



GDL (BBA: Bad Boy Academy)

Author: Casey Cox

Category: LGBT+

Description: SawyerI need a big story, and I need it now. And what could be bigger than profiling one of the hottest social media stars in the world—Kynan Parker-Gillis?

Kynan is the quintessential guy next door and ultimate unattainable bad boy rolled into one with his old-school charm and innocent sexiness combined with muscles, tattoos, and smoldering looks. He's also straight and waaay too young for me. I need to keep things professional.

I can't get distracted by our almost kiss in the back seat of the car...

Or how we almost REDACTED in the restroom...

Or the way we mauled each other when we got stuck in the elevator.

I have to stay focused because there's a story beneath Kynan's perfectly curated surface, and I'm determined to find out what it is. My entire career depends on it.

KynanI've never been attracted to a guy before, so why am I so nervous and fluttery around Sawyer Bannister?

Sure, he's a respected and successful reporter, but it's more than that.

I wanted him to kiss me in the car...

I wanted him to go further in the restroom...

And when we got trapped in that elevator, I wanted him to ravage me.

But I'm not alone anymore. Ashton may have come into my life unexpectedly, but I'm determined to be the best father I can be to my six-month-old.

As much as I want Sawyer, I'll do everything in my power to protect my image—and my son.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:26 am

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Sawyer

"Well, here we are," Grayson says as we pull up.

"Here?" I glance out the tinted car window. "This is it?"

"Yep."

I take in the exterior of the retro-inspired house, the scene for today's shoot and my first meeting with one of the members of the hottest internet boy collective in the world, known as BBA. Just one of the many new terms and acronyms I've learned lately.

I step out of the SUV and am immediately hit with a wall of heat. I'd forgotten how hot LA could be in September. I start undoing the buttons of my Tom Ford dress shirt.

"You sure you're ready for this?" Grayson asks, coming over to stand next to me.

"Of course I'm ready." I ditch the tie, tossing it onto the passenger seat before slamming the door shut. "I've been preparing for months."

"I know you have, but..." He bites his lip, hesitates. "But you don't have to do this."

"Yes. I do," I correct him, rolling my sleeve up my forearm. "This is about creating a

legacy."

"Mate, you already have a legacy." I scoff, rolling up the other sleeve, but it doesn't deter him. "You're one of Australia's most respected media figures. You hosted the local version of 60 Minutes . You've won the Gold Logie, the highest TV accolade three years in a row for chrissakes."

"Yeah, and when did all that happen?" I turn to face my manager and best friend who I've known since he took me on as his first client way back when. "A good fifteen years ago," I answer my own question. "My career is in the doldrums. I haven't had a proper TV gig in years. And don't say what about Dancing with the ?—"

"What about Dancing with the Stars ?" he takes over with a self-satisfied smirk. He's the only person in the world I let get away with giving me shit like this. The annoying thing is he damn well knows it.

I shake my head, the warmth of the sun seeping through the dark fabric of my shirt. "Things may be bad, but I still have a modicum of self-respect. I am not doing that show."

Despite repeated requests and bucketloads of money promised. My comeback isn't about money. Let me rephrase that, it isn't only about money.

Grayson's eyes meet mine. "I can picture you doing a killer cha-cha."

"I worry about you sometimes."

We make our way along the concrete walkway toward the house.

Grayson is responsible for me skyrocketing through the reporting ranks from local news to the most watched prime-time TV news and current affairs program in

Australia. He's been with me for all my highs and lows, like my wife, Elaine, dying when Benji was seven and Finch was only a toddler.

That was devastating, but it only strengthened my resolve to work even harder, make it into the big league, and provide for my boys. They're adults now, out in the world, forging their own paths. Benji's a bestselling romance author, and Finch is climbing the ranks in the world of sports reporting. I couldn't be prouder of them. Hands down, they're my two greatest achievements.

But while they're doing well, I'm in a funk. I've been pushed aside, replaced by a new breed of young, hungry reporters. It doesn't help that there seems to be no appetite for long-form content in a world of ten-second videos and mind-numbing clickbait delivered in increasingly narrow echo chambers.

Until an idea struck me about a year ago. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Rather than bemoan the loss of legacy media, why not meet people where they are and deliver content to them on their platforms?

And since everyone's on social media, what could be better than interviewing one of the hottest social media stars in the world—Kynan Parker-Gillis?

Stumbling upon one of his viral GDL videos, discovering he's part of the BBA, and appreciating his mix of charisma, humor, and good looks sealed the deal. Profiling him is my ticket to making a comeback. I know it is, and my instincts have rarely let me down.

It took months and months of Grayson negotiating with Kynan's management team to secure a two-week window to follow him around, get to know him better, culminating in a sit-down interview we'll shop around to the major networks, hopefully attracting a bidding war.

Dancing with the Stars is on ice. Permanently, if I can make this a success.

I'll do whatever it takes to make that happen. I want to show the world that a forty-nine-year-old can still be viable, that I'm too young to be put out to pasture, that I'm still passionate about sharing people's stories, even if I am getting a few lines here and there and small patches of silver threading into my hair.

But more than money and accolades and awards, the most important reason I have for pursuing this is I want to make my boys as proud of me as I am of them.

I know they already are, but they were young when I was at my peak in the late noughties, early twenty-tens. What they probably remember most is my absence as I chased stories all over the world and our nightly 7 p.m. calls, which I never missed, no matter what time zone I was in. They never got to experience their old man at the top of his game. I want them to see me there now.

"Why are we here?" I ask, taking in a pair of vintage plastic flamingos with sun-faded neon pink feathers that greet us at the porch steps.

"Kynan's filming today."

"I know that. But why here?"

Grayson shrugs. "It's as good a place as any. For GDL all he really needs is a laundry room and a clothesline. This place fits in with that vibe."

"That makes sense, I suppose."

We climb the few steps and arrive at a turquoise-blue front door.

"Oh. The video you posted before we left Sydney has just clipped past a million

views," Grayson says, lifting his phone to show me.

I squint to see the tiny view count in the bottom corner. "While we were flying over?"

"Yep. You're keeping the kids fed."

"That sounds highly inappropriate."

He laughs.

These days, I'm known more for posting shirtless videos on social media, usually taken at the gym or when I'm out hiking, than my hard-hitting reporter days of yesteryear. Launching my socials and filling them with thirst traps—another new term—was all Grayson's idea. It seems to be going well, even if I don't understand the world of followers and engagement at all.

Grayson goes to knock on the door, then stops himself. "And are you sure you're ready for him?" he asks, arching his brow as he says him.

"What are you suggesting?"

His smirk returns. "Oh, nothing... Just that, well, Kynan Parker-Gillis is a very good-looking young man."

He's got a point.

At first, I assumed he was just another pretty boy content creator—I've learned that the term influencer, like skinny jeans and dabbing, is out. But as soon as Grayson confirmed we had secured access to him, I immersed myself in a deep dive of his life.

I quickly discovered there's a lot more to him than just his good looks.

He's a triplet. Grew up in Thickehead, a small mountain town a few hours out of LA. Went to college to study business. Started GDL in his first term as a way to showcase how doing laundry helps reduce his anxiety. Dropped out of college when his videos started going viral, amassing millions of views. And I was especially impressed with how he's managed to convert views and likes into a business empire with sponsorships from detergent companies and washing machine makers, as well as spearheading the highly successful LaundryCon, now in its second year.

And the wildest part? He's only twenty-three.

Equally hard to believe is his muscular physique, easily the build of someone much older. Both of his arms are sleeved in tattoos that expand to cover the top half of his chest. He's got long golden hair that cascades down to his shoulders, and his face is angular and broody, possessing the smoldering presence, again, of someone a lot older.

Explains why he's taken the internet by storm—all that bad boy energy mixing with something as sweet and wholesome as the GDL hashtag he created.

Grayson is staring at me, and judging by that twinkle in his eye, I can tell where his mind has gone. The gutter.

"He's a kid," I remind him.

"No. He's a twenty-three-year-old adult."

"He's younger than my youngest son."

"That's one way to guarantee this becomes a blockbuster story."

"I'm not above putting you in a headlock, you know."

He laughs. "I'm just saying you could have picked from any number of social media celebs. What made you choose him?"

My jaw tightens. Okay, so maybe he's got a point. There is something special about Kynan that piqued my interest. An old-school charm. An endearing earnestness as he does a deep dive into the different materials, designs, and functions of the top ten most commonly used pegs. A certain innocent sexiness in the countless videos I've watched of him pinning up clothes on the line, shirtless, smiling, his long hair falling over his shoulders, his muscles flexing. The richness of his voice and the passion evident in his eyes as he discusses different drying cycles or returns to what seems to be the never-ending debate in the #laundryworld of hot v cold water.

Despite all that, I'm a professional, and I'm going to act like one. I have a lot riding on this, and I want this experience to be a positive one for Kynan, too. He ran into some issues with the media when he first got big, so this is my chance to help right some of those wrongs and change some of the misconceptions the public might have about him and the BBA crew.

Grayson's still smiling smugly at me.

"He's also straight," I point out. A fact I fact-checked repeatedly during my research. "So that rules out anything happening."

"It rules out nothing." He quirks a brow at the not-so-subtle hint to my bisexuality. "Young adults these days are...fluid."

"I wish I had a fluid to throw at your face right about now," I mutter, lifting the brass lion's head knocker and tapping it against the door three times.

It's showtime, and I need to bring my A-game. I can't afford any distractions. Yes, Kynan ticks many boxes, including some I never knew I had— hello tattoos —but

this is serious. I want to restore my career back to its former glory and show my kids their old man has still got it. I won't let anything stand in the way of that.

A baby-faced fellow opens the door. He's holding a phone in one hand, an iced coffee in the other, and has what looks like a baby blanket flung over his shoulder. He runs his icy blue eyes over us. "You're not Caviar."

"Caviar?" I whisper to Grayson, confused.

"Like DoorDash but fancier," he whispers back.

"No, we're not," I say to the young man. "I'm Sawyer Bannister, and this is my manag?—"

His eyes light up. "Oh, yeah. I follow you on TikTok. Sorry. Didn't recognize you with a shirt on. Hi, I'm Tharin. Come in, come in. We're shooting out back."

We follow him through the house that looks more like it's ready to be featured in a mid-century interiors magazine than being someone's actual residence. Grayson bumps me with his elbow. "Didn't recognize you with a shirt on. Tharin totally sassed you, BTW," he says, low enough for Tharin not to hear.

I roll my eyes. "You're too old to be using text acronyms in real life," I remind my fifty-four-year-old bestie.

We're led out onto the back patio. Tharin leaves us, and my eyes are immediately drawn to the photoshoot underway on the lawn. There's an elaborate setup with two cameras, lighting rigs, and a crew of four or five. It's a big change from the first video Kynan made where he was hanging clothes on a makeshift line in his dorm room, talking about how something as mundane as laundry helped quell his anxiety.

One thing that hasn't changed? He was shirtless in that first video, and he's shirtless right now. The LA sun beams down on his muscular body, lighting up his colorful tattoos to their full brilliance, and Jesus hold the peg bag, it's a stunning sight. Like a work of moving art.

Pressure builds behind my zipper as Kynan slowly hangs the white towels on the clothesline, his abs taut as his biceps flex, securing each towel with two pegs before bending down—the camera zooming in on his ass—and repeating it again, talking to the camera the whole time.

We're too far away to hear what he's saying, but it's likely one of two things: either care instructions about the best way to hang towels out on a line to dry, or something personal and motivational from his own life.

This whole setup could be trite and eye roll worthy, but it's Kynan's X factor that elevates it into something that millions of people around the world genuinely connect with. Side note, my clothes have never smelled better or been softer.

"Word to the wise, old man," Grayson mutters, rocking on his heels beside me. "People who aren't interested in someone tend not to drool."

"I am not drooling, motherfucker." I don't take my eyes off Kynan as I discreetly swipe my thumb along the seam of my lower lip, just to be sure.

I may be clear on the drooling front, but something tells me I may have seriously underestimated what I've gotten myself into.

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Kynan

A cold shiver races up my spine, which is weird because it's so hot out we've had to stop shooting multiple times for the makeup artist to fix up my running foundation.

"That's it, that's it," Jeremy encourages from behind the rhythmic click-click of his camera. "A little bit over to your right. Good, good. Now lift your chin. Hold out the towel a little farther. Abs tight. Perfect!"

I follow each of his commands, even though I feel silly doing it, like I always do on any professional shoot. I'm way more comfortable when it's just me and my phone in my own backyard. But I have to mix it up a bit, and changing locations and doing a pro shoot is a great way to add some variety.

Never in a million years did I think I'd be renting out a house and hiring a professional team to shoot content. It all started off as a gag, me posting a few pictures and videos online, washing my clothes and hanging them up in my dorm room in my first semester at college. When I created the hashtag GDL—Guys Doing Laundry—I didn't think I'd get anything more than a few thumbs-up and some laughing emojis from my friends. Doing laundry makes me feel better, eases some of the anxiety that's never too far from the surface. That's it.

I never expected it to blow up literally overnight, but it did. I went to sleep and had a couple of hundred followers and woke up the next morning to twenty-seven thousand. Within a week, I'd surpassed one hundred K.

It only grew from there, the start of a wild journey that's led me to where I am today. I dropped out of college and found a manager who introduced me to the content creator scene here in LA. There's a lot of fake people and industry drama that I tried to stay clear of, and it's through mutual connections that I ended up meeting Silas, Tanner, Rocky, Patrick, and Beckett, a.k.a. the BBA.

The six of us were starting out in the field at the same time, but our bond was strong and genuine right from the jump. We're all so different, yet when we come together, it works. When I get anxious, they lift me up. When Rocky lands himself smack bang in the middle of yet another PR crisis, we band around him. And when Tanner and Patrick want to either kill each other or fuck each other, we all leave the room.

We never set out to create the BBA—the Bad Boy Academy—it just happened. And I'm glad it did. They're not just my fellow content creators, they're my family.

"Now look left," Jeremy calls out, pulling me out of my thoughts and back to the photoshoot.

I turn left, and my gaze locks onto a man staring right at me. It takes my brain a few seconds to recognize him—Sawyer Bannister.

Another shiver rolls through me.

"You okay, buddy?" Jeremy asks, lowering his camera.

"Uh, yeah, fine." I try to shift my attention away from the man standing on the back patio, but I can't. I've watched all of his videos, and even though he isn't shirtless right now, he still looks incredible, with the sleeves of his black dress shirt rolled up to his elbows, revealing tanned, sinewy forearms. The navy pants he's wearing highlight his sculpted legs to perfection. I sure as fuck hope to be that jacked when I get to his age.

I don't know where the headquarters for producing these fine male reporter specimens is located, but I sure as hell would like to find out. Sawyer's face is made-for-TV perfection, angular and strong, with sharp cheekbones, inquisitive green eyes, and a jawline that could cut glass. He's handsome and yet slightly rugged in the sort of way that conveys I'm experienced, I've got this, you can trust me.

There's another man standing to his right, but I barely notice him. All my attention is focused on Sawyer Bannister, the man who'll be following me around for the next two weeks. Something that arouses me and terrifies me in equal measure. While I'm looking forward to hanging out with him, he can't find out about?—

"Let's take five," Jeremy calls out.

The crew take a well-deserved break. My assistant, Tharin, scurries over. "Sawyer Bannister and his manager are here. The food is late. And Ashton's sleeping in one of the bedrooms. Mischa's with him."

"Okay, good."

Knowing my son is safe—and out of view—I stride over to meet our new visitors. As I approach, my pulse kicks up a notch. Why am I nervous about meeting this man? Is it because I can't have him finding out about Ashton?

That's part of it, sure, but there's something else. Knowing I'd be spending time with him, I did some online stalking. Sawyer Bannister is one hell of an impressive guy. Initially, I only knew of him because of his shirtless TikTok videos, but I discovered he's a big deal in his homeland, Australia. He had a hugely successful reporting career in the late noughties and early twenty-tens. He was also a pioneer, coming out as bi at a time before the country even had marriage equality. I read the cover article from an Australian magazine with him on the front announcing, "Yep, I'm Bi." And of course, I couldn't avoid learning about the tragedy of his wife passing away,

leaving him to raise their two young sons alone.

One thing I haven't been able to figure out is why he stepped away from the spotlight. He's probably rich enough that he doesn't need to work another day in his life. But if that's the case, why is he so eager to interview me? My team told me Sawyer's manager hounded them like no one ever has. He really wanted this profile.

I guess I'm impressed and maybe a little intimidated by the guy. I flash a smile and stick my hand out. "Hi. I'm Kynan."

His hand slides into mine, pressing down on my fingers with a firm grip. "Sawyer Bannister."

Sparks explode in my chest hearing him say his name in his deep voice and accent that's a subtle fusion of Australian yet tinged with an international crispness. His piercing forest-green eyes stay on me even as he pulls his hand back. "And this is my manager, Grayson McDermott."

"Nice to meet you." I shake Grayson's hand. "You've come on an unseasonably warm day," I say, doing my best to resist the urge to stay focused solely on Sawyer and give both men my attention.

"We're from Australia. We can handle the heat," Grayson says. He then claps his hands and turns to Sawyer. "I'm going to say hi to the photographer and have a chat with him about what behind-the-scenes shots we can take. I'll leave you two to it. Actually, before I go..."

He takes out his phone and aims it at us. "Come in a little closer."

My pulse rockets. "Uh, okay."

Standing in close proximity to Sawyer Bannister is one thing. Having him curl his hand over my shoulder is something else. Sparks of heat spread from my shoulder and shoot down my back.

I steal a quick glance at him—his profile game is as strong and commanding as everything else about him—before facing the phone and smiling. A few seconds later, the impromptu photo shoot is done and Sawyer's hand is off me.

The two men exchange a look before Grayson leaves us, and my gut clenches in an unfamiliar way. I assume they're close since they work together, but does that closeness extend to their personal lives? From what I've been able to gather, Sawyer isn't seeing anyone at the moment and hasn't dated much—at least publicly—since his wife's passing more than twenty years ago.

Sweat dots my brow, and I swipe it away with the back of my hand. Why would I even care if Sawyer and Grayson are more than just business colleagues? It's not like I can lay a claim on Sawyer.

I'm not even gay. But I might be a tiiny bit curious, though. Might have jerked off a few times to the shirtless gym and hiking videos of the man currently standing less than four feet away from me.

May or may not have wondered what it might feel like to slide my hands all over that sculpted chest and abs, knead his meaty pecs like dough, feel the press of his cock enter a part of me no one ever has before.

"...appreciate you agreeing to this."

Shit. I barely manage to catch the tail end of what Sawyer's been saying while I drifted off into an entirely inappropriate X-rated fantasy land.

"Uh, sure. I'm looking forward to it, too," I say, hedging a guess it was something about us spending the next two weeks together.

"I want you to know something," he says, angling his body so we're facing each other. He swings those intense green eyes right at me. My breath hitches, so all I can do is raise my brows and nod for him to go on. "I'm not here to do an exposé. Yes, I want to do an incredible story, but I have no intention of exploiting you or invading your privacy. You may be in the public eye, but you deserve to have a personal life just like everybody does. I won't share anything you're not comfortable with."

"Oh, okay. Thank you," I reply, his words easing some of the trepidation I've been feeling leading up to this.

One of the reasons BBA came about is because after we all blew up in our respective areas, the crew and I started attracting negative attention. I did a few interviews and got misquoted. The magazine who ran a four-page spread on Silas got a bunch of facts wrong. Rocky was made out to be nothing more than a powerlifting himbo when he's actually a really smart and sensitive guy underneath that wall of muscle and loves nothing more than spending his evenings curled up with his cat crocheting.

But all six of us were dubbed party boys simply because we attended events like the opening of clubs and bars. That works well for attracting attention which, as content creators, we need the same way people need air to breath, but it also didn't sit right with us. A substantial part of all our audiences is kids and young people. We take our responsibility as role models seriously. BBA gave us a chance to take some control over the narrative, playing with the idea that we're slightly naughty and rebellious, without it going too far. It worked better than anyone imagined it would, catapulting us into the highest stratosphere of content creators, with all of us having over twenty million followers each.

But our success makes us a target, and my initial response was to decline doing the

piece. Then I discovered I was a dad a month ago, and my protective instincts ramped up even more. However, after watching hours of Sawyer interviewing world leaders, celebrities, and sports stars, my opinion changed. He never went for the obvious gotcha, never tried to trap anyone or make them look a fool.

"My passion is storytelling," Sawyer continues, staring right at me. "I believe that everyone has a story. And I have a feeling that your story has more depth to it than you just being a ridiculously good-looking young man who enjoys doing laundry."

I cough. Did he...did he just call me ridiculously good-looking?

"Kynan!" Jeremy calls out. "We're ready to go again."

My gaze drops to Sawyer's lips. They're thick, full, and the perfect shade of muted coral. This is so confusing. I've never paid any attention to another guy's lips before. Why am I noticing Sawyer's?... And why do I want to know what they taste like?

The air between us gets even hotter.

"I, uh...should probably get..."

"Going," Sawyer finishes for me with a slight smile forming on his lips.

"Yeah." A flush climbs my neck. "That."

"Go." Sawyer tips his head. "I'll be watching."

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Sawyer

Oh, I've been watching all right.

It's the second day of my two-week assignment. After our initial meeting yesterday, I stayed for the rest of the shoot. Then Kynan had to leave, somewhat abruptly. I wasn't really clear on why, but that's okay. It's not like we have 24/7 access to him. Kynan is a busy guy and has a million projects on the go. I don't want to get in the way, but I am definitely keen to spend some more one-on-one time with him.

Today's shoot is taking place inside, in a studio made to look like a laundry room. Kynan's currently filming, so after Tharin let me into the closed set, I found an out-of-the-way spot off to the side, and I'm watching the magic unfold.

"Now if you've seen any of my videos, you'll know that one of my favorite hacks for clothes or sheets or towels to come out super soft is..." Kynan lifts a tablespoon heaped with a white powder in front of his bare chest and pauses. The camera zooms in. I'm captivated, even though I know what he's going to say because this is one of his favorite hacks.

"Bicarb soda," I mutter under my breath in time with him.

He flashes that megawatt smile of his at the camera, and heat engulfs my chest. I run my hand through my hair and chide myself for the way my body is reacting. I'm being silly. I'm here to do a job and salvage what's left of my career, not get turned on

by my incredibly hot subject. That's what jerking off in the shower is for.

I also meant what I said to Kynan yesterday. I'm not here to score cheap shots or uncover some scandal. I genuinely think he's an interesting guy with an interesting story to tell, and I want to share it with the world. I want this piece to do well because I did a good job, not because I fucked someone over. I think he believed me.

I also couldn't help but notice how his eyes fell to my lips and he seemed to struggle with his words just before the cameraman called him over.

It was probably nothing. Again, if I want to read more into things and run off to some fantasy realm where Kynan could actually be interested in an old bastard like me, I can take care of that in the shower, too.

Kynan continues with the video, moving on to another favorite hack—essential oils. Five small bottles are arranged on the counter, so he goes through each of them, opening and sniffing them one at a time. I do not notice the way his biceps flex as he brings the bottles to his nose or how his abs contract as he breathes in.

He proceeds to load a basket full of clothes into the machine, then crouches down next to it. The camera person follows, and I gulp. Confession time. This shot is a guilty pleasure of mine. Kynan crouching down wearing short shorts is an image I can conjure in my mind on command.

I've watched and rewatched it so many times. His muscular thighs press together making his bulge bulge. There's something about it that's so innocent yet incredibly sexy at the same time. A lot like the man himself. A contradiction of hard muscles and bright tattoos with a softness imbued by how excited and passionate he gets about something as mundane and run-of-the-mill as doing the laundry.

Steadying himself with one hand on the machine, the other draped over his well-

toned thigh, he looks straight down the barrel of the camera. "Remember, cold water is your best friend if you're worried about shrinking or fading. This might be reopening a can of worms for the bajillionth time, but I firmly believe cold is the best temperature. It's the only setting I use. I don't mess with warm or hot. Same goes for my coffee order." He pauses to smile, and I find myself grinning, too. "But hey, if you're one of those folks who likes using warm or even hot water on things like bedding and sheets, I want you to know, I hold space for ya, too."

His fingers move to the dial, and he makes one or two more adjustments before pressing the Start button. Once the machine starts whirring, he rises to announce, "And now I'm gonna get me that cold brew. Catch ya next time!"

A few seconds later, the director yells, "Cut!," a bell rings, and the crew start scurrying around like ants.

I step out of the shadows. Kynan's talking to his assistant, but the instant he notices me, their conversation grinds to a halt, and he walks over to me. My eyes travel up his toned calves and massive thighs, taking in his vibrant red-and-white striped nylon shorts. His hair is tied back in a low ponytail, although a few wisps have fallen loose.

"I didn't know you were here," he greets me with a smile warm enough to almost make me believe he's glad to see me.

"I snuck in," I answer. "Tried to be as quiet as a mouse."

Kynan moves forward. "Well, you were definitely quiet...as a mouse." He shakes his head and sighs. "Sorry. I'm tired and haven't eaten all day." He taps his temple twice. "Brain no work."

"It's all good. How much more have you got to shoot?"

"Just a few more takes."

"Okay. Are you free for dinner later?"

His eyes light up. Or maybe it's the studio lighting. Yeah, it's probably just the lighting. "Actually, I am."

"Great. I'll hang around, quiet as a mouse , and then we can go grab something to eat."

Two and a half hours later, Kynan and I are finally walking out of the studio.

"They really work you hard," I say.

"We're shooting in advance," he explains, letting out a yawn. "It's not ideal, but we probably produced two weeks' worth of content today once we edit the videos into the smaller chunks we'll be posting online."

"I see."

He points to a side exit door, and we head toward it. "Have you watched any of my stuff?"

"No." I suppress a grin when he cocks his head in surprise. "I've watched all your stuff."

"All of it?"

"Yep. My clothes have never been cleaner."

He eyes me up and down. Correction, he eyes my clothes up and down. "I'm glad."

There's a beat of silence as a current of electricity passes between us.

Stay professional, Sawyer.

Right, professional. I can do that. "I've even watched the stuff you've deleted thanks to a guy I know who can work his way around the interwebs."

Kynan lets out a groan that makes sticking to my resolution to stay professional impossible, my mind racing, imagining a number of very un professional scenarios where I could draw similar sounds out of him.

"I kind of hate that, but then again, I also expected it," he says.

"What do you mean?"

"You're thorough. Like when you interviewed the Prime Minister of Australia after the contentious election in 2009. You really did your research."

We've reached the exit. "How do you know about that?"

Kynan brushes up next to me and smirks, so close I can see the tiny flecks of gray in his deep-blue eyes. "Let's just say I know my way around the interwebs, too, and I wasn't about to be profiled by someone I knew nothing about."

I press down on the metal push bar, and the door swings open with a loud click. "You're an intriguing young man, Kynan." I wave for him to go first. "An intriguing young man, indeed."

We walk through the mostly empty lot, the last light of the day a thin strip on the horizon.

"There's a cool retro diner a few miles from here," he says. "Does that work for you?"

"It does. You seem to be into retro at the moment," I say, thinking back to the location of yesterday's shoot. Unfortunately, his retro short shorts from today's shoot have been replaced by black track pants.

"Retro is in. We'll run with it for a while before moving on to something else."

"When will you release the content you're working on now?"

"Probably after the holidays. Might go with a new year, old vibes theme."

"You're very organized."

"That's because I take this seriously. You may think it's silly?—"

He stops talking when I latch onto his arm. "I don't think it's silly."

His eyes narrow. "You don't?"

"No. I've scoured social media extensively these past few months, and believe me, there is some absolutely mind-numbingly stupid shit out there. What you do is a cut above. Several cuts above. Unlike my own TikTok," I concede with a laugh.

His lips stretch into a sly grin. "Oh, I don't know about that. Never underestimate the value of a good thirst trap."

As he's talking, I realize I'm still holding on to him. His skin is so soft, so warm, and I can't think of a good reason to let him go.

Uh, hi. It's me, Professionalism. Debbie from HR just called and asked me to give

you a kick up the backside and to remind you — again — that you're old enough to be his father.

Yep, that'll do it. I release my grip, and we start walking again.

After a few moments, he says, "It's not only my livelihood anymore, either. I have a team I support, too."

"That's a lot of responsibility," I say, thinking back to my peak era when I had an agent, a PR firm, lawyers, the whole shebang. They're all gone. Grayson's the only one who's stuck around.

We reach an oversized black SUV. Kynan lifts the key fob, and the car beeps twice. He opens the back door then almost immediately slams it shut. "Uh, we can't take my car."

"Why not?"

His eyes dart left to right. "It's broken."

"Broken?"

"Yeah. I just remembered. It conked out on me this morning right as I pulled up."

I run my eyes over the late-model Cadillac Escalade. Cars like this don't just conk out .

Before I can say anything else, Kynan has taken out his phone. "I'll order us a ride. I have a partnership with Ridrrr. I can take some photos on the way over to the diner."

Something's not adding up here. "If you're worried about your car being messy, I

have two grown sons, so a bit of clutter doesn't bother me," I offer with a smile, wondering if that might be the reason he doesn't want me in his car.

He's engrossed in his phone, ordering us a lift, so he doesn't say anything. When he does, it's to confirm we'll be picked up in two minutes.

Hmm. It's odd, but I decide not to push it. We're still in the early stages of getting to know each other. I know from experience how difficult it can be to earn an interviewee's trust. If there's something in his car he doesn't want me to see, I can drop it. It probably doesn't matter anyway.

Our ride arrives. Kynan snaps a few photos of him in front of it before sliding into the back seat next to me. He waves his phone in the air as we take off. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all. What would you like?"

He swallows. "Let's keep it simple. A selfie?"

"Sure."

Due to the lack of room in the back seat and the restraint of the seat belts, Kynan slides in front of me, pressing into my right shoulder. I lean against him, loving the closeness way more than a professional should. At least I'm keeping my hands to myself. I should earn some credit for that.

He's almost done taking the pics when the car screeches to a halt. The driver smashes down on the horn as Kynan and I get shoved forward. Instinctively, I reach my arm out to brace him from the impact.

"Sorry, guys," the driver hisses over his shoulder. "Some asshole just cut me off."

"It's fine," I tell him, my arm still covering Kynan's chest.

Kynan's fingers curl around my forearm, and I think he's going to move me away. But he keeps his hand on me, the touch flaring a warmth that runs the entire length of my arm.

Time seems to stop. We remain connected, neither of us seemingly willing to be the first one to break away. Kynan turns slowly so we're facing each other. Pulled by an invisible force, our mouths inch closer, closer, closer ?—

"We're here," the driver announces, just as our lips are about to meet.

Damn the short drive.

Pull yourself together, Sawyer. This is business, not a date.

Unfortunately, my dick doesn't get the memo, and I bustle out of the car with a steel rod in my pants.

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4

Kynan

"So, why me?" I ask once we're inside, sitting in a booth, facing each other.

"Excuse me?"

"My management team tells me you've been hounding them for access for months. Why me? Why not any of the countless other creators who are killing it right now?"

Sawyer pauses, looking like he's searching for the right words, and I take the opportunity to catch my breath. The ride over to the diner took a few majorly unexpected turns. I was already sweltering internally, being in such close proximity to him for the selfie, and when we jolted forward and he covered me with his arm, I liked the way he protected me. Like it was an automatic reflex. That tells me something about the kind of man he is.

And then we almost kissed.

It's confusing enough that I wanted to kiss him, but it wasn't just a one-sided thing. He was right there with me, leaning in, parting his lips, ready for it.

Which means...

Fuck. I don't know what any of this means. Sawyer's here to work. We're only together for a story. That's it.

"I think you're fascinating." Sawyer's rich voice pulls me out of my thoughts. My eyes settle on his handsome face as he goes on. "You're authentic and relatable but somehow maintain an air of mystery. You're the quintessential guy next door and the ultimate unattainable bad boy rolled into one. That's intriguing to me."

Hang on a minute. My internal defense shields fly up. Is he trying to seduce me in order to get his story? Is this a tactic he uses to get his interviewees to open up to him?

I lift my chin. "I thought you said you weren't interested in doing an exposé."

"I stand by that. I have no interest in exploiting you or invading any boundaries you may have around your private life."

His mouth opens to say something else, but before he can, the waitress returns with our food. Once she's gone, he picks up his burger, but before taking a bite, says, "I've done my research. I've gone through all the publicly available information I can find about you. But I think there's more to you than what you've shown the world so far. That's what attracted me to you. And even though you have your own platform, I think I can help you tell your story."

He has no idea how much of a story I have. Ashton arrived in my life less than a month ago. No one knows about him, except for my assistant, Tharin, and the nanny I hired, Mischa.

I haven't told my family or the BBA crew yet because I'm still processing this all myself. It might sound strange, but I want some time alone with Ashton, for me to bond with him, before I share him with anyone else. And especially before I share him with the rest of the world.

Sawyer starts rattling off what information he's gathered about my life—where I grew

up, being a triplet, studying business in college, my journey from one grainy, amateurish social media post filmed in my dorm room to where I am today.

"Your research skills are top notch. I'm impressed," I tell him. "You just left out one detail."

"Oh. What's that?"

I tip my chin up and aim my sultriest smile at him. "The part where I'm ridiculously hot."

He draws in a sharp breath, lowers his burger to his plate, and wipes his hands on a napkin. "About that. And about what happened in the car before."

My chest constricts. Shit. I've blown it. My attempt at redirecting the conversation to more flirty terrain is about to backfire on me. I can hear it in his clipped tone.

"I apologize for my inappropriate behavior. We've been brought together in a professional capacity, and I intend on honoring that. I'm sorry if I've said or done anything to make you uncomfortable. It won't happen again."

My stomach sinks, and I push my plate away and stare out the window at the busy road. That's the thing. He hasn't said or done anything to make me uncomfortable at all. If anything, I wish we hadn't got cut off in the car because I really wanted to kiss him.

And I still do.

"What's wrong?" Sawyer asks after a few moments of silence.

I turn my head back to face him. His green eyes are lasered in on me, and as much as

I'd like to think he's worried about me, he's probably just concerned he's messed up in a 'professional capacity.'

"Nothing. I'm fine," I say, lifting my soda fountain glass filled with chocolate milkshake. "To professional boundaries."

My toast doesn't seem to make him happy, though. His lips remain pressed in a hard line. I don't get it. This is what he wants, isn't it? To keep things between us strictly business.

He lifts his glass and meets my gaze, his normally sharp eyes dimmed slightly. "To professional boundaries," he repeats with literally zero enthusiasm.

We keep things professional for the rest of the meal, mainly talking about BBA and how it all came about. We didn't cover any new territory he wouldn't already have discovered in his research, but he managed to look interested nonetheless.

I had a host of questions I wanted to ask him but decided not to, since I figured asking him about his sons or his dating life wouldn't go well in light of our recent commitment to professionalism.

"I need to use the restroom," he says as we get out of the booth once we've finished our meal.

"Same."

He smiles.

I smile back.

He waves for me to go first.

I bow my head in thanks.

We're totally killing this whole professional thing.

I step into the small restroom, holding the door open for him behind me.

"Thank you."

"Oh, crap." I step out of the way and point to the Out of Order sign on the cubicle door.

Both our heads turn to the two side-by-side urinals at the same time. When I look over at Sawyer, he's running a hand through his thick mane.

"You go first," he says, averting his gaze. "I'll wait here."

I roll my eyes and grab him by the wrist. "We can pee at the same time. It's no big deal. Come on."

He moves heavily but doesn't fight me on it. I unzip my pants and take my dick out. A few seconds later, I hear Sawyer unzip his pants.

Which means... he must be holding his dick, too.

And suddenly, I understand his reluctance. I've never thought about how awkward this could be before, because I've never pissed next to a guy I'm attracted to before.

With my pulse starting to race, I tilt my head down annnd slightly to the right as slowly as I can. Guys check each other out all the time. Happens in locker rooms, gym showers, even urinals. It doesn't mean anything. It's totally normal.

This is just like that.

Except...

I've never had my cock grow in response to seeing another guy's dick. And as I catch my first glimpse of Sawyer's girthy, veiny, uncut shaft, that's exactly what starts to happen. I'm powerless to stop it, watching with equal amounts of horror and excitement as my cock goes from floppy to hard in my hand.

I stop peeing, but there's no way I'm going to be able to tuck myself into my pants without making it obvious I have an erection.

Beside me, Sawyer clears his throat. Shit. Did he catch me checking out his junk? Not less than an hour ago, we were toasting to professional boundaries, and now here I am, holding my hard cock less than six feet away from the guy.

I slowly turn my head to face the music, which I'm assuming will involve a more sternly worded than before lecture on the need to keep things work focused.

But when I look at Sawyer, I don't see the face of an angry man. Instead, I'm met with two blazing green fires and his top teeth buried in his lower lip. His breathing is shallow and labored, and when I glance down again, my eyes bulge. His cock is as hard as mine.

"Holy shit," I mutter. "How did that happen?"

He emits a low chuckle. "Could ask you the same thing."

"No. I mean your head." I point toward the tip of his cock. "Where did the foreskin go?" Guess I've just outed myself as never having seen an uncut cock in my life.

"The foreskin retracts..." He clears his throat. "...when I get hard."

"Retracts where?" I ask, and since we're talking about his dick, I feel emboldened to take a proper look at it as Sawyer's long, well-manicured fingers slide along it to just beneath the crown. With a gentle tug, he brings his foreskin up over the tip before retracting it.

"Like this."

"I do," I reply, realizing a few mortifying seconds too late Sawyer didn't mean Like this as a question but as a demonstration.

That same horny feeling I had in the back seat of the car returns, slamming into me with full force. Despite never being with a guy, my instinct is screaming at me, loud and clear.

I want to do stuff with Sawyer Bannister.

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Sawyer

Kynan's breathing heavily, staring at me with a dangerous glint in his eye, and I'm... fuck , I'm still holding my dick. My hard dick. Not exactly sure when this went from having a piss to a how-to on foreskin retraction, but here we are.

This is bad.

This is really bad.

I'm way too old to be this stupid.

Not to mention how much of a hypocrite and liar this makes me—was I not apologizing to him for my inappropriate behavior less than an hour ago?—and yet here I am, in a public restroom where anyone could come in at any moment, touching myself in front of him.

"I like it," Kynan mumbles, the redness that tore up his neck when he mistook my words for a question moments ago still there, bright as ever.

"What do you like?"

His eyes turn a molten blue, and my cock pulses in my hand when he responds.
"Watching you."

He's let go of his dick, but it's still hard, jutting out from his body. Long, creamy-colored, and cut, with a pearl of pre-cum glistening on his slit. It's taking every ounce of self-restraint I possess not to scoop up that pearl with my thumb and have a taste.

"Have you ever done anything with a guy?" I ask, my voice suddenly low and husky.

He shakes his head, the blush creeping up his neck spreading to his cheeks, and I release my cock.

Kynan frowns. "Keep going. Please."

"No."

His frown deepens. "Why? What's wrong?"

"That's a loaded question, but I'll focus on the matter at hand. So to speak. If you've never had an experience with a man, I don't want your first time doing anything to be in a public restroom. I'd want it to be—" I cut myself off, not needing to go down that path. That's not the point I'm trying to make here, anyway.

Kynan inches closer. I look down between our bodies. If he takes one more step, the tips of our cocks are going to touch, and fuck, why do I want that so much? Why can't my cock agree with my brain that this guy—this twenty-three-year-old guy—is totally off-limits?

"What do you want my first time with a man to be like?" he asks, latching onto the one thing I wish he hadn't.

I take a step back, needing some physical distance if I'm going to have a hope in hell of controlling myself. My back hits the cold tiled wall. "I'd want it to be special," I say, surprised by the rough edge in my voice. "I'd want you to be taken care of. I'd

want you to be with someone who places your comfort and pleasure above their own. Someone you can talk to openly about what feels good and what doesn't. Someone who can make you feel all the pleasure in the world and hold you in his arms after he sends you soaring through the universe."

Something damp presses against me. I glance down. Kynan's cock has made contact with mine, his pre-cum oozing onto my crown. I want so badly to reach between us, slide my foreskin over his tip, and jerk us off together, docking-style.

But no.

Not like this. Not here. I may have blown professional boundaries out the window, but I meant what I said about Kynan's first time with a guy. He deserves better than a quick handjob in a diner restroom.

"I—"

The sound of approaching footsteps stops him in his tracks. We tear apart, barely managing to hustle back to our respective urinals before the door swings open and someone enters. I wrangle my still-hard cock into my briefs, zip up, and spin around.

"All yours, mate," I say to the waiting guy.

I quickly wash my hands, purposefully avoiding looking at my reflection in the mirror—because who the hell have I become?—and go wait for Kynan outside.

"Whoa. This reminds me of the first and only time in my life I dropped acid."

I chuckle as Grayson joins me by the entrance to the book tunnel. At first, I couldn't believe what I was seeing, either. We're surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of books, but they're not stacked on shelves, they're carefully arranged in a curved

tunnel that stretches out in front of us. It looks like a gateway to another dimension.

"It is a bit trippy," I agree.

The entire crew of BBA are gathered in the quirkiest bookstore in LA, possibly the entire country, to do a photoshoot for an upcoming Hot 30 Under 30 article by a well-respected magazine. Grayson follows my gaze to the six young men posing in pairs, staggered along the length of the tunnel.

Well, maybe I'm a little more focused on one of the guys than the others.

"You know what else is trippy?" Grayson asks. Without waiting for a reply, he continues, "You having the hots for a twenty-three-year-old."

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, come on, Sawyer. It's been pretty obvious these past few days."

"What's been obvious?" I ask, folding my arms across my chest, my eyes remaining on Kynan.

The diner incident happened three days ago. While we were waiting for our rides outside the diner afterward, I apologized again for my inappropriate behavior, and I told Kynan, in all seriousness, that from now on I would be the epitome of professionalism. When his face fell, and my heart felt heavy, I did leave the door open for something after we'd done the piece, but I assured him that from now until then, I would be keeping things strictly above board.

No more near kisses.

No more longer-than-strictly-necessary physical contact.

No more stolen glances that almost lead to docking in a restroom.

I thought I'd been doing a good job of hiding my attraction these past few days as I followed Kynan around, staying in the background through more photoshoots, trips to large and indie retailers that sell laundry products, and sitting in on a few business meetings.

"Mate, this is me. I know you. And I've never seen you look at anyone the way you look at Kynan. Not since... Elaine."

The mention of my late wife triggers a whirlwind of emotions. I loved her deeply, but what started off as teenage puppy love was forced to mature with the arrival of our first son. In that time, I grew up and discovered I was bi. She passed away from cancer before I could tell her, and then any feelings I had that things weren't right between us were frozen in a time capsule I hardly ever revisit.

There's no way I'd ever speak ill of her or bring up any of the issues we were having. You just don't do that. So I let people think we were the perfect couple. Don't get me wrong, I loved Elaine, and we were good together, but if she had lived, I don't know if we would have stayed together after the kids had grown up.

After she died, I threw myself into my work and my boys. But now my boys are grown men, and my career is on life support, and my heart... Yeah, my heart is smitten by the guy currently camping it up for the camera with his friends.

Not sure I'm ready to share any of that with my best mate yet, though.

"I'm keeping this professional," I say. "He's the subject, I'm the?—"

"Master?"

"Reporter." We turn to each other and share a look. I let out a sigh. "I'm not going to risk derailing this story because of feelings."

"Ah, so there are feelings."

"Possibly. But I've already told him nothing can happen until after we're done working together."

"So you've talked about this?"

"We have."

A beat of silence. Then, "So, if you've talked, does that mean you've done other stuff, too?"

I elbow him in the ribs. "A gentleman never tells."

"Exactly. That's why I'm asking you."

I shake my head and chuckle. Right at that moment, Kynan turns. Our eyes meet, and an eighteen-wheeler slams into my heart.

He gives a small, innocent wave.

I give a small, innocent wave back.

Grayson chuckles beside me. "A thousand bucks says you two won't be able to last two weeks."

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6

Kynan

"Heya," I whisper, slipping into the nursery, unsure whether Ashton is asleep or not.

Mischa looks up from the rocking chair and smiles. "Hi."

Ashton's in her lap. They're reading a picture book.

"How is everything?" I ask.

Ashton lifts his pudgy little arms and smiles when he sees me, which lights me up in a way I never imagined could be possible. I may have only known I have a son for a month, but he completes me.

"Great. He's eaten, and his diaper is freshly changed..."

"Phew." I swipe the back of my hand against my forehead.

Mischa smiles. "You're getting better." I might be getting less baby poop on me these days, but I'm hardly a pro. Her smile grows as she hands him to me. "You're way more hands-on than most of the other celeb dads I've worked with."

She's only twenty-eight, but Mischa is a nanny to the stars. She has years of experience working with some of the biggest celebrities in the world, and her reputation is above excellent. I'm happy shelling out a fortune to have her.

"Really?" I walk over to the soft play zone taking up one corner of the room and sit down with Ashton for some tummy time. "I feel like all I do is work and try to squeeze in time with Ash around all my commitments."

"Don't be so hard on yourself. This is a huge and very recent adjustment for you. You can't just abandon your work and responsibilities. In this business, it takes some time to clear your schedule."

"Tell me about it."

It's the reason why I've been working so hard lately, trying to get ahead to free up some time, ideally by the holidays. Doesn't help matters that I've been having to duck away without arousing Sawyer's suspicions. I'm pretty sure he hasn't noticed anything unusual, and he hasn't brought up that close call about my car being broken—lame excuse, I know, but I was totally caught off guard when I opened the door and saw the baby seat and all of Ashton's toys everywhere—so I think I'm in the clear.

Mischa gets up. "I'll give you guys some alone time. I'll be in the kitchen if you need me."

"Okay. Great. Oh, and the BBA guys are coming over in a few hours."

Her eyes light up, but then she shakes her head. "If only one of them were straight. Apart from you, that is, but you're off-limits because we work together." She closes the door behind her as she leaves.

Mischa calling me straight feels funny, a bit like trying on a jacket you haven't worn in ages that doesn't fit anymore.

Both of my brothers are gay, so I've always been comfortable around gay dudes. And working in the industry in LA, I've been exposed to people on every single notch of

both the sexuality and gender spectrums.

I've always considered myself straight since, up until very recently, I've only been sexually interested in women. But now that I'm interested in Sawyer, does that mean the label I use has to change?

I kick off my shoes then place Ashton on his stomach on the soft play mat. I don't get to spend anywhere as much time with him as I'd like to, so I push all the swirling thoughts about my sexuality and Sawyer out of my head so I can be one hundred percent present for this precious time with my son.

I lie on my front a few feet away from him, positioning myself at eye level. "You can do it, buddy," I encourage him as he lifts his head and kicks his little legs with determination.

Tummy time, as Mischa has taught me, is crucial for developing strength and motor skills. Ashton grunts softly, his tiny hands pressing into the mat as he wiggles forward. I'm completely captivated by him, at the wonder of getting to witness this tiny human—my freaking son—start to crawl.

Once we've done tummy exercises, I grab the box of building blocks and demonstrate how to stack them into a pile. I hand Ashton a block. He grabs it eagerly, his chubby little fingers exploring its texture...and then he brings it to his mouth. Oh, well. We're not at the building stage yet.

The minutes fly by, and I feel more at peace and settled than I have in a long time. I've always had low-level anxiety. It's never been diagnosed, but it's something that's always been there in the background. I overcompensate by channeling that energy into being busy. Laundry, as weird as it sounds, has always been the perfect, calming antidote. Even as a child. Dad thought it was strange, but Mom loved it because it was one less chore for her to do.

But being with Ashton is a thousand times better. It was a huge shock to discover I'm a father, but now that he's in my life, I'm determined to be the best dad I can be. For the first time ever, I have another person's needs to place above my own. He's entirely reliant on me, and I won't let him down.

Ashton's eyes grow heavy, so I place him into his cot and turn on some gentle lullabies. He's so small, so perfect, so beautiful. I watch as he falls asleep, and once he does, I retreat to the armchair a few feet away and take out my phone, doing my customary scan of my socials.

A video comes up in my TikTok feed of a certain shirtless someone doing something called a planche, a crazy advanced gym move. I watch in awe as Sawyer balances parallel to the ground, his arms straight and shoulder muscles taut, his core muscles engaged as he stabilizes his midsection, his legs extended straight back, toes pointed. This one is going straight into the spank bank, that's for sure.

Another stab of guilt shoots through me, and I drop my phone onto my lap. It's bad enough I don't spend enough time with my son, now is the absolute worst time in my life to be interested in someone. But true to his word, Sawyer and I have been keeping things professional since the restroom incident.

On the one hand, it's good. He has a job to do, and I respect that. On the other hand, watching his videos on social media is a special kind of torture. I don't know where it's coming from, but I am deeply attracted to him. I don't care that he's a man. Or even that he's much older than me. There's something about Sawyer that feels so right. I can't explain it.

The doorbell rings.

That'll be the BBA crew, so I push my thoughts about Sawyer to the side and get ready to tell them about my latest addition.

I invited them over after our bookstore photoshoot to introduce them to Ashton. His presence is likely to have a major impact on me and my image, and by association, on them, too. It could damage everything all six of us have worked our asses off for.

My audience is an eclectic mix of conservative suburban moms and gays. Each group could potentially be put off by the news. The moms might have an issue with me being unmarried, and a kid could be a boner-killer for the gays.

I'm going to need advice and a ton of support on how to navigate this publicly. Luckily for me, the guys aren't just colleagues, they're more like brothers, and I know they'll have my back.

"There's something I need to tell you," I say to the guys who are sprawled around my living room, beers and sodas in hand.

"You've got a thing for the reporter dude who's following you around?" Silas suggests.

Ugh. I forget how observant these bozos can be sometimes. "Here's my answer to that." I give him the finger then take a deep breath. "No. It's something else."

"What is it?" Rocky asks, picking up on my tone, dropping his feet off my coffee table and folding his massive arms across his massive chest. The guys stop goofing around.

I scan their faces then come right out with it. "I have a son."

"Whoa."

"Fuck."

"Shit."

"How? I mean, I know how, but... how?"

Only Tanner is silent, but that's because his jaw is on the floor.

"I'll explain everything. But first, there's someone I want you guys to meet."

I lead the gang into the guest room I've converted into Ashton's nursery. He's still asleep, but he can sleep through everything. He once fell asleep when I had Kendrick Lamar blaring at full volume.

Once the guys are done with cooing and gushing over him, we settle down in the beanbag corner, and I tell them the story about how I found out I had fathered a child.

"I'm worried about this getting out," I finish.

"Ohhh. Now it makes sense," Beckett says.

"What makes sense?"

"You pretending to like the reporter." Beckett nods. "You're doing it to throw him off the scent."

"That is not what is happening," I hiss sharply. "My feelings for Sawyer and wanting to protect Ashton are two separate things."

Silence.

Then Patrick speaks. "Wait. You have feelings for Sawyer?"

Eep. I guess that slipped out. I clear my throat. "Yeah. I do."

"Feelings feelings?" he checks.

"Yep."

"But...he's a guy," Silas points out.

"I'm aware of that."

"You can't, though," Patrick says.

"I... can't ?"

"Yeah." Patrick's eyes twinkle. "You're the token straight one in the group."

I chuckle. "That might not be entirely true anymore."

My revelation about my sexuality is met with a series of head bobs and Beckett muttering, "Always figured you might be at least bi-curious."

"So what are you going to do?" Silas asks.

"I don't know. I'm worried about how this might affect us."

"Don't worry about that," Rocky says in his deep, commanding voice, his MoM shirt stretched to maximum capacity across his sculpted chest. "We can deal with the fallout of anything." I guess he'd know a thing or two about that given the endless PR clusterfucks he finds himself in. "All you need to focus on is doing what's right for you. And for Ashton."

"Thanks. And that's my biggest concern." I glance toward the crib. "All I want is to protect my son. I don't want him to be the subject of any negative comments or shit

online because of my actions."

"That makes sense," Tanner says. "Not to generalize, but suburban moms can be a tricky demo."

"Not to mention the gays. They can be fickle as fuck," Patrick chimes in. "Although, you could pivot into zaddy-dom with this news."

"I don't know what that means." I lift my hand when Patty opens his mouth to explain. "And I'm okay with not knowing."

"We all have your back, Ky," Rocky declares.

"One hundred percent."

"One thousand percent."

"If you want to keep this a secret, it won't leave this room," Rocky continues. "If you decide to go public with it, we'll be right there with you. BBA forever."

"BBA forever," the others chant in unison.

"You guys are the best," I say, tears welling in my eyes at their unconditional support.

"I'm not sure what I'm going to do yet," I say. That goes for both Sawyer and protecting Ashton, because, hello, how long can I really keep the fact I have a son hidden from the world? "I need some more time to think. So for now, I don't want Sawyer, or anyone else, knowing about Ashton."

They all nod in support. "We got you, man."

7

Sawyer

"Are you completely blown away by the exciting life of a content creator yet?" Kynan asks drolly as we head toward the elevator bank after attending yet another round of meetings with his management and PR teams.

"I never expected it to be all glamour and fabric softener," I reply, pushing the Down button.

His lips stretch into a smile, and I wonder how the hell we've managed to keep our hands off each other. It's so easy being around him. He's funny, smart, and effortlessly charming. Plus his work ethic is commendable.

We're in the second week of my assignment, and true to my word, I've managed to keep things professional. But the attraction between us is as strong as ever, simmering below the surface, peeking out occasionally in a stolen glance here or a sharp intake of breath if we pass each other a little too close there.

Hitting pause on things was definitely the right move, though. The story is coming along great. We've shot tons of fun bonus, behind-the-scenes content we'll be able to use in promoting the interview in the lead-up to it. And I'm confident in our chemistry and rapport, so when it comes time for the sit-down interview in a few days, Kynan should be comfortable, resulting in a great, comeback-worthy chat.

The elevator opens, and I wave my hand for him to get in first. "Thanks," he says,

brushing past me so close the scent of the ginger mango fabric softener he shot a promo video for earlier today hits my nostrils.

The doors slide closed, and I press the G button. "So, I heard from Tharin you're going away tomorrow."

"Yeah. I'm going to visit my brother, Logan, and his partner, Wade, back home in the mountains. Haven't seen them in a while."

"That'll be nice."

"It will." He grins. "What will you do?"

"Prepare for our interview and probably hit the gym at some stage to shoot some more content ." I roll my eyes. "That last planching video has surpassed three million views."

"I'm not surprised. That's an impressive move. Not to mention, your body is banging."

"Coming from you, that's a high compliment."

Our eyes meet, sending tendrils of heat spiraling across my chest...but nope, I've been doing such a good job staying focused on work, I can't blow it now.

Blow. Now.

Fuck.

I'm really not helping my own cause here.

Unfortunately, neither is the universe because the overhead lights flicker, and a moment later, the elevator shudders to a halt. I press the floor buttons, but nothing happens. Kynan attempts to open the doors manually, but they won't budge.

"We're stuck," he says over his shoulder, still trying to pry the doors open.

"Appears so. Are you okay with being in a small space?"

He lets go of the doors and spins around. His eyes flick to mine. "I guess... As long as I have someone to look after me." I can't tell if he's being serious or flirty until he saunters over to me, slides a palm against my pec, leans into my ear, and whispers, "Will you protect me, Sawyer Bannister?"

Right. Flirty it is, then.

Him breathing my name into my ear snaps what little self-restraint I have, and before I know what's happening, I grip his waist and pin him against the wall. "You don't strike me as the type of guy who needs protecting," I say, holding on to him firmly.

My body is clamped against his, his hard cock pressing into mine. "You're right. Protect is the wrong word." The corners of his mouth tip up. "I meant ravage."

His chest is rising and falling fast, but it's his eyes that have a lock on me. They're blue flames, burning with a forbidden desire I recognize too damn well. He wants me just as much as I want him.

I slide my fingers up his bobbing throat. "Careful what you wish for."

His hands brace the sides of my face. "Stop making me wish, then, and just kiss me already."

See ya, professionalism. It was nice knowing you.

My lips crash against his, driven by an insatiable need that's been brewing since the moment we met. His fingers charge into my hair as he hooks his leg around my waist, pulling me in even closer.

I explore the seam of his lips with my tongue, enjoying the lingering aftertaste of his cold brew. His lips part, inviting me inside, and as I sweep inside his mouth, I tell myself to slow down, to enjoy this moment because who knows how many more moments like this we're going to get.

I successfully bypass the laundry list—pun unintended—of reasons why I know any fantasy of being with Kynan is just that, a fantasy, and focus on deepening the kiss. I slip my hand between our bodies, fondling his massive bulge.

"Wait." A thought occurs to me, and I pull myself off him and start searching the ceiling corners of the elevator. "There." I point to a camera.

Kynan moves to see over my shoulder. "You in the mood to put on a show?"

"No." I spin around and frame his face in my hands. "I don't want anyone seeing you but me."

The possessiveness of my words takes us both by surprise. I try to clarify what I meant but only end up stammering a few times. What did I mean?

"It's fine." Kynan runs his hand through my hair, his eyes sparkling even in the dim lighting. "I like it."

"You do?"

Kynan nods.

The momentary break has made room for some of my doubts to return. Pick a reason, any reason, why we can't be together. "You realize I'm completely too old for you?" It's the first thing that comes to mind.

His arms curl around my waist, and my dick pulses. "Based on what?"

"My date of birth."

"I don't see that as a problem."

"All right. How about this? My youngest son is older than you."

He winces. "Yeah. Okay. Maybe don't mention that ever again. Look..." He cups the globes of my ass with a solid grip. "We're both adults, and we both like each other. Correct?"

"Correct."

"I promise you that what's happening between us won't affect your interview. I'm on your side. I'll do whatever you need me to do to make this the blockbuster comeback story you want it to be."

That quiets some of my concern but doesn't eliminate it entirely. We're so close to the finish line. The interview will be done and dusted in a few days. Why can't I wait until then? How have I allowed myself to lose all self-control and discipline?

The elevator jolts back to life, and we're moving again. Kynan steps back, fixes his hair. I tuck my shirt back into my pants to make myself more presentable.

The doors open on the ground floor. People are waiting to get in. We get out, and it's strange being back out in the world, like nothing's happened.

"I want this," Kynan says, quietly but firmly, as we march toward the revolving doors. "Do you?"

"Fuck yeah," I growl, trying to keep the volume low since we're surrounded by people.

We shuffle into the same wing of the revolving doors. "Then let's do it, Sawyer."

Twenty minutes later, we're in my hotel room, picking up where we left off in the elevator. Well, we're a little past where we left off—our clothes are scattered all over the room, most on the floor, one of my socks covering a lampshade.

We're naked and on our knees in the center of the king bed. I lean down and lick my way from Kynan's massive left bicep, tracing along the lines of the flower tattoo there, along the ridge of his collarbone, across his chest, over to his other sleeved, muscular arm, lapping up the salty tang of his sweat-sheened skin.

"I want to hear all about these tattoos," I murmur, looking up into his eyes.

He smirks. "In the interview."

"No. Privately."

He chuckles. "I think that can be arranged."

I go back to exploring his body with my tongue and hands, greedily lapping and grabbing away. Hard muscles and soft skin have always been an intoxicating combination for me, and Kynan's got both in spades.

We resume making out for a while, the heads of our cocks brushing against each other. "You up for a docking?" I ask, thinking back to the restroom and how close we came to doing it then.

"A docking?" he checks. "Is that how Australians pronounce dicking?"

I grin and pull back. He's being serious. "Oh. No, docking is different to dicking. I take it you don't know what it is?"

He shakes his head. "No idea."

"Mind if I show you?"

"Go for it."

"Tell me if anything doesn't feel right or you want to stop, and I will."

"Okay."

I take my cock in one hand, his in the other, and stroke both, each time squeezing out the skin of my hooded cock a little more, preparing myself for the ultimate stretch about to come. I lock eyes with Kynan. "Okay so far?"

"Yep."

"Cool."

I let go of his dick and grab my foreskin between the thumb and forefinger of each hand, pulling it out.

Kynan's eyes bulge. "Holy shit. Doesn't that hurt?"

"I can feel it, but it's not painful," I assure him.

Then I take his cock and sheathe the skin over it, enclosing his crown.

"Fuck." He latches onto my shoulder for balance, staring down at our conjoined cocks with wild eyes.

"Still good?"

"So fucking good."

His voice has dropped an octave, and his fingers are digging into my shoulder so hard I'm sure he'll leave marks. Good. I'll take any reminder I can of this moment. I curl my fingers over where our dicks are connected and commence a featherlight jerking motion.

"Oh, shit." His head falls back as he lets out an almighty groan. "How?... Like, what is happening? How? How can this feel so... Oh no."

I stop moving. "What is it?"

"No, no. Keep going. Faster ," he pleads.

Still unsure of what's going on with him, I do as he asks, scanning his face for any signs of what's wrong.

He brings his head back up. His pupils have dilated, turning his eyes dark. "I'm gonna co— Oh, shit!"

My foreskin expands, filling with the warm wetness of Kynan's release. We're both staring down, watching in fascination as my foreskin balloons to accommodate his

cum, my hand stilling but keeping a secure grip on both of our dicks.

He's trying to even out his breathing, collect himself from what appears to be an unexpected orgasm. His hand is still pressed into my shoulder.

"I'm sorry I came so fast," he pants, his skin flushed and eyes glazed.

"No need to apologize."

"That was incredible."

I smile. "I'm glad your first time with a man was memorable."

His eyebrows knit together. "Was ? No, no." His eyes regain their focus. "This isn't over, Sawyer. This is only the beginning."

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:26 am

8

Kynan

I may have blown my load embarrassingly quickly, but this isn't over. Not by a long shot.

Sawyer bites back a smile. "Oh, yeah? What have you got in mind?"

I take a deep breath and finally let go of the poor man's shoulder. I've held on to him with such a death grip I hope he doesn't bruise.

What do I have in mind?

I've just experienced my first orgasm with and because of another man. I should be in shock, but there's no room for anything other than exhilaration and hunger. Rather than fizzling post-nut, my attraction to Sawyer is only increasing. We're just getting started.

I'll figure out what all this means later, for now I'm going to listen to what my body is telling me. And my ass is sending me a message loud and clear. I stare into Sawyer's intense green eyes and say, "I want you to fuck me."

He lowers his head, his eyes probing into me. "Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Okay. But just know, first times are often awkward and messy and can even be painful, so if you want to stop or?—"

I shut him up with a kiss. "Save the PSA for another time," I murmur into his mouth. "I've been practicing with toys. I know what to expect."

Sawyer lets out a soft chuckle, grazing my cheek with the backs of his fingers. "All right then. Let's do it."

We resume making out. It's so different to kissing a woman. Sawyer's lips are soft but the skin around them has a different texture. And his tongue is commanding in a way I've never experienced before.

He eases me onto my back then trails kisses down my neck, my chest, my abs. My dick is spent but trying to rise again. It's coated in my release, but that doesn't put Sawyer off as he slides his tongue over it, gently cupping my balls.

And then his mouth lands on my inner thigh, and holy fucking shit, why has no one told me the inner thighs are where it's at? Who knew I had so many sensitive nerve endings there? My whole body buzzes with a delicious current.

Sawyer's hands slide down to the backs of my knees. He positions himself on his stomach and lifts my legs into the air. I cock my head. This doesn't make sense. If he wants to fuck me, he's in entirely the wrong position, that massive uncut cock of his trapped under his stomach.

And then... His tongue. My hole.

"Holy fucking shit!" I scream into the room, my lower back arching off the mattress. If I thought inner thighs were a happening hotspot, they've just been replaced by my hole. "What are you doing?"

Sawyer stops licking me, and I immediately regret asking because I never want him to stop. "Eating you out, baby. Just relax. I got you. This whole night is about you. I'm going to make you feel so good."

My head sinks into the soft pillows, and I surrender to Sawyer's tongue.

Then to his fingers, working me up and stretching me out one expert digit at a time.

And then finally to his cock.

He worked me out so well I handle the first slide into me easily, gripping the sheets and riding out that almost overwhelming feeling of fullness. Just as the sensation threatens to overwhelm, the ridge breaks, and I fall into a paradise of pleasure.

My ass burns hot, spreading a fiery warmth throughout my entire body from the balls of my feet right up to my eyelashes. I latch onto his sturdy shoulders and look up at the face of the man fucking me for the first time.

"You okay?" he asks, slowing down.

"I am. I love this. Thank you."

"No. Thank you ." He strokes his hand down the side of my face. "You ready for more?"

Uh, there's more?

Not wanting to appear totally clueless, I smile and say, "Sure am."

And with that, he speeds up, and Jesus fucking Christ, he's hitting depths I never knew I had. My feet fly around in the air, and I grip the sheets with one hand and the

pillow with the other, holding on for dear life.

Sawyer is fucking the living shit out of me...and I am here for it.

So is my dick, now fully hard again. I let go of the pillow and start jerking myself off. Sawyer's eyes go round. "Fuck, that's so hot. Blow another load for me, baby. I want to feel you come when I'm inside you."

That's all it takes for me to be blowing my second embarrassingly fast load of the night. Once I stop rocking like I've just been electrocuted, Sawyer bites his lip in concentration and tenderly eases out of my body.

I instantly miss the fullness and whine, "No, stay. I want you inside of me."

"You've just come, baby. Your body is sensitive now and needs a break," he murmurs tenderly, sweeping away some loose hair clamped to my sweaty forehead. "And I gave you quite a fucking. I don't want you to be sore tomorrow."

I love the care he's displaying, but my inner sex demon isn't having it. "But you haven't come yet."

"That's fine. I don't need to."

Fuck that. Oh, yes, he does.

I grab his sides and force him up my body until he's straddling my chest, which gives me perfect access to his cock. I peel the condom off, grip the thick base with one hand, open my mouth, and take him inside me.

I ignore the faint smell of latex as my body floods with arousal. I'm sucking a dude...and I really, really like it. Twisting my wrist and pumping his cock in and out

of my mouth, my focus narrows on the one and only thing that matters—making Sawyer feel good.

He lets out a series of guttural moans, and I peer up his body. His skin is soaked with sweat, and his eyes are wild with lust as he meets my gaze. "You're doing so well," he encourages, folding his hands against the back of my head, not to encourage me to go faster or deeper, but for support so I don't strain my neck.

Seriously. This guy is the best.

And as I bob away, determined to drain the life—and a massive load—out of him, I realize my feelings for Sawyer run way deeper than I first thought. I'm not just attracted to him. I don't just respect and admire him. I think... I think I'm seriously falling for him.

And right as that realization hits me, Sawyer's cock swells in my mouth. "Gonna come," he announces with an urgency that makes me think his orgasm is about to arrive faster than intended.

Good. Glad I'm not the only one.

"You can pull off if you like," he says, all the muscles in his neck strained. "You don't have to swallow."

I may not have to, but I sure as hell want to.

Doubling down with my hand and my mouth, I give my everything in these final few seconds, worshipping Sawyer's cock with all my might until it erupts in my mouth. Warm, salty jets spray down my throat, and I do my best to gobble them up, but there's so much that eventually I can't keep up, and it overflows out of my mouth, dribbling down my chin.

"Fuuuuck," Sawyer says, swinging his leg off me and wiping his cum off my face with his thumb as he lies down beside me. "That was incredible."

I swallow the last of his cum, vowing to remember the taste of him forever, and turn onto my side to face him. "Yeah. It was."

He smiles, all sweaty and disheveled, and I like getting to see this unguarded, relaxed side of him. "Stay the night?" he offers, grazing the edge of my shoulder with his fingers.

And just like that, I'm snapped out of my post-sex reverie and back to reality. I can't stay. I have a son to get back to.

"I'd like to, but I can't," I start, hoping he thinks my voice sounds a little off because he literally rocked my world, not because I'm keeping a huge secret from him. "Have an early start tomorrow. I want to hit the road early to beat the traffic."

Sawyer doesn't move, staring at me with that intense reporter look he gets sometimes, and I just know he knows I'm hiding something. My stomach churns, which really sucks because not moments earlier, I'd been on such a high.

"All right." He gets up and extends his hand. I take it as he says, "At least have a shower and let me help you get cleaned up."

We have a shower. And he does help me get cleaned up...

After fucking me one more time.

"Why do you have vomit on your shoulder?" Sawyer asks two days later.

I'm exhausted. Worried out of my mind. And with vomit on my shoulder, apparently.

"Sorry, what?" I've just taken my jacket off and sat down next to Sawyer in the VIP section of Hollywood's newest hotspot.

Concern flickers in his eyes, and I don't blame him. I look like shit. Dark circles under my eyes from not getting a wink of sleep last night, my hair's a stringy mess, and these jeans have seen better days. Not exactly a good look to be out in public in, but I honestly couldn't care less. I don't want to be here.

I grab a shot from the tray on the table and throw it back. After returning from visiting Logan and Wade yesterday afternoon, Ashton started coughing. Then throwing up. By the evening, he was running a fever. I rushed him to my doctor, and it turns out the little guy's got a stomach bug. I canceled my day's plans but wasn't able to get out of this event since BBA are getting paid 50k each to make an appearance here.

Sawyer places a hand on my lap. "How about we get some fresh air?"

"That'd be great." I tell the other guys where I'm going then follow Sawyer through the packed club and up a flight of stairs that leads to an open—and thankfully empty—rooftop.

"How do you know about this place?"

"It mentioned a private rooftop in the invite. I've never been much of a partyer, so whenever I go to these sorts of things, I always make sure to find out if there are any quiet areas I can escape to at some point."

"I like your thinking," I reply when what I really want to say is: I really fucking missed you even though we only spent one day without seeing each other.

Being apart made me realize how much of a fixture he's become in my life in such a

short span of time. Doesn't help that I spent most of yesterday with Logan and Wade talking about him. Sure, they had questions about Ashton and how all that came about, too, but they were intrigued that I've got feelings for someone when I've always been Mr. Keep it Casual. There's also the fact that Sawyer's a man, and a much older man at that, which, as Logan enjoyed pointing out repeatedly, is something he'd expect from our other brother, Bodhi, who famously has a major thing for older dudes.

Guess he's not the only one.

The more I verbalized what's been going on between Sawyer and me and the feelings I'm developing for him, the more it made them real. That was a blessing and a curse because it also made me even more aware of how fragile this thing is. How many challenges and obstacles we face if we have even the slightest hope in hell of making it work.

We walk over to the edge. The air is surprisingly still. I stare out at the grid of buildings around us, admiring the beautiful, chaotic way LA sprawls out in every direction. There are twinkling lights as far as the eye can see.

"How was your trip?" Sawyer's deep voice slices through the night air. "Was it nice to see your brother?"

"It was. He's recently started dating his best friend, so it was cool to see them both so happy."

"Ah, the joys of new love."

"Exactly." Without thinking, I reach over and take Sawyer's hand. "I feel better already. Thank you for this."

Sawyer looks at our connected hands then back up at me and smiles. "I'm glad to hear it."

I tell him a bit more about Thickehead, the small mountain town I grew up in, and some of the kooky people who call it home, being careful not to accidentally let anything about Ashton slip out.

I hate holding this back from Sawyer, but I feel like I should tell the rest of my family next. Logan had a quiet word with me before I left, telling me he was slightly hurt I'd told BBA before him, and I see his point. I can admit when I'm wrong, and it might have been a mistake not telling my blood family first.

Changing the topic, I say, "Tell me about your sons."

"They're my proudest achievement." Sawyer breaks out into a huge smile. "Finch is making a name for himself in sports reporting. He's mad about cycling and is hoping to score the first interview with Jaxon Ducati after his big drug scandal."

"You Bannister men love chasing a big story."

Sawyer turns to me and winks. "We sure do."

Something very unprofessional hangs between us—most likely the memory from two nights ago when he fucked me so hard I can still feel it when I walk, forty-eight hours later—but as tempting as it is to take advantage of being out here alone and turn things sexual again, I also want to learn more about him. "And your other son, Benji, he's an author, right?"

Sawyer keeps his eyes on me for a while before answering, "An internationally bestselling author, yes. He went through a rough patch with his mental health for a while there, but he's doing great now. Got a great partner, Darren. They were best

friends before they got together."

I chuckle. "Same as Logan and Wade."

"It makes sense." Sawyer turns, staring out into the city. "Friendship is the foundation of any good relationship."

I pause, then decide to ask the question anyway. "You speaking from experience?"

"Yeah." A strange look falls over his face. He's silent for a really long time before speaking again. "Elaine and I loved each other very much. Her passing keeps her in a capsule, and I don't want to do anything to tarnish her memory. First and foremost, we were great friends. We had so much in common, whether it was music or politics or both of us believing sleeping in on a Sunday is a human right."

Despite his lighthearted comment, his expression remains pensive. "We were so young when we got together. We fell pregnant and got married before either one of us knew who we truly were. We were so unprepared, and it took its toll on our relationship. I feel like we'd always have been friends, but I don't know if we'd have stayed together. It's kind of a tricky one to think about."

"I can understand that."

"You can?"

"Yeah. I mean, I don't have the lived experience you do, but I understand what you mean about not wanting to imagine a life without her now that she's gone. It's almost disrespectful to her memory, right?"

"Yeah. That's exactly it."

I nudge him with my elbow. "Don't sound so surprised. I'm wise and mature beyond my years."

He turns to face me, and we kiss. It's a soothing kiss. A gentle kiss. A coming home kiss.

After a while, Sawyer shifts, taking a half step back. He aims those inquisitive green eyes at me. "So, are we ready to talk about the elephant in the room now?"

"What elephant?"

He taps my shoulder, right next to my vomit stain. Fuck. I'd completely forgotten about that.

"Like I said, I'm not here sniffing around for some scandal or to ruin your reputation, but please don't insult my intelligence." He takes a good long hard look at me and asks, "You ready to talk? Properly?"

I drop my head back as far as it will go and stare at the stars overhead. "What do you want to know?"

He pauses, then asks the question I was dreading. "Have you got a child, Kynan?"

9

Sawyer

Kynan's expression is like a deer caught in headlights, and it gives me my answer. It all makes sense now.

The baby blanket draped across Tharin's shoulder on the first day he greeted Grayson and me.

Why Kynan is constantly ducking away.

Him acting all weird and paranoid, not letting me into his car, no doubt because there was baby evidence in there.

And now the vomit stain on his shoulder.

"I do," he finally says, bringing his head back up and looking me straight in the eye. "His name is Ashton. He's seven months old. I only found out he existed a little over a month ago."

He stops talking and stares out at the sprawling city.

"Just so you know, anything you choose to tell me now is strictly off the record."

"Thanks." He blows through his nose and keeps going. "I met Carrie at a PR event like this one. She and I got a little too drunk, and well, one thing led to another, and

we had sex. I've never slept with a fan before, but she signed an NDA so I figured what's the worst that could happen?"

"I see."

"Turns out, the best thing in the world happened." His face lights up as he tells me about Ashton, and I can tell that even though all of this came out of nowhere and is still very new, he loves being a dad.

"What about Carrie?"

His jaw tightens. "She decided motherhood wasn't for her. I struggle with it because on the one hand, I have to respect her decision. And I'm grateful she came to me and told me about Ash rather than just put him up for adoption without me knowing I was his father. But on the other hand, I wonder how anyone can..." He blows out a heavy breath. "How can anyone leave their child?... Does that make me an asshole?"

"Of course not. You're handling all of this incredibly well, and your feelings are just as valid as hers. It's a tricky situation you're navigating." I hesitate. "Was that why we had to chase you for so long to get you to agree to this piece?"

He half smiles. "A little, yeah. I already had a low opinion of the press. No offense."

"None taken."

"And then when Ash came into the picture, my shields went up even more."

"What happened with the press to make you hate us so much?"

He tucks a loose strand of hair behind his ear. "All six of us were so naive when we were starting out. We thought that since we were creating content, we'd be in control

of the narrative about us."

"And let me guess, you weren't."

"Nope. The media took one look at us with our tattoos and muscles and labeled us as party boys. Himbos... Fuckboys." His expression tightens, and I can see the pain those labels caused. "Nothing could be further from the truth. Tanner and Patrick are huge nerds who study the Billboard music charts like it's the Bible."

"They're the ones who do the music video reviews where they banter and fight with each other, right?"

"Yeah. That's them." He grins. "Silas is obsessed with learning new languages. He's currently up to six. And everyone thinks Rocky is this big bodybuilding stud who's out banging a different dude every night, but he's actually quiet and reserved, and a night of crocheting while listening to classical music with his cat in his lap is basically his idea of heaven."

"So who came up with BBA?"

"Beckett. He's slightly older and the most savvy one of us. He said that if the media were going to label us as bad boys, then we should play into it but in a way that works for us. Use it to get clicks and attention but not harm our reputations. He's obsessed with everything mid-twentieth century, from the architecture to movies and music. He suggested we become a modern-day version of The Rat Pack."

"You knew who The Rat Pack were?"

Kynan shakes his head. "No. He had to explain it to us. It was before my time."

I lean toward him. "For the record, it was before my time, too."

"You sure about that?" I poke him in his side, and he chuckles. "Anyway, that's how it came about. We became the Bad Boy Academy and play up having fun and being naughty or whatever, but in a safe, PG-rated kind of way. It allows us to appeal to the widest audience possible and stops us from getting called much worse."

"That's pretty smart."

"And as you know, the guys have become more like family than work peers." He smiles. "It's really cool."

I stare out at the city, taking all this new information in. I'd had an inkling something was up, and seeing the vomit stain on his shoulder slotted the final piece into place. It explained so much of his behavior, and now that I know he has a child, it cements my feelings for him even more.

Fatherhood is a challenge when you have nine months to prepare for it. I can't even imagine the shock he felt finding out the way he did, completely out of the blue. He's handling things so well. Better than I think I would if I were in his shoes.

After a few minutes, Kynan says, "I don't know how I want to handle this yet. I know I can't hide Ash from the world forever, but I'm not ready to go live with any big announcement."

"I won't pressure you. You have my word." Would it be great for my interview? Fuck yeah. This would take an already big story and turn it into something massive. But I'm a man of my word, and if Kynan isn't ready, then I won't pressure him. "Is that what you're worried about?"

"No. Yes." He shrugs then sighs. "I trust you, but it's not the only thing on my mind."

"What else is?"

"You."

"Me?"

"Yeah. I like you, Sawyer. A lot. More than I've ever liked a man...or woman for that matter."

"Does that frighten you?"

He shakes his head. "That's the thing. I'm not scared. Or even all that confused. Something about you unlocks something in me that feels so fucking right that it's almost like I don't even have to question it... Actually, that's not true. I do have one question."

"What is it?"

"When you said that nothing more could happen between us while we worked together..." My face warms, hating that I've broken that promise so many times I've lost count. "But you hinted that afterward, maybe we could...explore."

"That's right."

"Is that option still on the table?"

"Yeah. It is."

"Because I don't want what happened the other night to be a one-off."

His words hit me right in the center of my chest in a mixture of relief that he doesn't regret what happened and hope that maybe, just maybe, he wants to see where this goes as much as I do. "I don't want it to be a one-off, either." His blue eyes sparkle,

and I add, "Let's get this interview out of the way, and then see what happens."

"I'd like that."

"I'd like that, too." I thread my fingers through his. "There are some other things we'll need to discuss at some point."

"Like you being ancient?"

"Cheeky fucker. But yeah, there is a significant age gap between us."

"I'm a new dad."

"I'm based in Australia."

"I live here. Oh, and your kids are older than me."

"I thought we agreed to never bring that up again."

He chuckles. "Sorry, sorry."

I squeeze his hand a little tighter. "I think it's clear we have some stuff to figure out, but maybe we can find a way to make it work?"

His lips stretch into a smile. "I'd like that."

"I'd like that, too." I place a soft kiss against his lips and murmur, "Wanna head back inside?"

"Actually, no."

I lift an eyebrow. "Okay. Wanna stay out here and keep acting unprofessional a while longer?"

He tilts his head to the side. "Ordinarily, I'd say yes. But not tonight."

I frown when I see the worry return to his face. "What's wrong?"

"Ashton's sick, and I feel terrible being away from him."

"Well, then, let's go to him."

"Both of us?"

"Yeah. I've got plenty of experience with sick babies."

His eyes widen. "Are you... Are you sure?"

"Of course. You're a package deal. I might as well meet your other half, right?"

Kynan lifts our joined hands and presses his lips to my knuckles.

"You're the fucking best, Sawyer."

"Yeah. I really fucking am."

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:26 am

Three months later...

Kynan

It's a Friday morning, and Sawyer and I are starting the day the way we always do these days, in bed with Ashton crawling around between us, his soft, sweet coos filling the room.

I was so nervous about Sawyer meeting Ashton that night three months ago. It's one thing to say you're cool with a dude who has a baby, it's another thing to be faced with it. I was scared it would all be too much for him. He's already done the dad thing. I wouldn't blame him for not wanting to go there again.

But from the moment they met, they just bonded. By which I mean Ashton threw up all over Sawyer because he was still sick, but Sawyer took it well, laughing it off. We stayed up all night with the little fella, talking and comforting poor Ash as he struggled to sleep.

Three months later, Sawyer has practically moved in. I've been able to tone down my crazy work schedule, and Sawyer has been spending most of his time editing the interview, getting ready for its launch tonight. Every spare moment we have, we spend together.

I told my other brother, Bodhi, and my parents about Ashton and introduced him, as well as Sawyer, to them. I've met and hung out with both of Sawyer's sons. Benji was in the US on a book signing tour with his partner, Darren, and Finch is in town, still doggedly trying to land that exclusive interview. I can see why Sawyer is so proud of

them. They're great guys.

Both of our families have been so accepting of us as a couple, which has been a huge relief. I was nervous meeting Benji and Finch since I'm younger than them, but they've both told me that as long as Sawyer is happy and I treat him well, that's all they care about.

"How are you feeling about tonight?" I ask as Sawyer blows raspberries on Ashton's belly.

He looks up. "I'm excited. You?"

"Excited, too. But also a little scared."

"It'll be amazing. You're happy with the final cut, right?"

"I am." It's not the first public screening of the interview I'm nervous about, it's the surprise I have planned for afterward.

Sawyer and Grayson's original plan was the traditional approach: to shop the interview around the major networks. They received plenty of interest, but every outlet had the same condition—they wanted final approval.

That was a deal-breaker for Sawyer because, true to what he'd been saying all along, he didn't want to exploit me by doing a cheap, headline-grabbing interview. He wanted to give me the opportunity to tell my story my way.

Getting nowhere, I put Grayson in touch with my management team and, together, they came up with DELVE , a YouTube channel—and podcast—where Sawyer interviews people and tells their stories by delving into their lives.

His way. Direct to the public. No corporate networks. No compromising on values

and integrity. Just good old fashioned in-depth interviews and storytelling.

Over the past few months, I've been helping him build up his social media presence even more. My interview, which will launch his new platforms, goes live on YouTube at midnight tonight. It already has close to three million people registered to watch it as soon as it releases, which is a record, apparently.

"I'm really proud of you," I say as Ashton crawls along the bed from Sawyer to me.

"For what?"

"For doing things your way. For staying true to your principles. You could have easily sold this interview, made bank, and been done with it."

"That's not why I'm doing this."

"I know. And your sons are going to be even more proud of you than they already are," I say, knowing that's his driving motivation for this comeback.

A faint smile tugs at his mouth. "I hope so."

It's so moving that Sawyer wants his kids to see their dad return to his peak, and it totally sucks that we live in a world where people get shoved aside just because they're in their forties. Why does everyone make such a big deal about age?

I was shocked when Sawyer told me about the ageism he'd experienced in the industry. I knew women experienced it—which is wrong and needs to change—but I had no idea it affected men, too. I assumed him stepping out of the spotlight was his choice, not something imposed on him because job offers started drying up. I really hope his comeback is a huge success for not only him but all the people out there who have a dream, whatever age they may be. And also because I've seen Sawyer dance, and he would be terrible on *Dancing with the Stars* .

"Uh-oh." Sawyer looks down at Ashton and waves his hand in front of his nose. "Someone needs to have their nappy changed. You happy for me to do it?"

"Always," I reply with a smile.

"Back in five." Sawyer says, scooping Ashton up and taking him into the nursery.

I'm much better with the whole diaper situation, but I'll never pass up an offer for someone to do it for me. I get up and make myself useful by putting on a fresh jug of coffee. As I wait for the water to boil, I think about the term settling down . It's what my brothers said on our video call last night, ribbing me that Sawyer and I are doing just that, settling down. But why is it called that? Why not settling up? Because if this is what a settled life looks like, then sign me up forever.

I turn around to see Sawyer carrying Ashton into the kitchen, and my heart swoops. I love seeing the man I love with my son. There are literally no words to describe what it does to me.

Speaking of words, despite Sawyer practically moving in and us spending all our free time together and being very domesticated, we still haven't said those three little words to each other.

But I'm as sure of my love for Sawyer as I am of my love for Ashton. Sawyer is the best person I've ever met, and my plan is to tell him I love him tonight, right after the screening.

That night...

Sawyer

"I can't get over how cute he is," Benji says, gushing over Ashton for the millionth time tonight.

"Don't go getting any ideas," Darren says, lifting a finger. "I am not ready to be a father."

I clap him on the shoulder. "I'll let you boys in on a little secret." They come in closer. "You never feel ready. You just have to take the plunge and do it."

"And is that what you're doing?" Finch asks. "Taking the plunge?"

"I sure am."

In more ways than one. I'm huddled away in a quiet corner of The Aero Theatre in Santa Monica with Finch, Benji, Darren, and baby Ash. Tonight's the big night. The first public viewing of the interview before it gets released online at midnight.

We've been teasing it on social media for about a month now, and the interest is huge. Doesn't mean I'm not nervous as hell, though. It feels a little strange to be doing it this way. I'm used to having a network behind me, having them handle the marketing and PR blitz. But I wasn't prepared to cave in to their demands since it meant I wouldn't be able to keep my promise to Kynan, so the indie path it is. It's proven successful for others, so I'm hoping it works for me, too.

"There you guys are," Kynan says, approaching us. "I was starting to get worried someone had kidnapped Ashton."

"Why did you look at me when you said that?" Benji asks in mock surprise.

"Makes the most sense," Kynan and I respond at the same time.

"Ughh, I love you both, but you two are too much." Finch groans with an eye roll and a smile.

The guys proceed to tease me and Kynan the way they always do whenever we get

together, but my heart is so happy hearing Finch say he loves both of us. It's wonderful how he and Benji have been so welcoming of Kynan and Ashton.

Kynan and I have faced a number of barriers these past few months. Some I was confident we could overcome easily. Like, say, me moving to the US. I have several homes in Australia, but nothing was tying me there. Relocating to LA was a relatively simple decision.

Others, like me meeting his parents for the first time, or Kynan meeting my boys were downright terrifying because that's when the age gap between us became impossible to ignore. When it's just him and me—or him and me and Ashton as is more often the case—I don't feel the age difference at all. He's smart and mature way beyond his years. But in the presence of his father, who is only two years older than me, or my kids, who are both older than him, it's a glaring truth that can't be avoided. Thankfully, everyone has been great about it and not made a big deal out of it, except for the occasional teasing, which is to be expected.

"Hate to break up this big happy messed-up family." Grayson breaks through the crowd to reach us. "But, mate, we gotta get you out there. Need to schmooze with some bigwigs and all that."

I sigh. "Fine. Can I take Ashton as a buffer?"

Kynan takes him from Benji. "No using my son as a shield. Go. You'll be fine. I'll join you in a moment."

"Fine." I plant a kiss on Ashton's head then one on Kynan's cheek before pressing the flesh with a who's-who of the media elite. Like always, Grayson takes the lead, and like always, I'm grateful for it. When we finally get a break, we head straight for the bar.

"So," he says, once we've placed our drinks order. "Was I right?"

"About what?"

"About you not being able to last the two weeks before things with you and Kynan progressed?"

Grayson had to return to Australia right after we shot the interview, and this is the first time he's been back to the States.

"I can neither confirm nor deny anything."

He chuckles, taking the drinks from the bartender, and raises his glass. "You deserve to be happy, mate. I'm stoked for you. This interview is going to be a smash hit, and you've somehow managed to convince a hot, young, successful guy to take a chance on a decrepit old fart like yourself. Cheers."

"I am not cheersing to that," I say, moving my glass away and taking a sip of vodka. "How do you think people are going to react when it comes out about Kynan and me?"

So far, we've managed to keep our romance under wraps, but once the interview goes live, we'll be releasing a joint statement to hopefully get ahead of things before anyone else beats us to it and twists our relationship into something it's not. Despite our massive age difference and the fact we met in a work capacity, there's nothing inappropriate or lewd or twisted about what we've done. This isn't some cheap and tawdry work fling; it's the real fucking deal.

"I have a feeling it'll be just fine." And with an unnerving smirk, he claps me on the back and walks away.

I make my way back to the boys as a timer on the big screen starts counting down from ten. I snuggle up with Ashton on my lap and Kynan next to me. Grayson, my boys, and Kynan's brothers are seated all around us.

Five, four, three, two, one!

The interview opens with a montage of the footage we shot and my voiceover. "To the world, Kynan Parker-Gillis is...."

Everyone is watching the screen, but I've seen this package so many times during the editing process I can recite it off by heart.

Instead, my focus is split between the little man I'm holding and the incredible man next to me. My heart is filled with so much love and joy and excitement about the future. Yes, I want this interview to be a huge smash and make my sons proud of me, but I'm also really excited about the prospect of starting a new chapter of my life with Kynan and Ashton.

The interview segment begins. Kynan was so nervous on the day, changing his shirt at least half a dozen times. He looks great on the big screen in a tight-fitting navy-blue Ralph Lauren polo, his hair swept loosely into a ponytail.

I go through a few of the usual standard questions, and then we get to the part I suspect is going to be the thing people talk about. The key takeaway from the interview. The headline-generating story.

It was Kynan's idea.

On the big screen, I say, "I believe you've recently experienced a major change in your personal life."

"That's right." Kynan smiles through his nerves. "I recently found out I'm a father to the most beautiful little boy in the world, Ashton Parker-Gillis." As he talks, a photo montage of Ashton plays on the screen. There are no face shots, just touching images of father and son, taken in a way to protect the bub's identity.

The crowd murmurs, and Kynan looks at me expectantly. "It's all good," I assure him, running one hand over his knee while keeping Ashton secure on my lap with the other. "It's all good."

I have no way of predicting how this audience, or the global audience who will watch this online in a few hours, will react, but no matter the response we get, we will be good because we'll get through anything together.

The interview ends shortly after. When the screen goes black, there's silence in the room. Deathly silence. One of the bartenders slides a glass across the counter, and we can all hear it. It's that quiet.

The silence seems to stretch on forever, and then...applause.

People push to their feet and start clapping, whistling, hollering. Kynan sags in relief beside me, and I'm about to tell him we should probably go up front to say a few words when the screen flickers back to life.

People stop clapping and sit back down. I have no idea what's happening. The package is over.

I look over at Grayson and mouth, "What's going on?"

"It was all his idea," he mouths back, pointing at Kynan.

I turn to Kynan. "Care to fill me in?"

"Watch." He tips his head toward the screen. "And all will be revealed."

Kynan appears on the screen again, shirtless and standing in front of a clothesline. "Thank you for watching my interview with the incredible Sawyer Banister. You've heard my story, and you've met my son... but there's one thing I haven't shared with

you. Yet."

My heart starts racing. What is he doing?

"You see, while filming this interview and spending a few weeks with Sawyer, something happened that's never happened to me before. I fell in love." A pause. "With a man." Another pause. "With Sawyer Bannister."

The shot changes to a montage of clips and photos of me and Kynan taken during our two weeks together.

Then Kynan's voice carries on in a voiceover. "I agreed to do this interview to let people see a different side to me than what you get on social media. I thought it might even be fun. But I got something much better than just that. I got to see the moment I met the man I would fall in love with."

The screen freezes on the very first photo Grayson took of me and Kynan, the day we met for the first time at the shoot at the retro house. I've never seen these shots before. Truth be told, I'd forgotten we'd even taken them.

I glance over at Kynan, and there's nothing but love in his eyes.

The video cuts back to Kynan by the clothesline. He puts on a black T-shirt that says, "Yep, I'm bi," a throwback to the Australian magazine cover I did when I came out in the noughties. "Oh, and one more thing..." He spins around and reveals what's written on the back of his shirt: I love you, SB .

I hand Ashton over to Benji and cup Kynan's face in my hands. "I love you, too."

He says it back, but it's a little hard to hear him with all the cheering and whooping going on around us. But in this moment, all I see is the man I'm in love with and the incredible life I can't wait to have with him and his son.

I hope you enjoyed Sawyer and Kynan!

You met some characters in this book who have their own stories, too.