papa were when they were together, I'd forgotten what love looked like. Although papa was busy with his medical practice, he still made time to come home every night and talk to us over dinner. And when Saturday night rolled around, they'd have someone they trusted babysit us as he took mama to dinner and to whatever they decided on for the rest of the night. They loved dancing; salsa or ballroom. It didn't matter as long as they were together. They both loved comedy, so when dancing didn't appeal to them, they often went downtown to the Comedy Store or the Laugh Factory for a show.

What I hadn't remembered all these years later were the quiet moments of conversation, mama's shoulder pressed against papa's chest as they spoke in low tones, figuring out a problem or telling a story about an experience one of them had that day. The camaraderie they shared, even with seven kids and being pulled in a million directions, their marriage took priority.

Mama's eyes dimmed, but the light never abated after his death. I realized it when it happened, but close to seven years later, I know for a fact I would not have been as strong. The pain was palpable in our family, all the more because mama lost her soulmate. But as a kid of nineteen, I remembered the pain of losing one of the two pillars of strength in my life and no thought extended to my other siblings.

Something in me recognized the younger version of myself avoided feelings or

attachment of any kind after the sadness lifted bit by bit. It was easier to sleep with whomever I wanted and give myself an arbitrary timeline of one night rather than risk my feelings. But part of me, even back then, craved the type of relationship my parents had. Fear of losing myself was minor compared to the terror of exposing myself and allowing any part of me showing vulnerability in front of another person.

It wasn't even my trepidation of someone knowing me inside and out, but the dread of losing them.

Another lightbulb went off as I made the correlation after all this time and my mouth tilted up in an ironic smile. Most men I knew in Hollywood, with both fame and money, lived alone. Hell, Kaid lived in his giant glass and metal monstrosity you could see from space by himself. Even Spencer, before Lee and he gave into the attraction they'd felt the moment they met, lived in a mansion by himself with Lee in an entire separate house behind it. I mean, who needed eight bedrooms to themselves?

The moment I brought home my first paycheck from a summer blockbuster action flick, I conferred with my family and we purchased a home in the hills where all of us could stay. Never once did it occur to me to break away from my siblings and make a life away from them, despite being a selfish asshole. We were a package deal and when one of us succeeded, we all did.

Sam was still in medical school, so I paid off all his bills, including tuition. When Emilia and Omi decided where they wanted to go to college, money wasn't an issue. And when the triplets decided on their future in the next few months, I had money set aside for them.

And those were two sides of myself I strove hard never to merge. Well, until I brought Ollie home.

Another squeal of laughter came from Ollie's booth, pulling me from my musings. There he was, knelt down in front of a toddler, holding out a stuffed whale. Instead of taking the toy, the boy threw himself into the man's arms and hugged him with all his might.

Ollie stood, cuddling the little one close, before he turned toward the boy's parents and smiled, shaking his head.

After a brief conversation, the boy reached for his whale toy and blinked, giving a jaw cracking yawn; the universal sign of nap time. When Ollie leaned down to hand the boy over to his mom, the baby gave a screech and held on for another minute, until he drifted off to sleep and gave up the fight.

As the parents and adorable boy walked off, I sidled up to Ollie and waited.

"Hey, there," I said.

Ollie turned to me, recognized me in a split second, before he let out an endearing little squeak. He threw himself into my arms and cuddled into me.

"You're home," he breathed out.

For two tall men, we fit together and my body started humming when he buried his face against my neck.

With a huge smile on my face, I asked, "So, I take it you missed me?"

Ollie pulled back, radiating sheer joy as he put his finger and thumb together, showing an inch. "Maybe, a little."

He laughed at my disgruntled expression. But before I leaned down and waited with

bated breath to press my lips to his, a high-pitched screech interrupted us.

“What happened to my stock?”

Ollie, ever the charmer, pulled back and stepped up to the man, who, by the looks of it, ran the carnival. Or at least the prize booths.

“It’s strange. All the little ones had the best luck with popping the balloons. It must have been the barometric pressure since I heard the meteorologists predicting a La Niña. But thanks for the opportunity to run the booth, I had a lot of fun and we raised over the amount they required for the charity donation, so it’s a win all around.”

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Left standing speechless with his mouth open and boggling eyes, he watched my man turn back toward me. Ollie noticed me watching the entire byplay and winked at me. My disguise must've worked because the man who made a living by ripping off kids and families had no recognition in his face when I looped an arm around Ollie's waist and we walked off together.

"Thank you for being here. I did not want to deal with that man alone again."

My spine stiffened, and I growled out, "Was he hitting on you?"

The light giggle warmed me, and I relaxed as he shook his head.

"No, I think he wanted to intimidate me because he thought I'd be a pushover. To me, he treated the kids as bothersome and talked down to the student representatives tasked with the setup. For a minute there, I thought Linus was going to punch him. After I sent the triplets off to man the dunk tank, I got back at him by letting the kids choose a toy, even if they didn't win. I restocked the prizes six times over the afternoon, so he'll flip shit when he checks underneath the table to find empty boxes where he stored the rest of the prizes."

Laughing at the way Ollie's pride shone through, I wondered aloud. "I never thought of Linus as a fighter."

"He's laid back until you ruffle his feathers, and then he's a fierce protector. The man stuck his chest out and tried to intimidate me when he was giving me instructions on working the booth. He even slowed his speech, and that was when Linus grew irritated with the condescending lecture, especially when the man reached for my

arm, and he snapped.”

We’d walked away from the booth and found ourselves on the outskirts of the fair, still thriving. I spotted an oak and led Ollie around the other side, grateful for the privacy.

“I missed you, too, you know,” I said.

A gorgeous blush stained his cheeks, and I lifted my hand and ran my thumb over the heated skin, inhaling the warmth of the man along with the hint of citrus.

“Several times since it happened, I thought I imagined it all. I’d all but convinced myself you hadn’t asked me to be your boyfriend. But the way you’re looking at me now, while it still feels like a dream, it’s also real,” Ollie whispered. “Are you freaking out?”

At first, his question confused me. But when he glanced up at me, I lost my voice for a second and let out a grunt.

My hands smoothed up and down his arms. “I know I’m a horrible prospect for a boyfriend, and my past actions are screaming I’m not into commitment?—”

Ollie shook his head once, hard, and then relaxed, softening his expression as he looked at me with a kind of wonder I couldn’t understand.

“No, beautiful, it wasn’t an accusation. I’m wondering because it’s been several weeks since we’ve been in the same room, all the while still getting to know each other. Talking on the phone or over video doesn’t always feel the same once you’re back in the same zip code and face-to-face. That’s what made me wonder out loud. And, I’ll emphasize this over and over, you need to stop beating yourself up over past decisions that were right for you,” Ollie said.

I stopped fighting the urge to kiss the man I've only put my lips on twice my entire life, which seemed a shame, bordering on criminal, and groaned out, "Can I kiss you?"

His breath rushed out, and my fingers tingled. He beamed at me and said, "Please."

With neither grace nor coordination, my hands reached up to cup his face. I tilted my head and devoured his mouth as though I were a drowning man and he was essential to my survival.

Somewhere in the fervent need, my hat disappeared as Ollie lifted my sunglasses on top of my head, but nothing other than a natural disaster would have prevented me from feasting on the man's delicious mouth. When his lips moved away from my own, I chased his touch with little care for how desperate I seemed.

The next second, my face burrowed against the front of Ollie's chest as his hands protected my head. I was about to open my mouth and ask what had changed when he shushed me. I relaxed into his hold, trusting him, as I wove fantasies in my mind about tasting every inch of his naked, scorched skin as he moaned below me, begging for more.

"Where did you park?"

"In the second parking lot on the other side of the school. Why?"

His silence lasted all of about thirty seconds before he whispered, "I could have sworn I spotted flashing from a camera, but when I opened my eyes, no one was around. I think we should leave."

Without waiting for my answer, Ollie pulled out his phone and texted something. When the device beeped, he let out a relieved breath, bent down and picked up my

cap and sunglasses, waving as though I should put them on, before we started walking us toward the open gate so we could cut through the stands and behind the school where I parked. We jumped into the SUV and he locked the doors behind us. He glanced around and found a dark tint on all the windows.

“People can’t see in, right?”

“No, well, not unless they’re pressed against the glass. What are you worried about? I get photographed all the time,” I said.

My statement made Ollie pause. “Oh.”

That one word held weight, and I knew he was beating himself up for our hasty retreat.

“Don’t worry about it. I arrived in a disguise, and you haven’t experienced what a pain the paps are when you don’t want to be photographed, so it’s understandable you’d want to protect me. Who did you text?” I asked.

“I texted Landon to see if they had a ride home. He told me not to worry, but now that my kiss-addled brain is clear, should I be worried?”

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Shaking my head, I said, “The media don’t know about the triplets or any of my siblings. I’ve taken mama to premieres, so they know about her, but everything else is under tight security. It’s how my siblings can lead a normal life without being hassled.”

Each word caused Ollie’s eyes to widen and I’m shaken to see how much of my world he still doesn’t know about.

“Didn’t you search for me or my friends while I was gone?” I asked.

He shook his head, “No, it, well, don’t laugh, okay?”

When I nodded, he continued in a whisper, “I don’t want to invade your privacy. If you want to tell me about your life, I’d be happy to learn all about you. Otherwise, I see it as a waste of time to dig through all the information and try to piece together whether something about you is the truth or complete fiction.”

My heart thumped once hard against my chest and I reached for Ollie’s hand, linking our fingers. I’ve never met someone as genuine and caring as Ollie, and I lost another piece of my heart to the man.

“Let’s go home,” I said.

The five seconds it took for me to exit the passenger side and walk toward the garage door as my body thrummed with desire for what was to come, Connor reached for me, pushing me back against the closed door. I gasped the moment he pressed his lips to mine and stole my breath.

I'd missed him.

During our time apart, I may have lectured myself that the scorching chemistry we shared might have been a fluke, or at least an overreaction in my mind. A reaction because of the newness of the situation and the tiny possibility of something significant starting between us, at least from my point of view.

But that notion fucked right off as he angled his head and deepened the kiss, leaving me weak-kneed as my brain turned to static as I pleaded with him to take me apart right there in the immaculate garage. I groaned into his mouth as his tongue teased mine, and within minutes, I was pulling back with the immediate necessity of breathing. It was then I realized I'd clawed his tee up on his chest as my hands roamed around the exposed skin.

In a hushed tone, Connor murmured, "I'm not surprised."

"What?" I asked as my brain rolled the statement around with no prompt answers.

I wasn't ashamed as my fingers roamed over his warm skin, getting distracted by the swell of his pecs and the ridges of his ripped stomach, itching to drag my thumbs lower until I reached the waistband of his jeans and found the cut of his hips. Fuck! I wanted this man more than my next breath.

"You aren't timid when you know what you want. And thank fuck you want me."

I scoffed. "Who doesn't want you? And because I don't want to miss my chance, I'll

be blunt. Do you want to go upstairs? I want to feel the weight of your cock on my tongue?—”

His lips slammed against mine and once again, time and everything outside our embrace ceased to exist. This man knew how to kiss, and if I made him feel even a tenth of the pure adrenaline and pleasure rushing through me from his touch, I’d be thrilled. I craved getting my mouth and hands on his body; and I hoped it would be enough.

“Fuck, Ollie, you can’t say things like that. I’m seconds away from blowing like a fucking teenager, and the prospect of your mouth anywhere on me might be my undoing. But on reflection, your idea is brilliant. If I have you in my bed, I can keep you there and drain every ounce of come from you before we demand sustenance, only to get enough energy to start all over again.”

Before I could form any words to agree with his outrageous plans, he took my hand and led us through the kitchen and living room. It was then I noticed how unusually quiet the house seemed.

“Where is everyone?” I asked.

Connor’s brows drew down as he glanced around, spotting something on the kitchen counter, and walked over to snatch up a piece of paper.

“Mama said she’s staying with a friend and the triplets and Omi are bunking with Emilia, so we have the house to ourselves.”

I asked, “Why?”

His deep laughter sent a shiver down my spine and I took a deep breath to control myself and not strip him bare right there.

“I told mama about us when I got home and I think this is her way of being supportive,” he paused as he opened the fridge, “and she left us food.”

My head popped to the side and my eyes widened as I noticed the enchiladas and an entire pot of what I suspected was tamales.

“Wow, that’s a lot of food. And now that you mention it, don’t tamales take most of the day to make?”

Connor said, “It’s mama we’re talking about.”

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“Right, and you’ll never tell her I doubted her culinary skills, if you know what’s good for you.”

“Why not? You’re already her favorite.”

I crossed my arms in front of my chest and narrowed my eyes. “I won’t suck your dick if you do.”

This time, a shiver passed over him and his expression grew serious. “To be honest, you don’t have to do anything. I can spend the rest of my life kissing you, holding you against me, and I’d be a lucky man.”

Without my consent, a sigh escaped from my throat, and my arms dropped to my sides.

I shook my head and said, “You are dangerous to my heart, Connor Blake. But I’d be happier if you took me upstairs and let me have my wicked way with you.”

“Yeah? Well, it’s good that I stocked up on condoms and lube. But before we start, I’m clean. Because I never take my health for granted, I get tested every three months and have never been with someone without a condom.”

“I’m fine with whatever you want. But taking my word for the fact I’ve never been with another man might be too much trust this early?—”

Connor cut off my words with another devastating kiss, making me weak in the knees, and my thoughts once again became fuzzy. I clung onto him as though he was

the oxygen I needed to survive, and the low groan he released as he nipped at my bottom lip before soothing it with his tongue had a burble of precome dribbling into my boxer briefs.

“Fuck, maybe you had the right idea. Kissing you is perfect, beautiful.”

His brows drew down, and he studied my eyes for a moment. Rather than wasting words on what was proving to be a sure thing, and by that I meant me, I was the sure thing; I linked our fingers together and dragged us up to his bedroom.

My body throbbed the moment I recognized Connor in his disguise at the school, so when he shut and locked the door, pressing me into the solid wood, I went lax in his arms as once again as our mouths melded into another mind-blowing kiss.

The next few minutes were a blur. I preferred the man undressed, so I tugged at the hem of his shirt, trying to wrangle it up and over his impressive chest, but he blocked my efforts when he refused to lift his arms. A moan of pure frustration escaped my throat, and he pulled away with a smirk on his face.

“Impatient?”

There was no use playing coy. “Yes.”

His expression confused me and I asked, “Why are you so shocked that I want you? I haven’t been shy about my attraction to you. I’ve even confessed to my crush on you when I thought any relationship with you other than friendship would be impossible.”

My words jolted him into action and I lost my mind when he reached behind him, scrunched up his shirt, displaying the muscles of his chest and arms when he ripped it off over his head and tossed it aside.

I might have choked on my tongue as my eyes traced over each inch of skin revealed to me. I sucked in a breath as I reached for him, but when his fingers skimmed against the side of my ribs, I let out a loud whine. The warmth of his skin touching mine had me biting my bottom lip to prevent the filthiest of moans from escaping my throat, but Connor wasn't having it.

"No, I want to hear every sound I draw from you. Don't hold back. Now, kiss me."

Every growled word went straight to my dick, and I released an obscene moan as my lips met his. I sucked on his tongue, telling him without words what I wanted. He tilted his head and deepened the kiss as his fingers traveled over my stomach, and I grew lightheaded when they popped open the top button of my jeans. With a yank, the other buttons gave way as I groaned, free of the confines of the denim.

"Need... you," he panted.

My head jerked up, and I met Connor's gaze. The heat behind his gorgeous light hazel irises and the way his stomach contracted as he took short, panting breaths made me bolder than my normal shy self.

I slipped my thumbs underneath my jeans, snagging the band of my boxer briefs, and shimmied my hips as I slid the rest of my clothes off, exposing all of me to Connor's view. I blinked up at him through my lashes and spotted the flush of red along his chest and up his neck as his hands squeezed into fists at his sides.

"Connor?"

"I'm... trying..." His breath huffed out as his eyes flared with need.

"Ah, beautiful, you don't have to hold back with me. I've..." Unable to stop myself, I blushed at the thought I stumbled to say aloud.

“You’ve what, cariño mío?”

“Well, I bought several toys over the past few weeks. With discretion, of course, through several online stores and have been trying them out. I... well, I used one this morning.”

Connor’s chest rose and fell as he took in several deep breaths, letting each go through clenched teeth. He held my gaze as he ripped open the zipper of his jeans and I choked back a moan to see him with nothing underneath. As he shimmied the denim down his long legs, I grabbed the base of my cock and squeezed.

Dressed, he was gorgeous, but naked, he was a sight to behold. His thick thighs and muscled calves showcased the strength he carried in his muscled body. But the sight of his heavy sac and the way his cock danced against his stomach made me swallow back the words begging him to fuck me, right that instant.

“Ollie?”

“Ye... Yes?”

I met his eyes as he stopped near the side of the bed. They about popped out of my skull when Connor crawled onto the mattress, keeping me in his sights, as I fought hard to keep still, anticipating what would happen next.

Stopping halfway up the bed, he nodded toward the nightstand and asked, “Can you grab the lube for me?”

Nodding, I stumbled over and opened the top drawer, almost laughing at the size of the bottle I pulled out, but then swallowing hard when I sent up a wish for the gods to grant, begging we would spend the next however many days using all of it. An unexpected thought popped into my head, but I shook it off and handed Connor the bottle.

“What were you thinking just then? Your beautiful eyes flashed as your breathing sped up?”

I shook my head, but he squeezed my thigh and asked, “Please, tell me?”

“It was only a fleeting curious thought.”

“About?”

Heat warmed my cheeks and chest as I explained, “I wondered how it would feel to

be inside you. But we've never talked about?—"

"Yes!" Connor all but shouted.

"You want... that?"

"I want you inside me. I'm vers, but you'll have to take it easy on me because it's been a while."

Connor handed me the bottle of lube and relaxed on his back, hands holding his head up as he gave me a wink as my cheeks heated at the thought of being inside this man. My eyes roamed down his fit and beautiful body, and I salivated at the thought of being able to sample him everywhere.

"Can I ask why it's been so long? Because if you prefer topping, I'm okay with that. I want you to enjoy yourself."

"What do you see when you look at me?" Connor asked.

A smile quirked up the side of my mouth as I answered with the complete truth.

"I see a man who has the biggest heart of anyone I've ever met. Someone who will put other's needs ahead of his own, takes criticism without comment, and keeps victories as routine, everyday occurrences. You live life brimming with the thrill of not knowing what comes next, but you're excited about the unknown because of all the possibilities. You love your family and friends with a fierce intensity, support their dreams, and are their biggest cheerleader, and they love you back with the same fierceness. I've never once seen you look down on anyone. Instead, you treat everyone with respect. People are envious of your career and success, but they have no clue how much hard work you put in and how brilliant you need to be in order to survive in this business. On top of all those admirable qualities, you're sexy-as-fuck."

With each word spoken, his eyes widened and by the end, his mouth dropped open and he looked stunned.

“Are... are you serious?”

I tilted my head and said, “Yes. How do other people see you?”

“As a stupid actor who can’t break out of the mold of being an action star, or someone who lucked out finding work because my parents gifted me with good genes.”

Rage built up inside my chest, and I growled.

“Well, fuck them because they don’t know you. Anyone who bases their opinion on your looks seems stupid to me. Yes, you are gorgeous, but that’s because of your beautiful mother and handsome father. All of your siblings are stunning, but you used your skills as an actor, and there is not a single thing wrong with your career. On top of all that, it’s fucking hypocritical how your critics watch your movies and find them entertaining, but then criticize you for making them. Make that make sense.

“But you are more than an action star. I’ve seen all you do for the production company you run with your friends; because you give a voice to those who can’t share their own perspectives with the world. And I know what it’s like to come from a family who couldn’t care less about the child they brought into this world, but you support your siblings and root for their success as they root for yours. I believe you can do anything you put your mind to and make the world a better place without effort. Look what you’ve already done for me.”

Yes, I might have gotten carried away with my speech, but it was all true.

“I suppose as human beings, we forget no one knows what they are doing as we

stumble through life. The older I get, the more I realize that almost everyone I know doesn't have their shit together no matter what age, and it's hard to live this life without stumbling a bit from time to time. It's your life and you've made the best of your talents. And that's on top of being a good man. Anyone with another argument can fuck themselves sideways."

The truth of my words seemed to make him think, and I drew closer and leaned down, brushing a kiss over his mouth and smiling against his lips at his quick inhale. He pulled me onto him and deepened the kiss as our heated skin pressed together. Lust flared between us, and I groaned as my hands rubbed up and down his chest.

"Thank you for being... well, you, Ollie. I'm lucky to have ever met you."

My answer was a bright smile before capturing his lips in another heated kiss. As though on instinct, and driven out of my mind with the need to touch him, my thumbs caught on one turgid nipple and I broke the kiss, needing to explore Connor. I kissed down his neck and chest, and flicked it with my thumb, before sealing my lips over it, tongue darting out, learning what Connor needed.

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“Ollie! Please!”

His hard cock pulsed against my stomach as I lavished one nipple before moving to the other. My desire grew from each mewl and moan escaping his throat and the way he clutched me against him, not wanting me to move away but needing more from me.

As I caressed his stomach with my kisses, I pinched his nubs between my fingers until I reached his hard, leaking cock, which required my full attention.

“Connor... you are magnificent.”

Before he could respond, I flattened my tongue and licked a swath up and over his slit, moaning as I caught his essence. My lips pursed over the head, seeking even more of him as Connor’s hips shot up and my name whimpered out of his mouth in a low keen.

His pleasure above all else became my priority and as I swallowed him whole, the head of his cock brushing the back of my throat, I fumbled with the lube and coated my fingers. But before I swallowed around him, I lifted off.

“Do you still want me?” I asked as I glanced up and caught his hazy gaze.

“Yes! Please, Ollie. I... inside me.”

I shivered at his deep, strained voice begging for more and leaked precome onto the bedsheets below me. Foregoing my pleasure, I massaged the inside of his thigh as my

fingers coated his taint with a sheen of lube. The one place I needed to feel his scorching heat tantalized me as I brushed against his pucker and closed my eyes against the onslaught of need when Connor moaned for more.

As I circled his entrance, I swallowed him down and sensed his entire body go lax as his hard cock swelled in my mouth. With a practiced ease, I slid my finger inside up to my first knuckle and sighed around his dick when he squeezed me.

While researching and writing gay sex was second nature to me by this point, I wasn't expecting my partner to be so vocal with his pleasure as I slid my entire digit inside him before easing out. Connor thrashed on the bed, seeking more of me inside him as I worshipped his cock with my tongue and mouth.

"More. Ollie, fuck, I need two more inside me."

There was a decisive intensity to his request, but I refused to rush and hurt him. Even by his own admission, he wasn't used to the onslaught.

His cock popped out of my mouth before I kissed the base, moving my lips along his skin.

"I love how responsive you are to my touch. You are a temptation laid out like this, and I can't wait for you to fall apart when I'm inside you."

With a crook of my finger, I brushed against his prostate and licked at the precome leaking from his dick as I pulled out and coated two fingers this time. He took me with ease and I almost swallowed my tongue as he ground his ass down on my digits as his head thrashed back and forth on the pillow.

I spread them, hoping to stretch him even more, and choked on a moan when more precome flowed out of his cock and I lapped it up as if I were dying of thirst. His

flavor, salty yet with a bit of sweetness, was growing more addictive with each lick, and before long, we were both gasping for air as I continued getting him ready for me.

“Ollie?”

“Yeah, beautiful?”

“Please, and I mean this in the nicest way possible, fuck me now!”

Instead of following his desperate plea, I pulled out enough I could group another finger with the two already stretching him and opened him wider. A choked off curse garbled in his throat as I plunged in, leaving him and me throbbing with need. I watched in fascination as his hole fluttered around my fingers and when I removed all three, he clenched, missing being filled.

Pouring out some more lube, I stroked my dick, getting it ready.

“Do you want to be on your back or on your hands and knees?”

He shook his head. “Like this, on my back. To see you. Please?”

With my clean hand, I rubbed his thigh and shushed him. “Whatever you want, beautiful.”

For a long minute, I examined his flushed face and neck, the sweat on his forehead and the sheen on his chest, and my dick pulsed in my hand at the sexy man spread out for me.

“You’re so fucking hot, beautiful.”

We both moaned as I positioned my hips closer and pressed his knees back to his chest, opening him up to me. When he looked comfortable and I found I couldn't hold back any longer, I pressed the head of my cock against his entrance and sucked in a breath when it disappeared inside him as he angled his hips up.

“Slow, beautiful. We have all night.”

Apparently, it was the wrong thing to say because he hooked his ankles around my back and squeezed, leaving me scrambling as I slid in deeper, cursing under my breath.

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“You’re so fucking tight. I’m never going to survive this.”

Connor grunted and tried the move again, but I held firm and rubbed his hips.

“Give me a minute. I don’t want to blow the second I move. You feel too fucking good.”

Impatient and greedy, Connor’s mouth tilted in a wicked grin before he flipped us over and gave me a triumphant sound as he held me down.

“Now, it’s my turn.”

9

CONNOR

In my life, I’ve had no issues finding willing partners to indulge my carnal side. But never in all my years of being sexually active did anything feel even half as good as Ollie fingering me while worshipping my body with his mouth. For a minute, I thought I’d pass out when his attention centered on my nipples. But then he moved on and my mind blanked, just reacting to his touch, needing more.

Sensitive didn’t even describe how my body buzzed, anticipation growing inside me for what was to come. Everything, from his kisses to basic skin contact, sent my nerves haywire, and I leaned into everything Ollie wanted to do to me.

I couldn’t remember the last time I bottomed for someone. It wasn’t a trust issue. I

was down for getting fucked whenever I took the time to get to know someone enough to get naked with them. But more often than not, I attracted men who were power bottoms or thought of me as an exclusive top.

To me, when all parties had a good time and got off, I was more than happy to play any role they wanted me to.

But with Ollie, I was so in tune with his touch, each nerve ending exposed and pulsing with pleasure, I became overzealous and found myself on top of the younger man, holding him down. The next words out of his mouth gave me a full body shiver.

“Yes, beautiful, fuck me. Take your pleasure,” Ollie groaned out. “Nnnnng... you’re so fucking tight.”

“Been... awhile,” I panted out.

Done with holding myself back, I closed my eyes as lowered myself down, moaning as every ridge on his cock brushed my walls as he stretched me open to take all of him. When I bottomed out, my breaths were fast as I panted at the delicious way his cock filled me.

My entire body jerked as Ollie scraped his nails down my chest and, being unprepared for the pulse of his cock inside my channel, I rolled my hips, seeking the epicenter of pleasure.

“Beautiful, you’re perfect,” Ollie groaned as he caressed me all over.

Unable to keep still, he drove up into me when I lifted myself up and then dropped back down. His hands on my hips kept me grounded, but my thighs trembled, not used to such exertion and appearing weak from the absolute sensual gratification of having Ollie inside me.

Of course, the man who I grew addicted to the second he sat next to me on the plane sensed I was straining and took control. He maneuvered me onto my side, facing me away from him, and draped my leg back over his hip. I closed my eyes and groaned as he slid back inside me, cock pulsing and stretching me even deeper from this angle. His mouth nibbled on my neck, finding every single pulse point that sent a thrill through me. Before long, he was slamming his hips against mine as he tweaked my nipples and growled near my ear.

“Is this good... for you, beautiful?” He panted.

I choked out, trying to answer, but soon gave up as I reached behind me, clutching onto his thigh and he drove himself inside me, holding him tight as he ground his cock against my prostate. The head of my cock burbled out a thick spurt of precome and I held on tighter, needing him to ground me as I lost myself to the sensations.

“I don’t remember... sex being this...” I stumbled over my words before trailing off.

It was then Ollie tilted my head back and kissed me breathless. I loved the way his body moved in a natural rhythm with mine and the safe way he embraced as he fucked me, so I let go and just allowed myself to give into the sensations.

So lost in his passion, I gasped when he pulled out of me and rolled me onto my back. Before I could figure out why he wasn’t inside me any longer, his mouth wrapped around my cock and he took me deep, swallowing me down as the tip neared the back of his throat. I cursed aloud when my hips shot up, but instead of choking him, the man moaned around me as though he liked my rough treatment. He almost pushed me past the point of no return as he fondled my balls, adding to the insane level of pleasure I experienced.

“Holy shit?—”

My brain leaked out through my ears as he took me all the way down, rubbing his tongue clinging against the underside of my cock as he hummed his excitement. Knowing I was seconds from losing the little control I had and coming down Ollie's throat, I squeezed his shoulder and whimpered.

With a slurp, he pulled off my cock. His eyes roamed over my wrecked form; my chest heaving as I tried to get as much oxygen as I could into my lungs, chest and face were hot from all his ministrations, and I throbbed all over, wanting to come but needing to hold off for as long as possible.

"Please," I begged.

I about choked on my tongue as Ollie knee-walked over to me, his hard dick slapping against his stomach with each swaying movement. It was the softness of the smile on his face that made me sigh as his hand rubbed up and down my leg, comforting me. It was not an area I would consider erogenous at all, but still pulsed through me and caused me to arch my back in anticipation.

Ollie placed his hands on the back of my thighs and without rushing me, exposed me to his view.

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“Do you want me to fuck you until you come all over both of us?”

The quiet spoken man made me shiver as his voice deepened when he growled out the question, which caused precome to spill from me.

“Yes, fuck, yes. I want you inside me!”

The easy way he bent me in half boggled my mind, since I wasn't all that limber. I kept in shape from all the movies where the director expected a muscular actor who needed to look good without a shirt on, but being bent in half to satisfy my partner was something I never thought to try.

He teased my pulsing hole by slapping the head of his leaking cock against it several times. His gaze lingered on the way his precome dripped onto my already wet entrance, and I sensed it like a physical stroke, causing a whimper to escape my throat.

Expression serious for a long moment, but that all changed when Ollie locked eyes with me and the side of his lips tilted in a smile, which stole my breath. But his next words almost pushed me off the edge.

“Connor, you are fucking magnificent. Beautiful both on the outside and in your heart. And I'm thrilled I'm able to share this moment with you.”

My throat rumbled in a groan as Ollie slid inside me with a deliberate pace. I throbbed around his cock and watched in fascination as he closed his eyes and cursed out a sharp retort, holding himself steady above me. His chest heaved with short pants

and he was chanting something under his breath, inaudible yet mesmerizing.

When his eyelids shot open and the ring of azure blue flashed at me, I realized I was in for the ride of my life.

Ollie reached for my wrists and directed my arms back above my head. His cock glided another few inches inside me and I panted as I waited to see what happened next.

My breath rushed out when, without warning, he thrust all the way inside me and this time not giving me time to adjust to his girth. A shout escaped when he canted his hips back before angling his cock to rub against my prostate.

“Oh, fuck yes!”

I flung my head back onto the pillow as I dug my heels into Ollie’s back, lifting my hips up to meet his, shivering as pure carnal need throbbed through me. Ollie making love to me was a novel experience for me, even with my encounters with the older, more seasoned men who were dominate tops. While their commands did nothing for me, Ollie’s every move from tightening his hold over my wrists to cupping my ass with his other hand, brushing his pinkie along my stretched hole, sending sparks of pure light through me, sent me to another plane of salacious delight.

When he dropped to nibble on my neck and collarbone, I clutched at him as though he might disappear if I wasn’t grounding him to me. Words babbled out of my throat, nothing making sense in the heat of the moment, but somehow conveying what I needed.

To be fucked into the mattress. Used until Ollie came deep inside me, marking me as his. This wasn’t a temporary sensation because I realized when I asked him to be my boyfriend, I was already breaking my one rule of never getting involved.

The logical part of my brain recognized we could break up at any time and we didn't owe each other anything more than a chance for our relationship to become more. But I'd already done what I believed I couldn't; commit to one person.

Restlessness and a drive to be the best at whatever I set my mind to came from early in my childhood. I was off to do and see the next best thing, my attention incapable of being snagged by one place or on one person. The striving to see and do all, at my pace, without ties to limit my desires.

That itch to meet new people and experience new things has now turned out to be something I wanted to share with Ollie. My ambitions haven't changed, but they included the man who already held a piece of my heart.

As Ollie's lips scorched me in a kiss so hot it sent sparks up and down my spine, a familiar tingle of my release tightened my balls and made me clutch Ollie tighter.

"Fuck! I'm going to come soon, beautiful."

His hand wrapped around my dick and he stroked me with each thrust of his, the sensations becoming overwhelming. Without warning, my dick pulsed with a stream of come, locking up my body and taking me by complete surprise. The intensity of the release stole what little breath I had left, and I watched in awe as the first rope landed on my chest.

"Yes! Squeeze my cock. So good."

"Oh, hell!"

His encouragement, something I never thought I'd enjoy, caused my body to seize, holding him inside me. My entire body trembled as several more ropes shot out of me, but my panted answer became moans of delight when Ollie's thick cock swelled

inside me.

“Are you sure?—”

“Mark me, cariño mío!”

Ollie’s mouth slammed down on mine as the pulse of his cock spilled scorching come inside me, leaving me sobbing into his mouth as I clutched at him, keeping him close and experiencing each throb of his pleasure pouring inside me.

While my body tingled in the pleasant aftermath of the best sex I’ve ever experienced, my eyes closed and I listened to Ollie’s harsh breathing. His warmth moved off me a few minutes later, but I still throbbed from my intense orgasm, leaving me unable to move. I lay there recovering with only a small whimper of protest escaping my throat at his disappearance.

As I woke to a soft washcloth wiping away the evidence of our lovemaking, a sigh of contentment slipped out when Ollie covered us both with the comforter and slid in next to me, cuddling his head on my shoulder. Overwhelmed, yet relaxed, I pulled him close, kissing his forehead, and found my voice a few minutes later.

“Are you okay?”

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Ollie chuckled. “I think that’s supposed to be my question. I was a little rough at the end. How are you?”

“Well, there’s no need to move for the next several hours while I recover from the most intense orgasm I’ve ever experienced and my lungs feel as though I’ve run a marathon, but other than that, I’m perfect.”

“Yes, you are.”

The lightness in my chest expanded, and I wondered what I did in my past life to deserve this sweet man.

“You realize you’ve ruined me for anyone else. I’m looking forward to exposing you to an entire world of debauchery and if the experience is anything like this time, I’m going to hit the gym and start taking vitamins to keep up with you.”

I found him gorgeous when he tilted his head back and let out a genuine laugh. The entire time, his hand roamed over my chest, as if wanting to keep the connection strong between us.

“I can’t wait until you’re inside me.”

“Give me an hour and a half and some food. After that, I may have enough energy to rock your world.”

Another one of those addicting laughs escaped his throat as he shook his head. “You already did, so if it’s any consolation, there’s no pressure.”

As we lay there, surrounded by silence and our even breathing, something niggled in the back of my mind.

“I know we haven’t spoken a lot about my career and what it entails...” My words trailed off as worry grew in my chest.

“You’re right, we haven’t, but I sense it isn’t your career as much as your fame that’s niggling at you right now. What are you worried about?”

I’ve never met someone as observant and empathetic as Ollie, so of course he would understand.

“I know that if someone photographed us kissing, it has the possibility of turning your life upside down.”

A long minute stretched between us before Ollie gave me a soft smile and shook his head.

“Your fame is just that, yours alone. There’s no lurid information from my past and if the tabloids tried to dig for information, all they would find is a studious man with no social life. There’s no history of acting out, drugs, or anything that might make you look bad. I’m sure they’ll pull up information about my conservative parents, but I can’t foresee them speaking to the press about me. They hardly acknowledged me when I was under their roof. And if they learned about our relationship, I see it as more of a reason they’d keep their mouths shut.”

I had been holding my breath as I worried about Ollie and how the press would speculate about him, while he worried about me and the potential impact on my career.

“You, Oliver Bright, are an exquisite human being and I’m proud to be your friend

and boyfriend.”

His smile softened, and he pressed a kiss to my forehead.

“While I appreciate your sentiment, I’m guessing you’re going to point out something I might be missing?”

His thumb ran along my forehead and cheek as he waited, showing that I must’ve had worry etched on my face.

“The last thing I ever wanted was to turn your life upside down. If the press gets wind of our relationship, they may try to hurt you with the information they have proof of. Or, since I’m notorious for being a playboy, they’ll say hurtful things to get a negative reaction from you.”

His brows drew down as he searched my expression.

“Is our relationship exclusive, Connor?”

The rise of jealousy surged, running rampant through me at the thought of Ollie kissing or touching another man, which sent a thrum of pain and uneasiness through my chest.

“Yes. At least... I’m hoping we are. When I asked you to be my boyfriend, I might not have said it, but I will now. I will be loyal; there will be no straying, no cheating, no trying to make you jealous. When I decided I couldn’t live without you in my life, I committed myself to you.”

By the time I ended my declaration, Ollie’s eyes were bright with unshed tears, but the smile on his face caused my heart to skip a beat.

“Whatever they throw at us, whether it’s the truth or fiction, we’ll be on solid ground. It may have taken me twenty-two years to find you, but I refuse to allow someone who doesn’t know either of us to ruin what we have growing between us.”

“Even if?—”

“Connor, beautiful. If I have a concern, I promise to come to you and we’ll talk. As long as we communicate, we’ll be fine. And no, like I told you a hundred times, your past and the decisions you made are yours alone, and I will never judge you for them. But you’re committing to me as I am to you. No worries, beautiful.”

“Okay,” I agreed, the tension relaxing.

“Besides, I’ve grown a pretty thick skin when I grew up with the professors who taught me not to value the opinions of those who don’t matter in your life. Just promise me that if you have concerns, you come to me and we’ll get through it together. The last thing I want to do is jeopardize this relationship because of a misunderstanding.”

“Agreed,” I said.

Seeking both reassurance and wanting to be grounded, I leaned toward Ollie and brushed my lips against his. The jolt of throbbing need at the newness of his kisses turned into an underlying buzzing.

Ollie broke off when my stomach grumbled and he rolled out of bed.

“Food first, and then more sexy times.”

He laughed when I flopped back down on the bed and grunted. I threw off the covers and pointed at my obvious need.

“What about this?”

Ollie’s answering smirk and heated gaze snared my attention before he sauntered around the foot of the bed and headed toward the bathroom. He gave me a sly wink over his shoulder and said, “How about I suck you off in the shower as we clean off?”

After watching him disappear into the darkened room, it took me less than a second to decide I would follow that man into the depths of hell if he asked, and scrambled off the bed. I grunted as the sheet tangled around my ankle, but maneuvered out before I cracked my head open on the nightstand.

Flipping on the bathroom light, I almost choked on my tongue as Ollie, bare ass pressed against the counter, was stroking his hard cock with his head thrown back and his skin flushed.

“Why don’t you start the water warming?” He asked, voice rough.

Stumbling over to the shower without taking my eyes off the amazing sight, I flipped the handle and waited for the water to warm, and then held my hand out. Watching him push off the counter and amble his way over to me was the absolute sexiest sight I’ve ever seen. But when he reached me, he continued walking, herding me back into the shower before he dropped on his knees and, without preamble, sucked me down his throat.

Although I’d already come and hard, I stood on shaky legs as Ollie worshipped my cock with his fucking talented mouth. It was almost embarrassing when I felt the telltale tingle of the start of my release.

“Cariño mío. Come up here, I... need. To kiss you.”

He pulled off with a pop and stood. As I slung my arm around his waist and pulled him flush against me while wrapping my hand around both of us, rubbing precome from both of our cocks up and down, I devoured his mouth. I grew more addicted to him with each kiss.

Before long, Ollie stiffened in my arms as his cock throbbed in my hand. I followed behind, both of us still sipping at each other’s lips as we came down from our high.

“Shit, if I knew this is what a relationship was like, I’d have asked you to marry me the moment I heard you speak to the flight attendant.”

We rinsed off as Ollie shook his head. “I like to think we experience what we need to when the time is right. Besides, you had the instinct to ask me to live with you while I got my feet underneath me in L.A. and that’s how we built our friendship into something more. And marriage is an enormous step. How did the press react when Spencer and Lee got married?”

“Well, since his so-called best friend had outed Spencer in the press and then he and Lee gave an interview to *The Hollywood Reporter*, their marriage hadn’t made headlines because they kept it under wraps until they were ready to share their relationship had changed.

“But you’re right, the stories dealing with any change in a relationship make headlines. And marriage is a tremendous step. But given how I feel now, I’m sure we would have gotten to know each other to the point of friendship, even if it started off as sexual.”

Ollie shook his head as he snagged the towels, handing me one.

“Connor, beautiful. I think you needed to get to know me. Trust, especially with your heart, is something that takes time. We didn’t lose out and we have time in abundance now that we’re dating.”

After we dried ourselves off and dressed, I reached for his hand and led him downstairs and into the kitchen. The sun was even on the horizon.

“Why don’t you go out on the patio and I’ll get the food ready. We’ll enjoy our meal outside.”

Ollie hesitated a second before he leaned closer and kissed me on my cheek. After giving me his shy smile, he walked to the sliding glass doors and opened them, letting the fresh air inside, punctuated by brine from the ocean.

I grabbed the tamales along with the beans and rice, heated them up in the toaster oven, and walked both plates out to the patio. I retreated inside for two glasses and a pitcher of iced tea, grateful to know the man who meant more to me than I ever believed I deserved.

As we sat down for the impromptu dinner, I realized that the life I'd dismissed for years had been what I sought to have all along. But only with the man beside me.

10

OLLIE

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Unable to hide my smile as I spotted the logo of Black Canyon Films, I opened the door and entered a spacious lobby with marble floors, chrome railings on the stairs and framing the elevators, and included comfy black leather couches, loveseats, and chairs with slate end tables. Plants of various varieties placed near the windows, growing healthy and making it a welcoming, classy space.

But centered a few yards from the entrance, and the only way to enter the building, was a gigantic curved desk housing no less than six security guards. The men and women looked military, and because of what Connor told me about Spencer's ex-friend and the violence in which sent Mason to prison, I understood the need for added security.

The scanners blocked the right and left of the desk, preventing anyone from sneaking through. I walked toward the desk with telegraphed movements, not wanting to seem suspicious.

"Good morning. Who are you here to see?" A woman with slick dark hair pulled into a bun asked.

I gulped before I stepped forward and somehow found my voice.

"Um, yes. I'm here to see Spencer and Lee Atreus."

A sigh stuck in my throat, but I pushed it back when I received a tilt of the lips before she started typing. As she opened her mouth, a shout interrupted the conversation at hand.

“Ollie!”

With a smile on my face and my shoulders relaxing from around my ears, I turned to see Connor, who was supposed to be on location for a production.

“Hey, beautiful. Weren’t you supposed to be in Pasadena today?”

Connor, with a skip in his step, approached me and, without hesitation, pulled me into his arms before he dipped me for a kiss. I may have let out a little squeak, which he found amusing, and I did not. But when he pulled back several moments later, I was breathless and my body throbbed with restrained desire.

“They have it all in hand, so I came back early when Lee told me you would be visiting.”

He narrowed his eyes at me and asked, “A quick question. How did you get here?”

“Linus escorted me to the back of the property and walked me to Sam’s place. Then Thomas called a taxi for me. Oh, wait, never mind. I teleported here using my big brain. Yeah, that’s what happened.”

He growled, and I let out a sigh.

“They’re still camped outside?” He asked.

“It’s so weird. The news broke two days ago and they are curious about me and you, so they parked on your lawn, even though it’s not even a scandal or a career-ending disaster?”

“Yeah, but they earn a lot of money to stay informed about Hollywood and the players involved. And you’re not someone in their realm of knowledge, so to them,

they need to understand the mystery of who you are and where you came from. Which, by the way, are you sure Cheryl and Robert wouldn't sit down for an interview regarding their son's relationship in Hollywood with a man if they find out who you are with?"

I snorted and shook my head. "Oh, that reminds me. Angel said they called her and begged her to come back to work for them without offering a pay raise or any other incentive whatsoever. She's talked to her cousins who told her they are having a hard time at the college because when people ask about me, they tell them they don't talk to me anymore, but not the reason behind it. Angel said they aren't aware of where I'm living or haven't tried to find out. They haven't asked her once, but then again, my parents couldn't care less about me."

Connor's brows furrowed. "Does she want to move out here?"

"She refused when I offered to help set her up out here because her and her family are close, and she doesn't want to leave the area. But I know her dream, to own a restaurant, so I purchased her the spot she'd been hoping to buy for years. We'll have to fly there for her grand opening next year."

Someone cleared their throat and when both of us turned, we had six amused guards and all of their eyes were on me.

"Who's this cutie?"

Connor, who doesn't have a reason to feel any type of jealousy, glared at the man with biceps bigger than my leg, trying to look intimidating. Ignoring Connor, I held out my hand and said, "Ollie, nice to meet you..."

"Archie."

He shook my hand until a choked exclamation interrupted us.

“What?” A fellow guard had a gobsmacked expression.

With one last squeeze of my hand and a comical smirk on his face, my new friend turned to the shorter, but no less muscled, co-worker. “What’s wrong with my name?”

The man glanced at me, narrowed his eyes and studied my face, before his expression cleared. He stuck his hand out and said, “Edgar.”

I smiled as I took his hand. The other four introducing themselves as Connie, Ethel, Sacha, and George. All of them studied me with curiosity, and when I turned to Connor and lifted my brow in question, he laughed.

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“You charm everyone you meet, *cariño mío*,” he paused before he glanced at everyone else and said, “And I met him first. He’s my boyfriend, and no, I’m not sharing.”

My brow furrowed as I wondered if he had shared partners with any of them before, but I shook my head. It wasn’t my business.

“Lee told me you’d be here, but not why,” Connor said.

“Spencer wanted help with a script he likes, so I offered to read it after I finished writing this morning.”

“Come on up, I’ll show you his office,” Connor glanced at the guards. “Ollie has clearance to come and go as he pleases. Can you make him a badge so he can bypass security and head straight for the elevators?”

George said, “Already on it. Stop by when you leave, Ollie, and I’ll have it ready for you.”

“Thanks George. It was nice meeting all of you.”

Connor cupped my elbow and ushered me toward the bank of elevators, pressing the up button. When the doors closed after we walked in, I said, “You didn’t have to give me special privileges.”

Pressing me against the wall, he tilted his head and kissed me, causing all thoughts to flee and leaving me with only need. I clung to his shoulders as he plundered my

mouth, and it felt exhilarating.

As he pulled back to breathe, his arms caged me in as he leaned his forehead against mine.

“I missed you, cariño mío.”

A startled smile burst wide, and I clutched his waist, pulling him against me as I nuzzled his neck with my nose.

“That’s sweet to hear. I’m glad I saw you here. I am happy you’re not on location all day.”

“Yeah, they had it handled.”

The ding signaled we arrived, and with reluctance, I dropped my arms and waited for Connor to lead me off. Instead, he captured my gaze. His expression was as serious as I’ve ever seen it. Before I could ask, he stood upright and reached for my hand, leading me into an opulent reception area.

“Oh.”

Connor turned his smile toward me. “You like it?”

“It has more personality than the marble and chrome downstairs, but I understand why it looks utilitarian down there.”

He nodded and led me to the curved wooden desk, half the size of the one in the lobby.

“And this is Andy, knower and seer of all around here. Andy, this is my boyfriend,

Ollie.”

I raised my hand to wave when Andy jolted to his feet and came around the desk, his face beaming with a smile. As small, yet powerful arms wrapped around me, I hugged back, amused at the warm welcome.

“Oh, my goodness. It’s so nice to meet you, Ollie! I’ve heard all about you from Connor and Spencer, and I’ve read all of your books. They are spectacular.”

It was unfortunate I had the same reaction whenever someone said they enjoyed one of my books. I peered down and blinked until the wetness dried up.

“That’s very sweet of you to say, Andy. And it’s wonderful to meet you. How’s your day going?”

Connor wrapped his arms around my waist from behind, his chin on my shoulder.

“Spectacular now that you’re here.”

Liking Andy’s energy and seeing why the actors hired him to be the face of the entire production studio, I asked, “Maybe when you’re free, we can get coffee and talk?”

I never made friends as easily as I had since coming to California, but with the genuine happiness and an energy I liked, I accepted his business card and I promised, “I’ll text you.”

The phone rang then, and with one last squeeze of my hand, he headed around and answered. Connor led me around the desk and to the right, where I glanced around. There were two conference rooms with frosted glass on either side of the reception area.

“Staff offices are to the left, while Spencer and Lee share the big office, and Kaid and I have separate spaces next door. There’s a full service kitchen with several coffee options in between the conference rooms. Do you want a coffee?”

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I shook my head. “Three’s my limit. Plus, your mom loves the pour over carafe I got her, and won’t let me get away without sharing.”

“Ollie,” Spencer said as he came out of his office and walked right into my arms.

With a hug and a pat on his back, he laid his head on my shoulder. As he settled in, I rubbed his back to give him some comfort as I noticed tension running through him.

“What’s wrong?”

Lee stepped out after his husband with a mischievous smile on his face, but crossed his arms and leaned against the doorframe.

“There’s something about this story. I can’t quite put my finger on whether I like the twist, but the writing is spectacular. There’s a major thing that happens right after the midpoint, but it doesn’t explain my trepidation. I love the characters... But I give up. Maybe you’ll see what I’m missing.”

We all piled into the larger office and Lee handed me a script. I sat down and started reading, getting a clear picture in my head as I lost myself in the story. It was around the midpoint where the protagonist reverted to his old self, and my brain screeched to a halt with the changes. I glanced up and blinked to see the three men staring at me.

“Oh, sorry about that. I lose myself whenever I read.”

Spencer waved this away, and he asked, “So, what’s wrong with it?”

“The man is an asshole, uncaring to the feelings of others when the story starts out, but some part of him is also relatable. He’s sleeping his way through the entire population, which is a start to a hero arc. Through trials, he becomes the snarky hero we all love, but when he cheats, which is a no-no in romance, especially a romantic comedy with no dark elements, it kills the desire we have to follow him throughout the rest of the story. At that point, there is no absolving him of his ‘discretion.’ But there’s something that spurs me to read on, despite my misgivings.”

Spencer nodded. “Yes, that’s what bothered me too, but I can’t figure out how to fix it.”

I reflected about it for a minute before I answered, “What I can’t shake and pulled me out of the story is that I want him to succeed and I’m not as shocked by the cheating the longer I stew about it. If you want to keep the story as is, the protagonist needs to redeem himself, some action or proof the love interest will accept, and he’ll have to work through the rest of his time on screen to deal with the fallout, and allowing himself to be vulnerable by the end. But let me read the rest.”

Spencer took notes and nodded as I went back to the screenplay.

When I finished, I blinked.

“I can see what the writer was trying to do. Instead of ‘the love interest cheats and they break up with them because they are horrible,’ it becomes romantic and a solid relationship when he goes through the trials, all of which makes him realize how sorry he is for his actions. Yes, it’s jarring when it happens, but when you understand no one is perfect and all relationships are a work in progress and need constant communication to work, it makes sense for his story. It has a great emotional impact and is memorable.”

“So, no changes?” Spencer asked.

“Despite my heart hurting during the part where he admits his infidelity, this story is the writer’s interpretation of how they would handle the situation or have in this same way. The painful and humbling aspect is that you never hear the story from the perspective of someone who deals with their partner cheating. And there are people who choose to stay. It might be a powerful movie if done right,” I concluded.

Lee cleared his throat and said, “It’s true. In the past, whenever I came up with worst-case scenarios where my partner cheated, the knee-jerk reaction would be to break up with them, deal with the grief, and move on with someone else or by yourself, whatever the choice. The way this story plays out is intriguing, if portrayed in a heartfelt way.”

Curious, I glanced up when Spencer stood from his desk, rounded the corner where Lee stood, and proceeded with a kiss so dirty I chuckled and glanced away.

My eyes landed on Connor, who sat next to me with a contemplative expression. I reached over and squeezed his hand. “What it is, beautiful?”

As if pulled out of deep thoughts, he shook his head and said, “This might be perfect for both of us.”

Both Spencer and Lee panted when they broke apart, but turned to Connor.

“Con?” Lee asked.

He swallowed as his eyes met mine. I gave his hand an encouraging squeeze.

“Over the last year, I’ve been curious about transitioning into the director’s chair. I’m not giving up acting, but I would like the challenge being a director would pose. Would you guys trust me with this project?”

Lee nodded.

Spencer scoffed.

My smile was so huge, my cheeks hurt, but I was proud of my man for taking this chance.

“Connor, when I envisioned opening this production studio, all I wanted was the freedom to not only give people a voice without the run around given by the typical Hollywood elite, and to work on projects I believe in. If this script is something you want to tackle, and Lee will agree with me, then you should be the director,” Spencer said.

Lee chimed in. “Besides, I’ve seen you interact with your directors along with the crew, other actors, and even catering. I’ve never seen another actor getting along with everyone like you do, because you’re a genuine, nice guy. It will be a net positive to have someone who would look out after everyone on set.”

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“What would Kaid think about it? He should get a say in this decision.”

Lee picked up his cell and texted. A minute later, Kaid entered through the door with a brow raised. The suspicious look disappeared when he noticed me.

“Hey, Ollie. Doing good?”

Standing, I approached the staid man and gave him a hug, which he returned.

“Yeah, but this is between you four.” I turned toward Spencer and asked, “Should I step outside?”

Connor snagged my thigh and directed me to sit on his lap. I lost my balance, and it allowed him to wrap me up and cuddle me.

“I guess not,” Spencer laughed. “Besides, you’ve read the script and we don’t keep secrets from our partners.”

Kaid gave a twitch of his lip, but otherwise didn’t comment. I knew he was thinking about Lewis and I wondered, although I kept quiet, how their relationship was going.

“What’s going on?” Kaid asked.

“Connor wants to direct a movie, and Lee and I think he’d be perfect for it.”

If there was any surprise, he didn’t display any signs of it. “Which one?”

Spencer handed the script I'd been reading over the man, and he raised his brow, turning to Connor. "I understand wanting to do something new. But this is a heavy story, especially the cheating. Is that a subject you want to cover?"

"It's where the second part of my idea comes in. I think with Ollie as the script supervisor, working alongside the person who wrote the script, and with suitable actors for the roles, yeah, I think the story would come alive on screen with enough emotional resonance to draw the audience into the theaters in droves," Connor said.

Stunned, I stood and faced Connor. "What?"

He linked our fingers together and smiled the soft, genuine smile I've seen every day since we became boyfriends. But Spencer drew my attention away from Connor's pleading eyes.

"Oh, oh. Yeah, I should have thought about that. That's perfect. You two working together is a great idea. Ollie understands what the scriptwriter wanted to convey, even giving the entire story a read before making a judgement. It's that attention to detail that will benefit you as the director, Con. Yeah, that's perfect," Spencer said.

Kaid nodded and handed me the script. "That's all I needed to hear. I approve of both positions. Good luck and let me know if you need anything."

Determination was my predominate emotion when I nodded at Kaid. "Thanks. I'll find out whatever the script supervisor does and it'll be my pleasure to work with Connor to get this movie made."

After that, my brain was a whirlwind of disjointed thoughts about how I would fill the position I didn't even know was a thing until Connor suggested it. I pulled out my phone and started down the rabbit hole of research. It was exciting. I'd help make the movie come alive for Connor.

By the time I finished, the list on my phone was a mile long. I glanced up and blinked when Connor pressed a kiss to the top of my head.

“I’ve been thinking about how much work this will be for you, but what happens if it cuts into your writing time?”

The honest, worried expression on his face squeezed my heart in my chest, and for a long moment, I forgot to breathe. Connor, underneath the exterior renowned movie star, both beautiful and gracious, had a heart of gold. He loved with a fierce loyalty, wanted the best for strangers and friends alike, and still had room to pursue his dreams. I wanted what was best for Connor, and I’d do whatever I had to for them to become a reality.

“Beautiful. I have a laptop and can work anywhere. I’m in this with you.”

Spencer cleared his throat. “Besides, with how systemized Ollie is with writing his books, you’ll have a schedule of things you need to get through each day, with some time for creative expression. It’s a learning experience and I hope you aren’t putting too much pressure on yourself to make things perfect.”

A brilliant, beaming smile lit up Connor’s expression. “No, thrilled to get started, to be honest. I know it’ll be a lot of work, but I’m looking forward to it. I’ll take the script home and read it again, making notes. And I’ll contact Ava Inoue and get her started on the casting call outs.”

“And think about the crew you want to hire. When you’re settled in the next couple of weeks, we’ll announce production starting soon with you as director. Do you have any idea who might play the lead?” Spencer asked.

I’ve seen Connor excited, tired, sad, angry, and turned on, but the hesitation on his face as he glanced back through the doorway Kaid left through brought a realization.

“Oh,” I whispered, nodding.

Connor met my eyes and agreed. “Yeah.”

Lee caught on and said, “Kaid would be perfect for the role. But if it happens, we need to support him through the trying scenes. A great way would be to hire Lewis as the caterer, so he’d be close by whenever Kaid needs emotional support.”

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“But isn’t he still filming the action movie?” I asked.

Spencer shook his head. “They finished last week. But he hired on Lewis to be his live-in chef, even though he would stay without getting paid. But that’s a problem for another time. I’m excited for you, Con. I think this will be a great opportunity. And if you need any help, just let us know.”

Connor stood and wrapped Spencer in a hug before moving to Lee. He then linked his fingers with mine and pulled me closer.

“I appreciate your support. I’ll figure out a way to convince Kaid to star in the movie, and give him a say on who he’d like to be his co-star, but I’ll leave it a few days. In the meantime, Ollie and I are off to have dinner. Thanks again.”

Excitement thrummed through me as we left the building, Connor leading me to his SUV. Before he started the car, he asked, “Where would you like to go for dinner?”

I shook my head. “We should head home and tell your family. You know mama would want to hear about your first directorial debut from you.”

Not proud of myself, but a squeak escaped me when Connor grabbed my waist and maneuvered me to straddle his lap. He cupped my face and when his tongue teased my bottom lip; I opened for him, once again overwhelmed by his kiss. My arms draped over his shoulders and I whimpered as he tilted his head and deepened the kiss. Unable to help myself, I ground my hard dick against his stomach, moaning into Connor’s mouth as my brain became fuzzy with need.

Breathless and gasping for air as we pulled apart, I couldn't help my cheeks heating at the desperation on his face.

“What?”

“You, cariño mío, are good for my heart.”

It took every ounce of control not to blurt out how much he meant to me. Falling for Connor would be as easy as taking a breath. Hell, in the recesses of my deepest thoughts, I could admit to losing my heart to this man at his first encouraging smile when we met. But being able to keep the man was a novel concept, and I wasn't sure I'd be lucky enough.

“I'm proud of you for voicing your desire to direct. And you know your mom will be thrilled. Especially if we decide to film here. But that's your decision and I'm on board for anything you decide.”

I returned to my seat and tilted my lips up when he reached for my hand, laying it on his lap, before he started the SUV and drove us toward home. With my thoughts on what I read about the position, making the movie come alive and keeping the schedule on track seemed like a new challenge, one I would take on with gusto. And bringing a story to life is another positive.

As Connor parked, I blinked, pulling myself out of my thoughts, to see I took notes on my phone.

“Ready?”

A smile lit me up from the inside, and I nodded. “Oh, have the paparazzi left?”

“There wasn't anyone outside. Despite my lurid past, I've never created a suspicion

for them to stay very long. And if we confirm nothing to the press, then there is no story.”

Connor hopped out, and I followed. When we entered the kitchen, it was to loud voices and laughter, and I noticed even Sam and Thomas were in the kitchen.

“Hey, mama.”

She gave us a smile when she noted our linked hands, but unlike every other time, she clapped her hands and asked, “What are you two so excited about?”

“I’m going to direct my first film,” Connor said.

I waited with a small smirk and laughed aloud when the room erupted in cheers. The triplets threw themselves at Connor, who held him close as they cuddled him. Next, his mama gripped him tight and kissed him on the cheek, her face beautiful with the proud smile. Both of his sisters kissed him on the cheek, and even Sam pulled Connor into a hug.

“And... Ollie is going to be my script supervisor on his first Hollywood production.”

“Holy shit,” Landon exclaimed, then flinched when his mama slapped the back of his head.

Linus lunged forward, and I hugged him. “This is so cool. We didn’t know you wanted?—”

“Spencer called me in for help with a script, and when I read it through, I enjoyed it. So did Connor. And when he volunteered to direct, he also volunteered me to be a script supervisor.” I leaned closer and whispered, “No clue what the position is like, but I want to find out. If I can help Connor with his directorial debut, all the better.”

“We’ll visit you on set, and you can put us to work,” Lyric said.

Connor huffed, “You’ve never offered to help me during a production.”

“You’re protective of us, Con. But we’re almost eighteen, and we know how to take care of ourselves. We can use this experience as something to put on our college applications, and it’ll get us out of study hall and credit us with work study since we’ve taken all the required classes needed to graduate. Besides, Ollie’s our favorite person and if he’s going to be away from home most of the time, we’re coming with,” Landon said.

“Fine,” Connor huffed, but the happiness shone from the brilliant smile on his face, knowing his brothers would be close.

“Let’s celebrate,” Valentina announced.

11

CONNOR

Ollie, still laughing at the whispers from the triplets before I lured him upstairs, looked up at me when the door shut behind us and I pressed my body to his, sinking into him, as I took his mouth in a deep kiss. It was a testament to how easy going Ollie was because he draped his arms around my shoulders and pulled me closer. He was never shy about sharing affection with me.

The night was an all out celebration with arepas, which mama makes on special occasions, along with her famous cheese enchiladas, and my favorite, mole de pollo.

On top of my and Ollie’s good news, Thomas relayed he convinced Sam he’d been working himself into exhaustion and they needed time to build their relationship, so he took his required vacation days before he lost them altogether, and for the next three weeks, he planned on moving his boyfriend into his home and catching up on all the TV shows and movies he’d missed out on. Because of his rare reprieve from work, he dropped his sometimes overbearing persona as our older brother and enjoyed the night with us. It was great to see him snuggled up to Thomas, and for the first time in years, I watched as he relaxed and allowed himself to just be with the family.

The triplets lured Omi and Emilia into a game of Twister, which ended up in a hilarious sprawl of bodies on the floor. Ollie, something I could attest to, was more

limber than any of the others, so it ended up in a sibling contest to beat my boyfriend. Mama encouraged them by spinning for them, laughing whenever anyone became competitive, and in my family, meant always.

It was the most fun I had with my family in years.

But now, alone with the one man who brought us all closer together and drew out the possessive beast inside me to claim him, I couldn't get enough of him.

Kissing had never been a requirement for fucking. But with this man, slotting our lips together as I absorbed his moans, amped up my need by a thousand-fold and I reached underneath his shirt and caressed the silky skin on his back.

Why was this man so addictive?

I'd never been what the tabloids suspected; a flighty man who hopped from project to project and person to person. My interest wasn't static and as I told Spencer when we had a press tour in South Korea, there wasn't anyone who drew my attention for more than a day.

But Ollie, being himself, changed everything. He learned about me, got involved in my life and all the craziness that came with it, and instead of changing, he became as protective of me as I was of him.

"Connor, please," he begged.

Without waiting another second, I slid my fingers into the back of his hair and squeezed. I slanted my mouth and devoured him as he whimpered, clutching his fists into my shirt, yanking me closer, and pressing us together from chest to hips. His hardness against mine elevated the need that grew inside me each time we touched, even as innocent as holding hands with this man.

“Fuck, cariño mío, you drive me insane. Can I be inside you this time?”

“Yes,” Ollie breathed.

He trailed kisses from my mouth down to my neck, where he started sucking a mark on my skin, before he stilled.

“Sorry.”

A harsh breath escaped my mouth, and I lifted his chin and swept my tongue against his lips, loving the whimper I drew from his throat.

“You can mark me. Bite me, I don’t care as long as you’re touching me.”

Without another plea, I moved my hands underneath his tee and slid his shirt up, loving the muscles underneath. At first glance, the man with messy hair, cute as hell glasses, and preferring the casual style of tees and jeans seemed nerdy. Underneath, he had defined muscles on a compact, skinny body that lit a desire in me, flaring out of control whenever I had permission to touch.

Taking my advice, he leaned closer, shoved my shirt halfway up my chest, and bit down on a nipple, causing my body to jerk and precome to dribble from my already interested and throbbing cock.

As a man who prided myself on control of my partner’s pleasure, I was one breath away from spilling in my boxer briefs. Before I succumbed to the ultimate pleasure of being touched by Ollie, an idea of how I could make my man shout came to mind.

My hands cupped his face, bringing him up to feast on his swollen lips, as Ollie’s hands refused to stay in one place. We broke apart only to get our shirts off, and if the glint in his eyes didn’t allow insight into his plans, then his actions as he bent his

knees enlightened me. Instead of letting him do as he pleased, I shook my head and reached over to strip him of the rest of his clothing along with mine.

“Connor, I want you in my mouth.”

A harsh chuckle escaped my throat. “I was thinking the same thing.”

With a strength I seldom used with my lovers, I gripped Ollie’s waist and lifted him to settle on the bed. With one hand on his chest, I tilted my lips in a tantalizing smile, which never failed to draw a sharp breath from his throat before he relaxed, lust overwhelming him.

I scrambled onto the bed, lying on my back, before I lifted him by the waist and had him straddle my face.

“What...” Ollie choked.

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Before he completed his question, I found his pink pucker and swiped a tongue against his entrance, holding him steady when he jerked in my hold. Then I feasted; both on the tangy taste of his skin and the sounds I drew from him as my tongue traveled from his pucker to his taint.

“This is so...” His statement ended on a moan, and I was thrilled when he jerked his hips back and forth, seeking more pleasure from me.

My hands traveled from his waist and down to his ass. The man had the cutest bubble butt, not at all matching his slim size, but luscious and delectable all the same. In normal circumstances, my actions would be a means to an end; to get Ollie loose enough to stuff him with my cock and make him lose his mind as he clung to me.

But as he sought his pleasure, I wanted nothing more than to take my time, savoring this moment that was much more than a normal fuck. He made all the difference.

Although my cock was throbbing and leaking precome, I ignored it in favor of listening to Ollie beg me for more.

“It’s indecent and sexy as all fuck. Fuck, Connor, please, I need something more.”

I pressed kisses against the soft skin of his inner thigh, but my feasting wasn’t over yet. Needing more, I tilted his hips and sucked one ball into my mouth, tonguing it before moving onto the other one. My hand searched for the bottle I set somewhere near the pillow after our early morning frotting session and coated my fingers. Not leaving Ollie without my touch, I circled around his saliva slicked hole and slid the tip of my finger inside.

His hips jerked forward before settling back, driving my finger deeper inside of him, and having both of us moaning at the action.

“Yes!” He shouted.

As he sought pleasure from both my fingers inside him and me tonguing his taint while catching the rim of his hole, I loved how responsive he was to my touch.

“Another,” Ollie demanded.

Not willing to deny either of us what we both craved, I spent the next few minutes fucking him open with my fingers as I inhaled his scent, now stronger with a fine sheen of sweat clinging to his skin as he fucked himself on my fingers and seeking pleasure from my tongue.

As I teetered on the edge of the pleasure and pain that comes from self-denial, my cry pierced the air when Ollie’s hand encircled my penis and stroked me from base to tip. Unable to take another minute without my being inside Ollie, I gripped his hips and flipped him onto his back as the momentum had me following him.

The wrecked expression on the younger man’s face unleashed the beast I’d controlled since I claimed Ollie for myself. His chest heaved with his quick inhale and exhales, the lids of his eyes lowered to half mast, looking wrecked, sexy-as-fuck, and mine.

“Ready to take my cock?” I growled.

Rather than answer with words, he gripped the back of his thighs and held his knees by his head, leaving him exposed to my view.

I knee-walked forward, holding my cock and squeezing the base to prevent the throbbing from becoming release. With my gaze on his face to see his reaction, I

rubbed the head against his lube-slicked entrance.

His answering whimper caused me to do something out of the ordinary, but the obscene nature of it encouraged the move. I slapped my cock against his hole and taint, which made my man release the filthiest moan I've ever heard in my life.

Fuck this! I need this man more than my next breath.

Still with half of my brain firing, the other half devastated by how sexy Ollie looked as he lay below me, I shoved two fingers inside him, seeking his prostate, and grinning with an evil smile as I found the spot, leaving my man shaking and clinging to me. He whimpered when I removed them, but watched me with avid curiosity as I slicked up my cock before lining up the head against his entrance.

Before he could take his next breath, I punched my hips forward and sunk all the way inside him, my senses only coming back to me once my balls were resting against the curve of his ass.

I cursed myself for the lack of caution. I mean, I was inside Ollie, who was becoming everything to me, and still thought about my pleasure alone. And my dick was the first in his tight hole.

“Oh, fuck, cariño mío! Are you okay?”

The seductive hum along with his pornographic smirk almost made me come inside him. My balls pulled up, which made me close my eyes and think about... well, fucking anything to keep my mind off what I wanted.

Fuck, fuck, fuck... don't come.

It became a mantra, which stuttered to a halt at his next question.

“Why haven’t you been inside me before now?”

My mind swam with an exorbitant amount of pleasure, which muddled my thoughts as Ollie’s question rolled around in my pleasure filled brain, never gaining traction. I cocked my head as I looked at his flushed cheeks, half-lidded eyes, and the tilt of his lips in pure bliss, and I knew I had no answer for his question.

As I contemplated the impossible subject of how I’d gone this long without knowing Ollie in this most carnal of ways, my hips shifted back and my breath caught in my chest as Ollie squeezed me, keeping me inside him.

“This... because by being inside you is enough for me to lose my mind. Trust me, I’m all about pleasure, but there’s something about being inside you, this connected to you, that makes me a selfish bastard who wants one thing, and I’m afraid of you not being with me every step of the way.”

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And when I thought I had the thread of sanity under my control, taut and unwavering, Ollie rocked my world.

He tightened his legs around my waist and squeezed. That was enough to make me grunt and pray I didn't come inside him, but then he somehow flipped us until I found myself on my back, blinking up at a flushed and amused Ollie sitting astride my lap, with me still deep inside him.

When he rolled his hips and clutched me tighter, head thrown back in pure ecstasy, as his chest and abs flushed with pleasure, I groaned aloud as my entire body throbbed and pushed me to the edge.

“Oh, beautiful. Trust me, there isn't any feeling better than you inside of me,” he paused and placed his hands on my chest, his bright blue eyes holding me in place, before he continued, “but I haven't ridden you yet, so the possibilities are endless.”

While with other lovers, I might have pulled back, distancing myself, which signaled to my partners that the lightning fast attraction between us burned out soon after release. But with Ollie, there would be no casual move to put my hands behind my head, smirking as if I knew a secret they would never be privy to.

Instead, my hands spanned around his hips and started caressing the swell of his ass, up to his back, as he arched into my touch, before I leaned up and pressed an open-mouthed kiss over his heart.

His breath hitched in his chest before he let out a breathless, “You are ever the romantic, Connor Blake.”

But then we both lost the ability to speak when Ollie lifted off my dick, which looked obscene and the hottest thing I've seen as the muscles of his thighs tightened under my hands before he slammed back down, swallowing my groan with his luscious mouth taking mine.

"Everything is more intense with you. Kisses are drugging and addictive. And being inside you gives me a sense of rightness, as though I'm in the right place at the exact right time. But then I dream about missing out on meeting you. What if I... fuck, yes, do that again!" I demanded.

His ass bounced up and down, and his slight movements sparked my nerve endings, which made my balls pull up, leaving me so close to coming. The answering smile, which to me was a cross between naughty and innocent, did nothing to help with calming my body down.

"We need to place mirrors around the room. It's a tragedy. I can't see your ass as you ride me. But then again, I'd come from the sight alone, and I'm trying hard not to right now."

Ollie huffed out a laugh, which caused crazy things to happen to his body intimately connected with mine, sending the heat between us into the stratosphere. My finger brushed against his stretched entrance and set off a chain reaction.

"Fuck!" Ollie shouted.

My arm tightened around him as I played with his sensitive rim, savoring the full body shudder as he squeezed his hole against my cock, milking it for the release I struggled to hold back.

He slammed his mouth against mine and a splash of come marked my abs while my cock became trapped inside him like a vice. There was a rushing sound in my ears

and my body seized up, crushing him to me, as I released deep inside the man whimpering above me.

There were several shouts, either from him or me I couldn't tell, and my head swam with the sensations I couldn't put into words, much less make sense of in the moment. All I knew was the essential; Ollie gave me his weight as he plastered his chest to mine, and he was the one person I needed more than breathing.

"Am I too heavy?" Ollie asked several minutes later.

Not able to form words, I tightened my arms around his back and shook my head back and forth. I kissed his shoulder and neck and moaned when I softened enough to slip out of him, disappointed I couldn't live inside the man, connecting us every moment of the day.

My feelings have surged since that fateful day I asked him to be my boyfriend. And with the swirling combination of too many emotions for this man and coming down off the high of the best release of my life left me clingy.

He huffed another laugh against my neck. "I'm fine staying here for the rest of my days, but my come will get sticky and feel gross in about five minutes."

I hummed, "I may let you up soon, but right now, I need you. Need this."

Rather than fight for me to let him up, Ollie placed his hands on my chest and laid his chin on the top of one, his eyes glinting their brilliant blue as if the sun brought out the light color. But Ollie's emotions, always at the forefront, along with his gorgeous smile, directed at me, caused me to lose another piece of my heart.

"Take all the time you need, beautiful. I'm not going anywhere."

Without realizing, I'd fallen asleep, comforted by Ollie's closeness as I came down off the high I experienced each time we made love. But when I came to and blinked open my eyes, he wasn't next to me and a surge of adrenaline shot fear through my chest.

It was then I heard him humming. It was the universal sign Ollie came up with a fantastic idea for his new book and needed to get it down.

Rather than interrupt his thoughts, I took stock. He must've cleaned me after he left the bed, because there was no trace of dried come on my stomach. He'd tucked me in and I held onto a pillow, commonplace whenever I woke up without Ollie in bed with me.

For a non-relationship guy for twenty-six years of my life, I maneuvered from a man who preferred his own space whenever sex wasn't involved into a grade A clinger. The thought of someone and my usual type before Ollie came into my life defined the word temporary, snuggled against me for an entire night while I lay vulnerable, gave me shivers of pure dread.

The keyboard, a constant clatter only a moment ago, paused, and I blinked one eye open and targeted Ollie, who gave me an amusing smirk as he glanced away from his computer.

“Cariño mío, why are you all the way over there?”

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“I’m trying to be good and let you sleep, since we were up too late celebrating last night. We’re going to be running around for the next half a year to a year getting this production up and running, so I might as well write when the sensation struck. Besides, last night gave me several ideas for my newest book. That, and I needed an excuse to stop myself from feasting on your ass before plunging inside you when you were nice and loose.”

My eyes closed as a groan poured out of me when I pictured the exact sensations, having experienced it many times before. While used to vigorous sex, being with Ollie and him matching my appetites ramped up my need. Either fuck him senseless or the other way round. I wasn’t picky.

The blanket I’d snuggled into when I’d fallen asleep slipped from my naked body, exposing me to Ollie’s gaze. Not above teasing my man, I wiggled my ass, encouraging him to touch me. But I cut off a clipped curse as Ollie’s talented fingers spread me open, not hesitating when he flattened his tongue against my heated skin and licked a swath over my hole. I pushed back on his tongue when a dribble of precome leaked from the head of my already throbbing cock, and I let out a moan, encouraging more.

“Can you come just from this? Can I try?” He asked.

Without giving me time to think about the question, much less answer, he tapped my hip with his hand and said, “Raise up a little on your knees. I want to suck on your balls.”

There was no teasing with Ollie. He dove into new experiences with a gusto that

sometimes left me in awe, and he was never shy in bed.

Since he became my boyfriend, I'd relinquished control without having to think about whether Ollie enjoyed our time together or wondering when it would end. It was as easy as breathing with Ollie. Letting go and enjoying myself, knowing he lost himself to the sensations as much as I did.

But there was more.

Something I never thought I could feel for another person, especially so soon after beginning my first meaningful relationship. My heart swelled with emotion whenever I was with Ollie and longed for him when he was absent. With each passing day, I knew what it meant, but I wasn't able to acknowledge, even to myself, what my feelings were.

Until I was ready to express what I held in my heart toward the man who changed my life and my outlook for the future, I would do everything in my power to show him in ways I couldn't say aloud.

And minutes later, as I shouted my release, Ollie was there to hold me, allowing me a bit of the lightness he held in his heart.

I would do and say anything to be with this man, grateful for that fateful day on a routine flight home.

12

CONNOR

The transition from actor to director was the hardest, most fulfilling change I've made in my career. And I accounted a hundred percent of that to Ollie.

Along with his organizational skills and brilliant contributions to the script, he strengthened the impact of the story and made filming a breeze. He met and befriended every single person in front of and behind the camera, which formed a tight bond on set. Ollie made everyone feel equally important as the person standing next to them.

And we worked well together. Through casting both the key players and the extras, hiring the experienced crew; who once they met Ollie, volunteered to work with us despite how green I was in the position.

For the first time on set, I learned names and faces, listened to their experiences and gained insights on how to make setting up a shot and filming the sensitive content much easier. After working on the movie for close to a month, I found myself as relaxed and included as if we all were family.

Speaking of family, even the Landon, Lyric, and Linus became invaluable parts of the crew.

Lyric worked with the camera operators, learning about positioning and how to capture the scene.

Landon bounced between all the jobs, helping whenever someone needed it, and making friends with everyone.

Linus had two departments he found he liked. Costume design and the makeup department. He absorbed everything he saw, and when they set him loose on the light touches of Kaid's makeup, the head of the makeup department welcomed his help and even offered him a position if he wanted it.

Gracie even came aboard as the line producer. The camaraderie on set grew stronger as my boyfriend and his best friend become the support system for all the cast and

crew, and since the subject was a heavy one, both kept up a constant stream of contact, ready to get a therapist on set if the story's subject became too stressful.

The one unknown when we started auditions was adding actress Adalyn Campbell-Parker as Kaid's co-star and love interest. Although I never worked with her, former co-stars contacted me and advised against hiring her as Kaid's love interest, citing her reputation for being difficult.

But Ollie and I agreed to meet with her at the Black Rock Production offices. The last thing Ollie would allow was past rumors to affect someone's future.

"Mrs. Campbell-Parker?" Ollie inquired when a statuesque honey-blonde walked tall beside Andy as he escorted her in and introduced her. "I'm Ollie, the script supervisor, and this is Connor, the director. It's nice to meet you."

She gave him a small smile and nodded to me. As Ollie led the way into my office, I waited until she settled on the chair before I placed a hand on Ollie's back and directed him next to me on the loveseat next to the window.

"It's just Campbell. And please call me Addie. Thank you for giving me a chance to play this part. The script differs from what I look for, but it's a challenge I'd like to take on."

"I'm so happy you see the potential in the story. Have you worked with Kaid Landry before?"

She blinked at Ollie. Because anyone in charge of making a movie learned the resumes of the actors and who they've worked with in previous films.

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But something about Ollie's disarming question had her relaxing back in her seat. A few seconds later, she shook her head. "No, I haven't worked with either Kaid or Connor here."

"Well, I see it as an opportunity to learn from each other. This is my first time anywhere near a movie set and it's Connor's directorial debut. And with the spectacular support that Spencer, Lee, Connor, and Kaid have taken Black Rock, I'm excited to see how this movie turns out.

"And while I know it's not customary to offer something in such a professional setting, but I would love to be here for you if you ever need a sounding board or a shoulder to cry on. We both want to support those who work on this film and understand there are off days where your heart or head aren't present. We feel there's no need to keep issues to yourself, especially if we are here to help, even if it's just a conversation or a pep talk."

With the knowledge that Ollie's way of connecting with people stood out among the typical Hollywood crowd, my heart lurched in my chest when her face crumpled and tears streamed down her face. Ollie, without hesitation, pulled her into his arms and rubbed her back as she sobbed against him. I stood there, horrified that we might have caused this reaction.

"Oh, honey. Whatever's wrong, we can figure it out." My boyfriend's kind words only made her cry harder.

After a few minutes, she pulled back and accepted the tissue Ollie handed her.

“Sorry—”

“No, please don’t apologize. If you want to talk about it, whatever you say will never leave this room. And if you’re not ready, that’s fine too. Our door is always open.”

She cleared her throat, and I somehow expected her to get back to business, but because Ollie was Ollie, she gripped his hands and admitted, “I found out about a year ago my husband has an entire other family with two kids who live only an hour away from where we... where I live. Of course, I filed for divorce, but he’s been contesting everything from the house to the money I’ve made to support us, and my lawyer is a moron. Although I believed my husband was supporting me by not working and helping me during my career, it turned out he was just stealing from me. I’m so fucking dumb.”

“No, you’re not,” I said. “You put your faith in someone who was supposed to love you and support you, but he put his own selfish needs first. But I know someone who can help you out.”

I texted Emilia as Ollie clapped his hands together. “His sister is vicious for her clients and will connect you with someone of equal ferocity to represent you. You’re in excellent hands.”

I have an employee who needs a better divorce lawyer. You can’t do it because of the conflict of interest, but who’s the next best to you?

Why?

Husband cheated, has an entire other family, but has taken her money over the years.

My sister, despite hating the term, was a champion for women, or of anyone who needed help. She wouldn’t stand for this and several seconds later, my phone rang.

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Nope, can you help?”

“Yes. Put her on the phone.”

Before I did, I said, “Addie, this is my sister, Emilia. She’s a sought after divorce attorney and she’ll put you in contact with one of the best to represent you. Would you like to speak to her?”

“Yes, please.”

I handed her my cell and rose at the same time Ollie had, and with a firm hand on his back, we exited the office, closing the door to give Addie some privacy.

As we walked into the conference room next to my office, I asked, “What do you think?”

“To be honest, I think she’s perfect for the part. Despite being drop dead gorgeous, she has the vulnerability we’ve been looking for. But if the thought of the story hurting her... well, we’ll leave the decision in her hands.”

After her conversation with Emilia, something settled in Addie. She became an integral part of script changes, working out the motivation for her character to want to stay after being cheated on. We’d implemented her suggestions since they were from a perspective we never considered, or couldn’t, because of our gender.

It was great to see how everyone contributed to make the story come alive.

As we were starting our day at the start of the second month of filming, I heard a disruption outside the stage doors, but I paid it no mind. Security was tight on the lot,

and if someone wanted to get on set, we had Thomas and a few others who could keep them out.

My phone dinged with a text message, and when I checked it, it was from my agent, Maggie.

Call me.

While Ollie walked around approving the set decorations, I had a moment before I framed the first shot, so I dialed the number.

After the scandal of Mason and Spencer years before, I had been looking for a new representation. News broke about my foursome in Vegas, and my agency dropped me as their client. Spencer explained how hard Maggie and her team worked to contain the shitstorm Mason's outing of Spencer as bisexual had. She also scheduled the infamous interview for the couple, introducing Lee to the world as his partner. My decision was obvious after meeting with her. And after years of working together, she'd not only become a friend, but she was one of the fiercest allies I've ever had.

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“Hey, Maggie. What’s up?”

There was a measured sigh before she asked, “I take it you haven’t heard the news?”

I groaned, unable to keep the sound from escaping my throat, as I wondered what made-up story the press or someone from my past had spun about me this time.

Ever since meeting Ollie last May, over eight months previous, I’d only had eyes for him. Soon after we started dating, I realized Ollie was the man for me and would be for the rest of my days. And when I committed myself to him, there was no doubt in my mind I would stay faithful, especially since temporary flings didn’t even come close to the happiness and contentment I felt with the man.

I would never hurt Ollie.

And despite us being photographed at the triplet’s school and the paps hanging out in front of the gate of the house for a couple of days, we gave them no news to share, and the media soon gave up.

When the Black Rock Productions PR team, which was part of Maggie’s agency, announced I was directing my first feature film, no one connected the announcement to Ollie as the script supervisor. Everyone on the set learned who Ollie was to me, since we’d never hidden our relationship. And because my boyfriend was as genuine a person as they’d ever met, our close knit crew and the assembly of actors on set were protective of him.

“No. I’m too busy to deal with rumors about my life. What am I being accused of

now?”

Because Ollie was a wonderful boyfriend and in tune with me, he sensed something off about my demeanor and broke away from the group gathering around Lewis, who started cooking breakfast. He snagged a cup of coffee, smiled at the gentle giant who cooked almost as well as my mama, which I would never admit aloud even on the promise of great bodily harm, and strode over to me, his brows furrowing in worry.

I laced my fingers with his when he was close and encouraged him to listen in on the strange conversation.

“Remember the tour in Korea almost three years ago?”

“Yes.” I elongated the word, thinking back to the raucous night with the couple visiting Korea from New York. They approached me at the airport and that night I was lonely, so when they propositioned me, I took them back to the hotel with me. It satisfied a physical itch, but I pushed my emotional dissatisfaction aside enough to tough it through the rest of the press tour.

“Well, she has a two and a half-year-old she’s claiming is your son.”

I huffed out a laugh and shook my head. “That would be impossible and quite a miraculous feat.”

“Why?”

“I’m going to be blunt here and sorry if it’s too detailed an explanation.”

Not everyone needed the details of my sex life, but because I needed Maggie’s help, I had to tell her everything.

“No, don’t apologize. If I’m going to get to the truth, I need as much information as I can get to fight back.”

“The couple came up to me at the airport. They were talking about me being their hall pass and the boyfriend wanted to be fucked while he took his girlfriend bare. Besides kissing the woman outside the hotel room, my focus was on the man, and I used a condom from the moment we were naked until they left, two hours after they arrived. I’ve never lied about my past or even hid my indiscretions, and I wouldn’t start now. After, I escorted them out of the room and slept that night alone.”

I glanced up and studied Ollie’s face. There was an expression I couldn’t decipher, but after I got off the phone with Maggie, Ollie and I would talk. There wouldn’t be any miscommunication on my part since I hid nothing from him once I decided on us being boyfriends and he agreed. But I could admit the look on his face worried me.

Something I said triggered Maggie’s anger, and she let out an indignant huff.

“I fucking dislike liars, and she has to know we could prove the baby isn’t yours. But she went to the press, and they are digging up all of your past photos with different people and they are wondering how many babies you fathered throughout your career. Sometimes, this business disgusts me.”

For a long minute, we didn’t speak as the work continued on set.

“Maggie, what if we do a tell-all interview, sort of like Spencer and Lee did several years ago? Would that help?” Ollie asked.

There was a long pause before she said, “It would have to be soon. Do you need me to get a list of questions to approve?”

I glanced at Ollie, curious about his thought process. I raised my eyebrow, and he

gave me his reassuring smile.

“No, but if you could set it up with someone trustworthy, and not just someone who wants to make a name for themselves. And they have to accept I’d be at his side when they are interviewing him.”

“A TV interview would be best. Would you mind being interviewed on film, Ollie?”

He shrugged. “No, I wouldn’t mind.”

“Good.”

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I added, “Can you get the woman’s information and send it to my attorney? I’d rather not communicate with the woman or whoever she has working for her. But if it goes through my representation, there will be no doubt of the outcome. I’ll give her a heads up.”

“Consider it done. And I’ll call around to my contacts and set up the interview.”

After we hung up, I wrapped my arm around Ollie’s waist and snugged him in beside me before I called Maisie Daniels. Her background included not only entertainment law but also criminal, thanks to her father’s work as a prosecutor.

“Blake? What do I owe the honor of speaking to you on a fine Thursday morning?”

Ollie laughed, and I smiled.

“Oh, is that Ollie?”

“Hi, Maisie. How’s your day going?” My boyfriend asked.

“Good, now that you’re talking to me. How’s Hollywood treating you? Do I have to come down there and bash heads?”

Ollie giggled. “No, everyone is great, and the production is coming along. We, or rather, Connor, learned something surprising, and he needs your help.”

There was a pause on the other end. “About the baby?”

I groaned. She was waiting for my call.

“Yeah, and I’m not the father.”

“Since I’m your attorney, I’m going to ask you straight out. Is there even a remote possibility you’re the father?”

“No. It was a threesome with her boyfriend, and I had sex with him only. And with a condom. No chance.”

“Could they have found the disposed condom...”she trailed off, and I recoiled as I thought about it.

“No, we were in my room, and they used a towel to wipe themselves clean and dressed. I threw on a robe before I showed them out. It was after I disposed of the condom. I spoke to Maggie, and she’s going to send you the contact information for the woman.”

“How long ago was it?”

I had to think back. “Two years ago in June. Almost three years then.”

“That’s strange.”

My eyes met Ollie’s, watching him quirk an eyebrow.

“Why?” my boyfriend asked.

“She didn’t contact you at all in the years since?”

“Not as far as I’ve heard. Maggie’s contact information was out there for anyone to

find if they needed to reach me, and she only learned of it when it hit the press.”

“I’ll start working on this and will contact you soon.”

“Sounds good. Talk soon.”

After the call ended, I stood and wrapped both arms around Ollie’s waist, pulling him close and breathing him in, taking a moment to readjust my perspective.

“You okay, beautiful?”

I huffed out a laugh and said, “I just had an errant thought about that night. The one thing I could remember was how lonely I was. And it made no sense, because until five minutes ago, I never thought of myself in those terms. It was around the time Spencer and Lee admitted their feelings to each other and even though there wasn’t much time to dwell on it then, now I realized I wanted what they shared with a simple look and a smile.

“Then one day, on a normal flight home, you walked into my life, and I was smitten. Did you know I resigned myself to stay away from you?”

He gave me his patented soft smile, and my heart beat hard in my chest.

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“But I couldn’t. It might have been the goodness you put out in the world, or the way you took every day as a joy and a challenge, but it all equated to me wanting to be around you and absorbing even a tenth of your happiness. After our first kiss, I wondered why I became so obsessed when it appeared you forgot about it the minute it was over?—”

“No, Connor. I wanted to be in your life, and I thought that if that meant friendship, I’d take it in a heartbeat. The kiss meant... everything.”

I leaned closer and pressed my mouth to his, breathing him in and loving the closeness we shared.

“For me, too. While I struggled with not doing everything to sweep you off your feet, I somehow understood a big gesture wouldn’t impress you the way I wanted. And the time away in Vancouver wasn’t ideal, but when we talked every night, it gave me hope each time you lit up when you saw me on screen. The powerful notion of finding the right person hit me harder than I expected.”

Ollie sighed as he slotted his face against my neck.

“You’re not mad at me?”

I regretted the words when his head snapped up and his brows furrowed as he studied my face.

“Why would I be mad at you?” He asked, confused.

So, I gave him my honest answer. “Because if I learned about someone else touching you, the jealous rage beast inside my chest would trigger and I’d howl at the knowledge.”

“Are we boyfriends?” He asked.

“Of course we are.”

“Are you planning on cheating?”

The answer was immediate. “No! I would never do that to you!”

He cupped my face and kissed me, and I relaxed as the tension drained from my body.

“The decisions you made throughout your life led me to you. And I know I matter to you with every gesture and word you speak. You communicate with me whether it’s something big or small. I trust you, beautiful. And...”

I lifted my eyebrow, waiting.

“Don’t get me wrong, I can choose to be jealous because other people have seen you naked. But we’re together now. And jeopardizing our relationship for a trivial moment in the past would hurt us in the long run. We have a future together and holding onto resentment for a time before we got together is a waste of time and energy. I’m with you wherever life takes us.”

Unable to stay away, I leaned forward and kissed him. Only to pull back when my mobile rang with my mama’s ringtone. The smile that lit up my boyfriend’s face at the familiar sound allowed the swell of happiness to surge in my chest.

“Hey, mama,” I answered.

“Do I have a grand baby out there?”

“No, mama. Trust me, if Ollie and I decide to have kids, you’ll be the first person we tell. And trust me, that’s the only way you’d get grandkids from me. All of what the tabloids are reporting isn’t true. Maggie and Maisie will clear it up.”

Ollie gasped, and I sent him a wink, which brought out a delicious blush on his cheeks. Then I paused, since mama was never one to listen to gossip or read about celebrity news. “Wait, how did you find out? I only learned about it.”

“Landon.”

“What?” I asked.

There was a rustling sound, and Landon came on the phone. “That was hilarious. You know mama doesn’t pay attention to gossip. I thought you’d freak if she called.”

“Bro, do you need me to sit you down again and give you the safe sex and consent talk? I know it’s been a while since Sam gave his presentation, but we can recreate it.”

A loud whine came through the phone. “That was so embarrassing. And detailed. And gross. Come to think of it, it was Sam, so we couldn’t expect anything less.”

I laughed, because our eldest brother would never take something as important as sex so lightly. But no one needed a slideshow of closeups of the effect of STDs straight out of a medical textbook.

“Wait, did you believe?—”

“Come on, Connor. We know you better than that. Even in your wildest days, you never allowed yourself to put anyone in danger, much less expose yourself and becoming a father before you were ready. You’re one of the most honorable people I know, bro.”

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Choked up at his words, and at the knowledge my brothers were growing into their own, I swallowed my emotions. At the knowledge of my entire family thriving in the past few years, only growing closer together since Ollie came into our lives, had me blurt out my feelings.

“I’m proud of you, Landon, and I love you.”

He cleared his throat and said, “Love you too, big bro. Lyric and I will be at the studio soon. Do you need anything?”

“Nah, we’re covered here, but be safe.”

Ollie cleared his throat when Landon rang off, and when I turned into his arms, I raised an eyebrow.

“Was I presumptuous? You know, when I suggested the interview?” Ollie asked.

Leaning in until our faces were close together, I pressed my lips to his soft ones and shivered in delight when he sighed. I loved the dreamy look on his face whenever we touched. In all honesty, there was a jolt in my chest at the complete trust he’d revealed to me.

The part of my personality where I dove in head first for the experience quieted to a hum inside me whenever we were together, something I never could have predicted.

“I...” my brow furrowed because I wondered if I hadn’t made my feelings clear. I knew we had jumped into a relationship once I came back from Vancouver when I

asked him to be my boyfriend, but I realized we never spoke about our feelings or what we wanted for our future. The relationship was a whirlwind of sensations new to me, but not once had I ever conceived that Ollie and I would be anything less than everything to each other.

His brows drew down as he searched my gaze, the concern about stepping past a boundary evident in the pinch of his lips. I cupped his face and leaned my forehead against his and blew out a breath.

“Maybe it’s my fault,” I whispered.

There was a moment where he worked on deciphering my words, but in the end, his brows drew down and he asked, “What?”

I drew back while keeping eye contact.

“Ollie. I have no clue why I never said this earlier, especially since I’ve been feeling the same way for months, but I want you to know.

“Cariño mío, I am so in love with you. I’m surprised you can’t feel it when you look at me. You are my everything. My confidant and partner in every sense of the word, the one man who holds my happiness in your hands. I live for you, for us, and everything else that comes is a bonus. I thank the gods every day you walked on that plane and gave me a chance and I will never, ever take you for granted.”

The pressure in my chest squeezed to uncomfortable levels when a sob escaped his throat, but then he wrapped me in a hug so tight he kept me from falling apart. Then a laugh broke through the tears and when I pulled back a couple of inches, his smile was gorgeous.

My thumbs wiped at the tears and then traced over his lips, filling me with such utter

devotion in that moment. I vowed to keep Ollie feeling this happiness for as long as we lived.

“Oh, Connor. Thank you for the words I longed to hear. I love you, with all my heart.”

When our lips touched, I became lost in the moment. A sense of peace settled in my chest, and I groaned as my lips pulled the sexiest little moan from Ollie’s throat. But we jolted back when loud applause started. Then came to hoots and whistles. Ollie buried his face against my chest as I smiled when I glanced up.

Lewis stood behind Kaid, one arm banded around his chest as they both smiled at the scene in front of them. And not only them, but Addie and Gracie were shoulder to shoulder, both with beaming smiles on their faces. The crew surrounded us, patting Ollie on the back as the genuine happiness for their friend reflected on their expressions.

It had been a whirlwind of a day, but one I wouldn’t soon forget.

13

OLLIE

I stood in front of the mirror in the bedroom I shared with my boyfriend, a notion that brought a blush to my face as I studied myself in the mirror. The simple slim fit cornflower blue button-down shirt with black jeans and the black sneakers seemed both casual and dressy. I’d rolled the sleeves up my forearms and brushed my riot of hair, before giving up with one last sigh.

Connor scheduled a fitting with his tailor a week after we wrapped filming on Happy to Let You Go. The touching story on the page turned out to be an emotional, mature

look at forgiveness, and I loved how it turned out. Kaid and Addie worked well together, and after another month of filming after the upheaval of the tabloids, the film was in postproduction. As I started, I was sure I'd mess up at the new position of script supervisor, yet it appealed to my organizational instincts, and I had a blast.

Along with it, came other changes I was unprepared for.

I'd never considered myself a man who would need custom tailored clothes, but then I met Anton. A whirlwind of tape measures and a discussion about color preferences, among somany other questions I couldn't remember, and I was the proud owner of several suits in a smattering of colors, along with about a dozen button-down shirts. But instead of being finished for the day after choosing the suits, Connor pushed an armful of clothes into my arms with a demand to try them on.

He laughed at my expression as I stared at the pile of clothing in my arms before he walked back into the changing room, directing me with a hand on the small of my back. In complete honesty, I would have gone anywhere he wanted from a simple touch.

We arrived in the changing room bigger than an average sized apartment. He closed the door behind us before holding up the shirts he pulled from the racks against my chest, and staring at me with a critical eye, directing which shirt matched which pant and I slipped out of the tee and jeans I wore to the appointment.

With the last button on the dress slacks secured, I examined myself and found each item accentuated my frame.

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“But... beautiful. There are few opportunities I have to wear this. Why would we stock up now?” I asked as I smoothed down the invisible wrinkles on the navy blazer I wore over the slate gray knit shirt that felt like velvet against my skin.

He paused with an eggplant v-neck sweater held onto the tips of his fingers before he draped it over the chair and strode forward to cup my face.

“Am I getting carried away?”

Rather than waffle about what I wanted to say, I decided being direct was the best form of communication between the two of us.

“No, you’re not. I’m not used to these prices. I’m more of a grab anything that’s cheap and covers me, but some of these,” I leaned close and whispered, “the cost... it’s outrageous. As much as this feels like heaven against my skin and makes me look fantastic, it’s not worth, well, close to a thousand dollars. The suits I understand, but I can’t justify spending this much money on a cardigan.”

Then it hit me, and the words were out before I could stop them.

“Oh... is it embarrassing for you to be seen with me because of the way I dress? I guess I should have thought about that?—”

I gasped when his mouth slammed down on mine and for several minutes, my brain turned to mush as I held on, kissing him back. My entire body melted when his thumbs ran up and down my jaw, the caress causing a shiver to overwhelm me, and I leaned closer, giving him everything he wanted.

“Fucking hell, Ollie. You drive me insane whenever I have you in my arms. But to answer your question. No, *cariño mío*, you do not and have never embarrassed me. This isn’t about changing you. I wanted to treat you, and I suppose since it’s natural to get anything I want, whenever I want it, I expected you’d like it just as much.”

As I swallowed the lump in my throat, I admitted, “I adore the clothes.”

“But?”

“Um, because we’re in a relationship, it’s important to me we are equal?—”

My words stuttered to a stop when his eyes fluttered closed.

“Ollie, my love. You are my equal, my obsession, my everything,” he paused and opened his eyes, his stare intense, before continuing, “and no amount of money or fame would sway me to change my feelings for you. Just like with my family, I want you to have every single thing you want in life. And if I can provide it, I will. You’re not taking advantage of anything, since I’m willing to give you the world.”

And with those words, the fight left me. If Connor wanted to spoil me, I’d let him. But I’d also find ways of spoiling him right back.

With the near constant smile etched on my face from the time we admitted our feelings, I hadn’t predicted my life would turn out quite this way when I’d set off for Los Angeles all those months ago. But tonight, I planned a special surprise for Connor. His birthday was Saturday, but he’d been busy with edits, working twelve to sixteen-hour days, and mama wanted to plan a party for that day. So tonight was for us.

I found a cute outdoor patio restaurant for dinner, asking for a corner with a view and after, well, that was a surprise I hoped Connor would love.

“Ollie?” Connor called from the bathroom.

With a smile on my face, I strode around the corner and stopped dead in my tracks. The love of my life stood there with a towel wrapped around his waist showing off his broad chest, along with all those delicious muscles, and a growl of pure need escaped.

The corner of his mouth tipped up. It happened whenever my control was close to snapping and I wanted him to take me apart until he became the center of my universe.

“What should I wear? Since you won’t tell me where we are going, I think it’s only fair you should pick.”

Closing the distance between us, I pressed my palms against his stomach and slid them up. The smooth skin sent a shiver down my spine and when I leaned closer, he closed the distance as the chaste kiss soon bloomed into more.

Several minutes later, we pulled back, both of us heaving in deep breaths as my gaze never wavered from his face.

The soft expression as he looked at me meant everything.

There was no need to mask his emotions around me, and I’ve learned to savor all the nuances, from the sparkle in his eyes to the dazed need as he met my gaze.

With one last peck on his lips, I turned toward the closet and picked out a white silk slim fit shirt. The white against his olive skin made the man irresistible and being paired with dark denim jeans emphasized Connor’s slim waist and killer thighs. And to complete the ensemble, his favorite dark blue laced canvas shoes. I hung up the shirt and dug into the drawer where he kept his underwear, and matching the blue

theme, pulled out tight navy boxer briefs. Turning, I handed him the boxers, watching in avid fascination as he dropped his towel.

“Are you appreciating the view?”

“The day I don’t find you sexy as all get out is the day you bury me. It’s not my fault you’re gorgeous, funny, loving, and generous. When they said the clothes make the man, it’s because they had someone like you in mind.”

He paused with his briefs halfway up his legs and blinked at me, the shy smile on his face punching me right in the chest. He then shook his head before he finished dressing. I let out a sigh as he reached for my hand and pulled me close for a kiss.

“You are good for me, good for my heart.”

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I laced our fingers together and gave him a small squeeze. “Ready for your pre-birthday night out?”

He nodded, and as we headed out, I listened to how the edits were going and what next project Connor had his sights on.

Before long, we arrived at the restaurant I picked, an Italian eatery with an outdoor rooftop dining area. When I called for a reservation, I asked for a corner table with a view without telling them about Connor. Because we had plans for after our early dinner, I picked a time where we were unlikely to have a swarm of people surround him.

“Welcome to Mattia. I’m Aria. How may I help you?”

“Hi, Aria, thank you. Reservation for two under the name Oliver Bright.”

Connor kept out of sight behind me, his arms draped around my waist as the hostess tapped at the screen a few times, before she smiled and said, “Yes, right this way.”

She grabbed two menus and led us to a perfect table with a magnificent view, and a planter with lush greenery blocked us from the rest of the space, giving us the privacy I hoped for.

“Here you are...” She turned and spotted Connor for the first time. “Oh, good evening, Mr. Blake. Thank you for dining with us.”

Connor beamed at her and leaned in closer to whisper. “If you and the staff would

like pictures after dinner, I would be happy to oblige.”

She nodded with a smile and said, “Thank you. Please enjoy.”

We sat, and I stared at Connor in confusion. As I considered this was our first true outing in public without Thomas to keep people away from Connor, the effect my boyfriend had on others shouldn’t have surprised me.

“What was that about?” I asked.

He reached for my hand, lacing our fingers together. “The staff at restaurants around L.A. are accommodating to actors. They want business but don’t want to deal with crowd control, so after dinner, I’ll take pictures with them and they’ll post them on their social media at the end of the night.”

“Oh, smart. Have you been here before?”

He took a moment to glance around and then shook his head. “I love Italian food, but this is my first time here. How did you find this place?”

“Luck and a lot of research. Plus, it’s close to the next place we’re going to.”

“Thank you for this.”

Emotion clogged my throat, and as I squeezed his hands. “You don’t have to thank me for anything. I wanted you to have a night where you could relax and have fun. And no, work doesn’t count as fun.”

I chuckled at his expression at the moment someone stepped up to the table. It took a moment to pull my eyes away from Connor’s expressive gaze.

“Good evening, gentlemen. My name is Elio. How are you two this fine evening?”

I blinked up and smiled at Elio. The tall man with his dark hair slicked back dressed in a crisp white shirt, black vest, and black pants. But it was his smile as he looked between both me and Connor, which had me smiling back.

“We’re good, Elio. Thank you for asking. And you?” I asked.

He beamed a smile at us; his radiating happiness surprised me. “Now I understand why the gossips can’t stop talking about you two.”

“Sorry?” It came out as a stutter before turning to look at Connor, who seemed just as confused. “We’re the subject of...”

“Yeah. But there’s no need to worry. My parents own the restaurant and most of my siblings and I work here, and we will protect your identity.”

“Thank you, Elio. I already told the hostess I would take pictures with you after dinner, but I’m grateful for the assurance.”

“Ah, yes. My sister. Thank you for your kind offer. While you peruse the menu, would you like something to drink?”

My eyes flicked down to the menu, but since I only drank a few times in my life, I was unsure what to order other than water.

Connor reached over and squeezed my hand. “May I order you something you’d enjoy?”

I nodded, “Please.”

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“Two Bellinis and water, please, Elio.”

With a dip of his head, he walked off, leaving us to peruse the rest of the menu. Connor reached over and laced our fingers together and squeezed. After a few minutes, he set aside the menu and asked, “What would you like?”

I shook my head. “We are celebrating you, so I want you to decide. Besides, you know me. I’ll eat just about anything.”

“Then I think we should get the four course tasting menu, since we’ve never been here before.”

I nodded at his suggestion, but turned curious. “What’s a Bellini?”

“Oh, you’re going to love it. It’s peach purée with sparkling Italian wine. Since we have plans after, we should take it easy on the alcohol for dinner.”

Until our food arrived, we spoke of other scripts we read and interested us.

“You should pick a script you like and star in it yourself.”

Connor laughed. “But now I know what it’s like to be in charge, so it might take some convincing to get me to back away from the director’s chair.”

With a casual shrug, “Why don’t you do both?”

Intrigued, he grew silent as he contemplated his choices. I hid the smile because I

planted the seed. Connor was brilliant at everything he did. Not only because of the passion behind his drive to be the best, but because he loved what he did as an actor and now a director. But that was a subject for another night.

Everything was exquisite from the Cesar salad with charred romaine, a bolognese with wild boar and veal, both a first for me, followed by a smoked dill salmon on a delicious risotto, and to top off the meal, a delicious chocolate cake with peanut butter gelato.

The chef, who turned out to be Elio and Aria's uncle, Dante, welcomed Connor into his kitchen and after I took about a dozen photos with them, loving the ones where my boyfriend made the entire staff laugh, we left with promises of returning soon.

Connor slid his fingers against mine as we headed toward the parking lot. I entered the address into the GPS and in less than fifteen minutes later; we arrived at the second half of his birthday night celebration.

"Where are..." he paused as he took in the neon sign and the rainbow arch above the entrance.

"Perfect timing. Let's head in and get a seat close to the stage." As we entered, I verified our reservation and paid for several cards and two daubers, and led Connor to an open table right off the stage and in shadow. There was recognition in the eyes of the employees and people here for bingo, but no one bothered him.

As we sat down, I slid in next to Connor, who was closest to the stage, and handed him six bingo cards and kept the other six. I turned and glanced at the stunned expression on my boyfriend's face and asked, "Have you ever been to drag queen bingo before?"

"No, I don't think I've even played bingo in my life."

“It’s low key enough you should be fine, and from what I researched, it looks fun. I’m sure they will go over the rules, but they call out a letter and number, and you place a dot over it with your dauber. You win if all the dabs are in a row, whether horizontal, vertical, or diagonal, and you shout bingo and they come over to verify you won.”

“Um, what if I win? What do I get?”

At this, I shrugged. “No clue. But with a host of drag queens in the mix, it’ll be interesting.”

Interesting didn’t even describe it. Since they hosted bingo every month, the crowd was raucous when the night started off with a gorgeous queen in a black sequined dress, introducing herself and cracking a few jokes as we relaxed into our seats.

As they started the wire tumbler rolling, a queen in a pink strapless dress sashayed over to us and I noticed her eyes widened as they took in my boyfriend. Her hand ran up his arm as she leaned closer and said, “Hey, handsome.”

He smiled at the queen, causing her to put a hand on her chest and fan herself. “You should come with a disclaimer, sitting your sexy ass over here with that smile.”

I laughed, and although she had eyes for Connor, she asked, “Who’s this cutie patootie?”

“I’m...”

“No, let me guess. You’re part of his harem and you’re here to recruit others to this very just and sexy cause.”

“What qualifies as a harem?” I asked.

She threw her head back and laughed. When she recovered, she winked at me and said, “No clue, just a girl’s fantasy.”

The games and the queens were entertaining, and I won a huge flesh-colored dildo while Connor won a hard, sleek purple vibrator, which looked uncomfortable to use, no matter how much lube was involved. But who was I to judge? We gifted them both to a bridal party near the front as we left, and Connor was gracious enough to pose for a couple of pictures and wished the bride the best for her upcoming nuptials.

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As we got into the SUV, my heart jolted when I spotted a small smile on Connor's face. His relaxed posture, especially his shoulders, made my chest swell with affection for the man. Being a first-time director was stressful because there were a lot of unknowns. But I told him, as did many of the crew, how supported they felt by him and because of that, they worked to make the movie go as smoothly as possible. He was a wonderful example of do unto others, as well as a gracious friend and a wonderful man.

"Did you have fun?"

Without a word, he turned to me and slid his hand behind my head, pulling me in for a scorching kiss. With ease, he drew a loud moan from me in the quiet confines of the SUV as traffic and the world went on around us. As he pulled back, both of us taking deep breaths, I noticed the strange expression on his face.

"What's going on in that head of yours?"

"I want to marry you."

The statement came across as so matter of fact; it stunned me stupid. My mouth dropped open, and no sound escaped as I floundered to understand his words.

Although we'd expressed our feelings for each other several months back, marriage wasn't even in the realm of possibilities I saw us headed in because... well, I didn't know, because maybe being in a committed relationship seemed like a fantasy already. Anything more would demand too much of the fates.

“You... do?” I asked, still floundering.

His look, so exasperated, brought a smile to my face as I ran my thumb underneath his bottom lip.

“Don’t pout, beautiful. It was... I wasn’t aware you ever thought about marriage. Have you thought about wanting to get married for a while?”

“Is it so strange to believe that I love you and desire a committed relationship with you for the rest of our lives?”

My brows drew down, and I said, “No.”

“Then why...”

“Connor.”

“Oh, you don’t want to marry me,” he said, sounding wounded.

I gasped out, “It would be an absolute dream to marry you, but I’m, we’re... this is your first relationship and I’m afraid you’re allowing the newness of it?”

He cut me off when he pulled me onto his lap and kissed me breathless. I melted into him and when his tongue met mine; I whimpered into his mouth, tilted my head, and savored his dominance.

“Do you love me?” He asked between pants.

“Yes,” I hissed, “Of course I fucking do! With all that I am.”

“Enough to take a chance on me. And I don’t mean until you get sick of me. I mean

forever. You are it for me, *cariño mío*. My true love, my forever. I know you think I'm flighty?—”

It was my turn to interrupt with a huff of disgust.

“The fuck you are! But that’s something we’ll discuss later. No, the reason for my hesitation was because I wasn’t sure if you were ready for the next step in our relationship by committing yourself to me, in a legal sense. I love you with everything I am. No matter how many years pass, I will continue to hold you in my heart. In truth, you own it, beautiful. You own every piece of me. But my instincts want you to be as happy with the decision as I would be. Because you’re it for me, too. The love of my life, for the rest of my entire existence.”

At my words, he gathered me in his arms and held me. I worried for a moment since his entire being seemed to vibrate.

“That’s why I want to marry you.”

I huffed out a laugh. “Because I’m an opinionated bastard who’s has no issue defending you from you.”

“Yes, and so much more. I never realized how closed off I was until you came into my life. I held people at an arm’s length, never letting them close. Even family. Maybe it’s because of my dad, or this industry, but something always held me apart. But you; all niceness and love, support and a true listener, broke down all my walls, allowing me to be different. I’m a better person when I’m with you. A better son, brother, and friend. But marrying you is because I love you, with everything I am.”

After a quick press of our lips together, I blew out a breath and said, “I want to marry you, too.”

He let out a whoop and pulled me closer, pressing his lips to my neck as he breathed me in. His hold tightened as he whispered, “Thank you for being in my life. I thought I knew what love was; my parents being the perfect example, but I’ve never felt it. Experienced it. Closed myself off to the possibility of it. But you with your cheery disposition, positive outlook, and a pure good that people see when they meet you, I know I lucked out finding you first.”

With a bit of distance between us so he captured my gaze with his own shining light hazel eyes, he continued, “But this all-encompassing devotion I have for you, craving this closeness, is what I want for the rest of our lives. I loved making the movie with you, experiencing the camaraderie with the entire production team and actors, and want to direct more movies with you at my side.”

Connor leaned back and studied my face as I watched the byplay on his, as his thoughts lulled him into silence. I reached out and laced our fingers together, waiting for the epiphany his thoughtful expression brought.

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“Years ago, when I was on the promotion tour for a movie Kaid, Spencer, and I were in, I met Spencer and Lee outside a hotel and my heart pounded in my chest to see how happy the two men were. But there was a shroud of sadness as well because I never connected with anyone the way those two had. Spencer must have recognized my emotions and asked me when I would settle down and I told him, even though at the time I’d never thought it would happen, that I hadn’t met my Lee yet.”

Unable to stay away from him, I leaned in and cuddled into his chest, smiling as his arms banded around me and held me close.

“But by an extreme coincidence, you sat next to me. Even then, you never looked at me as an actor or a playboy, and saw through the mask I was way too comfortable wearing. Drawn to you on the flight became happiness when you came home with me. I’m thrilled I get to be this open with you, allowing you to see the real me.”

The silence stretched between us as I processed the sincerity of his words.

“You are easy to love, Connor. Not to mention how gracious you were bringing me home with you and introducing me to your family. It’s amazing how freeing it is to have the support of people you love and who love you back. I hope they’re all thrilled when you tell them.”

He spluttered. “What do you mean? We’re doing this together. I know I’m throwing a lot at you, but what do you think about kids?”

I laughed. “In a general sense? Or having one of our own?”

“One of our own. We could get a surrogate or adopt. Either way, they’ll be ours.”

A gasp escaped as I pictured Connor reading to a toddler or finger painting and making a mess everywhere on the dining room table while mama looked on with a smile on her face.

“Oh.”

The man’s smile widened, and I caught the shimmering in his eyes. This affected him and, knowing my boyfriend, he’d been thinking about taking this direction in his life for a while.

“You... Yes, I can see it. I think adoption would be the best. While a child, through a surrogate, would share DNA with one of us, it’s a lot of strain to put a woman through, especially considering the number of children already out there without homes.”

Connor laughed and hugged me closer. “You have the biggest heart of anyone I know. But that’s settled. Let’s head home and tomorrow, we plan our wedding.”

14

CONNOR

After four months of my lawyer, Maisie, working to set up a paternity test along with a court date after a judge in Los Angeles County deemed it necessary, I stepped out of the back of the unremarkable SUV in front of the courthouse. A flurry of lights, bright even in the early morning, made me grateful to turn and hold out my hand for Ollie to take.

Over the past several months, I found his constant support essential to me, and I knew

no matter how the hearing would turn out, he'd be by my side.

I leaned in close and asked, "Are you ready?"

With a wide smile and a twinkle in his eyes, he leaned closer and kissed my cheek. He slid out and the moment his feet hit the pavement, the reporters and photographers shouted my name. But the crowd grew louder when Ollie linked his fingers through mine and squeezed me in reassurance.

"Let's go, beautiful."

Almost a month previous, Ollie and I sat down with Lucy Nakamura for a live TV interview. Although I was used to answering questions; mundane ones about the motivation for my characters or patented answers about how I got along with my costars or the film crew, but this was different.

Studios, other than the one Spencer, Kaid, and I ran, had told my agent I was a liability when the news broke and refused to send over scripts, which I would've been a shoe in for before this entire debacle began. In the public eye, the allegations that I left a woman pregnant without support was not the issue. It's that I'd abandoned a child, and to some fans, my actions were irredeemable. So in order to restore my name and answer all questions the public had, Ollie's suggestion of an interview was brilliant.

"Have you fathered any children, Mr. Blake?" Lucy Nakamura asked.

While prepared, it took me several seconds before I answered the question with all honesty.

"Please, call me Connor. The answer to your question is no. I've never been with a sexual partner without using a condom." I paused, giving Ollie a questioning look.

With his nod, I continued, “But when Ollie and I became boyfriends, we shared test results and have forgone contraceptives because we’ve both tested clean and are in an exclusive relationship.”

Then came the question I dreaded. “Mr. Bright, do you have an issue with your partner’s past? Especially about all the allegations after Ms. Bianca Remington accused Connor of fathering her child.”

As charming as ever, my boyfriend smiled and shook his head. “From the moment I met Connor, he’s been transparent with me. From his past partners to his view on consent and protection. And along with his assurance he’s never been with anyone besides me without protection, he’s shown me in every way he’s true to his word. I’ve never doubted a word Connor has spoken because he’s forthright and honest to a fault.”

The more questions thrown our way, I relaxed because although direct; the questions asked weren’t because she wanted to throw me off or catch me in a lie.

After our interview came the time in which every entertainment blog, vlog, show and anyone on social media with an opinion dissected our words, and accusations came fast and heavy about my reckless behavior throughout the years, especially bringing up the story about the foursome with porn stars in Vegas.

Weeks of the paps taking pictures of Ollie and me together, heading to the studio and a couple of us the night we celebrated my twenty-seventh birthday, and even the picture of our first kiss tamped down any criticism and it soon blew over.

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Maggie explained how positive the interview turned out to be in my, our, favor. Like in real life, everyone adored Ollie and doubted the voices of dissension.

And today, as we walked up the steps of the courthouse, hand in hand, we waved off questions, ready to get inside. Thomas worked to keep the fans from crowding in on us, but when I glanced over at Ollie, there was a bemused expression on his face, which made me hold back a laugh.

As we traveled through the hallways and entered the assigned courtroom, we left behind the noise and camera shutters, which drew a relieved breath from me.

Ollie wrapped his arm around my waist and pulled me closer. As I caught his scent, I relaxed.

We found Maisie near the double oak doors just inside the room and took our seats on the uncomfortable benches next to her.

“Good morning, Maisie. How are you today?” Ollie asked.

The harried woman looked up from her notes and gave my boyfriend a smile, reaching over to squeeze his hand. “Good, honey. And you?”

“Nervous for Connor.”

“Oh, there’s no need to worry.”

“Why?”

She took off her reading glasses and crossed her hands over the papers in front of her.

“Because in all the years I’ve worked with Connor, he’s never lied to me. There have been things that have slipped his mind or contracts he forgot to forward for me to go over, but lying, especially about family, goes against everything he believes in and stands for.”

With a smile, Ollie leaned against me, looking up at me with such a loving smile. My heart thudded hard in my chest at the adoring expression, and I thanked all the gods above for this man in my life. Unable to stay away, I leaned closer and pressed a kiss to his nose, causing it to scrunch, which was adorable.

“Thanks, Maisie,” I mumbled.

“Calling it like I see it,” she said before going back to her paperwork.

Within minutes of our arrival, the rest of the seats inside the courtroom filled up. We stood as the judge was called to the bench, but sat back down, waiting for the first case to be called.

As Maisie concentrated on the forms in front of her, I settled in, thinking it would take a while before we had our opportunity to face the judge. Several minutes later, the doors opened, and my attention turned toward a woman I recognized as she walked in with a toddler on her hip and took a seat several rows up.

“Is that her?” Maisie asked.

“Yeah, but she was blonde when I met her.”

Ollie kept his head on my shoulder, but I knew his keen eyes were tracking over her and the child. He sucked in a breath.

“Do you have anyone in your family with blue eyes? Grandparents? Great grandparents?” Ollie asked.

“No. Both my parents have brown, and so do both my maternal and paternal grandparents. I don’t know about great grandparents. I’ve never met them.”

The door opened again, interrupting Ollie’s train of thought. Spencer and Lee walked in, followed by Kaid and Lewis, all of them dashing in suits and ties. I gasped, wondering what they were doing there, but Ollie waved and patted the seats that were open next to him.

“You guys look great, but what are you doing here?” I asked.

Spencer smiled at me, patting my shoulder, before he said, “I told Maisie we could testify for you because both of us remember the night you showed up at the hotel with the man and woman.”

Maisie leaned over and whispered to Spencer, “Do you think that’s her?”

Both of my friends turned to see where Maisie pointed and I watched their faces to see if there was any recognition.

“Yeah, that’s her. But she has dark brown hair now, whereas when we saw her at the hotel all those years ago, she was blonde,” Lee said.

The smile on Maisie’s face said everything. She hadn’t been worried about the paternity test, but now, with witnesses and what I and my two friends remembered, it changed the game.

“I wasn’t worried about the judge dismissing the case, but I can call your friends if she disputes her boyfriend being with you both that night. But I don’t think it’ll even

get that far, since the judge will read the outcome of the paternity case first.”

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Before long, my case was called, and I walked with Maisie to the front while the woman with the toddler glared at me as she took a seat at the other table.

“Petitioner Remington vs. Respondent Blake. Are both parties present?”

“Yes, your honor,” echoed in the room.

“I have the test results here and the probability of Connor Blake being the child’s father is zero percent. I dismiss this case with prejudice.”

The gavel slammed down, giving the echo of finality. But of course, I somehow understood it wouldn’t be that easy.

“But... he is!” The woman shouted.

The judge looked up and glared. “Ms. Remington. The paternity test was court ordered, and a certified proxy of this court drew and tested Mr. Blake’s blood. The test gave the result of zero percent parentage of your young one. How can you, with a plausible explanation, believe Mr. Blake is your child’s father?”

“He was the only one I slept with around the time I found out I was pregnant.”

“Your honor?” Maisie interrupted.

“Yes, counselor?”

“Mr. Blake explained to me Ms. Remington, and a man identified to Mr. Blake as the

petitioner's boyfriend, was with her as they approached Mr. Blake at the Incheon International Airport before they retired to Mr. Blake's hotel room. I have a two witnesses in court today who will testify to witnessing Ms. Remington and a man accompanying Mr. Blake as they entered the Signiel Seoul hotel."

The woman made a noise of distress, but my attention never deviated from the judge.

The judge cleared his throat before he asked, "Not disputing the test results, but for the record, Mr. Blake? Did you engage in intercourse with Ms. Remington on the night in question?"

"No, your honor. Only with her boyfriend and I wore a condom." I answered.

"Do you have anything to clarify your position, Ms. Remington?" The judge asked in a stern, no nonsense tone.

Her shoulders slumped, and it was a long, drawn out moment before she shook her head. "No, your honor."

"Like I already stated on record, case dismissed."

With that, Ollie came forward and threw his arms around me and I pressed my face against his neck and breathed deep.

"Thank you," I whispered.

Ollie peaked out and asked, "For what?"

Again, I kissed him on the nose, satisfied by him scrunching his face at my action. "For living a life true to yourself and being genuine to who you are. If you weren't, we never would have met. That would have been an absolute shame."

“Love you, too, beautiful.”

This man got me.

I walked out of court, satisfied yet irritated. These past few months acknowledging the seriousness of the accusations against me, dealing with media speculation about my entire sexual history, while developing a relationship with Ollie and wondering if he might hear something that would tarnish his opinion of me, which was a real fear I carried daily, felt worthless. There was no point in her accusations, knowing a simple test result could upend her entire argument, yet she’d chosen to move forward with them.

“You okay?” Ollie asked.

As I glanced over at the man I loved, I shook my head. “I don’t think I am. All of this for what? I’m relieved the judge took one look at the evidence and dismissed her case against me. But all these months, getting dragged through the mud, putting you front and center in the media because they demanded answers to my private life. It feels all...”

“Hollywood,” Spencer answered.

I blew out a breath. “Yeah.”

Lee said, “When Mason outed Spencer and got out of the charges of burning down his house, I wanted to rage at the world because of everyone’s criticism of Spencer, the pressure to reveal his bisexuality because Mason outed him, and how Mason was a criminal with no true repercussions.”

Spencer tucked himself under his husband’s arm when the man smiled at him. Then Lee continued.

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“But in the end, I realized there will always be opinions and speculation about your life because of who you are and what you do for a living. I’m not saying it’s right, or even justified, but it’s a price you and Spencer and Kaid pay because of the profession you’re in. But you have Ollie, your family, and you have us. Let go of the things that don’t matter.”

I reached out and hugged Lee, and since Spencer clung to his husband, I enveloped them both.

“Why don’t you come over? Mama was cooking up a storm when we left for court, so I’m sure she’ll have plenty to feed us.”

Spencer, with one last squeeze, stepped back. “Sounds good.”

“Kaid, Lewis?”

“Yeah, we’re in,” Kaid nodded.

Determined to get over this chapter in my life despite the churning emotions still swirling in my chest, I turned, ready to lead Ollie back outside the way we came. It was then I spotted the woman handing over the baby to her boyfriend, the same one I recognized from our night together, as she fussed with packing the baby’s bag. It was a terse conversation as he held the baby close to his chest with his hand cupped around the back of the baby’s head.

“Fucking hell, isn’t that the guy?” Lee asked.

Maisie's head snapped up from where she was checking her phone. "What guy?"

"Her boyfriend," I offered in a low growl.

Maisie took several pictures of them. The man looked comfortable holding the baby as the two continued to converse in short, clipped tones. He glanced my way, but looked away, his cheeks reddening when he caught me staring at him.

"The baby looks like him. So she must've done it for money, thinking the judge wouldn't care about the paternity test and make you pay child support," Ollie said.

"Nothing much we can do today. But if you want to sue—" Maisie started.

As angry as the situation made me, I couldn't hurt her through financial means. The judge made it clear about the paternity of the child, and the baby was the innocent party in all this nonsense.

"No, I'll leave it be if she does. But if they come after me again, you have the photos and it's on record the judge ruled against her. I'm done with this farce." I turned toward my friends and said, "See you guys at the house."

"Yeah. We parked around back," Lewis said.

As a group, we watched the couple and the baby walk out of the front of the courthouse as I texted Thomas to bring the SUV around front. Ollie and I waved our friend off and waited by the doors as we watched the couple shielding their eyes from the camera flashes and flinching at the questions thrown their way as they made it out to the sidewalk and into a cab.

Several minutes later, after I spotted Thomas, we walked out to a swell of sound and shutters clicking. I left the reporters to Maisie as she explained the judge's ruling. I

took my boyfriend's hand and strode toward the open door of the SUV and waited until Ollie slid inside before I followed him.

"Not the papa?" Thomas asked with a chuckle.

"Nope. But she tried to contest the test results and looked pissed at me as she left court. Turns out her boyfriend was waiting right outside, and he spotted me. Maisie took pictures of them together."

The bodyguard scoffed. "She tried to contest a blood test?"

"Yeah. I don't know if it's ignorance or her determination to get something from Connor, but she was adamant Connor was the only man she slept with during the time, so it had to be his baby," Ollie said.

"But the judge wasn't having it. The test said I wasn't the father, and he shut down her protests after that."

Thomas shook his head. "I thought I've seen everything, but..."

"Yeah, I know. Let's head back to the house. Is Sam there?"

"Of course. Since he's cut back with work, or at least taking some time off in between shifts, he's spending more time with you guys and your mom."

Ollie leaned against me as Thomas merged into downtown traffic and headed home.

"Does this mean you've changed your mind about having kids one day?"

I shook the cobwebs from my brain. "No. Raising a little one with you is still a dream of mine." I leaned closer and snagged a kiss before I continued, "But I was upset

because she fought the paternity test for as long as she could before the courts stepped in and ordered her to comply. And all this knowing it would show I wasn't the father. Wasting all of our time, even money, for her and her family to fly out here for the hearing."

My boyfriend hummed, settling something in my chest that had been turning into something ugly. His next words put everything into perspective.

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“I’m choosing to give her some forbearance because I’m not aware of what she’s gone through in life. The way she went about this is horrible and offensive. But for the same reason you wouldn’t sue her because of her child, I wouldn’t wish her ill will. I just hope from now on, she concentrates on being a wonderful mother and making her son happy.”

And with his words, I let go of all my anger. Thinking back on how difficult it must’ve been for my parents to raise seven kids with differing interests, personalities, and needs would’ve been near impossible for my mama if she wasn’t as loving and resilient after my papa passed. Raising kids, even after they became adults, was a lifetime commitment.

“I hope so too, cariño mío.”

15

CONNOR

For the last five minutes, I’d tried and then failed at working on the cufflinks before I huffed out a frustrated sigh and left the walk-in closet in search of Ollie. I loved his fingers for many things and the dexterity in which he used them would have me aching for him. But I tamped down on my constant desire for the man’s hands on me. Determined to find him, I walked into the bedroom and stumbled as my eyes landed on his slim form, dressed to the nines.

Tonight, he’d donned slim black pants and shiny dress shoes, but it was the white jacket with black piping, layered over a black vest and bowtie that sent his look from

sexy as all get out to classy and understated.

“Wow. Cariño mío, you’re gorgeous.”

With a shy smile he reserved when he was out of his depth, Ollie turned to me and tugged down the sleeves of his dress shirt. “You’re not just saying that, right? I mean, I want to look my best for the premiere tonight, for your debut.”

Without a word, I shook my head and, forgetting about the cuffs, I pulled him against me and cherished his actions as he linked his arms around me before he buried his face against my neck.

“I’m proud of you, Ollie. And honored to be seen with you, to be known as your boyfriend. There isn’t an outfit you could wear that wouldn’t flatter you, because you’re gorgeous inside and out. I love you, cariño mío.”

“I love you too, Connor. So much, beautiful.”

“Are you ready for tonight?” I asked.

My man stood tall, and brushed down his suit jacket, giving me a definitive nod.

“I’m thrilled to be a part of the start of your long career and I can’t wait to see which direction the next project will lead you. But one step at a time. Let’s go knock ‘em dead.” He gave me a devilish wink.

I blushed and said, “But first...” Holding up my sleeves, Ollie huffed out a laugh and with a precision I was in awe of, he slipped the cufflinks through and fastened them.

He leaned closer, and I shivered as his breath caressed my ear. “You’re so fucking hot in his tux, beautiful. I might have to peel it off you with my teeth when we get

home.”

A loud groan escaped my throat as my cock plumped in my pants.

With a wicked smile, he reached for my hand and led me downstairs where, for the second time that night, I was in for a surprise. Thank all the gods above, I’d distracted myself enough to get my apparent desire for my boyfriend from showing in the time it took us to walk downstairs and into the living room.

Because when we arrived, our entire family waited for us in their elegant evening wear.

I stood there, speechless, while Ollie fawned over everyone, including Sam, who wore a black tux along with his boyfriend, Thomas. They looked debonair in their matching maroon bow ties.

The triplets all wore black except for their jackets, which were gold and black. The gold matched mama’s full length goddess dress along with the hair clip and earrings she wore. Emilia looked like an ethereal fairy in a classic collared white dress with a cape and Omi, in a gauzy light green number that made her look like a princess.

“Everyone looks spectacular,” I choked out.

Mama walked up to me and cupped my cheeks. “I’m so proud of you. And I know papa would be too.”

With my emotions clogging my throat, I gave her a watery smile as I leaned down and bussed a kiss to her cheek.

“Thank you, mama,” I stepped back, wiping the wetness from my eyes, smiling at my family, grateful for how close we’d grown over the past year.

“Ready?” Ollie asked, bouncing on his toes.

I gave him a kiss before I blew out a breath and nodded.

We piled out of the front door to find a limo outside on the street. Kaid, in a light sage green jacket and black pants, opened the door and stepped out, holding it open for my family with a genuine smile.

Of course, Ollie would have done everything in his power to get everyone in our lives to support one of the biggest nights of my career and as we were the last two to step into the car, I captured his lips in a kiss, telling him without words how much I appreciated all his efforts.

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Spencer, Lee, Lewis, Gracie, and Addie waited inside the limo and before long, we were on our way to West Hollywood.

“Hey, Addie. I’m glad you’re able to join us,” Ollie said, reaching out to squeeze her hand.

I couldn’t help but notice how Emilia and Addie paused as they perused each other. The woman slayed in a red chiffon sequined dress with a gorgeous cape that was both elegant and fierce. She moved on from her disastrous divorce and watching her grow into the strong woman she’d become was an honor.

“Ollie, has Con prepared you for a movie premiere?” Lee asked.

With a smile, he said, “I’m sure for all of you, it’s old hat by now, but yeah, he told me about the noise and the myriad of cameras, shouted questions, and screaming fans.”

“At least this will be a smaller premiere,” I commented.

Gracie chuckled. “I’ve read the dailies and trust me, Connor. This won’t be a flash in the pan. The reviews are spectacular. They’re talking Oscar contender. Besides, although actors turned directors happen more often than not, action stars taking on such a heartbreaking, emotional story with no action whatsoever isn’t. Hell, even the entertainment shows and sites are speculating about your next project.”

Stunned by her news, I sat there with my mouth agape, not wanting to get too excited about what might come next. “It’s because of Kaid and Addie’s acting?—”

Addie scoffed, but it was Kaid who shook his head and spoke up.

“The story would have fallen at the first hurdle if it wasn’t for the safe environment you and Ollie created on set. You allowed feedback and worked with us to make the story even stronger. It was a true privilege not being labeled as a certain type of actor, thanks to you. And I said all that to say I’d work with you any day, on any project you guys want.”

Ollie linked his fingers with mine and stayed silent, but with an all-knowing smile on his face.

Spencer laughed and rubbed his hands together. “I have some thoughts.”

“Of course you do, love,” Lee agreed before he turned and kissed Spencer.

Before long, we pulled up to the curb of the theatre, and I blinked and the number of fans, photographers, reporters, and the general crowd surrounding the place.

“You can do this, beautiful. And I’ll be right beside you,” Ollie whispered in my ear.

With a reassuring squeeze of his hand and a deep breath; I stepped out and almost became overwhelmed by the volley of shouts and camera flashes surrounding us.

The night turned out to be one I never imagined for myself.

The entire experience of making a film filled me with a sense of purpose I hadn’t experienced in a long time. Working as an actor was fun and thrilling, taking a story and bringing it to life. But as a director, satisfaction came from working with talented people dedicated to the art and watching the results from that same group coming

together to make something that would resonate for years to come.

We'd left my family and friends at the after party, but after a whirlwind of a night, I wanted to be alone with Ollie.

When we had the limo to ourselves, I loosened my tie and unbuttoned the top of my dress shirt. All the while, Ollie concentrated on my movements before staring at the naked skin on my neck. A heated sizzle slithered up my spine, and my cock plumped at the intense look. Not wanting to waste the opportunity, I leaned closer to Ollie and whispered, "I want you inside me."

"Yes," he hissed.

At that moment, the limo parked and, without waiting for the driver to open the door; I lunged for it. I took a second to adjust myself with discretion before I opened the door and reached back, linking my fingers through Ollie's before I hurried my boyfriend into the house and up the stairs. It was a miracle I had the dexterity to lock the front door behind us before taking the steps two at a time.

We rushed through to the bedroom and as I inhaled the scent of him, it added to my desire for the man who was my entire world.

Thinking back, I loved how little it took to talk Ollie into moving his stuff into my suite. I ordered a lovely Bureau à Gradin writing desk and placed it under the window and it warmed my heart to see him typing away on his laptop, creating stories. But the absolute best was lying in bed every night, whether we made love or cuddled, because he snuggled into my arms and I listened to his breathing as I relaxed into sleep.

The second I closed the door and locked it behind us, Ollie turned to me and started undoing the rest of the buttons on my shirt. After all this time, something in my chest

fluttered when I observed his reactions to me. Adrenaline spiked between us, which left his fingers shaking, but there was a softness in his gaze which made my heart thump in my chest.

“Need you naked. Now, please, beautiful.”

The desperation in his voice ramped up my desire for the man. I, without thinking, I ripped open my shirt and reached for his hands, sighing when his fingers dug into my skin. Closing my eyes, trying to settle my already flaring need, I sucked in a breath when he swept his tongue against my already turgid nipple. But I shouted in surprise when his teeth nibbled on it.

“Fuck me. I need...” I groaned aloud when he dropped to his knees and rubbed his cheek against my throbbing dick. Without teasing me, he unbuttoned my slacks and lowered the zipper, reached inside my pants. My head dropped back when his hand surrounding my cock, his long fingers sending delicious shivers up my spine. But I let out a clipped curse when his tongue darted out and licked the precome from my slit.

“You taste so good,” he moaned.

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His hand cupped my balls and massaged as his mouth slid down my cock. The suction was almost my downfall. As he pulled back, I let out a yelp as he grabbed my hips and turned me toward the bed. My hands lay flat on the mattress and before I could question the sudden move, his hands cupped my ass and he opened me up to his view.

Ollie hummed a second before his breath washed over my sensitive skin. It was all the warning I received before he flattened his tongue against my taint.

I choked on a gasp as his tongue swirled around my entrance, pressing against my pucker, before flicking in and out of me. Not long after, my knees wobbled, and I knew it was a matter of time before I took a header onto the bed.

That's when Ollie cranked it up a notch. His finger, already smothered with lube, pressed inside me to the first knuckle, and I let out a keening whimper. It'd been a while since I had Ollie inside me and, in a rush, I groaned for more.

"Please?" I begged.

His finger slid inside me and a whimper escaped as he crooked his finger, finding my prostate with practiced ease. Without withdrawing, a second finger joined the first, and when he scissored them open, I fell onto my elbows and wriggled back, loving the stretch and needing more.

"So greedy for me, beautiful."

"Yes," was all I could gasp out.

Between the mindless sensations sparking up and down my body, and the crooning of his voice, I reached down and clamped a hand on my dick and squeezed. “Fuck! I’m already close.”

With that, Ollie stood and helped me onto my back. His hands roamed over my chest, down my abs as his thumbs grazed my hips, doing nothing to cool the need boiling inside me.

After his hands had their turn, his lips brushed against my earlobe, traveling down over my sensitive neck and collarbone, where he sucked on the skin there. I wanted him to mark me, to show everyone I belonged to him, but all thought fled when his lips pursed over my nipple and he sucked.

Each movement pulled me into a euphoria I’d never experienced before and when he pressed the head of his dick to my entrance and slid in with ease, I clung to him in a desperate plea for more.

His powerful arms came around me, holding me close to his body.

“You’re so gorgeous like this. Out of your mind on pleasure, seeking your release. It’s a fucking sexy sight to see you out of your mind on desire.”

I gasped, loving the flush his words caused. But in the next moment, he lifted me before settling at the head of the bed; me straddling his lap as I moaned, taking him deeper inside me. My hips jerked forward and both of us cried out. I loved as his arms banded around my back, holding me close, and pressing little kisses along my chest and neck.

Not able to hold back, I rocked my hips, the little thrusts causing a desperation inside of me. My cock rubbed against his abs and with the added friction, I clung onto him. Each movement thrummed inside me, holding me hostage to the pleasure that rocked

me to my core.

Soon, my brain turned off and there was only Ollie; inside me, driving me insane with each brush of his cock against my prostate, as well as his mouth nibbling against the sensitive area of my neck, all while I listened to his harsh breathing and scattered moans.

“I love being this close to you, to hold you as you take me deep inside you.”

His lips find mine in a kiss so scorching; a trail of broken whimpers escapes, absorbed into his mouth. The devotion and love reflected in his eyes as I’m panting out his name, over and over, both wanting to be pushed past the edge and holding onto this perfect moment, almost overwhelmed me.

Sex had never been this all-consuming. Need, want, and longing consumed me, and it was second nature to me only since we’d started dating. Ollie was a generous lover and never failed to express his authentic emotions, whether during sex or hanging out in the movie room, laughing with my family and friends over a classic he’d never seen before. He supported me, told me all the time he loved me, and kept our lives filled with joy from his wicked sense of humor, all while he captured a genuine niceness people seldom encountered.

My body tingled as he drove me closer to tipping over the edge. But it was his sweat slicked skin and how tightly he held onto me as I drove him deeper inside me, murmuring words of love and devotion that made me tear up. I’ve never cried during sex, and when Ollie sucked in a breath and raised one hand to wipe away the tears streaming down my cheeks, I gave into my desire to be closer to him and pressed my lips to his.

“What’s wrong, beautiful?” He asked when the kiss broke off due to the lack of oxygen.

“Too many emotions,” I hiccuped.

The warm smile on his face and the gleam of pure adoration in his gaze pulled a sob from deep in my chest and I clung to him, forgetting for a moment how entwined we were with him still deep inside me. He held me as if it wasn't the most ridiculous thing in the world to have a man on top of you having some sort of emotional meltdown. But his hand rubbing up and down my back and he whispered soothing words settled my sob into inhaling quick breaths.

“You're okay. We're okay. It's the stress of the past few months getting to you. But remember, I love you and I'm not going anywhere. We'll take everything one step at a time, beautiful. I'm here and I won't ever leave you.”

This time when he captured my lips, there was a sense of calm that smothered the desperation of needing to be absorbed by the man I loved. His cock pulsed inside me and I moaned. Rather than go back to the desperation I was seeking, I sank against Ollie and allowed him to take care of me.

“That's it, beautiful.”

His hands caressed my back while his mouth touched every part of my skin he could reach. He bucked up inside me and I squeezed, holding him deep. My desire for him never wavered in the previous minutes, and so when I lifted myself up and dropped, I threw my head back and groaned.

Ollie met me thrust for thrust, and soon I was panting, back to begging he push me over the edge.

With all the emotion and need churning inside me, my orgasm hit me by surprise. I had time to gasp before I was spilling over Ollie's stomach and chest as I rode myself harder on his cock.

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“Fuck, beautiful, yes!”

Before I could grasp the intensity, Ollie swelled inside me and I ground down on his cock, wanting the rush of his come as he emptied inside me, marking me as his.

“Yes!”

His face burrowed against my neck and when his control slipped and his teeth pressed against a sensitive spot between my shoulder and neck, a burble of come escaped my spent cock and I panted in pleasure.

Who knew I got off with a little pain?

But as my breathing settled and my mind came back online, I realized it wasn't the pain I enjoyed, but the thought of Ollie marking me as his. After several minutes, he still held me close, even when both of us flinched as his softening cock slipped out of me.

“Do you want a big wedding?” I asked.

Of course, the man chuckled and rubbed my back. “Why don't we shower and you let me get my thoughts in order before we ask the big questions?”

In the next few minutes, I hobbled to the shower and, with help, appear to do a half decent job of cleaning myself. Soon, we're tucked under the covers when I turned on my side, holding my head up as I traced my fingers across Ollie's chest, avoiding his nipples. That would come later.

“I’m fine with anything you want. I understand you might need to invite some important people to?—”

“No,” I interrupted, “as long as family and friends are there, I will be fine with something small. As long as I’m married to you. It might be nice to have it in the backyard since it’s easier to have everyone here. Oh, that reminds me.”

Rolling toward my side, I opened the drawer to the nightstand and pulled out a black ring box and shut the drawer. When Ollie noticed the item in my hand, he sucked in a breath and met my eyes.

“What?”

“I know this isn’t the ideal situation, being naked and in bed after a wonderful night of celebration, but I can’t wait anymore. You said earlier you wanted to marry me, too. So, right now, I’m going to ask you before putting my ring on your finger. Will you marry me, Ollie?”

The gorgeous face of my boyfriend softened as he cupped my cheek with his hand and leaned in to brush a kiss against my lips. “Yes, I would love to marry you.”

As I leaned forward and captured his lips in a soft kiss, I thought back on my life before Ollie. It wasn’t cold and empty, but with this man in my life, the world seemed brighter and happier. Not only was I closer than ever with my family, my career moved from the rut I was in after being typecast for years as an action star. Yes, it brought me success and even though I wanted to move on and develop into more, I never took it for granted. But I yearned for more.

Along with Ollie’s faith in me, the one man who helped me feel brave enough to ask for something I wanted, I have a new direction in my life. Not discounting the support system of my friends and partners in the production company, I couldn’t be

happier with the direction my life was going in. Ollie, as my husband, would make all my dreams come true.

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OLLIE

Three Years Later

It was annoying, but my right leg refused to stop jumping up and down as my eyes darted back and forth in the deserted halls of the hospital waiting room.

Connor had gone downstairs to grab a coffee, and I teetered on the edge between calling him back or leaving him to his mission. We'd been there since close to midnight and now, at close to three in the morning, he'd been flagging.

In order to calm my mind, I closed my eyes and took deep breaths, getting nerves under control. But on such a momentous day for both of us, I couldn't help but remember back to the day Connor and I married.

A few days after Connor's directorial debut, he woke up and rushed me to get dressed in clothing he'd already laid out. Once I inhaled a cup of coffee, he put me in the car. Still a little too tired to ask what our destination would be, I leaned my head against the window and fell into a little nap.

I woke as he parked the car and blinked up to see the same courthouse where the paternity hearing took place. Confused, I got out and followed a beaming Connor through the parking lot and through the hallways, this time without cameras following our every move.

Upon entering a second-floor room next to another courtroom, surprise turned to

happiness as I spotted our family and friends assembled. But my heart leapt in my throat when among them stood a smiling judge in a black robe.

“Ready?” He asked.

Connor turned to me and took both of my hands in his. “Ollie, cariño mío, will you marry me today?”

My heart leapt in my throat, and my entire body buzzed with a fuzzy, disconnected sensation. But knowing my answer, I leaned close to him and said, “Yes, beautiful. I would love to marry you.”

In less than ten minutes, we exchanged vows, and the judge signed off on the marriage certificate. He explained how we would receive our marriage license in the mail, which had been hanging in the hallway near our bedroom since it arrived.

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It wasn't a hard decision to take his last name, but I kept my pen name. I still write, but more often than not, I love working with Connor as a script supervisor. He's directed three more movies; a romantic comedy, a period gay love story, which was my favorite, and the one set to release next year, a comedy action movie where Connor directs Kaid, Spencer, and himself.

Linus apprenticed under a costume designer as he worked on his degree in fashion design, and Connor has hired him for every one of our productions, and he's thrived in the role.

Landon enrolled in law school after finishing his B.A. in under three years, as he fast-tracked his education by also taking classes in the summer. Maisie mentored him whenever he struggled with a point of law he didn't understand, and he plans to be a defense attorney after school.

Lyric became a graphic designer and social media consultant. He creates all my book and audiobook covers, website, promo, and social media. To immerse him in the book world, he accompanied me to several romance conventions and networked with several other romance authors. Of course, they loved him and he had plenty of work in the publishing world. The best part, all three of them still lived at home.

The rest of the siblings all thrived in their lives. Sam stuck with emergency medicine, but Thomas helped him achieve a better work/life balance so he's not exhausted all the time. They married within a month of Connor and I exchanging our vows by the same judge in the same courtroom, with the same guests in attendance.

Omi choreographs several award shows and has contracted with studios for her

services.

And despite Emilia's law practice thriving, it hasn't soured her on love. Addie moved in with her and while they haven't spoken about marriage, I think it's a matter of time.

We are all still close, having family dinners most nights of the week. But rather than limit them to family, they include Spencer, Lee, Kaid, and Lewis, usually followed by movie marathons or game nights. It's nice to have siblings and close friends I love so integral to our happiness.

Valentina and Lewis, although they started as competitors, have become the best of friends. They have combined their efforts and researched new recipes, which we all benefitted from.

My phone buzzed, so I shook myself out of my thoughts, and paused in shaking my leg enough to get the cell out of my pocket. I let out a laugh when I noticed it was Connor.

Connor: Anything?

Ollie: No. Beautiful, don't you think I would have called you if I had any news?

Connor: Yeah, but... it doesn't take this long, does it?

Ollie: No clue. Did you find coffee?

Connor: Should we ask the nurse?

Ollie: They're a little busy. Where are you?

The phone went silent, and after a few minutes, the elevator dinged on the quiet floor. Not expecting anyone but my husband, I giggled when our entire group of friends and family piled out of the elevators, followed by Connor, looking triumphant with a large cup of coffee in his hand.

I stood and walked into mama's arms.

"How are you holding up?" Mama asked.

Connor moved behind me and wrapped an arm around my chest and pulling me closer to him when mama let me go. I let out every thought in my head.

"I'm nervous... but excited. Then terrified, and wondering why it's taking so long. I want to pace, but forced myself to sit down because I don't want to drive people crazy. But, yeah, excited. And nervous, anxious. Jeez, why can't I catch my breath? Is it hot in here?"

Soon, I was sitting with my head between my knees as Connor directed my breaths in and out.

"Are you okay, honey?" Emilia asked.

"Pretty sure. I might be. What's with all the questions?"

Addie laughed and rubbed my back.

Landon said, "I think she asked because you are hyperventilating, brother of mine."

"The glare won't help you get more oxygen," Lyric added.

"When did you become such a smart ass?" I asked.

“Yesterday,” he replied, blinking.

Spencer, Lee, Kaid, and Lewis laughed, and I glared at them, pointing. “Don’t encourage him.” Of course, I’m about as intimidating as a fluffy bunny.

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Gracie pushed people out of the way and sat next to me. “It’ll be okay, honey. Look how many babysitters you have on hand.”

“And I’m a doctor,” Sam added, leaning against his husband.

Before I could concentrate on all the support we had, I heard someone clear their throat. When I glanced up, a doctor in scrubs stood there with an amused expression.

“Mr. and Mr. Blake?”

I shot up to my feet, catching my husband as he flailed backwards from my sudden movement since he was still kneeling in front of me. I took his arm and jerked him up to his feet and turned us toward the doctor.

“Yes?” Connor asked after I tried to croak out an answer.

Linus chuckled beside me, and I elbowed him in the stomach.

“You two have a baby girl. She was born at one ten this morning. She weighs seven pounds, eight ounces. Would you like to see her?”

“Yes, please,” I whispered.

With a nod, he led the way toward the well-baby nursery and Connor linked his fingers through mine.

I leaned in and asked, “Are you shaking or is it me?”

He huffed out a laugh and said, “Pretty sure it’s both of us.”

Once the doctor ushered us into the room, my gaze zeroed in on the baby in the nurse’s arms being rocked back and forth as she cried. There wasn’t any hesitation on my part, so when I stepped up to the nurse, she gave me a smile and slid the tiny human into my arms.

“Shhhh, little one. We’re here now. You are safe and loved.”

When the baby stopped crying at my voice, my heart seized at the curious look on her face and the fact I was holding our baby for the first time. This time, I blinked tears from my eyes as I glanced up at Connor.

“I’m so glad your mom taught us how to hold a baby with that sack of flour before she came into the world.”

Connor smiled as the doctor and nurse both laughed.

Glancing down at our newborn daughter, I said, “Hi, little one. We’re your daddies...”

With the words out of my mouth, my head shot up, and I whisper-shouted at my husband, “We can’t call ourselves that!”

With an ease and calmness I had yet to experience, he wrapped an arm around my back as he cocooned our daughter between us.

“Ah, cariño mío, it’ll be okay. How about... you be dad and me, papa?”

I blinked up at him. “I’m... I would love to hear her call you papa.”

In the next few minutes, we filled out the information for the birth certificate, listing

both of us as parents to our daughter. They verified the legal paperwork where the mother had relinquished custody. The doctor performed a series of screenings along with a physical examination, declaring the baby healthy.

As I carried our little one toward the waiting room to meet her family, I glanced at my husband and asked, “Are you happy?”

“For the next step in our life? Yeah, I couldn’t have predicted how much I wanted to add to our family, but watching you hold our daughter fills me with so much joy, I don’t know how I’m containing it.”

“You’ll be a brilliant father. Because you have so much love to give.”

My husband beamed at me. “I do, but that’s because of you.”

He paused us before we opened the door to the waiting room. “I love you so much.”

I leaned my forehead against his, taking a deep breath. “Connor, you are the love of my life who gave me a loving family, friends, and now, our baby girl. I not only know it, but feel it, every day. And I love you just as much.”

With my hands full, I couldn’t reach up and wipe the happy tears away. But I pressed my lips to his and said, “Let’s start our next adventure.”

Connor nodded and pushed open the door. The hushed talking stopped.

“Who do you have you there?” Thomas asked.

With a smirk at me, Connor said, “Meet our daughter, Freya Valentina Amelie Natalie Blake.”

THE END