



Elevator Pitch

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Category: LGBT+

Description: What do you do if you're stuck in a hot, dark space in Vegas with a hunk of a closeted, professional athlete? Offer him one hell of an elevator pitch.

Graham doesn't know what he's in for at his best friends' Vegas wedding, but when he steps inside an elevator with a gorgeous stranger, he doesn't expect to lose power and get trapped together.

Caleb is amused that Graham doesn't know who he is let alone follow professional hockey, because Caleb sure as hell is familiar with Graham and his online cooking show.

With nothing but time on their hands, talking leads to confessions, touching, and kissing, and suddenly the minutes they have left just doesn't feel like enough.

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GRAHAM

I straighten the lapels on my tux and wait patiently for my best friend, Jace. Any minute now he'll appear alongside his fiancée dressed to the nines for their Vegas wedding. No doubt the Venetian ballroom cost a pretty penny, but the hotel feels like a dream. Almost like you've been transported to an Italian countryside with their old-world fixtures and painted ceilings. It's easy to ignore the rumbles of thunder and cracks of lightning from the storm raging outside when all you see above you are gold sconces, fluffy clouds, and blue skies.

The gondolas are a bit much but seeing Jace and his soon-to-be husband, Rob, riding on one last night was pretty epic. Even more so while a hunky guy sang to them in Italian. I didn't feel a tug in my gut at all. Besides, me and relationships don't really mesh. I've tried and failed one too many times. Jace says it's because I always choose unavailable men, but I don't buy that. If someone wants to be with you, they'll put in the time and effort.

Jace's parents are all smiles from the front row. The hotel provided just enough bright white chairs for the intimate ceremony. I give them a thumbs up as I consider the post-nuptial plans. The reception takes place immediately after the vows, and then we have a couple more days of sightseeing, gambling, and delicious food until I'm back home to Seattle.

The speech I need to deliver at the reception will come easily enough. These two are meant for each other. More than likely the guests will be too busy eating from the

delicious menu I helped Jace and Rob select to listen to me blather on about our friendship. I'm a bit of a foodie, so I was more than happy to help them settle on the chocolate buttercream cake as well.

Jace got all choked up choosing the two grooms as a topper, so I already know he'll be crying during the vows, and again after I hand them the rings.

My back straightens almost painfully. "Holy shit, the rings! How could I forget them?"

My gaze swings wildly around the room noting that some of the seats are still empty. I think I have just enough time to retrieve them from my room before the ceremony starts.

"Be right back," I whisper to Jace's parents, then turn and hightail it toward the hallway, trying not to alarm anyone as my panic builds with each step.

The moment I get to the lobby I jog at a good pace heading toward the bank of elevators. Any sweat that accumulates from my harried state will be worth it if I get those rings. One of the elevators stands open on my approach.

"Hold the door!" I yell to the person inside, and given his raised eyebrows, I've startled him. Despite wariness crossing his features, he still thrusts his arm out to stop it from closing, giving me enough leeway to sprint inside.

I bend forward to catch my breath as the doors shut. "Can you punch fourteen?"

"Sure thing," he mutters, and I lift my gaze to see a long finger on a large hand make the button light up.

When our eyes meet, my heart kicks up a notch noticing his shaggy chestnut hair, tall

stature, long and lean muscles, and broad shoulders. He averts his eyes, obviously not interested in a conversation, and I get it. I wouldn't want one with me either. Not while I'm a sweaty, disheveled, gasping disaster.

I straighten fully as we start to climb, and I count the seconds going by, hoping I get back downstairs before Jace even notices. I blow out a sigh of relief when the elevator slows as it approaches my floor.

All at once we're jolted forward as the elevator comes to a hair-raising, screeching halt. "What the hell?" The lights above us flicker on and off for only a couple seconds before we're thrust into total darkness. My hand reaches out to grip the wall for leverage.

"Looks like we lost power," the man mutters and I can hear the edge to his voice.

"How—because of the storm?" It's hard to hear any thunder and lightning in our current location, which only emphasizes the fact that we're essentially trapped in a steel box.

"I'd assume so. Fuck ," he swears under his breath.

"This cannot be happening!" I slouch against the wall, feeling nauseous. "Oh God, the wedding!"

Jace is going to be so devastated. And when he realizes I'm not even in the ballroom, he might panic. Like I'm doing right now.

"Is that why you're wearing a tux?" the guy asks.

I breathe in and out, in and out, before replying, "Yeah."

“Shit, that sucks. Is your bride waiting somewhere for you?” I can hear the sympathy in his tone.

“Oh, I...I’m not getting married, my best friend is,” I sputter. “I’m the best man and I forgot the rings in my room. That’s why I was running for the elevator. God, I’m such an idiot.”

“Hey, don’t be so hard on yourself. It could happen to anyone.” His voice is coming from the opposite side of the elevator now, so he must’ve placed distance between us. “Besides, it’s more than likely that the entire hotel is out.”

“You’re right.” I suddenly remember I have a phone. “I can at least try to call him and explain. Maybe he can send help.”

“Good idea.” Both of our phones light up. “Shit, no service. How about you?”

“Nope.” I make a frustrated sound. “Fuck my life.”

“Looks like we’ll have to wait.” His screen illuminates his face, and I marvel at his attractive features again. His full lips, sharp jaw, and aristocratic nose. Suppose it could be worse. I could be stuck with Jace’s totally obnoxious cousin instead of a gorgeous straight dude.

“At least our flashlights work.” We both flip ours on and aim them around every corner of the small space.

He punches the emergency button that sounds an alarm, then aims the flashlight toward the doors. I notice they’re open a crack, and when my gaze scales to the top it’s easier to tell we’re not exactly level.

“I think we’re stuck between floors.”

“I think you’re right. Do you hear anyone?” I feel a bit off-kilter, which makes me desperate to get the fuck out of here. “Help!”

There’s no response. I try again, this time louder.

“You might want to save your voice—and your battery. We’ll try again if we hear anyone.”

I sigh because he’s right, and with one click, we’re plunged into darkness again.

I find the wall behind me and lean against it. “Poor Jace and Rob.”

“Are those your friends?”

“The grooms.”

“The grooms? Oh, okay...I get it.”

“Yeah, two guys getting married. It’s legal now for us gays.”

I try to tone down the sharpness in my voice, especially since I have no idea what his views are.

“Of course, I knew that. Since 2014.”

“2015, actually.”

“I was close.” He chuckles. “Can’t say I’ve ever been to a same-sex wedding.”

“Well, they’re pretty much all the same, aren’t they? Two people committing to each other, reciting vows, and exchanging rings?”

“Did I say something to offend you?”

“No, sorry.” Chill, Graham . “My bad. I think it’s my automatic defense mechanism to people thinking straight is the default.”

There’s an awkward moment of silence before he says, “How do you know I’m straight?”

His voice is sort of shaky and quiet, and I wonder if he’s ever said that out loud. I rub at a stitch in my chest, feeling guilty.

“I wasn’t making any assumptions...okay, maybe I was.” And you know what they say about assumptions. “I should probably stop talking.” I huff out an exasperated breath.

“It’s okay. You wouldn’t be the first,” he says. “I’m not out. Yet. Or ever. Not in my profession. Christ, why am I even saying any of this to you? You’re a total stranger.”

“It’s all cool.” My lips pull into a smile. “Besides, there’s something about spilling all your secrets when the other person can only hear you but not see you. Probably why that one reality show is popular.”

“Which one?”

I try my best to describe the premise. “The one where they can’t lay eyes on each other for days, so they just sit and talk from separate rooms. Damn, what is it called?”

“ Love is Blind ,” he blurts out.

“That’s it!” My voice is a little too loud. “There have been a few love connections on that show. Not that we’re trying to make one now—so, what profession?”

“Huh?” Likely he has whiplash from my sudden change in topic.

“You said you’re not out in your profession.”

“You...you mean you don’t know?” His voice pitches up an octave. “Oh, I...was sure you recognized me.”

I wince. Likely I stared a little too long when I got in the elevator.

But, I mean, he didn’t look familiar. At all.

“Are you someone famous?” Now I’m more than curious.

“Sort of. To my fans, at least.” He sounds shy now, almost self-conscious.

“Are you an actor?” I inquire.

He huffs out a laugh. “Hell no.”

“A musician?” I wrack my brain trying to think of a thirty-something singer or drummer who is that drop dead gorgeous.

“What is this, twenty questions?” His tone is full of sarcasm now.

I hitch a shoulder even though he can’t see me. “I figure we have the time.”

I hear him shift, and now his voice is carrying from the floor. “I’m a goalie.”

I consider sitting as well, but I’m in my expensive tux, and the electricity is going to come back on any minute, I’m sure of it. And then not only will I be sweaty, but dirty too.

“A goalie...soccer then? Or football if you’re any other country.”

He laughs and I can feel my face flame. Not good. It’s clammy enough in here.

“What’s funny?”

“Sorry.” He clears his throat. “I guess it’s sort of refreshing that you don’t know.”

“I don’t know sports if that’s what you mean. They bore me, unless I’m checking out the pants.”

He sounds amused when he asks, “The pants?”

I really need a kill switch on my brain’s path to my mouth.

“You know—baseball pants—or football pants. And well, for soccer it would be shorts and who cares about those when you’ve got muscular legs to focus on.”

“Wow, I had no idea there was a whole fan base for sports pants.”

“Gay, remember?” I quip, then decide it’s time to get back to the subject at hand. “So, if not soccer then...what?”

“You ever hear of hockey?” he muses.

“Yeah, of course,” I scoff. “It’s very Canadian.”

He laughs again and I find I like the sound of it. It buzzes over my skin and fills my stomach with warmth.

“I play for Colorado.”

“Oh.”

My legs are getting tired so I sink to a squat, knowing my knees will be next. Jace might just have to forgive me if I end up sitting on gum...or worse.

“Even Vegas has a team.”

“I didn’t realize, but I’m not from around here...”

“Is anyone actually from Vegas, though?” he asks with a chuckle. “Where are you from?”

“Seattle,” I reply absently because I’m too busy loosening my bowtie and unbuttoning my shirt. It’s getting hot in here, and not because of the company. Obviously, the air conditioning is no longer piping through the vents.

“Seattle has a popular hockey team.”

“What is it?” I stand again to remove my coat.

“Begins with a K...?”

“Now who’s playing twenty questions?”

He chuckles.

“Stop laughing at me. If we had Wi-Fi, I’d look it up on my phone.”

“Sorry, it’s just that I’ve been around so many rabid hockey fans lately, I forget that ordinary people are just living their lives and don’t really give a rat’s ass about my sport.”

“If you have rabid fans, you must be pretty popular, which makes sense because you’re—” I slap a hand over my mouth.

“I’m what?”

“Oh, um...I’m gonna guess you’re a really good goalie and all that.”

“Uh-huh, I am. Not shy about admitting it either. I’ve trained for years to get to this level.”

“I’m sure.” I would love to be able to see him right now, to see that spark that would undoubtedly be in his eyes. I feel that same flicker when I’m filming for my audience.

“So, famous goalie, what’s your name so I can stalk you online when all this is over?”

The throaty, sexy laugh again. “Caleb Burnside.”

“Cool name. I’m Graham. Graham Adler.”

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CALEB

Graham Adler.

No way.

Oh, the fucking irony. He doesn't have a clue who I am, but I sure as fuck know who he is. I take a chance and switch on my flashlight under the pretense of looking for one of those elevator phones. I shine it near the door and spot the small compartment with a picture of a phone on it, and just as quickly move the beam of light over his face once again. He squints, but sure enough, I recognize those kind hazel eyes.

"Shit, sorry," I say and lower the light. I leave it on, though, and place my cell on the ground, letting it illuminate the small space. "I wanted to see if there was one of those emergency phones." I nod toward the panel near the door.

"Oh my God, you're a genius," he says and the expression on his face, that sweet excitement in his tone, I'm surprised I didn't realize who he was as soon as he spoke in the first place.

Graham Adler is my secret addiction.

He flings open the small metal hatch, only to find it empty. Groaning, his face falls into his hands, sending a damp tumble of golden blond waves over his forehead. Sweat beads along my own hairline as I watch him sink to the floor, designer tux be

damned.

“We’re so fucked.” He tugs at his open collar, popping another button. My eyes track his hand like it’s a puck flying toward the net.

Those familiar, capable hands.

I clear my throat. “It could be worse, at least the building isn’t on fire.” He shoots a weary glance in my direction, and I laugh. “I mean...”

“It’s one hundred degrees in here, might as well be on fire.”

Without overthinking it, I lower my gaze and shoot my shot. “I figure you’d be used to the heat... since you’re always in the kitchen.”

“Wait... y-you... How?—”

“I watch your videos religiously.” It’s cute how his mouth pops open. “Graham Cracks an Egg? Right? I tried to make that dessert... shit, what was it called? You made it last week...” I scratch my head trying not to stare at the way he’s pinned his bottom lip between his teeth, or how his cheeks have gone a deeper shade of pink that I assume has more to do with being recognized, and less to do with the fact the temperature has risen at least three more degrees in the last two minutes. “I think it was French.”

“Profiterole ?” he whispers, and a small smile starts to spread across his handsome face.

“That’s it.” I rub the damp skin on the back of my neck, a weird surge of embarrassment coursing through me as I wrap my head around being the fan for once. “I totally botched it. The entire endeavor was a failure.”

“You... Sports guy, goalie man, seriously watch my cooking tutorials?”

His channel is more than cooking tutorials. He has his own aesthetic; this sort of old-world-meets-modern vibe that’s easy to get lost in. The chopping, the sizzle, those sexy hands kneading dough, what can I say, it gets me going.

“ Sports guys, goalie man ?”

“Sorry, I’m doing it again... the whole assumptions thing.”

“To be fair, I suck at cooking, but I love food, and I don’t know, your page is... interesting.”

He raises a doubtful brow and my gaze snags on his Adam’s apple as he swallows. He looks different in real life. Better. More etched, hard lines and intense angles. Maybe it’s the tux, or maybe it’s the stubble on his jaw and the way it pulses as he fidgets under my appraisal.

“I’ve never...I like trying my hand at French cuisine but honestly, I’m just an amateur foodie, an eating connoisseur, really. I have a decent following but...” His words stall in his throat.

“I’m one of them,” I say. “For the last six months at least.”

I found him one night when I was mindlessly scrolling on my phone, trying to shut off my brain after a shit loss last season. His smile grabbed my attention. I was lying in bed, overthinking every goal I’d let slip by, and there he was, all soft eyes and big smiles, covered in flour, laughing at something that had gone over my head, because baking? I didn’t know or care. He was a hot guy, making something that looked edible as fuck, and I was there for it. I tapped the follow button, and my addiction was born.

“I’ve tried a few of your recipes, all of which turn into utter abominations. I tried once to make cookies for the team, and they give me shit for it all the time.”

“Because they were bad?” he asks, and I nod.

“Yeah, and now they call me Betty to mess with me.”

“Betty?”

“Betty Crocker.” I shrug. “It shouldn’t bother me, but it hits a sore spot I guess.”

“Because you can’t bake?”

“Because I’m gay.” I force a smile and shake my head at my honesty. “Every time they call me Betty, I feel like they know somehow. The stereotypes and shit. It’s ridiculous. I’m ridiculous, I don’t know.”

This man. He’s a stranger regardless of how well I know his face, yet I can’t seem to shut my damn mouth. Did I really admit to him I was gay? I never allow myself to even think of the word most of the time. My smile is too heavy to hold, and I let my eyes drift to the crack in the elevator doors. With zero out NHL players, hiding who I am? It’s become a way of life. Over time, after many failed attempts to get me to hang out, cruise the bars, get me out of my so-called shell, my team finally assumed I was overly dedicated to winning. I’d gotten good at selling my “no distractions” policy. When in reality, my loneliness wore me down day by day. I’m a thirty-year-old goalie. If I’m lucky my knees will give me at least two more seasons, and then what? When will I get to stop hiding? When will I get to begin a life that belongs to me?

“Being a gay athlete isn’t unheard of,” he says, and the innocence in his tone revives my smile.

“It’s not. But it depends on a lot of things. I’m sure I’m not the only gay player in the NHL. Statistics prove I’m not, but no one has come out yet. A few have in the minor leagues, and college players, but active NHL players? Not a single one.”

“Wow.” The corners of his mouth tip down, his brows bunching as he processes what I’ve said. “That’s... fucking depressing.”

“Tell me about it.”

He stares at me, and I count the seconds as his gaze falls to my mouth and lingers before trailing back up to my eyes. “How do you...” He chews the inside of his cheek and shakes his head. “God, never mind, it’s none of my business.”

“What?”

He hiccups a laugh and sighs, tipping his head back against the elevator wall. “How do you... date?”

“I don’t.”

Graham’s eyes widen and he sits up straight like he’s been struck by lightning. “Wait... like at all? No secret rent boys or side pieces?”

I crack up and rub my chin, my smile actually making my jaw hurt. “No. I’m basically a monk at this point.”

“Jesus.”

“I know.”

My dick protests against the forced celibacy bullshit, and twitches at the sight of

Graham licking his lips. Fuck, I have to get out of this elevator. I pick up my phone and switch off the flashlight, needing space from the sexy chef sitting less than ten feet away from me. The smell of his sweat mixed with his woodsy cologne saturates the tight space, sinking into my lungs with every breath I take. The heady combination is enough to make me think about things I never allow. Things like lips and hands and skin and kissing strangers. Like here in this hidden corner of the world, I can be the guy I hide from every day, take the things I want and not worry for one goddamn second about the consequences.

“I don’t know how you survive,” he says, and I want to tell him I’m not surviving. I’m slowly drowning, and he’s the first breath of air I’ve had in such a long time. He huffs out a humorless laugh and I suddenly wish I hadn’t turned off the flashlight, needing to see those expressive eyes. “Though, dating isn’t all it’s cracked up to be either.”

“No?”

“God, no. Trust me, maybe you have the right idea.” He scoffs like he doesn’t believe the words he’s said. “I always thought I’d get married before Jace, and then he found Rob and I’m... I’m...”

“Alone?”

He doesn’t answer right away, and I worry I’ve overstepped. He moves, the soft scrape of his shoes against the floor echoes in the small space. The hot air stirs around my body, and another bead of sweat trickles down the back of my t-shirt.

“In a way,” he says, and I jump. He’s closer now, close enough that if I reached out, I had no doubt I’d touch him. “I date, but it never works out. I tend to pick guys who run away at the first sign of commitment.”

“Maybe subconsciously you don’t want commitment either.”

“Maybe.”

Maybe you want to kiss a stranger in an elevator too?

I smile at my hopeful thoughts as I lift my legs and rest my forearms on my knees.

It’s this small ass box. All this heat and honesty is getting to me.

“I didn’t even want to come to Vegas,” I admit. “A few of my teammates come here every year in the off season, a couple of weeks before camp, a last chance to party. I always say no when they ask me to tag along.”

“And this time?” he asks, and I swear I can feel his breath on the skin of my cheek, my neck. “What made you say yes?”

I was losing my battle with sanity. How long had we been in here, twenty minutes? An hour?

“This time?” I lean back, tugging on my shirt, fanning the fabric away from my sweat-soaked skin. “I didn’t want to let the loneliness win.”

GRAHAM

I'm going to die. Die trapped in this small space with this gorgeous man who watches my ridiculous cooking videos and is a closeted gay who admits to getting no action.

"I didn't want to let the loneliness win." Add in the raw honesty and vulnerability in his words, and this guy is sure to steal someone's heart in an instant, given the chance.

I didn't mean to get in this close proximity to him but somehow, I did, drawn to the cadence of his voice, the citrus scent clinging to his skin either from cologne or body wash.

I lean back, to clear my head, but also hoping he doesn't feel like I'm crowding him. My back is saturated with sweat, and I want to strip down for some needed air, but that might be taking it a bit too far.

"Don't want to freak you out, but I need to get some relief."

"What do you mean?"

"Thing is, I'm a clammy mess, and as soon as those doors open, I have to attend a wedding and fulfill my best man duties and I don't have a change of clothes. I'll look totally ruined."

He flips on his flashlight again.

“It’s hot as hell in here. If you’re stressed about your shirt, do what you need to do.” He averts his gaze and fans the fabric of his own shirt away from his chest. “Don’t worry about me.”

My hands reach for the rest of my buttons, hesitating a second because I can feel his gaze pressing in on me again. Is he as attracted to me as I am to him, or am I just imagining his intense scrutiny?

Or more than likely, his curiosity is due to watching me online for months and reconciling seeing me in person. Caleb flips off the light, possibly to give me some privacy, and I’m grateful for it—mostly. It’s been a while since I’ve been in this type of scenario—not the whole elevator breaking down scenario, but one where I’m in the presence of a very attractive man with time to kill.

When my last button is undone, I open my shirt to allow some needed air against my clammy skin, but it’s not enough relief. Given that he can’t see me, I decide to take it off, squatting down to fold it carefully on top of my jacket along with the bowtie.

“So what made you take up cooking?” Caleb’s voice is gruffer now and it makes my dick pay attention. Christ, much longer and I might combust being in this small space with this man.

“I learned everything I know from my grandmother who raised me after my mom passed away. I mean, my dad helped too, but he was always at work, and most of my memories consist of him coming home when I was already in bed.”

Dad would enter my room to say good night if I was still awake, or to kiss my forehead if my eyes were already shut. Sometimes I’d try to stay conscious long enough to get those five minutes of quality time with him. Huh, maybe there is

something to my choosing unavailable men.

“Shit, I’m sorry about your mom,” Caleb replies, his voice thick with real emotion. “I can’t imagine losing my mom, she practically raised me on her own. My dad played hockey too, always traveling. The schedule professional hockey players have to keep is... grueling, to say the least. He tried to make up for everything in the off season. He was a good dad, and I know he loves me, but at the end of the day our relationship was more like coach and player, and less like father and son.”

I frown. “Yeah, I hear you. I know my dad loves me too, but he became more distant after we lost my mom. Almost like he was burying his grief in work.”

He sighs. “Hopefully, we’ll be better at it all—if we ever have kids.”

“No, thanks,” I retort, and he chuckles. “I have a hard enough time taking care of myself.”

“Yeah, I’m not really sure yet myself.” The space grows quiet again. “Anyway, you were telling me about how you started cooking?”

“Oh yeah...well, I would help my grandmother prep practically every meal and carried on the tradition when I moved out on my own. I still look forward to getting home and cooking dinner, even if it’s only for me. Besides, it means plenty of leftovers.” I think about how content I am in my apartment with my newly remodeled kitchen that was worth every penny. Lots of my subscribers remark on my colorful backsplash and stainless appliances. “I even enjoy hosting dinner parties for friends, which is how Jace and Rob met.”

“Look at you, a regular matchmaker too.”

“Sure am,” I tease. “Come to one of my parties and I’ll set you up too.”

“Yeah...no, thanks.” His tone sounds grim. “More trouble than it’s worth.”

“Is it? But you have needs too.”

“I’ll just have to stick with hookups.”

“That, according to you, don’t really happen.”

“Maybe I need to seek them out more,” he replies and my stomach flutters.

“Like in a dark elevator?” Did I really just say that out loud? “Just kidding. Sometimes my mouth works faster than my brain.”

“Don’t tempt me...” he trails off and I swallow hard. I think of something to say to break the tension when his voice booms in the small space. “So, what’s your day job?”

I suppose I’m glad for the change of subject. Sort of. “Ugh, not something I enjoy, which is why I started the videos, to give me something to look forward to after work. I’m in sales...I sell insurance.”

He’s quiet for a long beat, then says, “I didn’t picture that for you.”

I get that a lot. Still, I’m curious. “Why not?”

“You’re so vibrant in your videos with your painted nails and self-deprecating sense of humor.”

“Huh. Maybe that’s why I always meet my sales thresholds. You’re looking at employee of the month right here,” I tease, but there’s no heat to it. Smugness, either. It’s literally the most boring job in the world, but it pays my bills. “Anyway, thanks.”

“You must have a plethora of rabid fans who are gay men.”

I smile. “Mostly women, but yeah, I’ve gotten a DM or two.”

I can hear him scoot closer. “What kind of DMs?”

God, what kind haven’t I gotten? “I’m sure you can use your imagination.”

“Dick pics?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Do you return the favor?”

“Hell no. That stuff is forever.”

“No kidding.” I have a feeling there’s a story there. But before I can ask, he says, “Why not go to cooking school or work in a restaurant?”

“Good question. For one, I’m just an amateur cook, and second, I’m afraid if I do it for a living, I’ll lose the passion. Sort of like my current job situation, not that I ever had any passion for it to begin with.”

“Guess you won’t know unless you try. Sometimes mixing your passion with work is a good thing.”

He’s obviously referring to his own career. “So it’s a good thing for you?”

“Absolutely. I mean, it has its drawbacks.” He mutters, “Not being out, for one.”

“No doubt you have plenty of admirers too,” I point out. “How do you handle it?”

“It can be challenging. Teammates hooking up left and right with female fans. I flirt, but that’s the extent of it.”

“That would be tough.” I frown, considering the likely similarities between our co-workers, mine just happen to wear suits and ties all day. “I’m out at work, but I don’t really care what those idiots think. That said, I understand your dilemma in a sport that sounds homophobic, but is also very public.”

Plus, his salary is well above my pay grade. And that only makes me wonder how decked out his kitchen is. Or his bedroom, for that matter.

My gaze springs to the ceiling. “Hey, did you hear that?”

“What?”

“I think... I swear I heard something.” I stand up and find the elevator doors. “Help!”

When we’re met with silence, I scramble to think of a different way. “Can you lift me up? Maybe being closer will help.”

“Good idea.” I hear the squeak of his sneakers as he shifts closer. “I can definitely try.”

Now we’re standing nose to nose, and I can feel his breaths puffing against my lips.

“How should we do this?” he asks, a little breathless.

“Maybe, um, you grab onto me and lift me as high as you can? I can use your thighs for leverage if you bend your knees a little.”

“Sounds good.” He fumbles with something. “Let me use my flashlight again so we

can see what the hell we're doing."

I blink as the elevator is dimly illuminated again, momentarily throwing me off. He sets the phone on the ground, the beam of light shining up at us.

"Wait, when did you take your shirt off?" I ask.

"Oh, a few minutes ago, the heat... and I figured since you did I... I can put it back on if it makes you uncomf?—"

"No need."

His eyes briefly travel down the front of me, and I almost want to cover my chest with my arm, wondering what he sees. He's the picture of athleticism with his chiseled abs and defined hip ridges that disappear under his waistband. I'm lean, but certainly lacking any sort of muscularity. But if he's underwhelmed, he doesn't show it. Instead, his gaze travels up to my mouth, lingering there a moment before he says, "Let's do this."

I blow out a breath and refocus on getting us out of here.

His hands clamp onto my bare waist, and I try not to focus on how strong and warm they feel. He bends his knees and then lifts me up in the air. I scramble a little trying to get my footing on his thighs. He stays steady, which is impressive, and lessens my worry that he'll drop me. At least I won't have far to fall.

My groin is level with his face, though, and I pray to the elevator gods that I don't plump up. Jesus fucking Christ, focus.

His voice is strained when he asks, "Are you close enough?"

I feel guilty when his arms shake from the exertion. No way I could return the favor with the weight difference between us. “I think if I grab onto the lip, I can lift up a little more.”

I feel a sliver of air filtering in from the misalignment between the floors as he pushes me higher. As soon as I’m able to grasp on to the edge, I yell, “Hello? Anyone there?”

My plea is met with silence.

Goddamnit.

“If anyone is out there, we’re stuck in this elevator!”

That’s when I hear it—another muted voice calling for help, same as us. I don’t know why that hadn’t occurred to me before now. Suppose I was hyper focused on Jace’s wedding and okay, Caleb too. How could I not be? Even now, I can’t ignore how my skin is prickling being this close to him.

“I think there are other people trapped too,” I call down to him.

His breath is labored as he says, “Looks like we’re going to have to wait it out. No doubt the hotel is aware that people are stuck on these elevators.”

“I think you’re right.” His hands begin slipping and then I’m falling, but Caleb catches me before I hit the floor.

I lose my footing, but he hangs on, helping to steady me. We’re toe to toe again, panting softly in the space between us.

I have the urge to seal our mouths together, if only to give him a taste of something

he's missing. Never mind the clandestine atmosphere and the fact that he's fucking gorgeous.

I've hooked up for less, and sometimes, just to get off.

"So...what should we do while we wait?" I ask, my voice huskier than anticipated.

"Fuck," he swears under his breath. "You're driving me crazy."

CALEB

“Crazy good?” he asks, and the light from my phone catches on his hazel eyes as they darken with unmistakable need.

Graham shivers as I graze my thumb along the line of his hip. I should let go of him, create some distance. This isn’t what I do. I’m not the guy who hooks up in a broken-down elevator with a man I just met. Fuck, who am I kidding, I’m not a guy who hooks up ever, but his skin feels too good under my palms, feels right. I revel in the flash of goosebumps pebbling beneath my touch, in the way I’m affecting him. It has to be over a hundred degrees in here, the heat bathing my bare skin proof enough, but somehow, my skin prickles on the back of my neck too. This awareness, like I’m about to jump headfirst off a cliff into unknown depths, like I’m about to do something stupid, and amazing, and maybe I won’t hate myself in the light of day if I just let myself have this one moment, is too much to ignore.

“Good,” I say, finally able to break through the cloud of lust building inside my brain long enough to find the words I shouldn’t say. “I really want to kiss you right now.”

“But?” He leans up on his toes, his hands burning my chest, stealing every last thread of my restraint.

“I can’t think of a reason not to.” I raise my hand, the tips of my fingers tingling as I dust them along the line of his jaw. The rough scratch of his five o’clock shadow foreign and perfect sends all the blood in my body rushing to my groin. “I can’t...

think at all.”

Graham presses against me, the brush of hard against hard has my lips parting in a quiet gasp, and I can't stop, the progression is too much, too real, and I lean down, his breath mingling with mine. “Can I...” He nods and it's all I need to close the distance, before his hot mouth is on mine and my hand is curling around the back of his neck pulling him closer, chest to chest.

Graham tips his head back for me, opening himself up, taking me in as my tongue sweeps against his. His moan is enough to make me forget myself, forget all the reasons I shouldn't be kissing a stranger, and it spurs me on. He tastes sweet and, maybe I'm imagining it, a bit like powdered sugar. Graham bites my bottom lip, and a sound so unbidden and new rumbles in my chest.

“Caleb...” he whispers my name, his palms skating over my heated skin, until his arms are around my neck.

There's no space between us as I tower over him and back him against the wall of the elevator. My cock is heavy and throbbing, and it's like he can read my mind as he presses his shoulders into the wall to find leverage. My hands find his ass, lifting him until his thighs are wrapped around my hips. We both groan, mouths open and wet and sticky with salt and that hint of sweetness I can't stop chasing. Our hips grind together, the tension of it, of him, the friction, Jesus fucking Christ, I might actually come in my pants. The thought is sobering, and before I embarrass myself, I break away, breathless.

“Holy shit.”

He chuckles and rests his forehead against mine, his fingers light as feathers, tickling the back of my neck. “Holy shit is an understatement.” I huff out a laugh and he kisses me again. His lips are unhurried, measured. He's mapping the curve of my jaw,

taking his time, time I'm not sure we have, and I'm lost in him.

"Graham... I think..." I stutter and he lowers his legs, his body dragging across the bulge in my jeans and fuck... "God, I wish..." My hands find his face, and as he leans into the touch, everything I've hidden from, all the things I've denied, the parts of myself I've kept locked away inside, beg to be unleashed. It's been too long. "I wish I could... I want... hell, I don't even know... but I?—"

"Hello?" a deep masculine voice calls through the cracked doors of the elevator and my entire body freezes. "Anyone in there?"

Panic floods my veins and I can't move. My hands shake where they rest against Graham's skin, but his hazel eyes never leave mine.

"Here," Graham calls back, and every instinct I have is screaming for me to push away, to back off. You're going to get caught. Move. Move. Move. But my heart is thundering like I'm in the crease, poised just outside the net, in the middle of a shoot-out, and I couldn't move a muscle if I tried. I'm stuck between wanting and reality, and somewhere in the back of my head I can hear the voice that's telling me to breathe, telling me that the man can't see us, telling me it shouldn't matter if he could see us or not.

"The whole building is out," the man explains. "The storm took out half the Strip's power."

"It's okay," Graham's words are quiet as his hands cover mine. "It's okay," he says again, and I swallow when I realize he's talking to me, some of the fear fading as he smiles. "How long do you think before the power's back on?" Graham shouts, and again those eyes hold me captive.

"Unfortunately, the casino's generators failed. We're working as fast as we can with

what we have, but we're hoping to get everything up and running within the hour."

"An hour?" Graham exhales with what almost sounds like relief. "I guess that works."

"Maybe sooner... Hang in there, alright," the guy says, and after a minute everything goes silent again.

"Are you okay?" Graham hasn't moved his hands, the unwavering warmth of his skin on mine makes everything less overwhelming. "He couldn't see us."

"I know, it's just..." I shrug, and when he drops his hands to my shoulders, I keep mine in place, my thumb tracing that addictive line along his jaw. "I haven't given in, haven't allowed myself to have this in such a long time, and then all of a sudden it's you, and it's hot as fuck in here, and I didn't... think."

"Maybe you think too much," he teases, but he bites the corner of his lip, and I stare at the pink dusting on the tops of his cheeks. "I get it... I mean, I don't get it. Not in the same way at least. Even if I wasn't always out either, I'm not you, and I don't have the same pressures, but I have to wonder... especially after a kiss like that..." He sucks in a breath, his eyes, all wide pupils and hooded, fall to my mouth. "How the hell have you ever held yourself back in the first place?"

I shouldn't, but I smile at the way his compliment lights me up from the inside. I'm the same way on the ice, seeking praise anyway I can get it.

My thumb moves to the curve of his bottom lip, too aware we are both still shirtless with sweat dampening our skin as we find ourselves leaning in yet again. The pull is unreal, and the tang of my panic lingers, but not enough to ruin the memory of the taste of his mouth. There's an inch between us—and the possibility of an hour. One hour to not think, to have more kisses like that, to give in. One hour to allow myself

to just be me.

The light on my phone flickers before it blinks out. The darkness covers us, offering privacy, offering an abandon I desperately need as my mouth crashes into his, into that delicious, sweet surrender.

GRAHAM

“Caleb, I can’t...I want...” I murmur against his lips because my entire body is alight with electric energy from his mouth and hands and tongue.

“I want you too.” His voice is gruff, and it makes me shiver.

My fingers scale down to his zipper and I place my palm against the fabric. “Is this okay?”

“Oh, fuck yes.” The last word sounds more like a whine, and there’s nothing quite like hearing a man beg for it—whether on the giving or receiving end.

I press with the heel of my hand and note how big and hard he is. Christ, I can’t even imagine what his cock would feel like—no, I need to push aside that train of thought and focus on the fact that this is a big deal to Caleb.

Little does he realize that it’s also a big deal to me. And not only because all of this feels surreal, but raw and visceral too. Especially after we’d confessed some truths to each other. If I don’t take advantage of this opportunity, I’ll always wonder about Caleb and feel regret that I never got a chance to be with him in a way he never allows. That alone is something special. Even for a one-off.

“Can I...touch you too?”

“Please,” I huff out in my own needy voice, and when his knuckles brush across my fly, my knees nearly give out. “Ah, fuck.”

This might be a bad idea, but I can’t find it in me to care. I can’t see beyond my pure want in this moment to have any regrets. The only thing that matters is making Caleb feel good. Giving him what he’s been missing.

I deepen the kiss, my tongue exploring his mouth, trying to memorize the feel of his lips against mine before we run out of time. Before he’s gone and the entire experience is just a distant memory in my rearview mirror.

His fingers dig into the small of my back and I can taste the raw need on his tongue. Our kisses grow more frantic as I swallow down his groans.

I press my palm more firmly against his hardness and massage him through the material. “Fuck...I’m gonna blow.”

“Tell me about it.” My own dick is straining against his fingers. “Wanna feel more of you.”

He rocks a little. “God, yes.”

My body takes over, my senses on overload as my hands move to his waistband, pulling his jeans open with clumsy but eager fingers.

He leans in, lips grazing my jaw, and it sends pinpricks along the fine hairs on my nape. I’m beyond desperate to touch him now, so I work his zipper open and shove my hand down the underside of his briefs to cup his shaft.

Caleb buries his face against my shoulder, as he moans and trembles.

I nearly dissolve, not only from the sound, but from how his bare cock feels in my grasp. Hot and pulsing—the ridge of every vein, the smooth skin covering the stiff length.

All I can imagine is everything I could do to him if only we had more time. He shudders, his need like a crackle of electricity that pulses through my fingertips as I stroke him earnestly.

He lifts his head and seals his mouth to mine in a hungry kiss. I twist us around, his back hitting the wall while he roughly tugs open my fly. “Tell me I can touch your cock too.”

“Fucking hell, hurry.” I thrust into his palm as he encloses my shaft in his fist. I relish the size of his hand, the rough calluses, and the strength of his fingers.

My tongue pushes into his mouth as I rut against him, wishing we could strip fully naked and feel every inch of each other’s bodies. We could take our time, revel in every touch and sound instead of racing against the clock and our frantic need for release.

The thick, humid air doesn’t help our relentless pace as we pant and press our mouths together. We’re on overdrive, stroking and fucking into each other’s hands.

“My balls ache. I’m gonna lose it.”

I wish I could see him right now—his eyes, the flush on his warm skin, maybe the wonder in his expression that he’s gotten this opportunity. A silver lining in a shitty situation.

“Own it. Come all over my hand. Show me who you really are.”

He's likely magnificent out on the ice too, and for the first time, it makes me want to watch a game, just to see him in all his glory.

"Holy shit!" I keep jerking him good as his body tenses. He moans in this deep visceral way before the first spurt coats my fingers.

"So fucking hot." I loosen my grip and give into his fingers working their magic on me. My vision blurring, I squeeze my eyes shut as my balls draw up, and I spill my load as well.

We stand there with our hands still in each other's pants reining in our breaths, come all over our fingers, his taste still on my lips.

Finally, I get enough sense to release my fingers from his softened cock, and he does the same. I miss the warmth and closeness instantly.

"That was...wow," I manage to say between harsh gasps for air.

"Yeah, it was." I'm grateful not to hear a hint of regret in his voice.

"So, um, thanks for that." I sound like an idiot, but I also mean it. It's an experience I won't soon forget.

"Ditto." The roughness in his voice almost makes my dick rally for round two.

"You mean you've never jerked someone off in a dark elevator while stuck between floors?" I tease.

He snickers. "Can't say I have, but I'd do it again, in a heartbeat. With you."

I won't deny the little thrill that shoots through me that he's enjoyed himself too.

The space grows quiet, the only sound the choppy breaths between us.

“We should probably get cleaned up...just in case.”

I snap out of it. “Oh shit, I didn’t think of that. How?—”

“We can use my shirt. I’m not the one who has to attend a wedding.”

The reminder brings it all roaring back. Outside of this hot and stifling space—one that was just transformed into a blissful refuge—my friend is likely panicking that his ceremony is ruined.

Caleb pushes the material at me and my fingers fumble in the dark to wipe my hands and groin with his shirt. “Let me turn on my flashlight so we can at least see what the fuck we’re doing.”

I squat down to hunt for my phone, flip on the light, then set it atop my pile of clothes so it illuminates the space.

Seeing him again after minutes of darkness is like a breath of fresh air. Hair tousled, skin flushed, clothes askew...he looks gorgeous as ever. We zip, button, and straighten attempting to get ourselves in some semblance of order.

I probably look as much of a wreck as he does, but who wouldn’t after being trapped in a sauna with no relief. Well, there was some relief, but not from the stifling air.

I smirk. “It probably smells like sex in here.”

His eyes widen. “Oh shit. Do you think?—”

“Nah, I was only teasing.” He visibly relaxes. “Hey, there’s nothing wrong with what

we did. Consenting adults and all.”

“Yeah, I know.” He sighs. “Can’t help that automatic response. Been doing it for so long.”

“I get it.” I grip his arm. “Promise me you’ll allow yourself more of this.”

Our eyes meet and hold. “I’ll try.”

“Good.” I reach over to push a stray lock of hair behind his ear. Can’t help myself. “You deserve that.”

He burrows his cheek against my palm, and it’s such a moment of vulnerability that my chest aches.

“Do you think—” he begins before the lights inside the elevator flicker on.

We startle and straighten.

“Still hanging in there?” the voice calls. “You’ll be out shortly.”

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:50 am

With the lights on everything feels too real. The sticky t-shirt in my hand, the heat in my cheeks, the uncomfortable knot forming in my stomach. Not regret, but something more like longing. I want to know this man. Graham. Beyond the hurried kisses and hidden hand jobs.

“Shit,” I whisper as it all hits me. I’m scared. I’m worried I’m going to ruin this, and judging by the look on Graham’s face, I just did.

He backs away and forces a smile as he quickly bends down to gather his clothes. Cool air starts to pour into the small space through the vents on the ceiling, and instead of relief, I miss the sweltering heat. Goosebumps cover my arms and fill my chest with a familiar emptiness.

The elevator jumps and Graham grabs the rail with a small yelp that is adorable as hell.

“Sorry about that,” the man calls through the crack of the door. “We got the generator up and running. Just give me?—”

The doors slam shut before he can finish his sentence and the elevator jerks again.

With my heart in my throat, I stare as Graham quickly throws himself together.

“I...” He laughs and shakes his head as he fumbles with the buttons on his shirt.

I can’t help my silence as I watch him. God, I want to be in a hotel room with him. I want to be his date to this wedding. I want to be the guy who gets to help him get

dressed and straighten his bowtie.

“I guess this is it?” he asks, and I try to answer him, but everything I want to say is still stuck inside my chest, wrapped tightly with years of fear and hiding. “This was fun. You should... let yourself be happy, Caleb. Every now and then.”

The smile he gives me is sweet and brilliant and it loosens my tongue. Under the bright lights it's hard to form a coherent response, but my confusion and panic fades as Graham's eyes fall to my mouth, and I find courage in the memory of his kiss.

“I wish things were different. I want...” I rub the back of my neck and choke out a humorless laugh. “I don't know.”

“Let's not make this awkward, yeah? We had a weird, yet eventful and sexy experience. It all feels very... Vegas.”

“Very Vegas.” I take a small chance and straighten his bowtie, granting myself another wish. His breath hitches as he meets my gaze. Graham looks put together in his suit, but the flush in his cheeks lingers, the messy, misplaced strands of his hair fall over his forehead, and the slight burn on his chin from my stubble, all of it, evidence we've left behind. I've left a mark, and something inside me has shifted. I can't take it back. The parts of myself that I've hidden, that flame I've kept extinguished tears through me like a wildfire burning my senses in its wake. “What if I don't want this to be it?”

“Caleb.” Graham raises his hands, resting his palms on my bare chest, sending a shiver down my spine. I should pull away. The door could open any second. I didn't even have a shirt on, for Christ's sake. But I can't make myself move. “It doesn't have to be.”

“I don't know how to do this.” I rest my forehead to his, exhaling an annoyed breath. Why can't shit be simple like it is for everyone else? “I don't do this.”

“Then don’t.” He shrugs and I pull back enough to look into those soft hazel eyes. “This doesn’t have to be anything more than what it was. A hot, sexy hook up. But if you want more...” His hand slides up my chest and rests against my neck. He smiles as his thumb traces the line of my pulse. Can he feel how fast my heart is beating? “Maybe we can meet up later after I’ve completed all my Best Man tasks, or maybe we can exchange numbers and just see what happens. Maybe we’ll meet up and maybe we won’t. I can’t make that choice for you. All I know for sure? Is that we only have another minute or two before this hunk of metal starts to move, and I want to kiss you again.”

“Yeah?”

“I like you. And maybe you like me too? I’ll make it easy for you.” He pulls out his phone, and I miss the heat of his touch immediately. “Give me your number, and I’ll text you when I’m free later, and we’ll see what happens. We can just text if that’s all you want, or maybe there will be blow jobs. It’s up to you.”

“Blow jobs?” My head tips forward with a low rumbled laugh. “That’s one hell of an elevator pitch.”

“Well, I told you I’m a good salesman.” He quirks one perfect brow. “So, what do you think?”

“I think...” Leaning in, I kiss the corner of his mouth. “I think I’m sold.”

The elevator hasn’t moved yet, and I should probably thank whoever is listening for small favors, for the time we already had, but I deepen my kiss. Graham’s mouth seals over mine, our tongues taking one last quick taste, and the only thought rolling through my head is how at home I feel in my own skin. It’s a rare feeling, and as he moans into my mouth, I bask in it.

“Are you sure?” he asks as he pulls away and I nod.

I take his phone from his hand and type my number into his contacts. It's reckless, and I'm not sure what all I can offer him beyond this moment, this weekend, but I'm tired of denying myself.

You should let yourself be happy.

I want that more than anything.

"I have dinner plans with some of my teammates tonight, but?—"

"I'll text you later, and like I said, nothing has to be set in stone. We'll see what happens, okay?"

"Okay." I kiss him again, a quick peck on the lips just as the elevator starts to move. My phone slides across the floor with the motion, and I bend down to pick it up, grateful I didn't forget it.

Graham is smiling at me when I'm standing straight again, and it's infectious. My lips tug up into a huge grin. "What?"

"I just sent you a text," he says as the doors slide open to the fourteenth floor. There's a crew of firemen standing in the hallway, and they all stare at my shirtless chest with a mixture of confusion and humor.

"What? It was hot as hell in here," I offer as an explanation, and one of the guys blinks a few times, recognition widening his eyes.

"Wait, aren't you the goalie for Colorado?"

I press the button for the nineteenth floor and pretend like I'm not the guy he knows I am. "The who?"

“You look just like?—”

“Caleb Burnside?” Graham says as he steps off the elevator, and holds the doors open with his arm outstretched. “I know, right? It’s uncanny, really. Too bad, though, it would have been quite the story if I was stuck in an elevator with a real NHL player.”

Something like disappointment flashes in the fireman’s eyes as I fight to repress a laugh, but Graham’s smug smile almost does me in.

“Oh, well, damn... That’s unreal, you look just like?—”

“Don’t you have a wedding to get to?” I interrupt and focus on Graham, ignoring the annoyed look on the other guy’s face.

“Shit... I do.”

“Go be a best man...”

“Talk to you later?” Graham asks with a secret smile.

“Definitely.”

“Definitely,” he whispers, lowering his hand, and as the doors slide shut his eyes never leave mine.

Once the elevator starts moving again, I try to check the text he sent me, but my phone is dead. I rub the back of my neck again, my grin so dopey my cheeks hurt, every second of what happened running through my brain like a filthy movie. Fuck. I can’t believe that happened. And when I’m finally back in my room, it all feels like a dream. The only thing grounding me in reality is the jizz-stained shirt in my hand and the promise of a text waiting for me on my phone. I drop the t-shirt next to my luggage and immediately plug my cell into its charger. Staring at the little lightning

bolt on the black screen, I hesitate.

Maybe we'll meet up and maybe we won't.

We can just text if that's all you want, or maybe there will be blow jobs. It's up to you.

I can't make that choice for you.

I leave the phone on the desk, my heart in a chokehold, as I decide I need time to think. I strip out of my clothes and jump in the shower, dissecting every word, every touch until I'm hard and aching all over again. I take my dick in my hand and stroke myself slow and hard, thinking about Graham's lips on my neck and his fingertips on my skin. I close my eyes and wish myself back into that small box of time, where the heat was too much, but I was myself and feeling, and I... I coat the tile with my release, breathless with dissatisfaction and wanting. This is my life. This is who I am. I don't get to have what I want.

The thought grates me and I shut off the water, pushing open the shower door harder than I mean to. It hits the wall and I cringe waiting for the glass to shatter, sighing with relief when it stays in one piece. I towel off and dress, all the while staring at my fucking phone like it might detonate and obliterate this room, and every fucking excuse I've conjured up in my head of why I shouldn't do this.

I can't make that choice for you.

I sit at the end of my bed, glaring at my reflection in the mirror. Who the fuck is that guy?

He's a coward.

"Fuck that."

I don't have to decide my whole life right now. I don't have to decide whether or not I want to come out across the front page of every sports news magazine tonight. I can meet my friends for dinner and meet another friend for blow jobs. I'm in fucking Vegas, and who I choose to hang out with means nothing in the grand scheme of things. No one is watching my every move. No one probably even fucking cares. Jesus, I'm so self-centered. It's one night, and then maybe... Just maybe. That's all this is, and even if tonight is all I get, at least I had the balls to finally take what I want for once.

Standing, I walk over to the desk with purpose, and when I open my text messages and filter down to the one from an unknown number, I bark out a laugh. He'd sent three messages. One with a simple "This is Graham." And another with an eggplant emoji that says, "What? I'm a chef. I like vegetables." And the last one, "You choose?"

"Christ." I scrub my palm down my face and plop back down on my bed, grinning like a fool again.

I close the text app and open up his Instagram channel and watch the last video he posted. I already watched it on my plane ride here, but this time it's different. I know what his hands feel like, and that his lips taste like sugar.

There's no going back.

It's just one night.

Nothing too heavy, just see what happens.

I want this.

Let yourself have a little joy.

I open up my texts again and exhale as I type with shaking fingers.

Me: I think I choose...

My thumb hovers over the eggplant emoji, but God, that doesn't feel right either. I want whatever he is willing to give. I want him. I click back to the keyboard and type out three words.

Me: I choose you.

Thank you for reading ELEVATOR PITCH!