



Beauty and the Boutique (Foggy Basin)

Author: *Kota Quinn*

Category: LGBT+

Description: Ezra:

What happens when a famous rock star rescues you from an embarrassing encounter with your nemesis, who also happens to be dating your ex? You kiss him, of course.

When Olly Black walks into my small-town and takes a fast pass to my heart, all I can do is go along with this wild ride. But theres more to Olly than meets the eye. Sure, hes gorgeous and talented, and seems a little grumpy at first, but the more I get to know him, the more I see that hes a genuinely sweet guy.

Something happened in his past, and I want to prove to him that hes still worth loving. Even if it will break my own heart in the process.

Olly:

Im still dealing with the aftermath of my stalker. Hes locked up and Im safe, so why cant my mind and body get the memo?

When one of my panic attacks is photographed for the world to see, I realize that its time I get help. I want to go somewhere quiet, somewhere the paparazzi wont find me. When my aunt invites me to her small home in Foggy Basin, California, its the perfect place to hide out.

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(Two Years ago)

“ Thanks for joining us today, Olly. It was an absolute pleasure meeting you. This article will be a hit.”

I drum my fingers on the glass desk, itchy to leave this meeting. Privacy has always been important to me, but as one of the guitarists for Arcade Lake, it's like I gave up that privilege years ago. “The pleasure was all mine. Thank you, Sarah.” At least she was sweet and stuck with the least intrusive interview questions.

“One more question, before you go,” she drawls, placing her palm suggestively on my forearm. Here we go. I wince internally, but give her a smile that hopefully doesn't portray my discomfort.

“Is this on or off the record?”

Her blue eyes sparkle. “Oh, come on Olly. On the record, of course. Your fans are dying to know: are you seeing anyone special?”

My mind immediately wanders to Oscar, and I can't fight the smile on my face. My Oscar. I plan on keeping that particular answer to myself, but I know my expression gives me away. So instead, I lean into it, letting my smile grow a little wider as I stand and give Sarah a knowing wink. She can jump to her own conclusions. “Like I said, Sarah, the pleasure was all mine.”

She gives me a mock pout, but stands up and walks me out of her office. We make it all the way to the elevator before she speaks again. “You might have dodged the

question, Olly, but don't think that smile and dreamy look on your face won't be mentioned in my article. Because that was gold."

I laugh, enjoying her honesty. "You gotta do what you gotta do."

The elevator door opens and I step inside. She leans against the frame, catching the door with her red stiletto heel before it closes. "Maybe next time you can convince your brother to actually join us?" Her tone is hopeful, which makes sense. My twin is the more outgoing and charming one of the two of us.

With a ding, the elevator doors finally close, and I let out a deep breath.

I have no idea what happened to Zayden today. He was supposed to be in that stupid interview with me. Although it isn't unlike him to get easily distracted. I swear, my brother needs a keeper. He'll probably be upset when he realizes how gorgeous Sarah is.

Pulling out my phone, I check to see if there are any missed messages. Nothing. So instead, I call my younger brother, Noah.

"Hey there, Olly. How's the tour going?"

"Good. We finished the West Coast leg yesterday. We're in New York. Guess what I just did all by my lonesome?"

"Hmm. Let me think. What would my introverted, book-loving brother do on a Saturday morning after a tour?"

I laugh. "Okay brat, I'll just tell you. I wrapped up an interview with your favorite magazine."

“Oh my gosh,” Noah squeals. “You interviewed with Dee Rama Magazine?”

An image of Noah with his pink hair and infectious smile pops into my mind. Five bucks says he’s jumping up and down in his living room like a hyper cheerleader.

“Wait, where’s Zayden? I’m surprised Dee Rama didn’t want an interview with the both of you.”

“They did want him. Hold on one second,” I say as I slide onto my motorcycle and switch over to the Bluetooth in my helmet. “Zayden was supposed to be here, but I’m guessing someone distracted him.”

“Classic Zee. So how was it? Did Dee Rama dig up any dirty secrets from you?”

“Much to Sarah Salt’s dismay, she did not.”

“Oh wow, you got to sit with Sarah Salt? Fuck, I love her. That time she interviewed Jude Hale was inspiring.”

I laugh. Noah sounds star struck. Ever since Noah was a teen, he’s been obsessed with Dee Rama Magazine. So much so that he is doing a double major in business and journalism, hoping to work for the company someday.

“She asked me if I was seeing anyone special, and I almost fucking blew it.” My little brother is the only one who knows I’m seeing Oscar. It started a few weeks ago. He appeared so suddenly and somehow wormed his way into my heart. Makes sense, though, as he’s exactly my type; tall, dark, and handsome, with his wavy black hair and soulful blue eyes. Throw in his passion for music and late nights spent at the recording studio, and I was a fucking goner.

“Oh no. Did you tell her about your boyfriend?”

My heart flips. “We haven’t put a label on it, but I’m happy I told you about Oscar. It’s nice to talk about him with someone. No, Sarah didn’t find out. Although, I’m sure my face gave me away when she asked if I was seeing someone special. I smiled like a damn fool.”

Noah chuckles. “Yeah, you aren’t the best at hiding your emotions. Not like Zee.”

I make my way through the busy streets, weaving through traffic as Noah tells me all about his school year and how he and his best friend, Jules, will be graduating together. By the time I get to the penthouse apartment I share with Zayden, I hang up the phone with a promise to Noah that I’ll call soon.

Unlocking my door, I walk into the penthouse and toss my keys and wallet onto the dining table. “Hey Zee, you home? You fucking owe me, man. I had to do that damn magazine interview by myse—”

Music filters through the apartment, clearly coming from Zayden’s bedroom. I cringe. Music means he’s probably getting it on. Quietly, I walk back to our kitchen and start pulling ingredients to make myself a sandwich when I hear it. A groan. A very familiar groan I know all too well.

The blood drains from my face and I feel dizzy as I somehow make my way back to my brother’s room. They are quiet for a moment, with the exception of one of our songs playing through the speakers. Is Zayden seriously fucking someone to one of our tracks?

After a moment of listening, I start feeling awkward. My wave of dizziness is no longer present, and I’m pretty sure I just imagined Oscar’s groan through the walls. At least that’s what I tell myself until I hear Oscar’s voice. “Fuck, you are so good. So snug and perfect.”

The door isn't clicked closed, and the curiosity, confusion, and pain are too much. I need confirmation. So, I nudge the door open with my foot.

I instantly know I've made a horrible mistake. Zayden is lying on his back on the edge of the bed as the man who I've stupidly started to develop feelings for pounds into him. My mouth gapes open as my heart pounds so loud it beats in my ears, drowning out the music.

Like a car crash I can't pry my eyes away from, I just stand there, staring. Oscar notices me first. His striking blue eyes meet mine, no longer looking soulful but downright smug. To my shock, Oscar doesn't stop. He continues to pound into my brother. Zayden's eyes are closed, his mouth open in ecstasy. A part of me wants to deny this is happening. Zee and I are identical. Is it possible that Oscar thought it was me on the bed?

Only, I know that doesn't make any sense. The fucking gut punch in this whole damn scenario is that Oscar is topping and he never tops. Not once has Oscar hinted he wanted what he's currently doing to Zee.

"What the fuck?" I say, voice trembling with fury.

Zayden's eyes snap open. "What the hell? Olly? Close the damn door!"

Even at the sound of my brother's panicked voice, Oscar doesn't stop. Zayden props himself up on his elbows, but Oscar grasps his hips and yanks my brother toward him, causing him to moan.

Oscar gives me a calculating smirk. "Oh look, the boring twin is back. Wanna join, baby?"

My face flames at the pet name. "You fucking asshole. Get your disgusting dick out

of my brother and get the fuck out of my place,” I roar. Spinning around, I storm out of the bedroom and slam the door.

“What the fuck is going on?” Zayden yells at Oscar. “Are you fucking both of us?”

Oscar is talking, but I can’t make out what he’s saying. I stomp back to the kitchen and see my forgotten sandwich ingredients. Appetite lost and anger fueling through me, I viciously swipe an arm over the counter and cause the food and paper plates to go crashing to the ground.

I hear a door open and close. Suddenly, Oscar is by my side. His black wavy hair is falling into his eyes. “Baby, I’m so sorry. I didn’t realize, I thought—”

My hands flex at my side, tempted to smash into his cheek. I don’t know this man in front of me. The Oscar I started to fall for was a figment of my imagination. Someone created by this manipulative man. The fucker probably wants me to punch him.

What’s his endgame? Money?

“Get the fuck out. You damn well know that wasn’t me. I’d never fucking bottom for you.” I wince internally. I might be a top, but just an hour ago, I thought Oscar could be the one. It was just a fucking hour ago I was in Dee Rama’s corporate office, smiling at the thought of the pathetic man in front of me. I have no doubt I would have tried bottoming for him if he asked.

“Get the fuck out,” I whisper again, suddenly feeling drained and tired.

“Okay, baby. I’ll give you time to cool down.”

Zayden storms forward, fully dressed. When did he leave his room? “Like hell. You heard my brother. Get the fuck out of our apartment.”

Oscar doesn't even acknowledge or look at Zayden. "I'll see you in the studio tomorrow, Olly."

Zayden gets in Oscar's face and shoves him back. "Like hell, you will. You can kiss your job goodbye."

Oscar sneers at Zayden. "You can't do that. I don't work for you. I work for the label."

"Consider your job gone," Zayden hisses.

The door slams when he finally leaves.

I finally look up at my brother. His face is bright red, he's panting, and his eyes are filled with angry tears. Fuck. Why didn't I tell my brother about Oscar?

"Olly," Zayden says in a low tone. "I had no idea."

I stand up and walk toward my identical twin. I clap him once on the back. "It's okay, Zee. I should have told you. He fooled us both. We never have to see that guy again."

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

(Two months ago)

“What the hell is this crap?” Our agent and manager, Leslie Thomas, tosses a gossip magazine onto the kitchen counter. “Tell me you’re not on drugs.” Yeah, Leslie has always been an asshole. He stands there in his usual designer jeans and navy button-up shirt. Leslie stares at me with an intense gaze that would get most people replying in an instant, but I know the man is all bark.

I chew on my lip, not even bothering to answer him. He damn well knows I don’t do drugs. My gaze trails back over to the magazine. Even from my vantage point against the fridge, I can see a photo of myself plastered on the cover. It’s an image that will be carved into my brain until the end of time.

My twin brother walks into the kitchen in a pair of sweats. He picks up the tabloid. “Fuck,” he mumbles. “Another one? Can’t you fucking do something about this shit?” He tosses the magazine back toward Leslie, right as Leslie’s phone starts to ring.

“Damnit, I gotta take this.” He slams the tabloid on the counter and points a finger at me. “Don’t think we’re done with this conversation. I want some explanations.” Leslie brushes past me, and I sigh in relief as soon as he’s out of sight.

“Just a few more months,” I mumble. “Just a few more months.”

“Don’t let him get to you, Olly. His contract is up at the end of the year.”

“I know.” Picking up the magazine, I tense when I look at the title. “Arcade Lake on

Drugs? Are they serious with this shit?” I study my photo, feeling lost. I’m up on stage, something that wouldn’t be unusual if it weren’t for the fact that I’m curled up in the fetal position, eyes wide and manic as I stare blankly in front of me. The photo was clearly taken by a professional backstage because I can see the crowd of fans behind me. Thousands and thousands of people witnessing my panic attack.

Zayden gently pries the magazine from my grasp and throws it into the trash. He wraps his arms around me. “I’m so sorry, Olls. I wish I could go back in time. I wish we had never met Oscar Mendez.”

“It’s not your fault,” I say for what feels like the millionth time. “We didn’t know.” I’m just grateful the man didn’t break the trust between me and my brother.

The day Zayden kicked Oscar out of his bed should have been the last time we ever saw the cheating asshole, but unfortunately for us, it wasn’t. He called me multiple times a day for weeks, begging me to forgive him. I ignored every call.

Two weeks later, I got my first letter.

We thought nothing of it in the beginning. So many fans get creative, leaving us letters, gifts, and photos. But that first letter from Oscar wasn’t signed. It wasn’t until his letters turned creepy and ended with a ‘ Forever Yours ’ did I realize it was him. It was something he used to say to me in person.

‘ Forever Yours ’

The man I once thought would be my everything became my worst nightmare instead. A stalker. A predator. He was obsessed with Arcade Lake, but his main focus was terrorizing Zayden and me. After about a year of being followed, improving our security, and limiting my time out with the public, I started to get paranoid. Suddenly Oscar’s creepy love notes turned into threats and, eventually, into packages that

looked like they were gifts straight out of a horror movie.

When Oscar was finally caught, we found out Oscar wasn't even his real name. Not only was this repeated behavior with other celebrities, but he had also hurt those he stalked before he disappeared. The FBI got involved, and somehow, we were able to keep all of this from the media.

The day Oscar was caught was one of the best days of my life. The amount of relief I felt was overwhelming. He was going away for a long time.

Unfortunately, by the time he was arrested, it was too late for my mental health. My paranoia escalated, and my body had betrayed me. Even knowing the threat is behind bars, I still flinch at any sudden noises. My nights are filled with nightmares, and my body reacts against my will. The photo is staring at me from the trash. My face flushes with anger; he fucking did this to me. He broke me. It wasn't the first time I was performing on stage when I thought I saw Oscar out in the crowd.

Sometimes it's an outfit or the way a guy moves. This time it was a fan's mop of dark, wavy hair that made me react. When the guy's face turned up toward the stage, I could see it wasn't Oscar, but my brain couldn't communicate with my body in time, not with the adrenaline pumping through my blood and my heart pounding.

It happened in a flash. One minute I was strumming my guitar, then the next I was on the ground, lost in nightmares and memories.

I shake the thoughts away. "Whatever. There's nothing I can do. The damage is done," I say.

Zayden's forehead creases with concern.

"No," I hiss, jabbing a finger toward him. "Don't do that. Don't pity me. It's not my

fault I react this way. I can't fucking stop it from happening."

Zayden leans forward, and I shrug off his touch. How could he be so normal while I'm at war with my body, stuck in the aftermath of Oscar's bullshit?

"Olly, I never said I pitied you."

"It's in your damn expression."

"It's just..." Zayden hesitates. "It keeps happening. You're always taking care of everyone around you, but when do you ever focus on yourself? I think you need to talk to someone about this. You've kept it bottled up."

"And what if the media finds out?"

"Maybe they should."

I recoil back as if slapped.

"Maybe it's time we told our story. We can get ahead of it. Make sure we tell our side before the media finds out and twists the truth."

Leaning against the counter, I mull over Zayden's words. He's right. Maybe talking about this and getting it out will be my first step in the healing process. "Okay," I reply.

"Perfect. Why don't we call Noah?"

I smile, thinking of our little brother. After he graduated last year, he finally got an internship at Dee Rama Magazine. He's worked hard to get where he is, and I couldn't be prouder. "If Noah could interview us, or get someone he trusts, then I'm

in. I'll tell my story."

"Good."

"Good," I repeat, before hesitating. "Zee?"

"Yeah?"

"After our interview, I think I need a break." Zayden nods, so I continue talking. "It's something I've been afraid to admit to myself, but you're right. I need help. Time to heal. I'm going to call Aunt Tessy and see if I can stay with her a bit."

"You're going to Northern California?"

I nod again.

"Leslie won't like it, but I think this will be good for you. We just finished the tour. I think it will be beneficial for you to be out of sight for a while after the interview publishes."

"Looks like I'm finally going to Foggy Basin."

(Present Day)

I pull up to the only gas station in Foggy Basin, thankful there's one in town. I really should have filled up when I drove through Roseville, but I didn't want to prolong my trip even more. As soon as I park, I pull off my helmet and take a deep breath. The town is surrounded by trees and off in the distance there's a nice view of the mountains. I can't even remember the last time I stayed in a small town.

Puffy clouds are high in the sky, and the sun beats down on my back, causing me to

sweat now that I'm not riding on the highway.

"Am I dreaming or did one of Arcade Lake's guitarists just pull up in my small town on the back of a Shadow?" The silhouette of a man built like a running back comes into view. It isn't until he's closer and out of direct sunlight that I can make out his features.

The man has shaggy blond hair and stunning turquoise eyes. At first glance, I think he's tall, but once he's by my side, I realize he's a little shorter than me and more compact. I'd guess he's about five-foot-seven. The man's handsome, in that bad boy type of way.

He crouches down and looks at my bike, admiring it.

I grin, happy to meet someone who appreciates my bike. She's affordable, but still a beauty. "Olly." I hold out my hand once he stands up. He eyes my hand carefully before clasping it with his and offering me a shy smile. He's an interesting blend of innocent and bad boy, but it suits him.

"Haven," he replies. "Huge fan."

Suddenly, I register the sound of heavy metal coming from the building in front of me. I smile again. "That's my buddy's band. We went on tour together—"

"A few months ago." Haven nods eagerly. "I remember hearing about it. So, what brings you to Foggy?"

"Actually, can you keep a secret?" I glance around as if paparazzi will pop out from behind the gas pump. Haven seems like a nice guy, but I have no idea if I can trust him. Unfortunately, with a town as small as Foggy Basin, I'm positive it won't take long for the gossip of my arrival to spread.

“I can definitely keep a secret,” he replies, tone sincere. And, for some reason, I believe him. There must be something about his soft demeanor, despite his bad-boy exterior.

“I’m planning on staying here for a bit.”

His eyes widen, jaw falling slack. “But why our town?”

“My aunt lives here,” I say simply.

Sure enough, Haven knows exactly who my aunt is. We chat for a bit before someone from town pulls up, needing help with their car. Apparently, Haven and his brother live in the apartment over the building. He’s a mechanic and runs the garage, his sister runs the gas station, and their brother has a dispensary.

Hopping back on my bike, I make my way toward my aunt’s place, checking the address as soon as I arrive. It’s a cute little cottage-style house, with blue shutters on the windows and a wrap-around porch. It’s modest compared to the mansion she used to own in San Francisco.

I park my motorcycle on her driveway and climb the two steps onto her porch, spotting the wooden two-seater swing on one end. Holy shit, have I walked into a damn Hallmark movie?

“Oliver, honey, is that you?”

I spin around to see Aunt Tessy behind me with her wild curly brown hair half up in a messy bun. She’s wearing a purple sundress that hangs down to her ankles and a pair of gardening gloves. Despite a few grays, she looks exactly like I’ve always remembered her.

“Aunty Tessy.” I rush back down the stairs and wrap her tiny frame in my arms. Her familiar scent of lavender surrounds me, and I feel some of the tension leave my body. As if sensing I need her, she tightens her hold as I linger a moment longer.

“You look good,” I say as I pull away slowly. I point at her dirt-smudged gardening gloves with a grin. “Small-town life suits you.”

“It damn well better suit me. I’ve been here for ten years now. It’s not my fault you never visited.”

Heat creeps into my cheeks. “You know how it is. Life has been a little crazy lately.”

“Yes, yes.” She waves her hand in the air before leading me into her house. “The life of a famous rock star and all.”

“You didn’t seem to be complaining about said fame when Zayden and I surprised you and Mom with a trip to Hawaii a few months ago.” Just because I haven’t been to her house, didn’t mean that Zayden and I didn’t make it a point to see her as often as possible. Because of our busy schedule, it’s been easier to fly her, Mom, and Noah to us throughout the years.

“Well, I’m glad you’re finally here.”

“Me too.”

I sit at the small round table in her kitchen and watch her flitter around the room like a bumblebee with a purpose.

“Here’s some lemonade.” She places the glass in front of me and I offer her a smile.

“Thank you.” I hum in appreciation as I chug the tangy-sweet beverage. “I’m not

used to riding in the heat anymore.”

“So, how long do you plan on staying?”

I think about Arcade Lake and the guys, the tour we just canceled, and that damn article. “I’m not sure,” I answer honestly. “At least a few weeks.”

Aunt Tessy pats my shoulder and joins me at the table with her own glass.

“Do you think I’m being overdramatic? I feel like I left Zayden and the band in a jam.”

She shakes her head and places her hand on the table, palm up. Automatically, I grasp her hand, clutching it like a lifeline. Suddenly, I feel so small. Like the lost teen who ran to his aunt whenever he needed guidance.

“No, sweetie.” She squeezes my hand. “Your mental health is more important. You’ve dealt with a lot.”

Aunt Tessy is the only one who knows the full extent of my feelings about Oscar. Even my brothers don’t fully understand just how much damage Oscar’s stalking had done to me.

“You’re here to heal, Olly, in whatever way that might be. My doors are always open to you and our family, and you can take as long as you need. If the guys don’t understand, that’s fine. You are allowed to focus on you for once.”

I take a deep breath and nod. She’s right. It’s okay to focus on me for once.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

“ And that’s why you’ll never know what could’ve been. Let’s light these flowers on fire.” -Arcade Lake

The bell above the front door of my boutique dings. I glance up to see one of my favorite customers.

“Hey, Mosby. I’m glad you’re back. I have something for you.”

Mosby’s fingers rub against his clean-shaven jaw. I get the impression he was reaching for his unruly blond beard, only to forget Ty had touched up his appearance.

Ever since falling for one of our locals, Mosby has made it a point to frequent my little fashion boutique as often as possible. Mosby claims he’s dressing up for himself, but I see the way Ty appreciates his man in a new pair of jeans.

I walk over to the rack of clothes I just set up this morning, and reach for a green shirt that I know will make his eyes pop, matching it with a pair of dark jeans.

“How are you so good at picking out everyone’s outfits?”

I smirk and give him a curtsy. “Why thank you, sir. It’s a talent I love to show off.”

Mosby scoffs. “More like a superpower. I don’t even need to try it on. If you say it’ll look good on me, then it will look good.”

“Just in case, feel free to swing by the boutique if you need me to tailor anything,” I reply, knowing it will look amazing on him. It’s my thing. I am a couturier, stylist,

clothing designer, and fashionista to my core. I take a lot of pride in my shop and my ability to find the perfect outfit for those who want to feel beautiful inside and out.

People always joke that I named my shop Beauty and the Boutique because of my appearance, but the beauty stands for how I want people to feel when visiting my little slice of heaven here in our quaint town. I also want my shop to be a safe haven of sorts here in Foggy Basin. A place where anyone who feels different knows it's okay to stand out and look beautiful doing it.

For as long as I can remember, fashion has always been a passion of mine. I can thank Mama for that. When I was little, maybe eight or nine, Mama and I used to rush to the local gas station every month just to purchase the latest issue of Dee Rama Magazine. We would bond over our favorite styles and fashion faux pas, all while dreaming of moving to a fashion-focused city like New York.

Let's just say, college life made me realize just how much I missed Foggy. Busy cities might be fun to visit, but this town is my home and my shop is my happy place.

After ringing him up, I wrap Mosby's new outfit in some teal tissue paper and place it in a bright yellow paper bag with the shop logo on it. "Make sure you tell Ty I want to see him soon."

Mosby's whole face lights up at the mere mention of his man. Blah. I will not be jealous. I will not be jealous, I chant, silently telling myself I don't need a boyfriend to cuddle up with at night. That's what Tabby is for, and trust me, my cat can cuddle better than any man.

"Holy shit. You actually did it," Rebecca says, scanning my laptop screen from over my shoulder.

"Fuck, Becca. I was so nervous when I hit the submit button." I get out of my office

chair and tilt the screen toward her. She takes it as the silent invitation it is and plops down in my abandoned seat before scrolling through my application.

“You’re gonna be great. Fashion and designing is in your blood.”

“Well, I can’t undo it now.” I walk over to the front door of my shop, flip over the closed sign, and turn off the window display lights.

“We need to celebrate. This is a really big deal, Ezra. You’re putting your designs out into the world and competing against others in a fucking fashion show . We need to drink, and maybe even dance.”

I scrunch my face. “I don’t really feel like driving all the way to downtown Sac tonight. Can we just celebrate here?”

“Oh, come on. Sacramento always has the best bars and clubs.”

The more excited she sounds, the heavier my bones feel. God, why do I feel ancient? I’m only twenty-five, for fuck’s sake. “Why don’t we do it next week? I’ve been manning the shop all day.”

“Speaking of, where is Tessy? I don’t think she’s taken an extra day off since she started working here.”

Tessy is my only other employee—besides Rebecca. She’s a beautiful woman in her fifties. Sweet and a little mysterious, with a motherly, nurturing demeanor. “She took the day off to clean up around the house. Apparently, her nephew needed a place to stay, and she was getting ready for his visit.”

“Oh!” Rebecca gives me a sly smile. “Fresh meat. Tell me more. Is he our age? I know he’s an adult. And he has to be attractive with how pretty Tessy is, right?”

“Oh my god, stop.” I laugh. “Leave Tessy’s nephew alone. He’s probably eighteen or nineteen.”

“As long as we’re both consenting adults, it should be fine,” she jokes.

“You’re such a horn dog.”

Rebecca chortles. “Like you’re not?”

Fuck, yes. I’m horny all the time. But that doesn’t mean I want to jump some random guy’s bones. Let alone my employee’s family member. Talk about conflict of interest.

“Wait, when was the last time you hooked up with someone? Weren’t your last few attempts epic fails?”

I wince, hoping she wouldn’t remember that. Huh. But when was the last time I had sex? When was the last time I wanted to? Ever since breaking up with Forrest last year, I’ve missed being in an actual relationship, and apparently, I’ve grown out of the hook-up scene. I loved going home to someone, being wrapped in their arms, and feeling cared for.

“Oh, no.” Rebecca twirls a manicured finger in front of my face. “You have that damn look again.”

“What look?”

“The ‘maybe I shouldn’t have dumped Forrest’ look.”

I playfully smack her wandering finger out of my way. “That’s not what I was thinking.” It totally was .

“Oh shush, Ezra. Don’t forget, we’re best friends. I know your facial expressions better than my own.”

I pout. “It’s just—”

“No. It’s just nothing. You were miserable at the end of your relationship. Forrest is a good guy, just not the guy for you.”

She’s right. My ex and I grew apart. He’s sweet and wholesome, and he wanted me to act the same way. Forrest was so shy that he wanted me to dress in neutral colors, never stand out, not contradict others, or draw too much attention. Basically, blend into the background. We dated for two years, and while, yes, we loved each other, it’s almost as if he outgrew me during that time, rather than growing with me. He never actively tried to hurt me with his words, he just always acted disappointed, and in some ways that was worse, more painful.

It made me feel like it was wrong to just want to be myself.

“Anyway,” I say, suddenly feeling a new sense of urgency. “Are we going to go celebrate?”

“Yes!” Rebecca cheers. “There’s a new club that just opened up downtown. I can order an Uber and—”

“Let’s go to Pints ‘n’ Pool.”

Rebecca narrows her eyes. “Fine. It’s your celebration. But we’re going to Sacramento next weekend. No excuses.”

“Deal,” I smile, plucking her hand from her lap and shaking it. “Now, let’s doll ourselves up. Just because we’re going to our local dive doesn’t mean we can’t look

hot.”

By the time we make it to the bar, all the pool tables are preoccupied and a small crowd has formed around the bar top. Being one of the few places to go in Foggy, most of the locals frequented Pints ‘n’ Pool for a drink after work.

I tug Rebecca forward, leading her to an open spot near the bar. I raise my hand and wave, catching Nate’s attention.

Nate, the owner of this fine establishment, whistles when he takes in my outfit. “And who exactly are you dressing up for?”

“I always dress for myself.” I give a little twirl, showing off my tight pants and flowy white crop top. I’d also decided to add a little eye makeup and some lip color tonight. It’s light but obvious, and even though I identify as male, it gives me a gender-neutral look I love.

As I spin, I notice three handsome men in a booth near the back. Normally, I’d be attracted to the two outgoing smiling men, but there’s something about the scowling guy with the intense stare that has me pausing long enough to check him out.

Kit appears by Nate’s side. “Oh, wow. I, um, I...” Kit studies me a little longer, his cheeks heating.

Nate wraps a possessive arm around Kit. “Boy,” he growls near Kit’s ear. “You trying to make me jealous?”

A shy smile tugs on Kit’s lips, and Nate grins. Those two only have eyes for each other.

“Right,” I drawl. “Before you two start eye fucking, can I get two strawberry

margaritas?”

Nate rolls his eyes and passes me two mugs and a pitcher of beer on tap. I wink at Kit and sashay toward a table closest to the jukebox. And if it happens to be close to some eye candy, sue me.

Rebecca laughs as she follows close behind me. “How upset are you that Nate is officially off the market?”

I glance back at the couple just as Nate leans in and places a kiss on Kit’s lips, right there in the middle of the bar. It’s quick, but the affection between the two is obvious. “Nah.” I wave a hand in the air. “I’ve never seen Nate this happy before. It’s almost as if Kit has brightened up his life. They’re perfect together.”

“So, tell me more about this fashion show. How does it work?”

I pour us both a glass of beer and dive into my explanation. “If I get accepted, then I will get a package in the mail with the theme. From there, each person participating in the fashion show will feature four to seven outfits. I’ll need to find a model or two who would be willing to walk the stage. Then the first-place winner will win twenty thousand dollars and a feature in Dee Rama magazine.”

“That’s amazing—” Rebecca’s eyes pop wide at something behind me. “Oh, fuck,” she breathes out. “Don’t look behind you.”

My heart pounds. Oh God, why would she tell me not to look? Of course, now my neck is stiff and aching to twist around. Seriously, who does that? If you don’t want someone to look behind them, don’t say a word. Act normal. Telling me to not turn around just makes me want to do exactly that. Warning be damned.

“Did I hear you say Dee Rama magazine?” asks an all-too-familiar high-pitched

voice. “You wouldn’t be talking about the fashion show contest, would you?”

Despite my bestie’s warning, I turn around in my seat. Sure enough, Flora Sellar is standing behind me.

Flora Sellar, my nemesis. The girl who made college a living hell for me.

She looks absolutely stunning in a white-and-yellow dress with sunflowers on it. She’s wearing strappy white sandals that show off her perfectly pedicured toenails and her tiny, adorable feet. Her blonde hair is pulled back by a white headband that should be outdated, but instead looks quite fetching on her. And yes, the word fetching would make a comeback just for her. But the thing that has me absolutely floored—like mouth gaping and an unattractive sweat breaking across my upper lip—is the hand looped through her arm like the latest Gucci purse.

“Forrest?” I stammer. “You’re back in town?”

Flora answers for him. “He is. Forrest thought it was finally time for me to meet his parents.”

I blink, trying to compute the insane words tumbling from Flora’s mouth as she places a possessive hand on his chest.

“Hi, Ezra. You look really nice,” he says in a soft, unsure tone.

I muster a smile for my ex, the man I spent over two years of my life with. He’s such a genuine guy and I know he’s trying to break the tension.

A flash of something—probably evil—flickers in Flora’s gaze before she hides it. “Yes, Ez. You look quite nice. Honey, will you get me a drink at the bar? Something sweet, please.”

Forrest leans in and kisses Flora on the cheek. She preens under his touch, all the while never breaking eye contact with me and smirking as if she won some grand prize.

As soon as my ex is out of sight, I feel my hackles rise. Why can't she just act like an adult? It's like she's permanently reliving her high school bully years.

"Well, isn't that a cute surprise," Rebecca drawls, clearly on edge too. "Forrest and Flora. It's like the two of you were meant for each other."

"Why thank you, Rebecca." Flora's smile drops and she looks at me. "And I hope you'll be mature about this, Ezra?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" I reply, tone sugary sweet. "I just want Forrest happy." God, how could he date someone like her? Forrest was always too nice. He probably doesn't see how much of a witch Flora really is.

"That's not what he told me." Flora flips her blonde hair over one shoulder. "I know the two of you weren't really compatible, and I know it must be hard to see me with the man who broke up with you. But honey, he's upgraded, so don't go crawling back while trying to flaunt yourself. It won't work."

"Crawling back?" Oh, hell no. Upgraded? The bitch. I stand up, tempted to get in her face. Instead, I take a deep, slow breath. It's been a few years since I've seen Flora, but I swear she will probably turn me into an anxious college student, even in my sixties.

"That's right. I expect you to go crawling back. It's kind of pathetic. You lost a really good man and now you're in this small-ass town. What do you have to show for it?"

For some reason, her words cut deep, leaving me speechless.

“He isn’t pathetic,” Rebecca sneers as she gets out of her seat and stands next to me. “Ezra graduated top of his class and now owns his own fashion boutique.”

I nod eagerly. Right.

“And he is a successful designer, creating clothes that sell out.”

God, I could kiss Rebecca for being here. I nod again. I mean, they do sell out... eventually . I only make one or two unique designs at a time, but Flora doesn’t need to know that.

“Not to mention, he just applied for the Dee Rama Magazine’s fashion show. That’s definitely something to be proud of,” Rebecca continues, and I grin.

“That’s right.” Flora smiles, although I’m pretty sure a smile shouldn’t make someone look so calculating. “Seems like we’ll see more of each other. I’ve already been accepted, and I just so happen to know the themes they are considering.”

My heart tumbles. They’ve already started picking people? How is that possible? Today was the last day to submit the application.

“Yeah, well, Ezra has a gorgeous boyfriend, is a successful designer, and owns his own business. What do you have, Flora?”

I nod again—wait, what? My head snaps toward Rebecca. Did she just say I have a gorgeous boyfriend? Why the fuck would she say that? I peer around nervously, hoping said boyfriend would magically pop up and volunteer as tribute.

As if sensing my panic, Flora’s too-cunning gaze narrows before she smirks. “A boyfriend. Well, where is he? Come on, don’t be shy.”

“I, uh, what?” Fucking hell. Is it hot in here? I’m really sweating now.

Flora’s phone rings and she lights up when she glances down at the screen. “Speaking of, that’s my sweet boyfriend. Let me answer this real quick.” She spins around and talks into the phone.

I can see Forrest from here, talking to Nate, probably unsure which drink to get for his girlfriend. Forrest was always so indecisive. As soon as she’s out of earshot I hiss at my soon-to-be ex-best friend. “A boyfriend? Are you serious? I don’t know how long they’re going to be in town. Now I’m going to have to find a magical boyfriend just to save face, or admit that I really am as pathetic as she thinks.”

“I’m sorry,” Rebecca whispers before chewing on her lip. “I wasn’t thinking. I just fucking hate her so much. She made our lives a living hell, and now she’s dating your ex. It’s messed up. Does she even like Forrest?”

“It’s none of my business,” I reply in a rush. “Forrest is an adult, and if he can’t figure out how manipulative she is, then that’s on him. He always thought I was exaggerating every time she tormented me in school.”

“I’m sorry, Ezra. I just couldn’t let her win.”

I’m about to reply when Flora turns back around. Her smile widens as she gives me a slow once-over. “Let me guess. You don’t actually have a boyfriend, do you, Ezra?”

I swallow hard. What. The. Fuck? Can Flora Sellar read minds now, too?

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

“ Out of all the places in the world, you decided to stay in this town?” Emery asks, eyeing the small bar around us, concern evident in his voice.

We’re sitting in the back of Pint ‘n’ Pool, out of sight. Not that it matters, everyone is minding their own business. Completely oblivious that the lead singer and guitarist of Arcade Lake is sitting in their small-town bar. Or hell, maybe no one cares. With the exception of the older man who keeps glancing my way from his stool at the bar, everyone else is focused on their friends.

The older man narrows his eyes at me. There doesn’t seem to be any recognition, just curiosity. I wave, which causes him to huff before turning his back on me.

“You been spotted?” Emery tips his head at the older man.

“No. I think that might be Merle? My Aunt warned me about him. Or it could be the mailman. Forgot his name, but I think he’s a gossip too.”

“Jesus. Town gossips? What’s next? It’s like you walked into the town of Gilmore Girls .”

“ Stars Hollow .”

Emery scrunches his face. “What?”

“The town. The show is called Gilmore Girls , and they live in a town called Stars Hollow .”

“Jesus,” Emery repeats, downing his shot of vodka. “How do you even know that?”

I chuckle, sipping my Pepsi. “What? I had a thing for Rory’s boyfriends, Dean and Jess. The girl has good taste. What can I say?”

“Dean. Wait, isn't that the guy from Supernatural ?” He waves a hand in the air. “You know what? Never mind. I don’t care.”

I sip my soda again, hiding a smile behind the rim of the cold glass. “Whatever. Your loss.”

Zayden slides into the seat next to Emery. “Sorry I’m late; this town is...distracting. Did you see the bakery? It’s called Don’t Go Bakin’ My Heart.”

Emery snorts. “That one’s kind of cute. I saw one called Nuts and Bolts.”

“What?” I bark out a laugh.

“Yeah, I think they sell tools or something.”

My gaze bounces between my twin and Emery. “You guys didn’t need to come here. I just got here this morning, and I don’t need you two morons babysitting me, you know.”

“Nah. It’s about time I visited with Aunt Tessy. This loser over here just couldn't handle the two of us leaving his side.” Zayden wraps his arm around Emery and rubs the top of his head.

“Get off me, man. You’re fucking up my hair.”

A few people glance over at us, including the bartender with the scruffy beard and

older man on his stool.

“Children. Calm down. Part of the reason I wanted to be in this town was so I wouldn’t draw attention to myself. Well, go figure, you’re drawing attention.”

Zayden and Emery stop wrestling. “Sorry,” they say in unison before snickering. Holy shit, they really are children. We sip our drinks in silence for a moment.

Emery leans forward, a serious look on his face. “So, what’s your plan?”

I squirm uncomfortably. Talking about this shit is embarrassing. I liked being in charge, and being that person others go to when they need help. Growing up, I took care of my mom, Zayden, and Noah.

Now, I feel like I can’t even help myself. My body has betrayed me in the worst way possible. First Oscar took my heart and ripped it apart. Then he shredded my confidence and fucked with my head. I don’t even want to put a name to what I’m going through. If I do, then it becomes real, and fuck that noise. I sigh. But I also know that isn’t a healthy way to think. “I looked into local therapists and found one about an hour away. Booked an appointment with her once a week for the next two months. The rest I’ll play by ear.”

Zayden nods. “Good. That’s really good, Olly. Proud of you.”

Anger swirls in the pit of my stomach. How many times have I told Zee I’m proud of him? This is the first time he has ever said anything like this to me, and I can’t even appreciate it. Instead, I’m ashamed. I throw back my head and take the last gulp of my soda before flagging down Kit and requesting another.

I can’t even drink alcohol, afraid it might make my episodes worse.

“It’s okay to feel the way you do,” Emery says, as if reading my damn mind. It isn’t okay. Nothing about what I’m going through is okay, and I’m about to snap at my friend when the front door to the bar opens, and a young, brown-haired woman walks in.

My breath catches when my eyes land on the gorgeous blond man that follows. He is stunning. Like a modern-day Helen of Troy. I half expect the men and women around me to fall to their knees and worship him. The whole time he sashays his way to the bar and places an order, I’m mesmerized. The blond confidently leans over the bar and talks to the bartender, all the while giving me a perfect view of his very round, toned ass. Fuck .

The blond takes his glass mugs and pitcher to a nearby booth and I’m tempted to join him and his friend.

Emery smirks when he realizes I can’t take my eyes off the beautiful man. “I think I’m going to go get a drink at the bar. Wanna join me, Zee?”

Zayden’s gaze bounces between me and the blond before he finally replies. “Sure, Emery. I’ll meet you there in a minute.”

Emery leaves, but I can still feel my brother’s stare on me.

“You know,” Zayden whispers, leaning across our table. “I haven’t seen you look at another person like that in a long time. You should go introduce yourself.”

I narrow my eyes and glance at Zayden. “Nah. He’s out of my league.”

Zayden snorts. “Are you crazy? You’re a mother fucking rock star.”

“And he looks like he can eat me for breakfast.”

“Sounds hot. I’ll leave you alone for a bit and give you some time to make your move. But don’t wait too long.” Zayden waves his finger at me. “I might not hit on him, but I can’t guarantee Emery won’t try.”

I growl. An honest-to-God growl.

Zayden smirks.

“Yeah, yeah. Get out of here, Mom .”

This isn’t the first time the guys left me alone to go flirt with someone, but it’s definitely the first time I’ve been tempted since the whole Oscar bullshit started. The band doesn’t know, but Oscar was the last person I’ve been with. Over the past two years, I’ve tried flirting, tried hooking up, but have never been able to follow through.

I constantly compared everyone to the man who broke me. Either that or I was paranoid Oscar would find out and hurt someone I was interested in. Even after Oscar was arrested, my body just didn’t find the need to be sexual with anyone.

But now, as I stare at the beauty in front of me, I feel my cock stir, and that in and of itself is exhilarating.

Neither blondie nor his friend notice me, but their conversation is loud enough that I can hear them chatting. I try not to eavesdrop, but rather listen to the nuance of blondie’s voice. Even the way he talks is mesmerizing to me. It’s like a lovely song I want to spend hours getting lost in.

That’s when I notice another woman staring at blondie. There’s a strange, malicious look in her eye and I get the feeling some drama is about to go down. The next thing I know, the beautiful man is angry and standing, while Ms. Drama taunts him.

“Looks like someone beat you to your man,” Zayden says, reappearing by my side. We watch the drama unfold, and I’m briefly upset when I hear Blondie is taken. Damn.

I lean in and whisper to Zayden. “Sounds like Ms. Drama over there stole Blondie’s ex-boyfriend. She sounds absolutely horrible.”

When Ms. Drama answers her phone, I hear the panic in Blondie’s voice.

“A boyfriend? Are you serious?” Blondie hisses. “I don’t know how long they’re going to be in town. Now I’m going to have to find a magical boyfriend just to save face, or admit that I really am as pathetic as she thinks.”

So he’s single.

“I’m sorry,” his friend says.

A tempting, stupid idea pops into my mind, and when I see Ms. Drama hang up the phone with that evil glint in her eyes, I feel my idea take hold, causing me to stand.

“Hey,” I whisper to Zayden. “I’m probably about to do something really stupid. Go along with it.” I give him a knowing stare, and he grins. The words ‘bail me out if things go south’ are left unsaid.

Ms Drama laughs. “Let me guess. You don’t actually have a boyfriend. Do you, Ezra?”

Ezra.

Fuck. Even his name is beautiful.

I make my way to Ezra's side like a sailor who can't fight a siren's pull. "There you are," I say, wrapping a possessive arm around the blond's slim shoulders. He blinks up at me with startled, gorgeous blue eyes.

Dear lord, please don't let me get kicked in the balls.

His friend seems to understand what I'm doing before Ezra does. "It's about time. Ezra was feeling awfully lonely without his man by his side," she says with a knowing stare.

Ezra's lips part, and fuck, am I tempted to kiss him, but yeah, consent is a real thing. Instead, I squeeze him lightly, hoping he understands my silent message. Play along.

It seems to do the trick because suddenly Ezra is squeezing me back and a sexy-as-fuck smile plays on his plush lips. My dick grows hard at the sight. This time it's my turn for my lips to part in shock.

"Ezzy, baby. I missed you," I say, voice husky. Why is my voice so husky?

Ezra gasps and his pupils blow wide. Before I can comprehend what he's doing, Ezra is leaning against me and standing on his tippy toes. His lips meet mine and for a moment, I'm lost. Completely absorbed in his intoxicating sweet scent and the taste of his lips as they glide against mine.

He tastes like cherries and beer, an addicting combination I could get used to if it's always attached to these lips.

My lips part and his do the same. I don't waste the opportunity, tangling his tongue with mine as hands climb up my body and tangle in my hair. I can't fucking help it, I moan. He feels so good.

Perfect.

I'm about to deepen the kiss even more when a throat clears to our left. We both yank away from each other as if we were doing something inappropriate. Hell, give us thirty more seconds and I'm pretty sure we would have been tugging each other's clothes off.

Rebecca is sitting at their booth again with a huge grin on her face. Ms. Drama is being quite dramatic, just staring at me with her mouth gaping open. Her gaze is so focused on me that she doesn't see Ezra turn bright red when he glances down at his obvious erection.

I smirk. Holy shit. I did that to him. I made him hard. Why does it feel so damn good with this stranger? That's when it hits me. I kissed another person, and I didn't think of Oscar once. I was solely focused on the beautiful man in front of me.

Ezra drops into the seat next to his friend, trying to hide his boner with his glass.

Ms. Drama is still standing there staring at me, her eyebrows scrunched in confusion.

She gasps, snapping her fingers. "I know you. You're one of them, aren't you?" Oh, the joy of being an identical twin. No one but Noah and my aunt seem to be able to tell us apart, and even they struggle sometimes.

"Olly." I hold my hand out to her and she squeals. "Ezra's boyfriend," I add for good measure. She doesn't shake my extended hand, but instead squeals even louder and begins to jump up and down. I try not to roll my eyes as I sit down in the booth across from Ezra.

I should have expected it, but it catches me off guard when Ms. Drama pushes in close to me. "I can't believe I'm meeting someone from Arcade Lake. Oh fuck. This

is crazy.” She squeezes my arm, which causes me to frown.

My eyes lift to Ezra’s and something flashes in Ezra’s gaze. Jealousy? And fuck, why does that make me even harder? Warmth spreads in my chest like a fine shot of whiskey. When was the last time someone even looked at me like that?

Sure, it might be something else, and I’m probably imagining this. For all I know, the look could have been anger at the fact that this girl has the balls to sit next to someone else’s man, but I pretend that it’s jealousy and possession I see in Ezra’s gaze.

I really fucking like Ezra’s pretty eyes on me.

My phone buzzes in my pocket. I pull it out and glance at the screen, thankful when I read Zayden’s message.

Zayden: Tell McCrazy to come to the bar if she wants to meet us. We could distract her long enough to help you and your new “boyfriend” get your story straight.

I glance up at my brother, who’s now standing at the bar with Emery. I shoot him a grateful look before looking at the fangirl next to me. “What’s your name?”

“Flora.”

“Flora, is there any chance you want to meet my twin and the lead singer of Arcade Lake?” I ask.

She squeals again, and I chuckle. “Good, because they really want to meet you.” I point at my friends and Emery gives Flora a flirty finger wave. It’s all for show. Emery is gay. But my brother on the other hand? I shudder, trying not to imagine the two together in bed before shooting him a text.

Flora stands and rushes toward the bar.

Olly: Her name is Flora. Don't sleep with her.

Zayden: Aye, Aye, Captain.

My gaze wanders back over to Olly. "Hi," I say with a shy smile.

He grins. "Hi."

We stare at each other for a beat too long, with goofy smiles on our faces before his friend interrupts. "Okay. Um, hi. Hello. My name is Rebecca."

"Olly," I offer my hand and she shakes it.

"Yeah. I know who you are. Everyone does."

Ezra clears his throat. "I'm sorry, but um, I don't know who you are."

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

I raise my hand as if I'm in a classroom and repeat myself. "I don't know who you are."

Rebecca and Olly just blink at me.

Sure, he looks familiar, and yes, I did notice him at one point, but I never met the guy before today. Trust me, I would remember someone so... hot. Especially if he visited Foggy more than once. No. I'm pretty sure I've never seen this man in person.

Leaning forward, I stare at the handsome, god-like stranger in front of me. His dark brown hair has some blond highlights running through the front. It's styled long on the top, and short on the sides, giving him this yummy hipster look I'm totally digging.

Where the hell did he come from?

"You really don't know who I am?" Olly asks as he crosses his arms and arches a brow. He isn't cocky sounding, just shocked. Maybe even a little grumpy. Huh. Is he a local celebrity or something?

Olly continues to pout, reminding me of a sad golden retriever. Color me intrigued. The man is a mystery. One moment he's scowling, and the next he's a charming man coming to my rescue. The muscles in his forearms flex as he keeps them crossed, lips still turned down. Oh yeah, I'm totally hot for Mr. Grumpy Pants.

I reach out and pinch his arm.

“Ow. What the fuck?”

“I still don’t know who you are, but I can confirm you are real.”

Rebecca tugs me forward violently. “Oh my gosh, Ezra, what the hell is wrong with you? You just pinched one of the members of Arcade Lake,” she hisses.

I purse my lips together. “Uh, is that one of the scream-o bands you listen to?”

“We aren’t a scream-o band,” Olly replies with a frown. “We are a blend of progressive Metalcore and Southern Metal.”

“Yeah,” I drawl. “All I heard was metal, and I don’t listen to that stuff. It all sounds the same to me.”

“Ezra. Oh, my gosh. Shut. Up.” Rebecca slides out of her side of the booth. “I’ll be right back. I gotta use the restroom. But please, for the love of all that’s holy, don’t say anything while I’m gone.”

I turn back to Olly, expecting him to be upset. To my shock, the corners of Olly’s lips twitch. Something about that almost smile lights me up inside. I just insulted the man’s music, and he is more amused than anything. Forrest would have been butt hurt and it probably would have ruined our night.

Okay, where did that thought come from? Jeez. Now I’m comparing my ex to the stunning rock star in front of me.

“Thanks for saving me back there.” I trace my fingers flirtatiously across his forearm, yet somehow I’m the one trying hard not to shudder. “How did you know I needed a knight in shining armor?”

A cute blush covers Olly's cheeks and, for some reason, I'm flattered I can make such a stoic man react like this.

Olly's eyes dart away. "I saw you walk into the bar and noticed you ordering some drinks. Then I watched as Flora approached you. I didn't like the look she was giving you, and I wanted to make sure you were okay." His blush deepens.

How interesting. Olly could have just explained that he just overheard Flora and decided to help. But he admitted to watching me from across the bar. Was he checking me out? Does he like what he sees? Not to mention, how sweet is it that he was concerned for a stranger.

"I'm sorry she stole your ex from you."

I wave a hand in the air. "Don't worry, we broke up. It was mutual. There was no stealing or whatever else she implied."

"Figures. That girl is pure drama," he mumbles.

A smile spreads across my face. I try to hide it by biting my lip, but I fail terribly.

Olly's gaze drops to my lips and I'm reminded of the kiss we just shared.

"You're a really good kisser," I blurt. The best I've ever had, but I don't say that part out loud. Sliding out of my side of the booth, I walk to his side and slide in next to him.

Olly's eyes widen. "What are you doing?" He gulps, and his sexy Adam's apple bobs. Olly leans in close, despite his words.

My fingers lift to his face of their own accord and trace his jaw. I should reply by

saying something about how Flora and my ex are just across the room. That this is all a show for their benefit, but truth be told, I just want to be near this handsome conundrum of a man. It's almost as if he's a puzzle I want to solve, wrapped in a delicious treat I want to savor.

Playfully draping one of my legs over his, I whisper in his ear. "I'm getting to know my boyfriend."

He shudders against me. God, he's so responsive. It's such a huge turn-on.

I hold my hand out for Olly to shake. "Hi, I'm Ezra Strum."

"Ezra," he purrs, grasping my hand in his large calloused one before turning it over and kissing my wrist. "I'm Olly Black."

His voice is deep. Rough. Intoxicating.

Is there any way I can convince this rock star to come home with me? I mean, he must have people throwing themselves at him, just like Flora did. But, he also had to feel the chemistry between us. Right?

Flora's laughter breaks my trance, and I turn to see her and Forrest still talking to Olly's bandmates. My eyes widen when I notice one of the guys. He's laughing with a charming look on his face. A face that is identical to Olly's. "Holy fuck, there are two of you? How did I not notice that when I spotted you guys earlier?"

He grips my chin and turns my head back to face him. "Don't look at my brother," he rumbles. "I want those pretty blue eyes on me. Only me."

Oh fuck. Hello, Daddy. "That was really fucking hot," I whisper. "Please tell me you rented a room upstairs." The rooms above Pint 'n' Pool were the only ones available,

with the inn being renovated down the street. So, if Olly was staying here in town, that's probably his only option.

He shakes his head and my heart drops.

I take a deep breath. "Want to come over to my place? It's less than a five-minute walk."

To my surprise, Olly studies me for a moment, as if weighing every word. After what he just said, I would have bet money that we were hooking up tonight, so the hesitation throws me. A moment of insecurity hits me. He is famous, according to Flora's and Rebecca's actions. He probably has a harem of fans ready to worship his body.

His brown eyes meet mine, making my whole body heat under his dark stare, and my cock strain against my zipper.

Olly licks his lips. "Yes," he replies. "You have no idea how bad I want you."

"Same. You think we can sneak out before anyone comes looking for us?" I pull my phone out and shoot Rebecca a text. I notice her at the bar chatting with Flora and the guys.

Ezra: Hey babe. Planning on sneaking out. Keep everyone distracted.

He chuckles near my ear; it's low and husky. "Fuck, you are an eager little thing, aren't you?"

My face flushes, and I'm not sure if it's from said eagerness, embarrassment, or a little bit of both. I reach for his glass and take a sip to cool down. "Soda?" I ask, shocked.

He cocks a brow. “Is that a problem? I’m not drinking during my trip to Foggy.”

“No, of course not,” I reply quickly. “It’s kind of hot knowing you want me while completely sober.”

His eyes sparkle. “I’m coming to the realization that I might want you no matter what.”

If that line doesn’t get me moving, nothing will. I slide out of the booth and he follows, towering over me. He’s all grace and power.

His large hand wraps around mine. “Lead the way.”

I grin and tug him toward the exit against the back wall. “This way. It’ll be faster.”

He laughs. “Faster is better.”

The cool night air caresses my face and a light breeze ruffles my flowy crop top, causing my nipples to pebble. The alley is clean and well lit, with no one else in sight. Despite the lack of people, the sound of a violin playing classical music carries on the wind.

Olly arches a brow.

“That’s Henry. He plays the violin for the tourists. It’s technically the end of the season, but he loves to practice at night sometimes.”

“He’s very talented. Maybe you can introduce me sometime.”

I pause. An image of me holding hands with Olly after a dinner date and window shopping as we chat flutters into my head. I can picture us pausing by Henry and

introducing Olly as if he were my real boyfriend. What a lovely fantasy. Too bad he's a famous musician who's just traveling through.

"Sure." I offer him a smile as I squeeze his hand. "Sounds nice. But first, if I don't get you in my bed, I might die of lust deprivation."

I tug him down the alley toward my place. Living above my shop has its benefits, but I've never been more grateful for just how close my apartment is to Pints 'n' Pool. As we walk, Olly glances up at the stars—giving our desperate attempt at a hookup a romantic ambiance I try to ignore.

"This is me." I point at my door.

We climb up the stairs and I fumble with my keys before finally finding the right one and jamming it into the lock.

Olly's gaze is heated, but there's a hint of humor on his face as well. An addicting combination. Something tells me that this man needs more laughter in his life, and I'm happy I can give him something. I silently promise to blow his mind tonight.

As soon as we are inside my apartment, I flip on the light. There's no way I'm going to miss this gorgeous man undressing for me. I yank him into a deep, filthy kiss that's all tongue, panting breaths, and groping hands. It's so intense I'm pretty sure I could come just from this alone.

Olly flips me around and shoves me against the door, crowding behind me.

"Yes," I moan, seductively grinding my ass against his erection. Fuck. He's big. I pry my hand away from the door and slide it between us to feel just how big, but he captures my wrist, holding me captive.

“I couldn’t take my eyes off of you tonight.” His hot breath grazes my ear before he nips at it. “You’re so fucking beautiful, Ezra. I wanted to drop to my knees and worship you, right there in front of everyone.”

I shiver and pant, clutching the wall with my free hand.

Olly slides his fingers against the exposed stomach below my crop top. His hand trails down to my erection and he begins massaging my cock through my pants.

I whimper. “Oh fuck, Olly. I’m going to come if you don’t stop.”

He grinds his hard length against my ass. “Come whenever you want, doll. Just don’t touch your cock without my permission.”

Holy shit. No one has ever dirty-talked to me, let alone told me I had to ask for permission to touch myself. It’s so fucking hot. He’s so fucking hot.

Olly sucks on my earlobe as he continues to press me against the door and massage me through my pants. I feel the telltale tingling of an orgasm starting to build. My muscles go taught and I rise up onto my tiptoes. I’m about to fall over the edge and come in my pants when he pulls away.

“What?” I whine, half-dazed and extremely frustrated. “No.” I spin around.

Olly is standing there, stroking his enormous cock through his pants with a huge grin on his face. “Trust me, doll, an orgasm is more intense when you’re edged. Now, where’s your bed?”

My mouth falls open. I feel like my dirtiest, sexiest fantasy is coming to life. I’m half tempted to pinch him again just to confirm he’s real.

“Ezra, I can stand here and jerk off to the sight of you. Trust me, it’s no hardship. But I’d rather come inside of you.” He gives me a wicked grin.

I chuckle and yank my shirt off, tossing it somewhere over my head. “Alright, Daddy, come and get me.” I take off, sprinting down the hall and running through my bedroom door.

It doesn’t take long for him to catch up, wrap his arms around me, and toss me on the bed. He kicks his shoes off before walking toward me like a predator on the prowl. I lift my hips and he understands my silent request, jerking my pants down my legs before tugging them off completely. Olly’s breath catches when he sees what I’m wearing.

Leaning across my nightstand, I turn on my bedside lamp so he can get a better look.

His eyes roam my body, greedily drinking in the sight of me in nothing but my lace panties. “Do you like them?” They are black, sheer, and very delicate. When I was dating Forrest, he hated anything too feminine-looking. He also couldn’t understand my need to wear them for myself.

Shortly after breaking up with him, I moved back home and took over mom’s shop. When she said I could stock anything I liked, I displayed a whole line of women’s and men’s lingerie. It might not be too popular here in Foggy Basin, but it makes me happy and sells out quickly in our online shop.

I squirm under his stare.

He reaches out a hand to trace the lace with his fingers and groans. “Fuck.” Olly yanks me closer to the edge of the bed and runs his hands across the black lace. “Do you have any idea how sexy you are?”

I stretch my body out in front of him and moan as he continues to caress every inch of my exposed skin. Olly murmurs praise like “So beautiful,” and “Such a good boy.” I’m eating up his words and I’m pretty sure I’m drunk on his touches.

What did he say about edging? Because if this is how he works someone up, I could live in this moment forever. I’ve never been so hard in my life, but I’ve also never felt so cherished.

Can a one-night stand be filthy and romantic? Or is this what it feels like to be with a rock star?

“It drives me fucking wild to see you squirm like this. That’s it, doll. Look at you.” Olly crawls down the length of my body, kissing a wet path down to my neck, my chest, my stomach... and lower.

I gasp in surprise when he sucks the tip of my cock through the lace. His fingers find my balls and massage them as he continues to suck me.

“Oh fuck, right there, Olly. Right there,” I moan. My cock grows impossibly harder. “Just like that, I’m about to come.”

Olly, the devil he is, pulls off of me and crawls off the bed.

“Fuck! No, get your ass back here.” I pound a fist against the bed and groan. The tip of my cock is straining against my wet panties. It looks obscene and sexy as fuck. I can’t help it and bark out a laugh. “Fuck, Olly. You are a thrill. I don’t know whether to praise you or throw my lamp at your head.”

He chuckles. “Don’t worry, I can’t stay away. You got supplies?”

I nod eagerly. “In the nightstand.”

Olly pulls out a condom and my stash of lube. He tosses the bottle onto the bed next to me. Then pulls off his shirt and pants, before tugging off his socks. He's even more toned than I anticipated, with a muscular chest and defined rock-hard abs I've never seen in person before. "Oh fuck. I want to pour syrup all over your abs and lick it off."

He grins, caressing his hand on his bare skin as if he's showing off some grand prize. Finally, he tugs his boxer briefs off and stands before me, completely naked. "Take the sexy panties off and prep yourself for me, doll."

I laugh. "No one's ever called me that, but it sounds so hot when you say it."

"Good." He strokes his cock while he watches me. "No one's ever made me smile this much during sex before."

I blush, extremely happy that we seem to just...click. We haven't even gotten off. Yet, it feels like Olly is completely in tune with my body somehow. This is how sex should always be; exhilarating, sexy, and fun.

Snapping the bottle of lube open, I squeeze out a few drops and coat my fingers. Slowly, I work myself open while I moan and put on a show for Olly. By the time I work a third finger in, he growls.

"Enough. Lie back, beautiful."

I obey, pulling my fingers out of my hole and lying back. Olly climbs back on top of me, pulling me into a deep kiss. The friction of his scruff on his face and his cock against mine has me panting eagerly. It isn't long before I'm on the edge. Again.

"Please," I beg. "Please fuck me, Olly."

He gives me a wicked smile and gets on his knees. He's gorgeous. His cock is hard and proud, pointing straight at me. I spread my legs for him, desperate to feel him inside of me. Olly opens the foil pack and rolls the condom down his length before pouring some lube into his hand. I never knew a cock could be beautiful, but his is, with the perfectly sized mushroom head and sexy as fuck veins running up the length.

He grasps his thick cock and lines himself up. "Tell me to stop if it's too much." When he starts to push his way inside of me I moan, and he gasps.

"Damn, you're tight." His eyes are scrunched closed in concentration.

For some reason, I giggle.

His eyes pop open. "Stop giggling, you brat. Fuck, the vibrations are going to make me come."

My laughter falls away when he pushes in further. "Yes, keep going."

"How are you this tight?"

I gasp when he sinks in all the way, brushing against my prostate. "Oh, fuck. Do that again. Again."

He begins to pound into me at a steady rhythm. Usually my cock flags during intercourse, but I'm harder than I've ever been. There must be something to that damn edging of his. Once again, I feel my orgasm building as he rubs against that spot inside of me.

"Can I touch myself? Please? Please, Olly, let me touch my dick."

He smirks. My begging must really turn him on because he thrusts faster, his

movements becoming a little erratic. “Yes. Touch yourself, Ezra.”

I wrap my fingers around my cock and gasp at how sensitive it is. “Fuck, Olly, I’ve never been this hard before.” I stroke myself faster.

“That’s it, Ezzy. Stroke yourself. Such a good boy for me.” He leans over me, changing the angle, going deeper, and my balls draw up tight against my body.

“Oh fuck,” I cry out. “I’m coming.” I tremble and shudder. My hole tightens in harmony with my spurting cock.

“So good, baby, so good.” He groans long and loud as he comes inside of me.

We lay there for a moment, with him pressing down on me as we gasp for breath.

I smile up at him. “Wow. That was—wow. Can you pull out slowly?”

He does just that before he collapses next to me. I close my eyes for only a moment, but I must have drifted off. The next thing I know, he’s tying off the condom and making his way to my bathroom.

I stand on wobbly legs and follow him. Usually, I can’t get away from my hookups faster, but something about Olly makes me eager for more. I clean myself up with a wet washcloth. Then I wrap my arms around his middle, resting my cheek against his firm chest.

I’m about to ask him to stay when he speaks first. “Can I stay here with you tonight, Ezra?” He’s smirking, but there’s something to the tone of his voice. He almost sounds vulnerable.

I press a kiss to his neck. “I was just going to ask you to stay.”

Olly's whole face lights up.

"Let me just add some food to Tabby's bowl."

"Your cat?"

"Yeah. She's probably hiding. She always does when she hears a stranger's voice."

After placing some dry food in her dish, we make our way back to my bed and crawl under the covers. I turn off the lamp, surprised at just how drained I suddenly feel. I can't believe how happy I feel right now.

I laugh and yawn. "Damn, I walked in here tonight hoping to blow your mind. Instead, you completely shook my world."

He pulls me tight against his body, spooning me from behind. Olly presses a tender kiss against my temple. "Trust me, Ezra. Not only did you blow my mind, you ignited my soul."

I yawn again. "Such pretty words. You really are a musician."

He chuckles, but his tone is serious. "You don't understand. What we just did? It meant something to me. You blew my mind, then you showed me I'm not completely broken."

Snuggling into his warmth, sleep pulls me under before I can ask him what he means.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

A strange instant buzzing wakes me from the best dream I've ever had. I reach for my phone on my nightstand, only to feel another pillow. What the? I open my eyes to scan the room, and have some sexy memories kaleidoscope across my mind's eye.

So, it wasn't a dream. My lips tilt up into a rare smile. Damn. I've smiled more in the last twenty-four hours than I have in over two years. Coming to Foggy Basin has already been healing for my soul. Although, I'm pretty sure most of that is thanks to Ezra, rather than the town.

The buzzing starts up again. I flip over and come face-to-face with a beautiful tabby cat lying on the nightstand. "Well, hello pretty kitty," I say.

The purring continues, and I realize why the buzzing sounded so strange. "Is your tummy keeping my phone warm?" Slowly, giving the cat time to think or swipe, I reach out and pet the cat on its head. Tabby purrs even louder. "Hi, little one. Where is your owner?"

The tiny cat sits up and stretches before making its way to my chest and lying on top of me. I chuckle. "How am I going to start my day if I can't get up, huh?" I pet the cat for a few minutes before my phone vibrates again.

I tense, expecting it to be the band manager, but let out a breath when I see it's the band instead.

Dallas: Wtf? Did everyone go to some place called Foggy Basin without me?

Emery: Why? You miss me?

Zayden: Don't worry, this town is cute and all, but way too quiet for you. Everything closes early, and the bar was closed by ten.

Beckett: Wait, I'm not there. Who else is at this Foggy place?

Emery: Me, Zee, and Olly.

Dallas: Seriously? Why no invite? That's cold.

Zayden: Olly and I are visiting with our Aunt Tessy. No idea why Emery had to tag along.

Beckett: As long as you guys are all in one piece and make it back in time for our show tomorrow, I don't really care.

Zayden: Olly will be staying with our aunt to help her out for a bit. Already cleared it with Leslie.

Beckett: Shit. I bet he was pissed. I can't wait till we get rid of that manipulating bastard.

Emery: Have we given much thought to the list of potential managers?

Dallas: I have a few in mind. Will Olly be back in time for our private concerts?

Zayden: Nope. He'll still be with our aunt, helping out. If it changes, he'll let us know.

I appreciate Zayden covering for me. If anything, my aunt is here to help me , not the other way around. However, if I can help her around the house or in her garden, then that would make me feel a million times better.

Dallas: Speaking of Olly, where is he? It's not like him to ignore our texts.

Emery: Someone might have caught our boy's attention.

Beckett: No shit?!

Zayden: It's true. Not Olly's usual type, but an absolute stunner.

Images of Ezra flood my mind. Damn. Have I ever been with someone so beautiful or witty? Ezra had a unique mix of wit, sass, and charm. Zayden wasn't kidding when he said he wasn't my usual type. I was always attracted to bigger, taller, broody men. Ones I used to fight for control with in the bedroom.

I always just assumed that someone submitting in the bedroom would be boring, but Ezra was... playful. He was perfect. Maybe my experience with Oscar has changed me, because if I'm being honest with myself, Ezra is my type.

Tabby continues to purr with her eyes closed, but as soon as I start trying to maneuver her around carefully, she leaps over to the pillow I was lying on and props herself on it. "Aw, I'm sorry, girl. Was I in your spot?"

I swipe my phone camera on and take a selfie with her, only to be disappointed that I can't text it to Ezra. Going by the eerie quiet in the room, I'm assuming Ezra left for the day. A little pang shoots through my chest. Will last night be the last time I ever see him? I briefly remember him saying something about work, but I hope my late-night confession wasn't what chased him out of bed this morning.

After relieving myself in the bathroom and getting dressed, I'm not shocked to find the rest of the apartment empty, but I'm pleasantly surprised when I spot a handwritten note on the kitchen counter.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

Hey Olly,

Wow. Just wow. What do I even say? Thank you for last night. I had such a good time. Help yourself to anything in my fridge. No need to lock the door on the way out. This is Foggy and everyone leaves everyone's place alone. Just make sure you click the door closed, because I don't want Tabby getting out.

Good luck with everything, and who knows, maybe next time you're in the Sacramento area, Rebecca can convince me to go see you live.

Ezra

Disappointment washes through me. I don't know what I was expecting. It's not like Ezra was going to write that our one-night stand was so fucking epic that it was life-changing. Although, that's what it was like for me, right?

Ignoring the fact that it was the most mind-blowing sex I've had, but our chemistry was off the charts. We clicked. Our banter, the shared smiles. I know he felt it. If so, why is he running from it? Or hell, maybe it is one-sided. Fuck. How many times did Oscar tell me we had chemistry? The man was delusional. And what about me, am I making last night more than it was?

With one last glance around to make sure I have everything I came with, I head into the bedroom, pet Tabby on the head, and then make my way out of the apartment. The sun is high in the air and the morning fog is completely dissipated. I check the time on my phone and notice it's almost lunchtime.

In the light of day, the alley looks completely different. Luckily, I remember the direction I came from. Unfortunately, I don't think I can walk through the back door of the bar at eleven in the morning. Instead, I make my way out of the alley and turn the corner, happy to see the main street that is the life of the town.

It dawns on me that the apartments in the alley are all attached to various businesses. Does Ezra own his own shop or does he just live above one?

People leisurely walk around as they chat and meander into stores and eateries. Once I spot my bike right where I parked it last night, I walk over to it and slide my hand across the seat. Further down the street a bookstore called 'Books, Beans, and Buns' catches my eye. Across from me, I notice a place called Blue Star Diner. My stomach takes that moment to grumble.

Ezra and I burnt a ton of calories last night. A smile tugs at my lips. God, I needed to see him again. I wonder if my aunt knows who he is. Pulling out my phone, I shoot her a text.

Olly: Good morning. Are you free for lunch anytime soon? I'm hungry and would love to take you out.

Aunt Tessy: Sure thing. The boss and I close up shop and take lunch between noon and one. Want to meet me here?

I chuckle, remembering how much my aunt gushes about the little shop she works in. My aunt doesn't need the money to survive, but loves fashion more than the normal person. When she started working for a fashion boutique, she said she met her platonic soulmate when the shop owner hired her.

Olly: Sure. What's the shop called again?

Aunt Tessy: Beauty and the Boutique. It's several doors past the bar you went to last night. It has a bright yellow sign. You can't miss it.

Sure enough, I spot the boutique's bright sign, but since I have some time to kill, I wander into the bookstore instead. I'm shocked when I spot a big selection of LGBTQ+ Romance, and at one point the owner introduces himself. He looks a little gruff in a sexy leather jacket and biker boots, but he's actually a happy, down-to-earth guy.

By the time ten minutes until noon rolls around, I'm ravenous and ready to pick up my aunt so we can get lunch. I walk into the boutique and I'm shocked. While all the other stores on this street seem to have a sweet homely feel, this one is bright, modern, and stylish with its unique jewelry and up-to-date, modish clothing. It's obvious the owner stays up with the latest fashion trends.

I even spot a lingerie corner in the back that looks like they might cater to both men and women.

"We'll be with you in just a minute." My aunt's voice filters from the back.

"No rush, Aunt Tessy, it's just me."

A sharp-looking suit catches my eye, and I can't be sure if it's just the way it's displayed on the mannequin or if the fit is really as nice as it looks. Either way, it's fun and unique. The suit jacket and pants are pastel yellow and paired with a white silk dress shirt. The stitching, though, is what makes the suit truly unique with a light blue design weaving through the whole thing.

My eyes keep wandering back to it, and the more my gaze lands on the outfit, the more intrigued I am that a mere suit can get such a reaction out of me.

Being in Arcade Lake over the last decade, the guys and I have come a long way. No longer needing to budget for cheap clothes on the road, we can now afford the best brands. We might be able to get away with the occasional band shirt or some ripped-up Vans or Converse while on tour, but when we did photo shoots, we were expected to wear fashion-trendy clothing.

As I stare at the suit, appreciating the details in the design, the more I realize I want to wear this suit to my Dee Rama Magazine photoshoot next month.

“Thank you for your patience. That suit is one of my favorite designs. I—”

That voice.

I turn around and come face to face with a shocked-looking blond. Ezra. He’s here. The damn smile I seem unable to fight when I’m around him reappears. He’s stunning in a pair of brown skinny jeans and a black-and-white striped shirt. His hair is styled in a messy, faux bedhead that makes me want to run my fingers through it and tug. He looks like a male model who should be walking the runways in Paris, not someone in a small town.

“Did you say you designed this suit?” I turn back to the outfit I was just admiring.

Ezra nods in my peripheral view.

He steps in so close to me, his arm is leaning against mine. “I did,” he says. “This piece I made specifically for a fashion show I was hoping to get into. But I recently found out that there will be a theme, so the chances of that theme lining up with this suit are slim.”

“So, does that mean you’ve decided to sell this piece?” I tenderly trace my fingers over the outline of the sleeve, but I don’t actually touch the material, just hover right

above it. “If so, I want to buy it.”

Ezra’s ocean-blue eyes follow the path my fingers take. He seems almost lost. Mesmerized. And I’m suddenly hoping he’s thinking of last night. Ezra’s gaze meets mine. “You don’t have to buy it. You don’t owe me anything.”

“Owe you? Ezra, are you kidding? This suit is amazing. I tried to walk around the store, just to browse, but I kept getting pulled back to this suit like a magnet. If you designed this, then you are truly talented.”

A sweet blush dusts his cheeks. “Thank you, Olly.” He practically purrs my name.

As if my body is completely in tune with his, I feel my own cheeks heat. I’m in so much fucking trouble with Ezra Strum.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

“ A unt Tessy!” Olly rushes forward and wraps Tessy into a hug.

“There you are, sweet boy.”

Sweet boy? Olly is most definitely not a boy.

“I wondered where you wandered off to last night,” she coos, as they sway back and forth in an over-dramatic hug. “Did you meet someone special?”

Kill. Me. Now. My face is on fire.

Did I just spend the last twenty minutes gushing to Tessy about the ‘wonderful, sexy, charming man’ who, and I quote, ‘ gave me the best orgasm of my life? ’

His tall frame bends slightly to accommodate their size difference. Tessy must be somewhere around my height, but I swear she looks tiny in his arms. Olly laughs as they continue to sway. “What’s gotten into you, woman? You’re acting strange.”

Tessy glances my way and winks. “I don’t know, sweetie, dear nephew of mine. I thought that maybe you just met someone last night.”

Is it hot in here? I find a tissue from my pocket and pat my forehead. I think I might die of embarrassment.

This time Olly looks over at me, warm brown eyes sparkling. “Yeah, actually, I did meet someone special.”

Oh. Swoon.

Okay, well, that somewhat makes up for the fact I spent the morning telling ‘Aunt Tessy’ all about the sexcapades I had. With. Her. Nephew.

“Alrighty then, you’ll have to tell me all about this special guy at lunch. Wanna join us, Ezra?”

“Oh, no.” I hold up my hands and shake my head viciously. “I couldn’t possibly interrupt.”

And hear Olly talk about me all while Tessy knows it’s me he’s talking about? Yeah. No, thank you.

Olly’s whole face lights up. “Oh my gosh, yes. Please join us, Ezzy.” He grins.

My heart flips. “If you’re sure?” I ask, drawing out each word. I really don’t want to interrupt, but the eager look on Olly’s face has me giddy inside.

“Of course,” Olly and Tessy say in unison, and I smile.

“Okay. Where do you two want to go?”

“What’s good in town?”

“Well, for lunch, I recommend Blue Star Diner,” Tessy replies.

As soon as we walk into the diner, we’re guided to a booth in the middle of the restaurant. I slide into a seat and Tessy sits in the spot across from me. Out of habit, I scoot in, and Olly slides in easily, pressing his thigh against mine.

Gabriella walks over to our table and hands us some menus. “Hey, Tessy. Hey, Ezra. Who’s—” Gabriella blinks as she stares at Olly. “Okay. I’m sorry, but has anyone told you look just like Zayden or Olly Black from Arcade Lake?”

Olly’s lips twitch. “Actually, I get that a lot.”

Gabriella relaxes and gives him a lazy smile. “Okay, good. Guess I’m not the only one. My name’s Gabriella and I’ll be your server today.”

“Thank you, Gabriella. It’s nice to meet you. My name’s Olly.”

She blinks again, and Tessy laughs. “Stop teasing the poor girl, Olly.”

“Wait, are you really one of the twins? You’re him? Olly Black?”

“Yup. The one and only.” He leans forward against the table. “But can you keep it a secret?”

She nods solemnly. “I won’t tell anyone.”

Olly’s shoulders drop, and it’s then that I realize he was tensed up. Is there a reason he doesn’t want people to know where he is? Clearly, the paparazzi haven’t followed him. I don’t even know if he’s big enough to be followed. But, with the way everyone seems to act around him, I’m guessing he is.

“I can’t be sure that Zayden or Emery can keep their mouths shut, but I’m trying to fly under the radar while I’m here in town.”

“Emery and Zayden are in Foggy Basin too?” Gabriella’s eyes widen.

“Zayden and Olly are my nephews,” Tessy says.

“Oh my gosh, Tessy! Talk about keeping secrets. Okay, let me hand you your menus and grab you some water. I’ll be right back.”

As soon as the menu is in my hand, my stomach starts growling. I already know what I want. “I’m dying to order a burger.”

“Same. I need all the melted cheese,” Olly replies, slipping a hand under the table and squeezing my thigh. I give him a quick smile before glancing away. Fuck. Why am I suddenly so shy? Tessy gives us a knowing smirk. Could this be any more awkward?

We place our orders and Tessy chats about the shop. A part of me is tense, wondering when she’s going to grill me about what I did to her nephew the night before, but it never comes. When the food finally arrives, I notice part of it is packaged to go.

“Oh no, Gabriella, we’re eating here today. Can you place this order on a plate, please?”

Tessy reaches for the bag and gets out of her seat. “Nope, she got it right. I realized I have a book to pick up over at Books, Beans, and Buns. It just released. I don’t want it to sell out before I get off work.”

Gabriella is flagged over to another table. She smiles and hustles over to the couple and refills their coffee while I’m stuck staring at Tessy, wondering what the hell she’s up to.

Olly narrows his eyes. “Books usually release on Tuesdays.”

She waves him off. “Oh, nonsense, Olly. Not every bookstore has the ability to stock things on the proper day. We live on Foggy Basin time, in the middle of nowhere. You’ll have to get used to it.”

That piques my interest. Get used to it. Does that mean Olly will be staying a little longer? Visiting more often?

“But what about our book club? You told me last night that you haven’t finished our book yet.”

I clap a hand over my mouth and stifle a giggle. Oh lord, Olly is not picking up the hint. I squeeze his knee under the table and he glances over at me with a scrunched brow.

And how cute is it that this tall, stoic, rock star reads book club books with his aunt?

“Aunt Tessy, are you not enjoying—”

“Olly! For fuck’s sake.” She throws her arms up in the air. “If you’re going to do the dirty tango with my boss, the least you can do is enjoy a meal with him.”

I bark out a laugh, and Olly’s face turns a deep shade of red.

“Ah. I see.”

At first, I’m a little worried that Olly will be upset that I told Tessy about our night, but despite his flaming red face, he reaches for my hand and tangles our fingers together.

“Right,” Tessy says. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to go pick up some new gardening gloves at the Plant Emporium.” With that, she rushes off, her lavender skirt swishing as she walks away.

“I thought she had to get a book—ah, she wasn’t just giving us alone time, she was making things up, wasn’t she?”

“Yeah,” I giggle. “Your aunt can’t lie to save her life.”

He chuckles, shaking his head. “That’s true. Wow . I can’t believe it took me so long to catch on. The meddling woman.”

“She’s probably just going to take her burger back to the boutique and watch her favorite show on Netflix .”

Olly takes a bite of his burger and hums in appreciation.

I pop a fry in my mouth and chew slowly. “Are you mad?”

Olly chews his food before he takes a sip of his chocolate malt. “Why would I be mad?”

“I don’t know? I told her about us.” I hold up a hand before he can say anything. “In my defense, I had no idea I was bragging about her own damn nephew.”

He nudges me. “Bragging huh?”

I ignore his question by shoveling my burger into my face. I chew in an over-exaggerated way and hold up my pointer finger, indicating that I needed a minute—or maybe a year—before I explain.

He laughs. “Okay, doll. I’ll let you get away with it.”

My insides warm at the nickname, and I place my half-eaten burger back on my plate.

“I had no idea you designed your own clothes.”

“And I had no idea you were some hotshot musician.”

“I’m serious. What made you get into fashion? You clearly have an eye for it.” He picks up his glass and toys with the straw, waiting for me to answer.

His compliment makes me feel really good and I love that he seems genuinely interested. It’s been a long time since I’ve met someone I can talk about my passion to besides my mother and Tessy. “It started when I was really young. You know those crazy movie montages where the main character tries on a bunch of outfits?”

He nods as he continues to eat, his body half-turned, giving me his full attention.

“Well, some of the outfits looked absolutely ridiculous, while others made the character look amazing. But then the main character would find that one special outfit, the one that was just perfect for whatever occasion was about to happen. They’d walk out of the fitting room and everything just...clicked.”

Olly nods eagerly. “I always secretly loved those scenes.”

I smile, imagining Olly watching some rom-com in secret. “I wanted to do that. I wanted to find that special outfit for someone. My mom and I came home one day after going to the movies. Honestly, I don’t even remember the movie—maybe something with Lindsay Lohan?”

Olly smiles at me, his eyes crinkling in the corners, and he gives me a warm look, as if he can see my memory clearly.

“As soon as we were in the house, my mom and I rushed to her room, where she pulled out dozens of outfits. She turned up the music in the house and we modeled all her clothes.” I laugh. “I remember picking out some hideous outfit and saying, ‘ This is the one. You’ll catch your prince with this one !’”

“Oh god,” Olly chuckles. “Please tell me she took a photo wearing that outfit.”

“She did. We took a selfie. I’ll have to show you sometime. It’s on my dresser by my closet.” My words slam into me.

Did I just imply that we would see each other again? I chance a peek at Olly, but he’s still grinning as if I didn’t say anything farfetched.

“And can you do it now? Can you pick out the perfect outfit for someone?”

I blush. “Actually, I kind of joke that it’s my hidden talent. I love finding that outfit that I know will just look amazing on someone.”

“How do you know what will look good though until they try it on?”

“It’s not too complicated. I take several things into consideration. Things like height, build, and skin tone. I also take in the person’s personality.”

“What do you mean?”

“Okay, for example, if I get someone who is shy or introverted, I won’t be passing them something scandalous, like a shimmery red miniskirt. Unless, of course, their goal is to look hot and dress in something unexpected.”

Olly laughs. “I don’t know. That sounds impressive to me. You aren’t only taking fashion into consideration, Ezra. You are looking at the person as a whole, analyzing their character and their wants. Not everyone can be that intuitive.” He leans forward and wipes something from the corner of my lip. I half wonder if anything is even there.

Either way, a warm tingling travels from my lips to my toes. I want this man. I want him to touch me everywhere. More often.

We finish the rest of our food as I tell him more stories of my mom and how she got me into fashion. I tell him how she's still one of my best friends and is currently on a girl's trip visiting different spas and wineries before flying out to Hawaii in a few weeks.

I glance down at our empty plates. "Now what?"

"What time do you have to be back?"

I check my phone and laugh, flipping it so he can read my screen.

Tessy: Take your time eating. Your next appointment isn't till 3:00 pm.

Tessy: Have fun.

Olly shakes his head. "God, I love her. Why don't I get the check, then we can wander back to your shop? I'm dying to see you use your magical powers and pick out an outfit for me."

I open my mouth to protest about the check, but then it dawns on me. When was the last time someone even offered? Instead, I'm going to appreciate this special feeling Olly has lit in my heart.

"Were you serious about wanting my yellow suit? It's a little out there."

We are in the back room labeled 'Employees Only' at Beauty and the Boutique, where Olly, bless his soul, is letting me dress him in all types of outfits. Tessy, knowing all my childhood stories with my mom, turned up the music and cleared the hallway so we could throw our very own fashion show, and walk a fake runway from the back room to the front, where we twirl in front of the floor-to-ceiling mirrors.

A few customers wandered in, and I'd be lying if I told you I wasn't excited that Olly wanted to witness my 'magical powers' in action. Two college-age girls walked out with brand-new outfits they couldn't stop gushing about.

"Yes. If that suit is for sale, then I want it." Olly leans over me, caging me in with his toned arm as he props his hand against the wall. "I've never been so captivated by something before."

I shiver.

God. The way he says captivated combined with that intense stare makes me think he's trying to hint that he's never been so captivated by someone before.

I should step to the side, get out from under his hypnotizing eyes and pretty words. I shouldn't let things go further with us. But what if we were put in each other's paths for a reason? What if there's actually something here between us?

"Okay, well, the wedding party I'm doing a fitting for will be here any minute, but I'm free tomorrow. Want to come here right before closing and I can measure you? Then maybe we could go out or get something to eat?" I ask hopefully.

"Are you asking me out, Ezra?"

I blink. Wait. Am I?

Bracing my hand on the wall behind me, I let out a deep breath. Olly must see the panic in my eyes because he steps back, giving me space.

Oh god. What am I doing? The man is famous and will be leaving Foggy Basin sooner rather than later. Even if he is here visiting his aunt, how long would it be before he needs to go back home, back on tour, back to his real life?

“Ezra?” he asks, brow creased with worry.

I hold up my index finger. “Oh my god. Don’t move. I’ll be right back. Um. Don’t go anywhere. I—uh, think I heard a customer up front.”

His eyes narrow. Fuck. I’m a mess. He knows his aunt is up front and would call back here if she needed me, but I rush through the door as if my ass is on fire anyway.

“Ezra, honey?” Tessy asks. “Is everything okay?”

“It’s great, Tessy. I just remembered I need to make an important phone call.”

“Is Olly still back there?”

“Yes,” I call out over my shoulder. “Make sure he doesn’t leave. I’ll be right back.”

I make my way out of my shop and pull out my phone. I almost call Rebecca, but then I decide to call the one person I know will help me not panic right now. I call Mom.

“Ezra, love. How’s it going? Did you get into that fashion competition?” Her voice is cheerful and soothes my racing heart.

I let out a deep sigh. “Hey, mom. No, I haven’t heard from Dee Rama Magazine yet, but I need your advice.”

“Of course. Is everything okay?”

I almost chuckle at her switch in tone. I can picture her sitting up straight and tossing her shoulders back. She was always a steady presence in my life.

“I think I met someone.”

She laughs. “You think?”

I grin, feeling even more at ease. “Oh shush, you. I met someone.”

“Okay, honey, tell me about him.”

“He’s very attractive. Like the hottest guy I’ve ever seen in person. He comes off a little grumpy at first. Kind of like he has resting grumpy face.”

She snickers. “Go on.”

“I noticed him at the bar, which is odd because you know me; I tend to go for the men who smile. But I was so focused on him I didn’t even notice he had an identical twin till later.”

“Wow. How do you know you weren’t mixing the two up?”

I pace the sidewalk in front of Beauty and the Boutique while I think back at our encounter. “No, there was just something about Olly. It was him the whole time. Anyway, he helped me save face. Flora walked into the bar and you won’t believe who she’s dating. Forrest.”

Mom gasps. “That hoe bag. She bullied you for years and now she’s dating your ex. That girl is crazy. How’s Forrest? Poor thing.”

I bite back my smile. “He seems happy? I don’t know. It was brief. But she started taunting me and Rebecca tried to make things better, but then said I had a gorgeous boyfriend. Which I don’t, obviously. So I panicked.”

“Oh my goodness! Did you walk up to Olly, sit in his lap, and say ‘ This is my boyfriend ?’”

“What? His lap?”

“Yes! I just saw a romantic comedy like this, although it got a little raunchy for a moment.”

“No, mom. No lap dances or whatever the hell you’re watching. He placed his arm around me and pretended he was my boyfriend. Popped out of nowhere and just saved me.”

Mom sighs. “So romantic. Then what happened?”

“We talked for a bit and our chemistry was off the charts. So I took him home. We had a one-night stand, or at least I thought it was a one-night stand.”

My cheeks flame. Damn them. My mom and I have always been open about sex, but I still tend to get embarrassed any time I tell her anything.

“Aw, honey. Did he walk out on you?”

“No, the opposite. I left him a note. But then he showed up at my shop this morning. We just had lunch.”

She squeals. “How romanti—”

“No, he was there for Tessy. Tessy is his aunt.”

“Oh! Olly, as in Olly Black?”

“Oh, crap. Not you too? Does everyone know who he is?”

“Wait, you don’t? Honey, remember that Dee Rama Magazine winter special where they featured the ice queen and her harem?”

“Of course, that’s one of our favorite issues. Wait.” Something clicks as I mentally shuffle through some of the photos from that spread. “No way,” I gasp in shock. “I knew he looked familiar. But that was years ago. I remember the twins who posed with my favorite model. But he was clean shaven and, again, that was probably eight or so years ago. I think I was still in college.”

“That’s him. Tessy told us those were her nephews. I’m pretty sure you squealed so loud.”

I chuckle. “I vaguely remember that. I guess now that Tessy and I work together, I just kind of forgot. I didn’t talk to her much until I hired her.”

“So, what’s the problem, love? Olly and Zayden are good boys.”

“Mom, I’m pretty sure he’s way older than me. You can’t call him a boy.”

“Fair enough. Then tell me Ezra, what advice do you need? You seem to really like him.”

“That’s the thing. We just met, but we click in such a way, it feels like I’ve known him longer. But he’s some famous guy who will be going back to his glamorous life. I feel like I should stop this before my heart starts to fall. Because at the rate we are going, I’ll develop feelings by the end of the week.”

“Ezra, I can hear it in your voice. You don’t want to stop seeing him. In fact, I think you called me to ask permission. To see if it’s okay for you to keep seeing a man

you're scared of falling for.”

Her words hit me. I gasp. She nailed it right on the head before I even knew it. “Mom,” I whisper.

“I say go for it, honey. If he is such a good guy, and you click that well with him, why not explore it? It’s rare we come across people who make us feel this way. Who knows? Maybe he’ll surprise you. If things get serious later on down the road, the two of you can figure things out. If things don’t get serious with Olly, just have fun with him while you can. Maybe Olly is meant to show you how beautiful and talented you are as he passes through. Life isn’t so cut and dry.”

“He already makes me feel talented and beautiful. He makes me feel seen. Fuck, mom. It’s only been twenty-four freaking hours, and he makes me feel more cherished than Forrest or anyone else has made me feel.”

“I’m happy for you, Ezra. You worked so hard in school, and now you’re always so busy with the shop. You deserve a little break. Have some fun. Only you can decide what to do next, but if you want to hear my opinion, I say go for it and see where it leads.”

My heart beats faster as a thrill shoots through me. I nod, even though she can’t see it.

“Ez, I can easily say, as your mother, who has been there through all the guys you’ve crushed on or dated, you’ve never sounded this excited before.”

“I am excited.” I grin. “Terrified, but excited.”

“Isn’t that how love and romance should feel in the beginning?”

“Thanks Mom. I gotta get back in there. I kind of ran out of the room in the middle of

our conversation to call you.”

She barks out a laugh. “Oh, Ez. Where on Earth are you?”

“At the Boutique. Mom, I told him about our fashion show montages we like to reenact. He threw a fake fashion show with me and Tessy. No one has ever done that for me before.”

“He sounds like a keeper.”

“I think he is. Okay, I really gotta go now.”

When I walk into the shop, the bell overhead chimes as I enter. Olly is sitting in a chair, scrolling through his phone. He looks worried. But he stayed. He waited for me. Fuck, and he probably saw me pacing outside on the phone as I chatted with Mom.

I walk toward him, and as soon as he sees me, he shoves his phone in his pocket.

“Ezzy, is everything okay? Did I push too much? I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable or assume anything,” he rambles.

Without another word, I straddle his legs and sit on his lap. His addicting citrus scent surrounds me. I can’t be sure what exactly the characters did in the romance flick my mom watched, but I know what I want to do. I press my lips to Olly’s and kiss him passionately.

When our lips pull apart, I look into his dazed, lust-filled eyes. “Yes.”

“Hmm?”

“Yes, Olly. The answer to your question earlier. I am asking you out on a date.”

A beautiful smile breaks out across his handsome face.

That’s when I realize that no matter what happens between us or where we go from here, I will never forget this smile or this day.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

“Wow. Your body is perfect,” Ezra says as he continues taking measurements. I’m standing on a mini stage in the back of Beauty and the Boutique. We are surrounded by a large three-panel dressing mirror that shows off various angles of the pastel-yellow suit I’ve become obsessed with.

“Why thank you,” I snark, feeling playful.

A quick sharp spank hits my ass. I blink. Did Ezra just spank me? I peer down at him where he’s kneeling in front of me on the carpet. “Did you just—”

Another smack to the ass.

“Hey! Be careful back there! You have me pinned like a damn pin cushion over here.”

His smile is contagious. As he continues working, he does this cute little wiggle that reminds me of an excited puppy. I’m pretty sure the brat is excited that he got away with spanking me.

“So, what was this about my body?”

“Yes, the world knows you have the perfect body. The body of a rock god. Don’t get fucking cocky about it.” He smirks. “What I mean is that your body was the ideal body type I had in mind for this suit.”

I run my fingers through his wavy blond hair and he leans into it. Fuck. Seeing him on his knees like this, looking at me with his pretty blue eyes, is giving me some dirty

thoughts. Not to mention the damn mirror. I'd be able to see Ezra do some dirty things at all kinds of angles.

I can feel my cock start to grow thick under the suit pants, and I pray Ezra doesn't see.

"Tell me about this fashion show," I say, hoping to keep my thoughts PG. "What kind of theme is it? Do you know yet?"

He shakes his head and runs the measuring tape up between my legs, caressing his hand on my inner thigh. I swallow hard and glance up at the ceiling.

"I need to get accepted first, but if I do, then the competition is in Sacramento. In my acceptance letter, they should have a theme picked out. We'll then have only two months to design and produce a line of clothing catering to that theme. Then, during the fashion show, we have models walk the runway and show off our pieces."

"What do the winners get?"

"The top three winners will be featured in Dee Rama Magazine. Which is literally a dream come true for me. But the top prize will be twenty thousand dollars, a full article, feature, and cover in Dee Rama."

I whistle. "Damn, that's a nice prize. I'd love to see your designs featured in such a huge magazine."

He grins up at me. "You know, you're the first one to get it. When I tried applying a few years ago, Forrest asked what I was going to do with the money. Everyone always asks about the money. Which would obviously be nice to have, but I wasn't kidding when I said it would be a dream to see an outfit of mine in that magazine."

“I bet. Having your work in Dee Rama can literally make your career. It cost thousands and thousands of dollars to even have a small ad in Dee Rama. But to have your clothes featured and celebrated? That could potentially take you further than what you could do with the prize money.”

He nods eagerly and grips my thighs, palms traveling higher. I groan internally as my cock grows harder.

“I got all the measurements I needed. This suit is going to look even better on you once I tailor it.”

The suit really is unique. Its color gives it an edge that is totally fitting of a rock star persona. But when you look closer at the sky-blue stitching and trim, it also makes this suit look sleek and expensive. I can imagine someone like Regé-Jean Page, David Beckham, or even my favorite actor, Jude Hale, rocking a suit like this on the red carpet.

“Speaking of models. I still need to find mine. I want to have at least one woman and one man, but I’ll wait till I get accepted before asking someone.”

My heart pounds harder as I realize I want to do it. I want to help Ezra show the world his art by being his model. “When is the show? You said in two months, right?” I could do it. It wouldn’t be the same as me on stage performing. I might need to bring it up with my therapist just in case, but I know I want to do this for Ezra. Assuming he wants me to.

“Yup. Why, wanna walk the catwalk for me?” he jokes.

“Yes. I do.” Determination lights my soul.

Ezra pauses, lips parted. “Wait, are you serious? Won’t that ruin your bad boy

image?” he teases.

Despite the last remark, I can hear the excitement in his voice, and I can't hide how much of a thrill that gives me. “I am. Let me model your designs for you.” I wave a hand down at his tablet. “You just took all my measurements. I've walked a runway before. Not to mention I have a lot of experience in professional photo shoots.” If he gets accepted, I'll do whatever I can to make Ezra's show a hit.

“Oh my gosh! Yes.” He nods. “Yes, yes, yes. If you are willing to model for me, then I want you.” Ezra jumps to his feet and tackles me.

I catch him easily as he wraps his legs around my waist. I cup his ass and knead his flesh, causing him to moan. We kiss with a desperation that feels like our lives depend on it. His light lip gloss smears onto my lips with a silky glide that has me hungry for more. “Mmm. You taste like cherries. You did the other night, too.”

I remember that first kiss we shared, then all the kisses since. Damn, and the way he straddled me right in the middle of the shop. My erection is throbbing, and I feel precum leaking into my underwear.

Ezra drops to his knees again, and I gasp, looking around. The shop is closed up for the night and the doors are locked, so I have no idea why I'm glancing toward the front as if someone will walk through. “Ezra,” I groan. “What are you doing?”

Fuck. I damn well know what he's doing, but I swear he always has me on a hair trigger.

“Olly, please, can I suck your cock?” He bats his lashes at me with those mesmerizing blue eyes.

“Fuck, doll. I'm a goner for you. Do you know you can ask me anything here on your

knees before me? If you ask, I would do everything in my power to make it happen. Did you know that?”

“No, I didn’t know.” He unzips the pants of the suit he’s been working on.

Damnit, I don’t want to ruin his design with any kind of body fluid.

I quickly unbutton the white dress shirt, carefully pull off the jacket, and step out of the suit pants. My cock is hard and jutting forward. Ezra leans in and presses his face against my length. He looks up at me with large round eyes before seductively licking the base to tip.

“You’re so freaking big, Olly.” Ezra’s cheeks are flushed.

I can’t stop staring at him, working my cock with long, drawn-out licks. My cock has never looked this huge before, but with his sparkling eyes looking up at me and the thick veins running down my length, the image in front of me is pornographic.

Throw in that large panel mirror and I can see Ezra from all angles. The sight is almost too much.

Ezra gives me one more lick before shooting me a wicked smile that has my cock bobbing. It’s been so damn long since anyone has gotten me hard. Even toward the end of my relationship with Oscar, I never felt like this. Never felt this good.

At first, I was frustrated that my body wouldn’t get aroused after he messed with my head, but as I stare down at this tempting beauty, I could almost believe in fate. Almost as if my body has been waiting for Ezra.

I caress his cheek tenderly and his wicked smile turns soft. He closes his eyes and leans into my touch like a cat seeking warmth.

After only a moment, Ezra opens his eyes and focuses on my cock. “Such a sexy cock.” He leans in and sucks the head between his lips. The heat of his mouth almost makes my knees buckle. Ezra moans around my length, getting it wet before bobbing up and down and slurping loudly.

He’s putting on a show for me, but what’s even hotter is he fucking loves sucking my cock, almost as much as I like getting head. I thrust my hips forward, and he groans. He pushes down on my cock, deep-throating me easily. Suddenly, I can feel the vibrations of his moans closing in around my head.

“Fuck. So good,” I murmur, lost in his touch.

The sound of Ezra’s zipper being unzipped hits my ears. He looks up with pleading eyes, silently begging.

I grin. “Such a good little doll for me. Look at you straining against your pants.”

Ezra whimpers.

“Pull yourself out. Let me see how hard you are.”

Ezra quickly shoves his pants down to his thighs, all while still working my dick with his mouth. The sight has me ready to come.

“Touch yourself,” I growl. “Jerk your pretty cock while you suck me off.”

Ezra moans, wrapping his slim fingers around his girth. I glance at him through the mirror; my favorite angle is seeing him work me from the side. He continues to bob his head, picking up speed.

“That's it doll. Faster. Make me come down your throat.” I'm panting now. There's

no fucking way I'm going to last. As soon as that thought occurs, I'm spilling down his throat with a groan. I glance down in time to see Ezra coming all over the floor as he shudders apart.

We stay like that for a while, with me breathing heavily above him. Ezra is lapping at my cock, still kneeling. Finally, I recover enough strength to move. I reach for his hands and help him to a standing position. I kiss him before pulling away and leaning my forehead against his.

"Can I tell you a secret?" I whisper. For some strange reason, I trust this man in front of me. It's probably all the endorphins, and maybe I'm being a fool, but it's nice to feel like I can trust someone besides my family and band.

"Of course, Olly. Whatever it is, you can tell me."

I let out a deep breath.

No, I know I can trust this man. My aunt has trusted him for years and I trust her. But it's more than that. Whatever the hell this is. It's real. It's fast as fuck, but it doesn't mean it's anything less.

"You are the first person I've been with in two years," I confess, still whispering. Something about the words that just slipped from my mouth makes me feel shaky and vulnerable. I feel like I'm opening up my chest and letting Ezra see a little piece of my heart. It's scary as fuck and it has me trembling.

Ezra's lips fall open. He leans in closer, his hands on my hips and his ocean eyes searching. To my shock, he traces the pad of his thumb under my eye and wipes away a stray tear. I feel like I'm going to crumble to ash and fly away. I don't understand why I'm this emotional over such a confession, but as Ezra wraps his slim arms around me, I feel safe. He might be smaller than me, but at this moment, Ezra is my

anchor keeping me at bay.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

Olly trembles in my embrace. I rub slow soothing circles on his back, trying to comfort him. What the hell is happening? And who the hell hurt Olly in the past. I'm shocked, completely speechless at his confession. His secret. But I can tell there's more to it.

If I'm the first person he's opened up to, enough to be sexual with, what happened in his past to shut him down? And why me. How could I have possibly earned this amazing man's trust?

I press my body closer to him. By the silent tears in his eyes, I know what he's just told me is huge. Bigger than anything I can imagine. "I'm here for you, Olly."

He hugs me tighter, and I don't push him to speak. He doesn't need to tell me anything. This is enough for now, maybe too much for two people who just met. But I'll protect this secret with all my heart.

"Why don't I call Midnight Pleasure and cancel our reservation with the restaurant? Apollo owes me. I'll see if he can get someone to deliver some food to us."

Olly nods against me.

We continue to stand there with me rubbing his back. We don't pull away for a few minutes and Olly finally relaxes.

"How did you know how to help me through that?"

I offer him a small smile. "It's been a few years, but my mom used to have a lot of

anxiety when I was younger. Everyone responds differently, so please just let me know if I made you uncomfortable in any way.”

“No, you were great. I’m so sorry for freaking out on you.” Olly glances away, and I can’t have that.

“Hey.” I tilt his head till his brown eyes look down into mine. “Listen to me, okay, Olly?”

He nods.

“Whatever you are going through, whatever you are feeling, it’s okay to feel the way you do.” I gently place my palm on his chest and repeat myself. “It’s okay to feel the way you do.”

Olly lifts my hand off of his chest and kisses my knuckles. “Thank you, Ezra. It means a lot to me that you are so calm about all of this.” He waves a hand down at his body.

“Thank you for trusting me. You don’t have to tell me anything else tonight, but if you want to, I’m here to listen. Any time. Now, why don’t we clean up here, and go up to my apartment? We have a fun, relaxing date night ahead of us.”

Back in my dining room, Olly and I are sitting at the table, enjoying some wings and fries. I’ll have to thank Apollo for getting us food so quickly. It took us a while to get back upstairs with everything we had to put away and clean up, but I get the impression Olly needed the time to gather himself. As soon as we entered my apartment, I was surprised to see Tabby zip by me, lightning fast. At first I thought she was trying to hide, but it turns out she was rushing to greet Olly by weaving

between his legs and headbutting him like he was her long lost love.

The conversation between us is so easy. I haven't felt any of those awkward first date silences I'm used to. Instead we've been chatting and bantering back and forth for over an hour it feels like we've known each other for years.

"I know this is a little crazy asking now, but how old are you?" Olly asks before lifting a buffalo wing to his mouth.

I chuckle. "Why, you nervous, old man?"

"Hey! I'm not that old," he sputters.

I arch a brow.

"I'm only thirty-seven, not even forty yet."

Taking a sip of my water, I hide my smile behind my glass. "I'm twenty five."

"Oh my god. My aunt said you were a lot older than you looked. I'm twelve freaking years older than you."

I stifle a laugh. "And how old do I look?"

"Fuck," Olly scrubs a hand down his face. "With your flawless skin, I thought you looked like you were in your early twenties. Twenty two, maybe? I don't know, I kind of suck with ages. But after my aunt told me you were older, I figured since you owned your own business, you had to be in your early to mid thirties."

"Sorry to disappoint, but you are in fact robbing the cradle." I laugh.

“You are the worst.”

I chuckle. “But you like me.”

Olly shakes his head, chuckling. “I do.”

My cheeks heat and I shove a french fry in my mouth. Gah. Why do I always react like a shy teen when he compliments me?

I nudge his leg with my foot. “So, Olly, tell me about yourself. What do you do in your free time when you’re not wooing the world with your music.”

He smirks. “I’m not sure our music is the wooing type.” He taps his chin playfully. “Let me see, it falls in line with being a musician, but I love to play the guitar. Although, if you ask my brother, Noah, he likes to tease me about my love of fiction books. Since we are always on the road, it’s easy for me to pull out my phone at any time and read there.”

“A reader, huh? I never would have thought. I don’t have many friends who read. What kind of books?”

“All kinds. Fantasy, mystery, romance. Give it all to me.”

I take the last bite of my food and glance at Olly’s empty dish. “Want any more? If not, I can put the leftovers in the fridge and we can pick something to watch.” I point at my TV.

“I’m full. But thanks. What about you, do you read?”

“I do,” I reply as I reach for his plate and rinse it off in the sink. “I’ll show you my collection later. I can’t seem to get into ebooks. I prefer paperbacks. Especially

knowing it helps our little indie store.”

“Oh, yes. I bought a book from there. That place is cute.”

I reach for the blanket at the end of my sofa, and Olly sits before holding his arms out. I snuggle up against him and we chat about our likes and dislikes while going through the menu trying to pick a movie.

“Have you seen that new fantasy series with Jude Hale in it? Jude’s my favorite actor.”

“Oh my god, yes! It’s so good. Jude is super hot.”

“Should I be jealous?”

I bite my lip and look up at him. “Trust me, you have nothing to worry about. Although I wouldn’t mind if you wore that fae warrior outfit Jude did during the fight scene in last season’s episode.”

“Okay, be honest,” he says. “How many times have you seen this show?”

I snort. “Too many times. I can watch it over and over again. Sometimes when I’m working on my designs I just put it on in the background and glance up at the good parts.”

“Let’s do that then. Let’s put it on while we continue to talk and get to know each other.”

“Alright. I’m good with that,” I reply with a grin. “As long as we can make out during the sex scenes.”

“Deal.”

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

Three weeks. That's all it took to completely change my life and flip it on its axis. Olly and I have been dating for three weeks. Every day he's been at my shop; helping me with things like inventory, or chatting about our lives, or just spending time near me. Three weeks. That's all it took for me to develop deep feelings for this talented, handsome man.

During the slow days in the shop, Olly either helped me revamp my website, or organize the display. One time he even let Rebecca photograph him modeling some of my new designs. When it was really slow he would bring his guitar and play acoustic.

Here I am thinking that metal is just noise, but when Olly showed me one of their music videos, I was shocked by the complex blending of genres, the contrast between clean and harsh vocals, and even the southern twang I've always loved in any type of music. Maybe I'm looking at things through rose colored glasses, but suddenly I'm listening to Arcade Lake and love it.

"How's our girl?" Olly coo's, as he pokes his finger through Tabby's cat carrier to stroke her striped fur. "Did you have fun with Alex? He wasn't mean to you, was he?"

I laugh. "Alex is an amazing Vet. I've been taking Tabby to Paws, Claws, and More since she was a kitten. I swear, Tabby just needs to look into Alex's dark soulful eyes and she's happy."

We make our way down Main Street back toward my apartment. One of the nice things about living in such a small town is that everything is close to my place. I

don't really even need a car other than when I want to drive out of town for fabric.

"That's because Tabby is a good girl. Isn't she?" Olly coos, again.

"Oh my gosh, I swear, you like my cat more than me."

"Oh doll, that isn't true at all." He leans forward and presses a kiss to my lips. Right there in the middle of Main Street for anyone including the town gossips to see. "I like you."

I can only imagine what my sappy smile on my face looks like.

Olly pats his pockets. "Oh shoot, I forgot my phone at the vet's. Here, take Tabby. She's starting to get restless. I'll meet you back at home."

Home.

And that's how I end up standing in the middle of downtown Foggy Basin, gripping my cat's carrier, daydreaming about the man I'm falling for using the other L word. Damn. I'm so gone for the guy. Ironically, the thought of falling for a rock star no longer scares me like it first did. Olly and I have opened up since that night three weeks ago.

We've told each other things that neither of us have told anyone. He told me about his crazy stalker ex who cheated on him. He hasn't gone into too much detail about Oscar because it seems to make him unravel, and I'd rather wait for him to tell me than push him into a panic attack. He's danced around some of his other issues, but not for lack of trying to tell me, but more because he can't seem to form the words.

Tonight he's staying the night, where we plan to cook dinner together, watch our show, and make love. Tomorrow is the big day, where apparently Dee Rama

Magazine is publishing a “tell all” piece about Arcade Lake’s stalker.

I talked briefly on the phone with Zayden last week about what to expect. Olly couldn’t seem to get the words completely out, but insisted he wanted me to know. So, he came up with the solution of calling his brother and handing me the phone.

Let’s just say if I could get away with murder, this Oscar asshole, or whatever his name is, would have to watch his back. The amount of mental torture and mind games he played on Olly is something no one should deal with. Makes my situation with Forrest and Flora look downright angelic.

As if summoning the demon herself. Flora appears by my side. “Look Forrest, love, it’s little Ezra.”

Little? Um I’m like an inch taller than her.

Forrest gives her a confused look.

“Hi Forrest,” I reply without acknowledging Flora. Yeah, I’m a petty bitch, what can I say?

Flora rolls her eyes as I walk past her, clutching the handle of Tabby’s carrier with a death grip. “Did you hear that Dee Rama picked out all the contestants already? I didn’t see your name on the list.”

My heart sinks. “Oh. Did they? I’ve been so busy with my online store and here in the shop I haven’t had time to check the mail.” Total lie. I’ve been checking every day. Olly and I have been making a silly adventure out of it, walking down the street to the shared mailbox, only to be disappointed every time. How the hell did Flora get in.

“It’s too bad you didn’t make it. Forrest said you failed the application process last time too.”

The blood drains from my face as I turn toward my ex. “You said that?” I don’t want to believe that he could be so cruel. Just because we broke up, doesn’t mean we weren’t friends when we ended things.

“Oh course not, Ezzy. Jesus Flora. What the hell is wrong with you? Ever since we’ve come back to town you’ve been obsessing over Ezra and his boyfriend. Leave them alone. Ezra is a good guy.”

Flora gasps. “You’re sticking up for him?”

Forrest stops slouching and stands up taller. It’s almost as if he’s shedding his gentle giant, shy persona and finally sticking up for himself. “Yes. Just like I know, Ezra would stick up for me if the roles were reversed. Don’t forget, Ezra has told me every petty, evil thing you’ve done in the past. I overlooked it because I had hoped you would change.”

Flora’s mouth falls open.

“If you don’t apologize to him right now, for everything, we’re done.”

“Forrest!”

“No, Flora. This isn’t a good look. And no one deserves what you did to him.”

I’m floored, Forrest never once hinted that he believed me. And he sure as hell never talked to me like this. Good for him. He shouldn’t let anyone walk all over him anymore.

Flora narrows her eyes on me. Like a child in trouble, she turns and gives me the most insincere apology before rushing away.

“I’m so sorry, Ezra,” Forrest says, looking sheepish.

I shift Tabby’s heavy carrier to my other hand and shuffle my feet awkwardly. Suddenly exhausted, I just want to go home.

“Ezra are you okay?” Olly asks, jogging up to me. His gaze narrows on Forrest, but he doesn’t say anything to my ex. Instead, he reaches for Tabby and I hand her over.

“Thanks, Olly.” I nod. “Yeah, I’m okay.”

Olly leans his arm against me, silently giving me support. Fuck, I’m so thankful he’s here. Thankful he saved me that night in the bar, and thankful he’s still in my life.

I turn back to Forrest. “I’m really proud of you, ya know? That took guts sticking up to her and defending me instead of your girlfriend.”

Forrest sighs. “Yeah, she’ll probably give me shit for it, but it wasn’t until that night in the bar I started to see that other side of her that you always told me about. I’m just sorry I didn’t defend you back when we were dating.”

Olly places his free arm possessively around my shoulders.

Forrest chuckles, putting his hand up in surrender. “Don’t worry, Olly. Ezra and I ended a long time ago. You two are definitely meant for each other.”

Olly relaxes a bit. “Take it from someone who stayed in a toxic relationship longer than I like to admit, if you aren’t happy, or she’s treating you like shit. Get out of there. You deserve happiness too. If Ezra can give someone like me happiness, then

others deserve to feel this way too.”

My heart melts. Fuck.

I’m in love with Olly Black.

We barely make it into my apartment before my phone starts ringing. “Can you let Tabby out and feed her for me, please?” I call out.

“Sure thing, doll.”

I smile at our domestic bliss we seem to be in. But my smile quickly falls when I notice the caller id on my phone. “Is this a joke?” I murmur.

“What’s that, babe?”

“Uh, nothing. I gotta take this phone call. I’ll be out on the stairs.” I walk outside and swipe to answer.

“Hello?”

“Hello, I am trying to reach Ezra Strum. Is he available?”

“This is him.”

“Ezra, hi. My name is Lawson. I'm calling on behalf of Dee Rama Magazine. My boss, Ella Gray, wanted me to reach out to you. She noticed something interesting about your application. Just to confirm, did you apply to participate in this year's fashion show, correct?”

My heart pounds so hard, I almost can’t hear Lawson. “Yes, I did,” I reply as I

frantically turn up the volume on my phone.

“Something must have happened in the process of sending you your acceptance package.”

I gasp, my hand flying to my mouth.

Lawson continues talking. “The only reason we were able to catch it this year was because Ella recognized your name. She remembered your application from two years ago.”

“She did?” I can’t believe the words I’m hearing. My palms are starting to sweat, and I don’t know if I’m shaking from excitement or nerves.

“She did. Ella really liked the portfolio, both of them. She was shocked that you didn’t reply two years ago and was even more surprised when you didn’t accept again.”

“Two years ago?” I repeat. I think I’m in shock.

“Ella wanted me to personally look into your application. And it looks like your acceptance package has been sent back, for whatever reason. Can you confirm your address? We have a building on Main Street, but when I look up the address online, it looks like it’s a shop called Beauty and the Boutique.”

“Yes, that’s correct. That’s my address. I live above my shop.”

“Hmm,” Lawson hums. “I’m not exactly sure why it was sent back, but I’m assuming last time your package either got sent back or got lost in the mail.”

My heart pounds even faster. “What does that mean for me?” I ask, walking down the

steps until I'm in the alleyway.

"Just one moment. Please hold while I transfer you to Ms. Gray."

"Ms. Gray?" I squeak, but the hold music is already playing in my ears. I pinch myself. Am I dreaming? I begin to pace with excitement. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

I shouldn't get ahead of myself.

"Hi, Ezra. This is Ella Gray. Are you still on the line?"

"Ms. Gray, hi. Wow. I'm so sorry, I'm kind of in shock. I'm such a huge fan."

"That's wonderful. Thank you. Look, I wanted to personally congratulate you and let you know that you have been accepted into this year's fall fashion with Dee Rama Magazine. Unfortunately, because we didn't catch the error in time you lost an entire month. Other contestants will have an advantage of working for a longer period of time. Which I understand is a huge disadvantage for you. Another reason I wanted to reach out to you over the phone to not only congratulate you, but to see if you were still interested in participating despite that disadvantage."

I blink. I want to scream yes. Tell her there's no way I'm passing up this opportunity. But I take a moment to think. "Can you tell me what the theme is?"

"Unfortunately, I can not. If you decide to accept then I will have Lawson email you a basic electronic contract. Once you sign and send it back he will email you your package rather than send it snail mail. Again I apologize that you never got either acceptance letter."

"This is a huge dream come true for me, Ella. And I'm honored you recognized my name, let alone reached out. I'm in. I want to show you what I can bring to the

fashion show.”

“That’s wonderful. Congratulations, Ezra. Just in case, jot down our phone number. If you don’t get the contract from Lawson within thirty minutes, call him back. He will immediately email you your acceptance package with the theme.”

“Thank you, Ella.”

“And, Ezra?”

“Yes?” I ask, climbing my way back up the stairs to my apartment.

“There’s a reason I recognized your name both times. I look forward to seeing what you bring to the table. Good luck.”

I hang up the phone and burst through the front door and squeal. I throw my arms up into the air and do this crazy knee high kick dance. “Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. Olly, where are you?”

Olly rushes out of the kitchen. “Are you okay? What’s going on?”

“I got in!” I cheer, sprinting toward Olly at a speed that’s probably dangerous for us both. “I got in.” I jump up into his arms and wrap my legs around Olly’s waist. I cling to him like a monkey, before bouncing up and down.

Olly starts peppering me with kisses and laughs as I laugh. He’s feeding off my excitement and I’m totally feeding off of him. I pull him into a passionate kiss, all while bouncing in his hold as he cups my butt.

“Ezra, doll. I have no idea what we are cheering about.”

“I got into the Dee Rama Magazine Fashion show!”

Olly places me back on my feet. His smile is so wide, it looks painful. “Are you fucking serious?”

I nod eagerly.

“You’re in?”

“I’m in!” I shout.

“Holy shit. You’re in!” He swoops me back into his arms and twirls me around. “We need to celebrate. Do you want to go out? I know we had plans to stay in but wow. We need to celebrate.”

“I want to celebrate here. But I have to check my email. They are emailing me the contract, then I should get the theme and welcome package shortly after signing.”

“Oh my god, it’s happening. Why don’t we order in, then once we get the theme, we can start planning out your designs.”

We. Fuck. I love that ever since we started dating he has always referred to us as a unit. A we. Can he be anymore perfect? How is this my life?

“I have a little bit of a disadvantage.”

“What do you mean?” Olly’s brow scrunches.

“Everyone—including Flora—has had a month to design. They should be in the producing and finalizing stages, right now. I have to do this all in a month.”

Olly grins. “We got this doll. I’m so damn excited for you. Let’s stick to our plan. Order food. Sign the contract. Get the theme. Once you get the theme we will spend the night planning it out. It’ll be fun.”

“You sure? What about our tv show?”

Olly scoffs. “What about it? It will still be there. We got a mother fucking fashion show to plan out.”

I bounce on my toes. “Oh my god. It’s really happening,” I cheer. “Damn. I’m going to turn into a broken record over the next week until it really hits me that I got in.”

We end up ordering our favorite burgers at the Blue Star Diner. I receive the contract and sign it electronically. Within minutes I get the welcome package. “The theme is Alice in Wonderland.”

“That’s actually a really cool theme,” Olly replies.

We are huddled close, sitting at the dining table and munching on our burgers while we read through the theme and shared documents on the laptop between us.

Olly snaps his fingers. “What if we use the pastel yellow suit? That suit is amazing. You can add a top hat and make it a Mad Hatter piece.”

I shake my head. “No, I first designed that piece two years ago. It was in my sketches I sent to Dee Rama two years ago. If Ella remembered me and my designs, she might recognize this one. I need something new.”

“The suit is really good. It deserves a spotlight.”

I grin over at him. “Thank you, Olly, but that’s your suit. It was meant for you, not

for the fashion world to get a hold of and replicate.”

“Okay, that was really fast thinking. I’ll let you win this one.” He leans in and kisses me.

I laugh against his lips, before scanning the shared doc again. “Take a look at this.” I point at the screen. “Here’s a list of the characters we can use inspiration from. Everyone seems to be gravitating towards the Queen of Hearts, White Rabbit, and Cheshire Cat. It seems strategic.”

“Maybe people think Hatter is too obvious.”

“I think you’re right. And look no one has even selected Alice. How can we have Wonderland without Alice?”

Olly squints at me. “So, are you going to pick Alice and Hatter then?”

I nod eagerly as an idea pops up. “I have to be different. I can’t show off an Alice or Hatter that everyone has seen before.”

“Well then, how are you going to make the two most obvious characters different?”

I eye Olly’s build. “I have an idea, but you’d have to be very open to wearing anything. You’d have to trust me.”

Olly’s eyes sparkle. “I do trust you, Ezzy,” he replies with a grin.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

The crowd in front of the stage is riled up, excited to see us. Thousands of fans chant for an encore.

It's exhilarating.

Intoxicating.

We are backstage watching the people cheer for us, begging us to get back on stage. I glance over at Emery and he nods, giving us the signal. Dallas grabs drum sticks and walks back on stage first. He holds up his drumsticks high into the air and the crowd goes wild.

Beckett goes next, hollering and sprinting on stage, purposely pumping up the crowd in front of him. Emery saunters on stage with a swagger that only a lead singer can perfect. He holds his hand up to his ear as if he can't hear the crowd.

The cheers get louder.

"Are you ready?" Zayden asks, and I nod.

We run onto the stage together, strumming our guitars. The fans scream with excitement. I scan each of their faces, happy to be here. Until one face has my blood running cold.

Ezra.

He's jumping up and down right up in front, cheering me on and yelling my name.

But right behind him is Oscar. Completely unmoving. His sole focus and angry sneer is on the man I love.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

Something is wrong. This isn't the first time I've woken up to Olly having a nightmare. But the pure panic in his voice as he thrashes and whimpers breaks my heart. I've studied up on the various ways to help him, and next week I'll be going with him to meet his therapist who will have better advice on how I can help.

But knowing that he's suffering right now still pains me.

Olly jerks awake, sitting up. His face is drenched with sweat. He looks around frantically. He doesn't see me at first. It's almost as if he sees through me.

"Olly," I say, using a calm tone. "It's me Ezra."

His gaze focuses on me. "Ezzy?"

I nod. "Hey, love. It's me. I'm right here. You're safe. I'm safe."

"Good, good," he murmurs. "Oscar was behind you. He was so angry. I didn't know what he was going to do."

"I'm okay. Oscar is in jail. He can't hurt us. He won't take me away from you. I'm here, Olly."

He looks at me again, this time there is recognition in his eyes. A little more clarity. "Oh, Ezra." He lays back on the bed and opens his arms to me.

I snuggle up against his chest. His heart is still racing. We lay there for a while until his heart starts to slow to a normal pace. He places soft kisses into my hair. "Thank

you for being here for me.”

“Of course.”

“I know it might be difficult dealing with me—”

“No, never,” I interrupt. “Olly, it’s completely understandable that your body is reacting like this. You’ve been through a lot. It might be scary and stressful. But it’s okay, I’m here for you. No matter what.”

Olly takes a deep breath in before letting it out. “I have PTSD.”

I nod against his chest, letting him speak.

“Wow. That’s the first time I’ve said it out loud,” he breathes. “I think I might have been triggered knowing that the article is being released today.”

I nod again. “We’ll get through this.”

“What if I’m always like this?” he whispers.

“From my understanding, there are so many ways to treat PTSD, but that being said, everyone is triggered differently and handles it differently. It’s okay. We’ll continue to get you the best help and take one day at a time. If you have this forever, then I’ll help you through it. For as long as you keep me in your life, I’m here to help.”

I didn’t mean to let those last words out, but I didn’t know how else to word it.

Olly tightens his grip on me and whispers against my ear. “If it’s up to me then you’ll be in my life forever.”

“Deal,” I reply. “Now, let’s get some sleep. We have a busy day ahead of us.”

“Thanks, doll.” Olly kisses my forehead. I settle back onto my side of the bed. Just as I’m starting to drift off, Olly’s fingers tangle with mine.

We fall asleep just like that. Hand in hand.

Zayden: The article is live. Ella did a great job. The fans have been nothing but supportive all over social media. Seriously, there is almost zero negative reaction.

Olly is still sleeping next to me when I get the text. Quietly peeling away from Olly, I get out of bed and grab my tablet, settling in my plush chair in the corner of the room. I type in the link that Zayden gave me and begin to read. The article is tasteful, and respectful, while still painting enough a picture for the world to see.

Arcade Lake, and the twins specifically have had a stalker for the good part of two years. The article doesn’t disclose Oscar’s real name, but ensures that he is in jail for a long time. Olly goes into detail about his relationship with Oscar and how the man made Olly keep it a secret.

Olly explained to me that it took him hours to recount certain events to Ella, and as I read the article I can only imagine why. The stalking seems like something pulled straight out of a horror movie. Creepy packages, threatening letters, hundreds to calls and texts, no matter how many times they changed numbers. Somehow, dodging professional security. The whole thing seemed unbelievable.

At one point, the article has me tearing up. When Olly describes his panic attacks on stage, being triggered by people who look similar to Oscar. Olly being accused of being on drugs. Zayden explains that Olly stopped drinking and refuses to do drugs since it will only make his panic attacks worse.

Beckett and Emery also talk about some of the things that Oscar did to them, but for whatever reason, Oscar was more focused on the twins. The article continues with a brief history of how this stalker terrorized other celebrities, that there will be a follow up article about how the band is doing, and please respect their privacy as they heal.

It ends with several general ways for friends and family members to help people with PTSD, anxiety, and panic attacks, as well as how people suffering can get professional help.

I sigh, letting out a deep breath at such heavy topics. I exit out of the browser and close my tablet, grateful that I could read the whole thing before Olly woke up. He wanted me to read it, but mentioned that he didn't want to. He said that he trusted Zayden and his younger brother, Noah when they approved the original draft.

"Hey you," Olly peers over at me from my bed. "Did you read it?"

I nod. "It's really good. Respectful, but informative, and all stuff you know. So I can understand why you don't want to read it. Here, Zayden texted me. Take a look." I hand him my phone.

The text makes Olly smile. He blows out a relieved breath. "It's still early, but having such good feedback this early in the game sets the tone. Not to mention, we are on the west coast, so the East Coast has already had this information."

"I have a feeling that most people will be understanding. I can't imagine too much negativity falling onto the band. It's your day, how do you want to celebrate?"

Olly's eyes meet mine. "Will you let me make love to you? Give me something else good to celebrate today."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:35 pm

The next several weeks in Foggy Basin speed by. When I first pulled up to this town on the back of my motorcycle, I couldn't imagine staying here long. Now, I secretly consider Foggy and its quirky shops and loving townsfolk my home.

I consider Ezra my home.

Seeing Ezra work on his designs is fascinating. He makes this cute little face where his forehead scrunches and sometimes his tongue pokes out when he concentrates. Ezra decided to focus on only two characters for his fashion show. Alice and Hatter. When he originally told me his ideas I assumed that Rebecca would be dressing as Alice and I would be Hatter. But part of his plan to stand out, is a gender swap on the characters.

It's brilliant.

And the various outfits he designed for us are absolutely breathtaking. Ezra and I are in his tailoring area again with Ezra on his knees before me. This is a position I've had to grow used to. Let's just say it's been really hard for me not to pop a boner everytime we're in here.

The only time we seem to get work done in this room is when Rebecca and my Aunt Tessy are here too.

"And we're done." Ezra grins, all sassy charm, once more. "What do you think?"

I glance in the mirror and know deep in my heart this will be the winner. "It's amazing, Ezzy. You've outdone yourself. And in half the time everyone else has.

Aunt Tessy walks into the room. “Wow. I never imagined you wearing anything like this, Olly. But you are stunning.”

“I agree with Olly. You’ve outdone yourself, Ez.”

Ezra's eyes bounce back and forth between the two of us in our outfits. “I can’t wait for Ella Gray to see these. Alright.” Ezra claps his hands together. “Everyone clean up, I’ll finalize the designs and add little details to all the outfits over the next two weeks. For now, my models can relax. Neither of you have to try anything else on until our final fitting right before the show.”

“What do you say, doll, after we clean up, do you still want to go on our date to Roseville.”

Ezra nods eagerly. “Yes. Let’s do it.”

It doesn’t take us long to put away all the loose material and supplies. And in no time, Ezra is wrapping his arms around me on the back of my bike, as we drive on the highway, wind whipping around us. I’m riding a high I’ve never felt before. There’s something special about hitting the highway on my bike. Something therapeutic. Especially with days like today, where not many people are on the road and we are able to travel at a faster speed. Happy and a little giddy to be sharing this with the man I’m falling for, is completely surreal.

We arrive in Roseville around noon and start off our date playing mini golf and laser tag before enjoying a late lunch at an all you can eat Japanese buffet. After our bellies are satisfied, we head over to a local used bookstore where we spend hours chatting and looking through books.

The date is simple, and yet I’ve never had so much fun with someone. Ever since we met, things have just flowed easily between us. I keep waiting for conversation to run

its course, or for us to run out of topics, but I get the feeling Ezra and I can talk about paint drying, and we would still have a good time.

We chat about our common interests and make plans to go hiking at the waterfalls up past Auburn. We see an advertisement for a Renaissance Fair coming to Folsom in two months, and make plans to go there together as well. People don't usually care about me outside of the band, but knowing that Ezra wants to know other aspects of my life—just like I want to know everything about him outside of his love for fashion—only has me falling harder.

Is this what life with Ezra would be like if I moved to his town? Because sign me up. I never felt this way about anyone before, and by the way Ezra talks to me I think he feels the same.

“Olly, Zayden. It's so nice to see you!” Ella Gray greets us as soon as we walk through the Olivia Cove Corporate office a few days later. “The rest of your band mates will be here in a few hours.”

Ella reaches us and hesitates as she eyes both of us. Zayden and I give each other knowing looks. Ella is having a hard time telling us apart.

Zayden steps forward and kisses her on the cheek, confirming that he did indeed grow close with Ella last time he was here. “Beautiful, as always, Ella.”

She squeezes Zayden's forearm in a friendly gesture. “Thank you, Zayden.”

Ella glances over at me. “You look different, Olly. Happier. How is life treating you since the article published?”

“Good. Thank you. I heard the article was great, forgive me, I don't plan on reading it. I hope you understand.”

“Of course. I worked hard with both of your brothers to make sure it doesn’t read as a gossip piece or cheesy tabloid. The topics are serious and my goal was to not only inform your fans, but to help others who might be hiding or struggling with their own mental health.”

“My boyfriend ensures me that your article was quite helpful.”

Ella’s eyes pop wide. “A boyfriend?” She peers behind me. “Well, where is he?”

“Oh you’ll meet him soon.” I wink.

She narrows her eyes as she continues to smile. “What are you up to, Olly? Why are you being so mysterious?”

I chuckle. “Trust me, I want to shout on the roof tops and tell you all about him. But it might be a conflict of interest. But all in good time, like I said you’ll meet him soon.”

“Curiouser and curiouser.”

I bark out a laugh. “You have no idea.”

“Alright then, follow me to the back. The photographers already have your outfits ready for the photoshoot. We’ll start off with the photos today, then tomorrow we’ll do our follow up interviews tomorrow.”

“Sounds great,” Zayden replies, as we follow her into the next room.

An attractive familiar looking man strides forward, hand outstretched. “Hey guys. It’s a pleasure to meet you, huge fan. My name is Jamison Parker.”

“Jamison,” I snap my fingers. “By any chance are you married to Kingston Foxe?”

Jamison grins. “I am. Do you know him?”

“No, but I saw some photos of you with my brother, Noah, and his friends on the cruise a few months back.”

“Ah,” Jamison chuckles. “The kinky crusie. Yes, that was a blast. Noah, requested me personally for this photoshoot. Olly, we’ll be photographing you first since you’ll be the main person on the cover. Then we’ll get some photos of you and your brother together before moving onto photos with band.”

“Okay, let me get changed, and I’ll be good to go.” I walk over to the garment bag with my name on it, and take it to the dressing room off to the side of the room. I change into my suit with a grin. Eyeing the pastel yellow and the light blue stitching, I’m eager for Jamison to photograph it. I didn’t tell Ezra that I was bringing the suit with me. I want it to be a surprise when the article releases. He was so sweet gushing about how I was going to be on the cover and wondering what kind of fancy designer pieces they were going to dress me in.

Considering this follow up article is supposed to be happier one, highlighting and celebrating ‘Arcade Lake after Oscar,’ I thought the cheerful color of the suit would be fitting. I’m also so thankful that I’m in a better place than when I first interviewed for the first article.

I step out of fitting room feeling like a million bucks. Ezra and his suit are to thank for it. Leaving him back in Foggy Basin was one of the hardest things I ever had to do, but the thought of returning to him quickly is what got me on the plane in the first place.

Zayden whistles as soon as he spots me in my outfit. Noah is in the room now

chatting with Ella and Zayden. They both turn to see what Olly is staring at. Ella's eyes pop wide as she strides toward me, appreciating my look. The faint click of the camera can be heard as Jamison takes candid shots of Ella's reaction. I get the impression it isn't often Ella Gray, CEO of the biggest fashion magazine is impressed.

"Oh my. Olly," she says, letting her eyes travel slowly over my figure. "That suit is perfection on you. Who designed this—wait." She pauses, studying the outfit. She spins her finger, indicating she wants me to do a slow twirl for her.

As I spin, it's as if I can feel her gaze burning into me.

"Why does this outfit look so familiar?" She murmurs to herself. "The detailing is exquisit."

I grin at her once her eyes finally meet mine.

"Olly, this suit is amazing. Who designed this for you?"

"Ezra. Ezra Strum. My talented boyfriend."

Ella's eyes sparkle.

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“Ezra, honey. Stop staring out the window,” Tessy says. “I promise, Olly will be back.”

It’s been a week since I’ve seen Olly, kissed his lips, made love, or read in bed with him. Fuck. I miss him so much. I’m starting to think I’ve never been in love before, because this crazy heartbreaking need to see Olly is something I never felt with my other exes.

“Love is stupid,” I whine.

Tessy gasps, before rushing forward and gripping my shoulders. It isn’t until she’s staring at me with those intense brown eyes that are so similar to Olly’s that I realize what I said out loud.

“You love him?” Tessy grins at me.

“I do,” I let out a deep breath. “He doesn’t know, yet. But damn, I do. I love the way he makes me feel. I love that we have so much in common. Sure we have our own passions, but we share passions and hobbies as well. I can have just as much fun with him, taking an adventure and hiking by the waterfalls, as I would window shopping with him on Main Street. I always thought it was crazy how people talked about soul mates, and hell maybe it’s all the damn romance I read, but Tessy, he feels like my other half.”

Tears spring to her eyes. “I believe it, Ezra. You and Olly are meant to be together. Both of you are so different together. You treat each other with so much respect and truly listen to each other. It’s beautiful to witness.”

“I’m scared, Tessy,” I confess. “What if he realizes he wants to keep traveling the world, doing tours and performing. My life is here. Can I give that up for someone I just met a couple of months ago?”

“Oh honey.” Tessy pulls me into a hug. “I don’t think Olly would make you choose. Olly, Zayden, and Noah have the biggest hearts I’ve ever seen. Those boys have been through so much and each of them has fought for their dream. Each of them knows what it’s like to have a passion. And Olly knows how much Beauty and the Boutique and fashion means to you.”

“Talk with him. You two will work it out.”

The bell chimes overhead as three people walk in. I turn fully to get a better look, and a smile breaks across my face. Olly, Zayden, and an attractive younger man with pink hair are standing there.

I sprint toward the man I love, and launch myself into his arms. I kiss Olly passionately until he pulls away and peppers kisses on my cheeks.

“Fuck, doll. I’ve missed you.” He kisses me again.

A throat clears.

Blushing, I climb off my boyfriend and greet the other guys, only to see them starting with their mouths gaping open.

Zayden picks up his jaw first. “How the hell did you know that was Olly and not me?”

Olly chuckles behind me, placing a hand in the back pocket of my jeans and cupping my ass in the process. “I told you.”

I glance between Olly and Zayden, and it's only then do I realize they are wearing the same outfit. Both have tight black jeans, a faded black shirt and a necklace. I laugh. "Were you testing me, Zayden?"

"I mean, yeah, you called it. Not that I would have been very disappointed in a greeting like that."

Olly's grip on my tightens, and I give Zayden a glare.

"Kidding." Zayden throws his arms up. "I didn't mean that at all. Trust me, my brother and I are never going to look at the same man again."

I relax.

The pink haired man steps forward, hand extended. "Hey, I'm Noah. The younger brother."

"Hi, Noah. It's nice to meet you. Olly has told me all about you." I shake his hand before tugging him into a hug.

Noah laughs, hugging me back. "You didn't answer the question. How did you know you were greeting Olly and not Zayden?"

Zayden walks over to Olly and I step back to get a better look at them side by side. I give it some serious thought.

"I'm not sure I can explain it. Olly is more... intense. Zayden is more cheerful, and Olly is more growly and sexy. He reserves his smiles and Zayden offers them freely. I don't know how to explain it, but ever since Olly caught my eye in the bar that first night, it's as if I only have eyes for him."

Olly does that sexy possessive growl and tugs me to the back room.

I laugh. “What is going on?”

He lifts me up and shoves me against the wall. “Fuck, doll. I missed you.” Then his lips are back on mine. We kiss for what feels like hours. When he pulls away his lips are red and swollen.

I place one more gentle kiss on his lips. “I almost expected you to get whisked away by your rockstar life and not come back to me,” I confess.

“Nonsense,” he growls. “Nothing can keep me away from you.”

“I know but—”

“Nothing. You hear me, Ezzy. Nothing could keep me away from the man I love.”

I gasp, tears filling my eyes. “You love me?”

“I do.”

“Isn’t it too soon? What would people think?”

“I don’t give a fuck what others think. I love you.”

I sniffle, and laugh. “I was just telling your aunt that I’m in love with you.”

Olly smiles, that perfect smile that’s just for me. “Good. Now tell me.”

I grin back. “I love you, Olly Black. I love you so fucking much.

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Sharing a room and apartment with Ezra is a lot easier than I anticipated. And waking up with Ezzy in my arms is one of my favorite things to do. It's been a week since I came home from the photoshoot. Ezra and I have easily fallen into the perfect routine.

The sun peeks through the blinds and the birds are chirping just outside the window. Tabby is sitting on the windowpane swishing her tail back and forth as she coos and chirps back.

Ezra is warm and pliant in my arms as he lazily runs his fingers through my hair.

"I'm thinking about leaving the band."

His fingers pause, and he tilts his face so we are making eye contact.

"But you love your music. Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I've been thinking about it for a while, but I'm happy here in this small town with you and my aunt. I love our home, and your shop. I love playing music downstairs or at the park for the locals. I missed playing acoustic, and Zayden and I have been thinking about the idea of writing music together.

"God, hearing you say all this is making me so happy, and I promise I'm not arguing, but doesn't the band need you?"

"I mean, sure I don't want to think of myself as replaceable. But Emery's step brother knows all our songs and is amazing with the guitar. If he joins the band, then Zayden will still be lead guitar, and I'll still play with them on occasion."

“We actually have a big tour coming up in October. And there’s a huge concert I can’t miss, but I figured it would be my farewell tour. I also wanted to ask if you’d be willing to travel with me while on tour.” I hold my breath, waiting for Ezra’s answer.

Ezra’s eyes sparkle, and he nods eagerly. “Yes! Definitely! I’d love to travel with you. I haven’t been out of town much, and the last time you left, it was pure torture.”

I chuckle. “Thank God. I felt the same way.”

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“Is everyone ready? Ezra, you’re up next.”

I nod over at Lawson and Noah. They are helping the contestants backstage and making sure we get our models out on time.

My heart thunders in my chest as I hear the crowd cheer and applaud for Flora. To my shock, her designs were some of my favorites and I know I have some stiff competition. But I also believe in what I created.

Flora walks backstage with a happy alert look on her face. She rushes over to me. “Oh my gosh, Ezra. That was a rush. The world is seeing my work, and the models did such a great job.”

She throws her arms around me and I stiffen.

What the hell is happening.

She squeals happily. “Good luck out there.” Flora rushes off and I’m left there gaping at her retreating form.

Did she just realize she didn’t insult me?

Noah appears by my side. “Okay, ready to sit on your throne?”

I bark out a laugh. “Oh god, this is part of the show I’m really nervous about. Why can’t I be backstage making sure the outfits are properly in place? And why can’t I announce my own designs?”

Noah laughs. “Trust me, we have this handled. Don’t you want to see your designs walk the stage and observe other people’s reactions? Didn’t you see Flora just now? Trust me, you’ll want to see your clothes being presented to the world.”

“Okay, yes. When you put it that way, you’re right.” I follow Noah to the seat that does indeed look like a throne. The designers are supposed to sit here when it’s their turn.

As soon as I sit down, the crowd breaks into applause, and I smile and wave at everyone.

Ella Gray walks back up to the stage. Instead of her usual high ponytail and tight pencil skirt, Ella is wearing her hair down, elegant waves framing her face and tumbling down her back. Her dress is black and red, and her lipstick matches. I realize her outfit is a nod to the queen of hearts. “Let’s welcome our last contestant. Ezra Strum is a talented local designer with a unique story. Every other year we hold our competition on opposite coasts. Last year we were on the East Coast. But two years ago, when we had our fashion show in San Francisco, Ezra applied and got accepted. Only, he didn’t show up to the competition.”

Ella pauses and I feel my cheeks heat. I squirm in my chair as I hear people whisper around me.

“It turns out, Ezra never got his acceptance package. It was lost in the mail. He assumed he didn’t get in. This year he applied again. Now, as some of you know, I have a lot of respect for people who try and try again. It’s hard following your dreams, but Ezra here didn’t give up. But here is the crazy thing. His acceptance package didn’t make it to him, again. I had my assistant look into it. Why would such a talented designer apply twice, only to not show up?”

I smile at Ella, once again thankful she took the time to find out what happened. I can’t imagine many other big companies doing the same thing.

“Once we got everything sorted, I invited him to compete in the Dee Rama Fall Fashion show over the phone. But by the time I called him, all of the other contestants already had a month to design and prepare.”

More murmurs go up around the room. Fuck. She’s making it seem like I’m some grand finale. I really hope she likes what I created.

“So without further ado, let's welcome Ezra’s first model to the stage.” Ella glances back my way. “I look forward to seeing what you designed.” She hands the mic back to the announcer who waves at the DJ. Once the music is going, and Ella is back at her seat, the announcer calls out Rebecca’s name and talks about her outfit being inspired by the Hatter.

Rebecca looks absolutely beautiful. Her brown hair was dyed red for this occasion and it’s styled in a faux wild look with loose wavy curls. Her makeup is dark and dramatic, but her outfit is sexy and fun with a lavender top hat with a floral print and a matching miniskirt. She’s wearing a light blue tailcoat jacket that pulls the whole outfit together. She looks like a cross between a sexy fae and a steampunk Hatter.

Clicking cameras go off and people cheer, impressed with the outfit.

As soon as she walks off the stage, Olly is there. My breath catches. Fuck he’s gorgeous. Constantly looking at him up close during all our fittings didn’t prepare me for how he looks from a distance away.

“Let’s welcome Olly Black, modeling Ezra Strum’s vision of Alice.”

Cheers erupt. At first, I just assume it’s for the rockstar rocking the corest, until I hear the murmurs around me. People are impressed with my vision. With my design.

Olly is wearing a light blue corset with silver floral detailing. Under his corset is a skintight white dress shirt. The outfit is paired with silver skintight pants. Olly looks

absolutely stunning. The clothing makes him look handsome yet pretty, badass yet sexy. The whole outfit together is breathtaking. It's clear that if Rebecca was they would match, but Olly was meant to be the star of the show.

I can't take my eyes off of the man I love. As he walks the stage I realize that he is surrounded by people, hundreds of people cheering him on as he saunters on stage. Everyone is transfixed by him and the design I created.

At this moment I realize it doesn't matter if I win the fashion show or not. My life has taken a wonderful turn and as I watch my boyfriend smile and work up the crowd without an ounce of fear on his face, I know I want to spend the rest of my life with this man.