



Spooky Level Up (Love Takes No Holidays #1)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: CHARLIE

My ex taught me that love is a scam. Which is fine—it's not like I need that rose-tinted fairytale. I'm perfectly content enjoying a different man every night while focusing on my video game career.

Until I run into Ben on Halloween. He's big, charming, crazy good in bed and a bit of a nerd. He doesn't make fun of my passion, nor does he treat me like a trophy boytoy the way my ex did. The more time we spend together, the more I realize how painfully perfect he is.

There are just two problems: I still don't believe in love, and he's my brother's best friend.

BEN

I returned to the UK to help my sister expand the family business. Meeting the cutest guy ever at a theme park is the last thing I expected to happen. No one has caught my eye for years.

And the crazy part? Charlie is my best friend's brother, and the crush I had on him as a teen is back in full force. But we are both old enough now, so I'm not wasting my chance with him. His no-dating rule gets in the way, but throw in a little revenge plot when his ex decides to be an ass, and I have everything I need to prove to Charlie that I am his person.

This is a low-angst Halloween novella that features brother's best friend, a sassy gamer who doesn't believe in love, grumpy/sunshine, size difference, high heat, a revenge plot, opposites attract, a theme park and a trip to Greece.

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Chapter 1

Charlie

My boyfriend is an ass.

Okay, correction. My ex - boyfriend . As of right now.

“You can’t be seriously breaking up with me, Charlie!” Andy roars, huffing and puffing like an overheating bull.

Which is impossible, considering this lovely part of our globe known as England rarely sees above twenty-three degrees Celsius. Or seventy-three-ish in Fahrenheit. So, technically, he couldn’t be overheating.

“I can and I am,” I correct him, crossing my arms over my chest and angling my body toward the front door of my London apartment. “Get your shit and fuck off.”

Andy gives me the nastiest scowl his handsome face can muster, flailing his bulging arms in exasperation. They are huge just like the rest of his 6’3” frame of pure muscle and strength. “You are out of your mind!”

Am I? Maybe to him. After all, how dare I refuse to hang out with his jock buddies so I can stay home and play video games? The sheer audacity.

“Don’t be a drama queen. Let’s handle this like the adults we are,” I say calmly. Yeah, I’ve had it with him.

He gapes at me, brown eyes livid and fuming. Alarm bells ring that maybe aggravating him wasn't the smartest idea considering he's twice my size and weight, but it's a bit too late to take back what I've said. Besides, I don't feel like looking for a more diplomatic approach to the end of our short-lived relationship.

Andy stalks over to me, banging his fist into the wall to the left. "Ungrateful prick," he growls in his British accent, baring white teeth at me. Despite living here since an early age, I still don't sound native. "Whatever. I've had it with your stupid nerd shit." He scoffs, pointedly looking at my desktop setup behind the vintage armchair I got at a sale. "And the sex wasn't even that great. Should've listened to the guys. They warned me not to deal with your type."

I raise an eyebrow, pursing my lips. "Yeah? And what type am I, asshole?"

He shakes his head and steps back, giving me a dejected once-over. "Loser weirdo who lives in his little imaginary world instead of real life."

I see red. How dare that idiot speak to me like that? If I wasn't a twig compared to him, I'd have beaten the shit out of him by now. "Oh yeah? As if you didn't benefit from the money this loser weirdo makes!"

"Not worth the bitchy attitude you've been giving me for the past month. Or the lack of sex." Grabbing his suitcase from where I've diligently packed and prepared it for him by the dining table, he shoves his shoulder into me and storms out. "Don't come crying to me to take you back. And good luck finding someone who'll tolerate even half of your shit."

Asshole. Bastard. Piece of shit. Waste of resources. I can't believe I thought we could work.

I shouldn't have ignored the red flags, that's on me. His dumb chad friends, the

constant drinking, the sharp quips about my gaming career, the going out and dragging me around like I'm some trophy boyfriend.

In my defense, in my twenty-two years so far, he was my first boyfriend. I met him at a bar that my friends, Trish and Greg, took me to after the stressful summer play-ins were over, and he was all smiles and flirtatious glances. It was love at first sight for me. My lonely heart wasted no time getting attached. We hooked up the second time we hung out, then began dating. Things were fine at first, but then he started trying to change me. To make me like him and his monkey-brained friends who only know how to drink, fuck and play football at a mediocre level.

I groan, sliding to the floor with my back pressed against the wall. I can't believe I was such an idiot. I should've known it was too good to be true, that someone like him was just using a 'weirdo' like me. I'm aware that my interests and hobbies are a little unconventional to some people, but my brother, who's living abroad, and my two best friends have never held them against me. They've always supported me, so am I really at fault for thinking that there is a person out there—my person—who'll love me for who I am, like Trish and Greg love each other?

What - fucking - ever . My eyes have been opened and I'll know better next time. Fairytale love and princes on white horses just don't exist in the real world.

I huff air out of my nose, pull out my phone and glare at the door Andy didn't even bother to close.

“Fuck you, asshat. I hope your dick falls off.”

I tap on my device's screen to order a pizza. Since Andy won't be around forcing me to eat his 'healthy' smoothies, I might as well start enjoying food again, right?

There's nothing wrong with a healthy diet—I do like my veggies and I've never been

obsessed with fast food—but the copious amounts of protein powder, pre-workout crap and fat-rich stuff that he consumes to upkeep his massive body can hardly be called that. Not to mention the energy drinks he's forced to chug down every other day because he stays out partying all night and has to go to practice or lectures.

But really, part of me is grateful. I let myself believe in happily-ever-afters and I got burned for it. As much as it hurts now and makes me want to blow my savings on hiring someone to beat the shit of that sexy jock, I'm glad it happened sooner rather than later.

Lesson learned—no matter how hot or nice or perfect the next guy might seem, I won't mistake his fleeting interest for love.

That rose-tinted fantasy I've been dreaming of just doesn't exist.

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Chapter 2

Charlie

Greg nudges me toward the theme park gate four weeks later, Trish trailing behind. I can't believe I let my two best friends convince me to join them for this stupid Halloween carnival. I don't even like Halloween.

Yet here I am, decked out in a pro-level cosplay of my favorite book character and about to head to the stupid haunted house that's most definitely not giving me the creeps. My friends have opted for a dragon-shifter duo, and unlike me, they look positively excited.

"Babe, stop overthinking it," Trish scolds me, rubbing the space between my furrowed brows with her blue finger. Her face is painted blue too as part of her getup, contrasting her deep red curls. "His dumb post got taken down. It will be fine."

"Will it though?" I grumble, scanning my ticket at the barcode machine. It beeps and the gate opens, letting me in. "I can't fucking believe he posted that stupid picture! And he's the one that made me wear that crap in the first place."

"I know it's no consolation, but the cowgirl stuff looked cute on you. Objectively," her husband pitches in, earning himself a death glare from me. "But yeah, he had no right to post something so personal. I hope his dick withers."

I'm sure I could probably buy something to make it happen. I have a voodoo enthusiast buddy who's got connections on the Dark Web.

Trish throws an arm around my neck, smooching my cheek. “I know this look. You are concocting some evil plan in your smart head. Don’t. It’s not worth it.”

I know she is right, but I’m still fuming. I can’t comprehend why that ass Andy would post such personal pictures just for petty revenge! Ugh.

“Deep breaths, Charlie. And no frowning. You are scaring all the potential stallions that want to get in your pants tonight,” Trish points out, steering me toward the haunted house attraction. “Just focus on having fun. The post is down, and the damage was minimal. I doubt anyone cares that you showed up on the internet in a slightly kinky outfit. That shit happens all the time.”

Still, it wasn’t by my own choice. My controversial photo was posted by Andy without any input from me. If that isn’t the most assholest thing to have ever assholeed, I don’t know what is. But, well, Trish is not wrong. The best way to get over it and the stress it caused me is to have some fun and maybe even get laid. It’s been a while and I’m feeling withdrawal symptoms.

We reach the haunted house. It’s a two-story Victorian building with stained glass and ornamented gables. An intentionally messy garden sits at the front, the weeds and overgrown bushes cresting the wrought-iron fence completing the creepy look.

“I hear they have a 99% scare rate,” Trish informs me, dragging me up the creaky stairs.

I wrinkle my nose as the gruff scream of an adult male sounds from somewhere inside. I don’t like this. “With kids, maybe.”

“Oh, yeah? You sure about that, buddy? You look a little pale.” Greg snorts, wiggling his thick dirty blond eyebrows at me.

I aim my best scowl his way. He grins at me in response and pulls the strap-thingy attached to his wings, making them flutter up and down while a dinosaur screech plays from the small speaker attached to their base.

A giggle pours out of me. Even though he's wearing a dragon costume, he still retains that supermodel look he has going about him. It's no surprise, really—he represents a bunch of brands, so I suspect it's something that he can't really escape because it comes to him naturally. I don't think I'm bad-looking per se—I've got a nice face with high cheekbones and soft features—but he's what you'd call conventionally attractive.

The staff person posted in front of the house halts us, instructing us to wait until the light above the door goes green. A few more shrieks split the air as glass shatters inside the building. My hackles rise and shivers race down my spine.

I have hated haunted houses ever since my brother took me to my first one as a kid. I must've been no older than five, but that stuff traumatized me for life. Trish and Greg don't officially know about it as I haven't told anyone, but I highly suspect that they might've figured it out because they've made it their life's mission to take me to a haunted house attraction every Halloween.

I study my best friends as they fuss about with each other's costumes. I'm sure that if I explained they'd understand, though knowing them, they'll drag me to even more scary places for 'therapy' reasons. So, I guess it's best to keep quiet about my borderline phobia.

When ten more minutes pass and the door sign still shines in red, I hook a finger over my shoulder. "This is taking ages. I'm bored. Wanna check out the shooting range? Or we could do the rollercoaster first?"

Trish snaps her blue gaze to me, planting her hands on her hips. "Are you chickening

out, Charlie?”

I arch my eyebrows high. “Who, me? No way! I just thought we came here to have fun.” I give the still red light above the door a pointed look. “This is not particularly fun.”

A noise between a click and a ding sounds then, and the light changes to green. My stomach sinks, cold sweat peppering the back of my neck.

“Wow. Perfect timing, let’s go!” Greg claps his hands, ushering us inside.

God help me.

Taking a deep breath, I plaster on a smile and follow my friends.

Inside, it’s dark inside and smells like firewood. A single chandelier with real candles hangs in the middle of the entry hall, throwing a dim light that barely illuminates the surroundings.

“The front door is now locked. The only way out of this house is via the back entrance. But beware: the kitchen is currently inaccessible, so you must find an alternative way to get to the conservatory,” Trish reads aloud from the framed instructions that are left on the end table near the shoe rack.

“Oh shit, this sounds fun! It’s like an escape room and haunted house in one!” Greg cheers, grabbing the single flashlight that’s hanging off the empty coat hanger.

I suppress a shudder. Amazing. So not only do I have to deal with potential jump scares, but I also have to use my brain. I should’ve stayed home and played games. Obviously, it’s too late now, so there is no point regretting my decision to give into my friends’ excitement for this stupid holiday. I’m already here, so the best course of

action would be to get out of here as soon as possible so I can go straight home and sulk in peace while stuffing my face with pizza.

“I can’t believe I let you drag me here. This is so lame,” I whine, snatching the flashlight from him as I head over to a carved wooden door.

It won’t budge. I frown and try the next one. Then the next. Five minutes later, it’s clear that none of the doors will open. We are forced to go upstairs.

Fucking great. Of course we’d have to go through the entire house. Otherwise, how would the staff scare us?

Sighing, I lead the way up, trying to pretend I don’t hear every creak and squeak and rustling noise the house makes. It’s really hard when all I want to do is shut my eyes and hug Trish so she can protect me from whatever real ghosts might haunt this place. I know it’s silly. I don’t really believe in ghosts, but I also, to this day, can’t explain what my five-year-old self saw when my brother and I went to my first haunted house.

“I think we should separate!” Trish announces when the first room we enter is a dead end.

I give her a nasty glare. “No.”

“What do you mean, no? It’s what everyone does in horror movies!”

“Yes, and then they end up dead,” I argue, really really not liking the idea of being on my own.

“Exactly!” She grabs Greg’s hand, dragging him down the corridor. It splits after an alcove with a table and a cushioned bench. “Charlie, you go check the hallway on the

other side of the landing. I'll go left and Greg will go right. We meet up here in ten minutes!"

Before I can protest or list one of the many reasons why this is a bad idea, she's gone. Greg and I stare at each other for a few seconds and then he shrugs and disappears too.

"Great."

Grumbling obscenities under my breath, I turn on my heel and stalk toward my designated area. Sconces with candles maintain the overall gloom, offering only enough light so I'm not walking in complete darkness. Doors line up both walls once I pass the lounging area by the stairs, the space between them filled with pictures of eerie landscapes. Most of the rooms I try are locked. The bathroom I slip into smells like mildew and offers no clues as to how we can get to the conservatory, so I move on to the next room.

It's a children's bedroom with an attached bathroom. I wave my phone's flashlight around since Greg took the one provided by the staff. Old toys litter the floor, and a dollhouse looms in the corner, just off the bed. I approach it, my every careful step causing the floorboards to creak.

Just perfect, Charlie. Now the entire ghost population knows where you are.

Speaking of which, other than some scary noises that make me question my life choices now and then, I'm yet to come across an actual scare. Not that I am complaining. In fact, I'm not. I like it this way.

Scrunching my nose as the smell of dust intensifies, I crouch down and peek inside the dollhouse. The entry hall looks exactly like the one downstairs.

“Oh, shit. Is this a replica?”

Sudden excitement thrums in my veins. This must be a clue. Heart racing, I examine the layout. Then I straighten up, cross my arms over my chest and frown. It’s a clue alright. Too bad I’m horrible with directions.

Rolling my eyes at myself, I snap a picture with my phone and turn around. The candles suddenly go out, erasing what little I could see. My phone’s flashlight also goes out, refusing to turn back on as I tap my fingers all over the screen.

My stomach plummets to my feet. Is the stupid haunted house equipped with flashlight jamming devices? Seriously? Do such devices even exist? That’s going a bit overboard.

A hinge screeches from the corridor, then a floorboard creaks.

I swallow hard, trying to get enough air to my lungs.

The light in the bathroom comes on, seeping into the room from under the door. I see a shadow move inside.

Oh no, no, no. Fuck this. I’m not getting possessed here.

I clench my clammy hands into fists. The light turns off. The door hisses open. I bolt, scrambling to turn the flashlight on as I emerge in the corridor. But it refuses to comply. The groan I am about to grace the stupid phone with dies in my throat. I stop dead in my tracks, eyes-wide and brain reeling.

Because this can’t fucking be. The way I came through is gone! There is no corridor, no locked rooms, no creepy paintings. Just a wall with a huge mirror on it.

Oh my god, what is happening here? This is so not funny anymore.

A thud sounds from the room I just left, like the door to the bathroom closing. Fear spears through me, rooting me in place. I need to run. I need to follow the corridor further into the house. It's bound to lead somewhere, right?

But I can't, my body frozen in place as the darkness around me swirls and spreads and threatens to eat me.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. I knew this was a bad idea! I should've stayed with Trish or Greg!

But I didn't. They aren't here to help me. I am on my own. Inside a creepy house with nowhere to run as a dark outline steps out of the bedroom and blocks the way forward.

My pulse pounds in my ears as hot and cold waves surge through my body. The dark shape approaches me, scraping the wall with its nails. My panicked breathing turns into wheezing. I'm too scared to even move. This is too much.

So I do the only thing any sane person would do in such a life-or-death situation.

I ball my hands into fists, brace my feet firmly on the ground and yell, "Shoo you evil asshole ghost or I'm going to beat the shit out of you! I'm ex special forces and I have a black belt in judo!"

If I can't run, then I sure as hell am going to fight. Or try to. I don't actually have a black belt in judo.

"Really?" a deep voice whispers in my ear from behind, the sound so tangible I feel it caress my goosebumps-covered neck with its ghostly fingers.

My blood turns to ice, my every nerve-ending shorting. There is someone behind me.

I scream with all my might as my heart tries to hammer its way out of my chest.

Oh my god, there is someone behind me!

I don't think from that point on, I just act on impulse, spinning on my heel and sending my fist at whoever is trying to kill me. They grunt. I keep hitting. I'm not going to die here. Fuck that.

Shouting at the top of my lungs, I shove with my elbow. My attacker chants some curse in a gibberish language, but my legs are finally working now that adrenaline is in control of my body. This is my chance. I just need to slip the ghost currently trying to haunt me and get past the creepy outline.

No biggie, I've already lost it. I got this.

Until I don't as strong arms encircle my willowy frame and pull me inside the dark wall.

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Chapter 3

Ben

The guy screams and thrashes as I carry him over my shoulder through the tunnel in the wall. I can catch the occasional nonsense about exorcisms and holy water and garlic baguettes, but trying to speak to him only aggravates him further, so I give up on that.

I've encountered all kinds of reactions today. I agreed to do my friend a favor by covering for him at the fair since I didn't really have any plans for Halloween. It's an easy job , he said. You just scare a few kids and go home , he said.

Oh yeah, Terrance? Tell that to the hysterical guy I'm carrying like a bag of potatoes. He's currently cursing my entire bloodline, threatening he'll return as a ghost and haunt the shit out of even my horses.

I snort despite the ridiculousness of the situation. But it's kind of funny. I just wish he'd shut up for a moment so I can talk to him and apologize. He's convinced I'm a real ghost or a serial killer posing as staff, never mind the fact that there are cameras everywhere and he knew he was walking into a silly haunted house attraction.

And seriously, if he's so phobic, why even enter? Surely, he'd know how bad of an idea something like that is.

Finally, I emerge into the control room. We chill here when we have downtime. The camera feed is playing on the four screens, and by the looks of things, the two friends

of my screaming damsel-in-distress are having the time of their life.

Of course I had to get roped with the crazy one. But then again, it's also amusing. I mean, who in their right mind threatens to beat up a ghost?

"I'm gonna put you down now, okay? And I'll turn on the lights," I try, but get only more screaming and clawing and snarling in response.

I stifle a chuckle. Fuck, I'm so glad he's tiny. I don't think I'd have been able to manhandle someone my size.

Shutting the door, I let go of the guy. He crumples to the floor, aiming a nasty scowl at me as he skitters away until his back hits the side of the desk. He looks spooked and like he's about to pass out from shock.

I bite on my lip. At least he stopped screaming. Shit. My 'ghost whispering in your ear' act was too much.

"You okay?" I ask and turn on the lights.

He squeezes his eyes, but then snaps them open almost immediately after. They are like laser sights; trained on me and following me as I plop in the squeaky office chair across from him.

I get no reply and so I simply stare him down as he does the same. He's breathing hard. His black hair curtains his lean face, where a delicate nose, big blue eyes and exquisitely sculpted brow ridge and lips grace him with doll-like elegance. He's wearing what looks to be a very well-made DIY cosplay of the tactical armor from the third Ravaged Stars novel, just like I thought. It complements his pretty features with its masculine and minimalistic design, giving him an edge that I find rather intriguing.

It's also why I approached him. I swung by the fortune teller before my shift started, and out of curiosity let the old woman read my future. She said I'd cross paths with a black ghost from the past, but I didn't believe her. Picture me surprised when I saw this guy enter the haunted house. I just had to have a better look at him, though I'm yet to figure out the 'from the past' part.

"I'm Ben. I work here. Sorry for scaring you like this. I didn't think it would go this badly," I say calmly.

His livid eyes scan the room, bouncing from me to the door, then to the shelves overflowing with props, and finally to the monitors. He cocks his head, scrunching his nose as his brain seems to work overtime to catch up. It's kind of cute. Or maybe it's that he is cute.

"Oh," he breathes out, his entire body sagging. He blinks at me slowly, frowns, and then flushes, burying his face in his elegant hands. "Oh god, this is embarrassing."

I grin. I suppose it is for him. "I won't hold it against you, I promise. And I do mean it when I say I'm sorry. It wasn't my intention to give you a heart attack."

He gives me an unconvinced once-over, peeking from between his lean fingers. "I thought that was the point of jump scares."

Snatching the bottle of water I keep on the shelf, I toss it to him. He scrambles to catch it, nodding in thanks when he does. I'm transfixed on his neck moving as he takes a big sip.

"Well yes, I guess. Sort of. It's complicated," I acknowledge, almost failing to catch the bottle when he throws it back to me.

He snorts, shaking his head. "You're weird."

I raise an eyebrow at him, feeling a smile tug at the corners of my mouth. “I’m weird, Mr. ‘Shoo you evil asshole ghost’?”

He groans, visibly cringing. “I’ve had a bad day, okay? Please forget this ever happened. Or, you know, that I tried to punch a ghost.” He sighs, rubbing the sides of his face. The tinge of pink in his cheeks is still there.

I should do as he says. We are practically strangers and I don’t tend to spare brain cells on random people. But he’s kind of adorable. In a dorky ‘I must protect him from all bad and scary things’ kind of way? And he fit so well in my arms, even though he was technically trying to claw my eyes out.

But I can forgive that part. I can’t explain it, but there is just something so enticing about him. Just looking at him makes my heart beat faster and my fingertips tingle with the need to ruffle his mop of dark curls. Or trace his delicate jaw, stroke his rosy cheeks, part his full lips with my tongue...

I blink, a frisson of heat sending a thrill down my spine and right to my cock. I think I wouldn’t mind kissing him.

Not backing out of our stare contest, he huffs out and narrows his eyes. “What?”

The slight edge to his voice, coupled with the broody vibe he maintains without even trying pulls a chuckle out of me. His sky-blue eyes gain intensity of the aggressive type, but his attempt to intimidate me only makes me want to tease him more.

“What’s your name?” I toss when, really, I should be leading him out of the haunted house attraction.

But there are still ten minutes left before his friends’ time is up, so I might as well make the best of the situation, right? Besides, I’m curious about his day now.

He stands and pats himself down as if to get rid of invisible dust. Then he fumbles with one of the suit's straps, his frown softening even if his gaze remains a little suspicious. "It's Charlie."

Is he nervous? And is it good nervous or bad nervous? "I'm Ben." I push up from the old chair and hold out my hand.

I used to know someone named Charlie. He was cute like this guy and should be about the same age. Twenty-one? Twenty-two maybe. So, two years younger than me.

He pulls on the corner of his lip, amusement displacing some of the apprehension still lurking in his eyes. "I know. You told me already."

His grip is firm, even if his hand is smaller than mine. It slots perfectly in mine as I close my fingers around it and soak up the pleasant smoothness of his skin. It's so unlike the cuts and chaffs that working as an engineer comes with. But I love my job, so I don't mind it.

Our handshake lasts what feels like hours, both of us as if entranced. There is just something so comfortable about the contact. It's like how it feels when you go home after a long time away, though I can't really explain why a stranger would cause a sensation like this.

If I'm being honest, I don't think it really matters right now because sparks are dancing under my skin. Every moment is bliss. I rub the underside of his wrist gently, his quickened pulse reverberating through me as my own heart tries to drill a hole out of my chest.

Can Charlie feel how madly it's beating? I seek out his gaze. His eyes are locked on our hands, dark and a little wondrous. He looks like he doesn't know exactly what's

happening, like this is the first time he's shaking a hand with someone and he's hellbent on soaking up every sensation.

I step closer, a whiff of vanilla and mango making my head spin. His fingers tangle with mine. I suck in a breath, my dick jerking inside my cargo pants. He looks up at me, a spark of something irresistible flickering in his gorgeous blue depths.

I want to gobble him up.

He raises an eyebrow as if in challenge, a smirk teasing his kissable lips.

Can he tell?

My heart skips a beat as I lean down.

The door shoves open. We both let go, and I turn around so quickly I get whiplash.

“Oh my god! Charlie, are you okay? Where the hell did you go?!” a girl in a colorful dragon costume shrieks, crashing them into a hug. “You weren't at the meeting spot! We thought you'd found another way out, but you weren't outside either!”

“Sorry,” he mumbles, giving me a pointed look as he gently pushes her off him. Not a word about his freakout, got it . “I, uh, got lost?” He hooks a finger at me. “Had to call the staff over for help.”

The staff? Ouch . Not that he's wrong.

“You got lost?”

“Yeah. It was dark and my phone died and...”

“He locked himself in one of the bedrooms by mistake. I had to swoop in and save him,” I jump in helpfully, earning myself a nod in thanks.

His friend gives me a long and somewhat calculating look. “Well, in that case, thanks. We’ll be out of your way now.”

I open my mouth to protest it’s not necessary, but she’s out of the room before the words even leave me. I stare at the dark corridor as her shoes clink against the hardwood and her voice drones on about fun and parties, feeling like the rug has been pulled from under my feet.

She barged in at the worst possible moment, interrupting what I am sure was going to be an amazing kiss even if I don’t really understand why I had such a strong urge to be close to Charlie. I just did. And then she just took him away before I’d even had the chance to ask him for his number.

Great. Just great. I meet the first guy in years who makes me feel like I’m riding a rollercoaster, and his meddling friend snatches him from my arms.

“You okay, buddy?” Lawrence rasps in his perpetually hoarse voice, slipping into the room and shucking off his zombie costume. “Just two more groups and we are off. You coming to the party with us?”

Sighing, I walk over to the window and watch another staff member lead Charlie and his two friends through the overgrown back garden. She hands them the silly certificates that they’ve successfully cleared the haunted house attraction and sends them on their way.

I guess I’m never seeing the cute dork again. It’s a shame, but that’s life for you.

“So?” Lawrence insists, leaning back in the creaky chair and crossing his big arms

behind his head. “Yah or nah?”

I pull my phone out. We’ll be done by nine, which means I’ll be home by ten. There’s no way I can fall asleep, especially with the buzz of excitement that meeting Charlie invited. So I guess I’ll go.

Who knows, I might even meet someone who’ll help me forget the blue-eyed cutie I wish I hadn’t let go.

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Chapter 4

Charlie

I'm still reeling as we enter the noisy club. That guy. Ben. He was going to kiss me, wasn't he?

A shiver rushes down my back. I drag a finger across my lips as the phantom sensation of his breath caresses my skin. God, he was so hot. He also seemed super nice... not that I'm letting myself get fooled by something that can be so easily faked. I learned my lesson.

A part of me likes to think that maybe he would've been different. Genuine. I can't explain it—it's a gut feeling. But well, I doubt we'll see each other again, so I guess it's time to move on and forget all about my embarrassing accident at the haunted house and the nice guy who manhandled me like I weigh nothing.

"What are you having?" Trish shouts over the music when we reach the bar.

I take in the crowd, spotting a couple of guys I wouldn't mind rolling in bed with. I'm still annoyed as fuck because of what Andy did, and the shitty freakout I had only made it worse. So I need a distraction, something to take my mind off things.

What better way to do that than a hookup?

"Gin and coke!"

“Going straight for the hard stuff I see,” Greg comments from the left, shaking his head when I roll my eyes at him. “Same for me, babe!”

We usually start with beers and take our time, but I’m not in the mood for it today. I want to get a buzz as quickly as I can, so the excitement Ben instilled in me can go the fuck away.

Thirty minutes later, I’ve downed my drink. Trish and Greg are slacking behind on theirs, so after letting them know I’ll be on the dance floor, I head through the sweaty, swaying bodies of the Halloween crowd. Everyone is dressed up, the costumes ranging from intricate full-body getups to skimpy lingerie that barely covers people’s private parts.

The guy I am after is somewhere in the middle. He’s big and blond and dressed as a Viking. His full beard is braided just like his long hair. Yeah, he’ll do, even if I prefer clean shaven. Like Ben with his angular jaw, green eyes and dirty blond undercut.

“Cut it out, Charlie, geez,” I mutter to myself, plastering on a sexy smile as I approach my target.

But just as I am about to chat him up, something compels me to look at the crowd again. I don’t like beards, so why should I settle for one?

Bouncing on my heels in tune with the music, I start to make my way toward the other end of the dance floor when someone grabs my arm and tugs gently. I turn around, a snappy remark at the tip of my tongue.

“Shit. It really is you!” Ben, the theme park hottie, grins, showcasing those damn sexy dimples.

My eyes go wide. Electricity rushes through me and my pulse skyrockets. Why is he

here? “Ben? What are you doing here?”

He tilts his chin at two guys with familiar-looking zombie costumes. “Finished work and thought I could have some fun.” Snapping his eyes back to me, he pulls on his lip. “Shit. I didn’t think I’d run into you here!”

Neither did I. But here he is, the blond Adonis who spooked the shit out of me and tried to kiss me better afterwards.

I let my eyes roam his fit body. He has unbuttoned the black shirt he is wearing, showcasing defined pecs. His camo cargo pants suggest this is a soldier costume, though it looks kind of low effort. But I let it slide since he probably came here right after finishing his shift.

“Hey, you wanna dance?” he says, shooting me a flirtatious smile.

About time he asked. “Sure.”

We find a spot with slightly more space, so the other clubbers aren’t constantly bumping into us. It doesn’t last though and by the time a slower song starts playing, my back is pressed flush against his front. One of his hands is resting on my hip and the other one traces haphazard patterns along my flank as we move together. The heat of his body is all around me, as is his scent of candy and sweat. It’s so comfy. So safe .

I don’t know this man, not really, but his touch feels so good. It stirs fire inside me. My hips move of their own accord, rolling and swaying as I feel a telltale hardness push against the small of my back. I reach up with my arms, just barely managing to loop them around his neck. He’s just so tall.

Humming, he lets his hands trail up my body until his fingers locate my nipples. They

are hard and poke through the mesh fabric of the suit.

“You are so badass and sexy,” he whispers, his rich voice so close to my ear I can feel the warm puff of his breaths. “I love the way the EVO-H armor looks on you.”

Holy shit . Did he just say EVO-H? Does he know where this is from?

I turn around so abruptly as the music pauses and the DJ starts talking about a dance off, that I almost headbutt Ben in the chin. “You know what my costume is based on?”

He smiles. It’s a slow, deliberate upturn of his lips that leaves me staring at them. They look very nice, but that’s not why. It’s the angle and the way they curl, the slight quiver on the left side. For some reason, it reminds me of one very specific mouth that I haven’t thought about in ages.

I step back and study Ben. Now that I think about it, he does resemble him a little bit. My brother’s best friend. He moved to Australia when I was sixteen, crushing my infatuated heart. His name was Benjamin. Ben. I chew on my lip. Even that matches.

But obviously he can’t be the same Ben. Stuff like this just doesn’t happen in real life. Besides, why would he work at a random theme park? I’m pretty sure his family is loaded. His dad was setting him up to take over the company’s Australian branch.

“Of course I know what it’s based on! It’s kind of obvious.”

I purse my lips. “It’s kind of not. At all. RS has been gaining traction since the video game adaptation, but it’s not even mainstream yet!”

“Okay? Then I just have amazing taste. Who cares? It still looks fucking hot on you.”

I chuckle, shuddering pleasantly as his gaze seems to devour me. The music starts again and someone bumps into me, causing me to stumble forward. Ben catches me, circling me with his big arms as I crash into his muscular chest.

Standing on tiptoes, I lean in so I can whisper-shout in his ear. “Is that why you tried to kiss me earlier?”

I feel the vibrations of his laugh. “Part of it!”

We dance until his friends find us. I shoot Trish a text as they drag us to someone’s house, where a private party is already in full swing. The techno music is loud and there is booze everywhere, but I’m not really interested in any of that, or the carved pumpkins or the rest of the tastefully decorated interior.

No. My attention is firmly on Ben and how his hand feels clasping mine as he leads me through the house to the upstairs bedrooms so we can watch the new trailer that’s just come out for the RS series.

We settle on a bed in what has to be a guestroom. It’s simple, sporting a closet, a seating area and its own bathroom. I pull out my phone and start the short video, excitement thrumming in my veins. I can’t wait for the release. They’ve been teasing it for ages.

As the action starts on the screen of my device, I chance a quick glance Ben’s way. He’s completely engrossed, his face taut in concentration. His lips are slightly parted and his eyebrows are slanted down.

“Oh, shit. This looks amazing,” he breathes out, bumping his shoulder into mine.

The contact electrifies me, but it’s not just it. I guess he’s for real. I thought maybe he’s pretending to be a fanboy because he wanted to get in my pants, but no one can

fake the spark I can see flickering in his pretty green eyes.

It's annoying. I mean, not only is he the hottest piece of meat I've seen in a while, but he's also a legitimate RS fan and seems to be into me. The combination is making my heart flutter in weird ways and my stomach fill with butterflies, and I just can't have that. I am reformed, a stronger me who needs no man to make him happy. Love is a scam. All I'm after is a good fuck, so I need Mr. Potentially Perfect to stop being that, especially if there is a possibility this could turn into a friends-with-benefits long-term arrangement.

Technically, we haven't even fucked yet, but I've already decided he'll be just what I need in bed. How? I don't know. It's just a feeling that I have. Every casual or accidental touch between us has been fire, and now that it's just the two of us in this small bedroom, the air has gotten heavy and charged as if a storm is about to hit us any moment now.

I snake a hand up his arm. His firm muscles tense up for a second before going pliant under me as he sucks in a sharp breath. My skin tingles, my cock jerking to attention. His hand comes to rest on my thigh, big and possessive in the way it softly presses down as his eyes zero in on my bulge.

"What are you doing, Charlie?" he rasps in a hoarse and lust-filled voice.

I shudder in delight. "What does it look like, big guy?"

He chuckles, the dark, guttural sound flooding me with even more desire. "Like you are being a naughty little thing asking for a spanking."

"Are you offering?" I whisper into his ear, grazing the lobe with my teeth.

"I don't know," he breathes out, trembling as I palm his rigid cock through his

clothes. He's big . "Am I? Do you like that kind of thing?"

"There's only one way to find out, isn't there?"

I don't give him the chance to respond as I push him down. He falls back, bouncing off the mattress, and I quickly straddle his hips, trapping him under me. His eyes cut to my very prominent bulge, the gleam in them intensifying. He licks his lips and crosses his arms under his head, using them to prop himself slightly up.

"You are a bossy one, aren't you?"

The growly quality of his voice causes more sparks to dance across my skin. I need to be naked and so does he. Rolling my hips, I lean forward and prop my chin on his chest. He groans and I do, too. He's huge compared to me. It turns me on to no end, especially because I already know how his strong arms feel around me. He can manhandle me so easily, he's already proven it. He could do anything he wants to me.

"Why? Can't handle me?" I tease, humping against him.

His lips curve up. "Oh, you've no idea how well I can handle you, baby."

I tremble at the endearment and smile into his skin, kissing his exposed chest as my fingers work on the buttons of his shirt. "Promises, promises. I have to say I'm not impressed so far. You seem to be all talk and no—"

I'm not entirely sure what happens exactly. One second, I'm teasing his nipple with my tongue, and the next I'm pinned under him on my stomach, with my hands held above my head by one of his. It's so huge it easily wraps around both of my wrists.

I yelp into the pillow, trying to wiggle free. It's instinctual, a reflex as my body absorbs the shock of my sudden restraint.

“Is this more to your liking then?” Ben purrs into my ear, his mouth hot as it kisses its way down the side of my neck.

Oh, fuck yes.

When I don’t reply and only struggle again in an attempt to slip free, he snaps his hips and presses his massive erection into my crease, making me bite off a groan. Before I’ve had the chance for a snappy response, he pulls back a bit and his free hand comes down, smacking me on the ass with just enough force so I can feel a sting.

“ Fuck .” I arch off the bed, tingling shocks assaulting my body.

“Good?” he grumbles behind me, and I can hear the smile in his voice.

Yes, but it could be better.

I crane my neck back and capture his gaze. “So-so. You’ll have to do way better than this, big guy, if you want to make—”

He spanks me again. My breath catches, a buzz of liquid heat spreading throughout me. My cock begs for attention, trapped under me with little room for friction. I was half-joking earlier; I’ve never been spanked. But shit, I think I kind of like it.

Folding himself on top of me, Ben finds my ear. “I love how small and sassy you are. It’s driving me crazy.”

“Yeah? Wait until you have your cock in me.”

He growls like a beast. It reverberates through my whole body, firing up nerve-endings all over. In one fluid motion, he rolls me over so I’m facing him. His eyes are

even darker as they stare right into mine, the green but a thin rim around his dilated pupils.

His mouth calls out to me, wet from him having run his tongue over it. I lick my lips, my stomach twisting as his gaze drops to them.

“What are you waiting for?” I taunt, reaching up and rubbing the corner of his mouth.

He opens, to say something or scold me, and I use the opportunity to shove my finger inside. His nostrils flare. My heart bangs in my chest, just as wild as the expression he shows me as his tongue envelops my digit.

Once he’s licked it thoroughly, I take it out and bring it to my mouth. He holds his breath as I pop it inside. I can taste a hint of him, but it’s so faint and subtle, it only makes me more ravenous. Luckily, he seems to be in the same boat as he grabs my wrist and yanks my hand away so he can seal our mouths together.

I moan, throwing my arms around his neck. I can pick out cotton candy and mint as his tongue pushes past my teeth. It’s hot and demanding, licking and laving every inch it can get to. I try to fight it, to take control, but Ben overpowers me, deepening the kiss and making me yield. He rolls his hips as I make another needy sound, the friction between us adding to the growing arousal within me.

“Clothes... in the way,” I mumble as we pause for air, then dive for his taste again.

His hands roam my torso, agile and greedy. He’s found the zipper along the side of the suit in no time, and before I can even comprehend how, I’m stripped naked of it. Giving my mouth another possessive lick, he pulls away and straightens up. His wild eyes take in my exposed form, lingering on the wet spot on my briefs.

“Part of me thought you’d be commando. Like they do it in the books,” he says, his

rich baritone like silk against my skin.

“I considered it, but thought there was no point making myself horny in case I ended up with no company for the night.”

He pulls his shirt over his head and shuffles off the bed to get rid of his pants. I prop myself on my elbows and watch him, lazily palming myself through my underwear as he takes his sweet time. When his dick finally springs free, my mouth waters and my ass clenches with need. It's gorgeous and in proportion to his body. But that's not the best part. Nah, that would be too vanilla . He's sporting a Jacob's ladder.

“Like what you see, baby?” he chuckles, giving himself three rough strokes.

I pull on my lip and shove my hand in my underwear. Fuck, I bet it feels amazing . “You've no idea.”

He hums in satisfaction and tosses a packet of lube and a condom on the bed. Then he climbs on top, the mattress dipping under his weight. “Then why don't you show me?”

Hell yes.

I swallow hard and scoot to the side so he can settle next to me. He sits on his knees and holds his cock out for me, the tip already leaking. My semi-lying position brings my head just at the right height, so I wrap my mouth around him with quick ease.

He groans, his abs tightening. I hum appreciatively around him, grabbing his left ass cheek with one hand while my other one keeps jerking me off. Starting at the tip of his dick, I lick along his slit, his musky sweet taste fucking divine. Then I move lower, exploring each metal barbel with my tongue and ripping gruff moans out of him.

He's thick. On the longer side, too. I bet my small body will feel him for a while. I can't wait.

I worship Ben's cock for a few minutes, but the position gets uncomfortable at some point. He seems to sense that as he pulls away and settles onto his back. Not breaking eye-contact, he watches me as I rid myself of my last piece of clothing and finally let my dick out.

"God, you are so pretty," he huffs in awe, his dark eyes hungry as they roam my willowy frame. He pulls me on top of him so I'm straddling his chest and clasps my waist with both hands. "You've no idea how long it's been since..."

His dreamy expression and the way he trails off send a thrill down my spine. Shit, surely he can't mean...

"Since?" I prompt, my throat thick as anticipation twists my insides.

He smiles knowingly, humming in thought as his fingers close around my hard nipples. He twists and rubs, alternating between gentle and rough pulls. My eyes flutter closed, my muscles tensing.

"Since what, Ben?" I insist, squeezing my thighs with urgency and shooting him an expectant look.

His eyes bore into mine, mesmerizing and raw with his confession before it's even left his sinful lips. "Since I've been with anyone."

His words rock my world, turning it on his axis. My dick throbs. I'm going to explode and he hasn't even fucked me yet. This big, hot, infuriatingly perfect jock, who instead of making fun of my obsession with an obscure book, turned out to be a fan, too.

“How long?” I press, reaching back and grasping his massive cock.

He groans, fucking into my hand, and flushes ever so slightly. “More than a year.”

More than a year. My heart skips a beat as I glance at the condom, my insides knotting. “I got tested after I broke up with my ex. I haven’t been with anyone since.”

He inhales sharply. “Me neither.”

I pick up the wrapper and toss it to the nightstand. “We won’t be needing this then. Now, suck my cock, big guy. I’m dying to feel you inside me.”

“Back to being bossy?” He slaps my ass, giving my tip a quick lick. “Do I need to spank you again?” he counters, but swallows me to the root.

I keen, the sudden heat catching me off-guard. He sucks and licks with addictive enthusiasm, kneading my ass and teasing my hole at the same time. My balls are squished against his chest, tingling with pleasure.

In no time, I’m thrusting into his mouth. But it’s not enough. I need more. I need him to make me feel so good I see stars, to fuck me so thoroughly I feel sore for days.

“Ben...” I start, my voice whiny and low.

His hands slide up my body and he sits up, propping his back against the pillows along the headboard. I’m suddenly in his lap, his erection straining against my crease. It’s mind-blowing how he can just tell what I want without me even voicing it. How he’s tuned to the needs of my body as if my pleasure is his number one priority.

No one has ever treated me this way. It’s too much, in the best way possible.

I hear him rip the lube packet and a heartbeat later he rubs the chilly liquid around my hole. Two slicked fingers press against it, pushing inside gently but firmly.

“Relax and open for me, Charlie. I need to stretch you so you can take me. I’m gonna make you feel amazing, baby.”

I whimper, letting some of the tension leave me as my stomach suffers another butterfly invasion. Fuck, this is so hot. I’m burning up. I need him, and yet he’s taking his time being thorough. It’s both flattering and annoying.

“This is torture,” I protest, biting off a groan as he breaches me. “Just give me your dick before I lose my mind.”

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he says, pushing in and out with his digits.

I can feel the stretch, the slight burn as they reach deeper and deeper. I wiggle my ass, impaling myself on them. But it’s not enough. It can be better, so much better.

“I can take it.”

He hooks a finger under my chin and pulls me closer. “I know you can.” His lips meet mine in a barely-there kiss. “But let me do this, okay? Let me take care of you, baby.”

“You talk too much,” I shoot back and dive for him.

He growls and plunges his tongue inside my mouth, devouring me like he’s a starving man and I am his five-star dinner. His sweet-sharp taste is intoxicating, hijacking all my senses until all I can do is moan and shake and let him dictate the pace.

“That’s it, fuck yourself on my fingers, baby. Show me how much you want my

cock,” he praises, breathless and reverent.

“Please, Ben. I can’t take this. I need more.”

He hums, nipping along my neck as I bury my hands in his messy curls. Pulling on his hair, I force his mouth back to mine. He grumbles but gives in, his fingers slipping out of me. I whine in annoyance, biting his bottom lip.

“So naughty,” he chuckles, lining up his cock.

“Shut up and—”

He snaps his hips, thrusting into me with no mercy. I see fucking stars, howling as my body tenses around him.

“Fuuuuck.”

My eyes roll back. He’s so thick. It’s incomparable to his fingers, the stretch and burn so so good. And the piercings. Holy fuck, I can feel them, the smooth metal bumps adding even more pleasure.

“God, you are so tight. I’m gonna lose my mind.”

I’ve already lost mine. Shit. I’ve never felt so full, so completely and utterly owned. The way he moves inside me, the way he’s pushing deeper and deeper and then pulling back out only to repeat it again is too perfect. Everything narrows down to him. To his body, to his heat, to the way he’s making mine mold to him. It’s like he’s made for me, and I am made for him, even though we are practically two strangers.

“Ben... More,” I urge, crying out in pleasure as he tags my prostate. “Yes. Oh fuck.”

He clasps my waist and holds me in place as he thrusts even faster. Every time he pulls out, his piercings catch on the rim of my hole, heightening the sensation as he fucks into me. I'm at his mercy and I love it, each glide of his massive cock meant to remind me. I moan and scream, not caring that someone might hear us.

"That's it, Charlie. Let go for me. I'm gonna make you feel so good."

I can't think anymore. I'm reduced to pleasure and heat and desire, ravenous for anything he will give me. Tension builds across me with each strike against the bundle of nerves deep within me, pulsating and spreading like a tidal wave I cannot stop.

"Ben..." I whimper, finding it hard to form words.

The need to come is blinding, controlling each cell of my body.

"I've got you," he says, coiling calloused fingers around my shaft.

Fuuuck. They feel amazing. The added roughness only makes his strokes more potent as he jerks me off, as he squeezes the base and teases the slit.

"I'm close, Charlie. Come for me and milk me dry with your ass," he whispers, his voice strained as he licks my earlobe.

It's too much, I'm dying. And he seems to be in the same boat, groaning and panting and blabbering nonsense as his hold relaxes so I can bounce on top of him and meet his chaotic thrusts. The bed creaks as we fuck, and there are voices outside the room. I bet the people on the other side can hear us. I bet they know exactly what we are doing.

I'm getting my guts rearranged by the hottest man at this party and the whole house

knows it.

The thought completely derails me. A surge of heat starts from my spine, advancing through me until it crashes into my core. I come with a shout, shaking and spilling all over Ben's stomach.

"Fuuuck," he groans, pounding into me with renewed vigor as he too quakes uncontrollably. "Milk me, Charlie. Every last drop. That's it."

I feel every spurt as his cock throbs and pulses. He captures my mouth, his tongue owning me with head-spinning greed as he fills me up with his cum. His hands are rubbing my ass, spreading it open as his fingers trace the place where we connect.

Keeping our tongues tangled, we kiss through the last of our tremors. I'm boneless against him, and if not for his powerful arms holding me, I'd have collapsed on the bed already. But he keeps me close to him in an embrace that feels both comfortable and lulling. His cock is still in my ass, the fullness so pleasant even though it's started to soften.

"Do you want me to pull out?" he asks, kissing my head as he maneuvers us into a more comfortable position lying on the bed.

I sigh and hold his blissed-out gaze. "Not yet. I wanna feel it for a bit more."

He slaps my ass, then pinches it. "Fuck, this is hot. In like a filthy way, considering I pumped you full of my cum."

I purr, my chest warm and tight. I pretend I don't notice. "You fucked me so good, I'm gonna feel it for days."

We lie for a bit, my back pressed against his front. His lips drag all over my body,

claiming any part they can get to. I'm feeling so comfy, I'm starting to fall asleep. But that won't do. Something like this is way too domestic to do with a hookup.

Groaning as he slips out of me, I sit up and start dressing. I need a shower, but it will have to wait until I'm home. Which means... I bite on my lip, feeling his leaking cum. I think I might need to wait a while before I head back.

"You can go first," I say, throwing him a smile.

He frowns, but sits up. I raise my eyebrows expectantly. Sighing, he gathers his clothes and puts them on.

"Listen." He pauses at the door, raking a hand through his hair as he turns to look at me. "Give me your number? I had a great time, and I'd love a repeat. If you are up for it, of course."

I consider that. "I'm only interested in sex."

He shrugs. "I wasn't proposing, sweetheart."

Snorting, I purse my lips. "Give me yours. If I feel like it, I'll give you a call."

Shaking his head in what seems like both amusement and exasperation, he tells me his number. Once I've saved it, he opens the door. "See you around, Charlie. And stay away from haunted houses if I'm not around to save you."

I laugh and wave him off, sinking to the bed once I'm alone in the room so I can pretend that the butterflies in my stomach aren't there.

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Chapter 5

Charlie

I run into my ex, Andy, two days later at the café near the Baker Street subway station. My mood is instantly ruined, even though I just got a call from my brother that he's visiting for a week and wants to meet up tonight.

I haven't seen Ethan in ages. He's too busy running his multi-billion-dollar company to spare me more than an hour or two for a weekly call so we can keep up with each other. But he's in London this week, which means we can spend some time together in person.

Ordering my usual drink—a chocolate Frappuccino with no coffee—I grab a seat along the corner bar table and gaze out the window at the busy street. I'm the one who discovered this gem of a place, but I suppose I can't exactly ban my asshole ex from coming here. As long as he fucks off once he's got his drink, I'll let it slide.

Of course, that's the exact opposite of what he does as he slides onto the stool next to mine.

“Hey, Charlie. It's been a while. I hope you've cooled off. I've missed you.”

My eyebrow legit twitches. What the fuck is this asshole saying after posting that stuff online? Is he stupid? Squeezing my cup so hard some of the whipped cream spills out of the straw hole, I aim the most disgusted and outraged expression I can muster his way.

“Fuck off.”

His big hand settles on top of mine. It feels nice. Two days ago, I might’ve even sighed and felt sad that things between us didn’t work out, but he’s shit out of luck. Ben’s hand holding mine as he led me through that house party so he could screw my brains out in someone’s guestroom felt ten times better.

“C’mon now. You know I only posted that because I was angry. You were being a real brat not answering my calls after you threw me out. I had to get your attention.”

Jesus fucking Christ. The gaslighting with this one is strong. I can’t believe I ever thought he actually liked me.

“Fuck. Off. Asshole.”

He squeezes my hand tight. It takes everything I have not to wince. It’s the downside of being a cute and adorable twink with a thing for the big jock types who can manhandle the shit out of me.

Like Ben. Who’s into RS like me and gave me the pounding of my life. Sigh .

“Don’t give me that attitude,” Andy encourages, his deep voice channeling fake concern. “Let’s forget our little argument, yeah? You can go back to playing your silly games and I won’t say anything as long as you pay some attention to me before bed.”

I gape at him, my brain not braining. Oh my fucking god! How dare he? Does he think I’m his sex toy or something?

“Get your disgusting hands off me,” I growl in warning, my blood boiling. “You are fucking delusional if you think I want anything to do with you.”

“Charlie,” he scolds, clicking his tongue. “Don’t make a scene.”

I’ll fucking kill him.

I shoot up from my seat and throw the rest of my Frappuccino at him. He grunts and hisses. The entire café gasps, heads turning our way and phones snapping pictures.

“Stay the fuck away from me. We are done. And by the way, I might be into ‘silly’ games, but at least I’m not a brainless sheep who only copies what his dumb friends do.”

Yanking my hand free, I walk out of the shop and leave him with his jaw hanging.

Fuck him and fuck every other hot jock. I’m done being the fool in my own story. Cute and gullible Charlie who believes he’ll meet his Prince Charming one day is dead and buried six feet under the ground. Love can go suck it, because badass psycho murder twink Charlie only cares about sex.

My mood stays sour the whole day, and I hate that I let that asshat Andy be the reason for it. But it is what it is. Shitty days happen even to the best of us. Or the worst, depending on how you look at it. I mean, my actions at the café? Seven out of ten evil. I only regret not bitchslapping that asshole, because that would’ve bumped it up to a nine.

I scoff at myself as I pull up my phone and check the time. I’m waiting for my brother at a high-end roof restaurant in Canary Wharf. It offers a view of the Thames and the Cloud Cable cars, which, now that I think about it, I’ve yet to ride.

Me : Where r u?

Ethan : Traffic really bad. There in 10.

Me : I'm hungry. Nacho starter or fancy Mediterranean meats board?

Ethan : U srsly asking me this? Just order both.

I snort. I knew he'd say that.

Me : U still havent told me who u bringing. Is it a new partner?

Ethan : It s a surprise. Not ruining it. U find out soon.

I hate surprises. Almost as much as chickpea. Or minced chicken meat. Or juicy tomatoes, though I sometimes wish that wasn't the case. About the tomatoes. I think it's more of a texture rather than taste issue, but confirming such a hypothesis would require close encounters with them and I like to keep my distance. Besides, my brother knows I'm in a shitty mood today, so whoever he's bringing will probably have an agreeable personality.

The starters arrive shortly after I order them, and I dig in. I'm about halfway through the nachos, and a third through the meats board, when my brother arrives just as the sun peeks out from behind heavy clouds and lights up the modern buildings that make up the Canary Wharf skyline.

"You are late. You said ten minutes. It's been twenty, so you can't blame me for eating most of the stuff," I point out as I look up from the food.

"You know I'm shit at time estimation. Cut me some slack." Ethan sighs, runs a hand through his dark hair that's the same hue as mine, and flashes me his trademark charming smile as he steps to the side so he can introduce whoever is infringing upon our brotherly time. "This is my best friend. I don't know if you remember him."

"Hi, Charlie. It's been a... while..." Ben says, frowning, scowling and looking

completely and utterly confused as he offers me his hand for a shake.

I spit out the half-chewed nacho chip, the cheese string that was hanging off it making me choke. My heart erratically tries to dig a hole out of my ribcage. You gotta be kidding me.

“Why are you here?” I accuse, pointing a finger at him as I get up from the chair.

My brother, who is bigger than me but still on the leaner side, gathers me in a hug and laughs. “You remember Ben, then? I was sure you’d forgotten. He’s changed a lot.”

He’s changed a lot, alright. And so have I. My brother, too. It’s been almost seven years. But that feeling I had when he smiled at me? I should’ve trusted my gut. I should’ve made the connection and not dismissed it as some wishy-washy daydream my brain was randomly having.

But how could have I? Coincidences like this just don’t happen in real life!

I shake Ben’s hand belatedly, after which we all sit down. He claims the chair across from me, his green eyes mostly amused now that the initial shock has passed.

God, what the fuck do I do? I have so many questions! What was he doing working at a damn theme park for one? We haven’t kept in touch, but I know from Ethan that Ben works at his dad’s company and is on the Board of Directors. So why the fuck is he here, in the UK?

“I thought you lived in Australia,” I say, my voice clipped and suspicious even to my own ears.

He smiles, taking a sip from the elderflower lemonade the waiter just brought to our

table. “We are looking to expand the business here. That’s why I moved to London. I’m helping my sister oversee things here, while also handling the assembly and engineering of our new models.”

Oh yes, sure, this makes sense. Ben’s parents own a vehicle manufacturing empire. It’s everything from commercial cars, to planes, helicopters, and ships. They have military and government contracts, too.

“Ana doing okay, then? I haven’t heard from her since July,” Ethan says, shaking his head.

“She’s really loving it. Helping dad run the show has always been her dream. She’s doing one hell of a good job.”

“Has he finally stopped bugging you?”

Ben laughs, waving his hand. A few locks of his messy dirty blond hair flop over his forehead. “Nah. Still brings it up from time to time, but it’s not like he can convince me to be a CEO. I just love tinkering and making shit too much. Besides, I’m our best engineer ever, and Ana is killing it on her own.”

Oh. I have a hazy memory about Ben taking things apart and putting them back together. And he was crazy about the cars and planes his dad’s company designed. I guess he grew up and does what he loves as a job now... Which explains his rough, big, greedy hands.

Get your head out of the gutter, Charlie!

“What about the haunted house?” I blurt out, my mind jumbled as it tries to connect this new sexy as fuck well-endowed Ben to what I remember of the goofy, energetic boy I used to crush on.

He was my first love and heartbreak, the only secret I haven't told Ethan. It was just too embarrassing because they were best friends, always together, sharing everything. Knowing your teenage kid brother saw your best bro that way and wanted to exchange saliva with him would've weirded out anyone.

"Ah." Ben chuckles, his entire face lighting up. He chews on his lip and my eyes are immediately drawn to the movement.

I know how he tastes. Like cotton candy and mint. My cock swells just remembering it and the way that dominant tongue owned my mouth. And his monster dick? Holy shit. It's the biggest I've ever seen—and felt—and I've been jerking off to it the past two nights before going to bed.

The truth is that I didn't call him because I didn't plan to ever see him again. He's too dangerous. Too perfect. A threat to new Charlie's resolve to be the top predator of the food chain.

"A friend asked me to sub in. I had nothing better to do, so I thought, why not?"

My eyes snap to his, finding them curiously studying my face. "Huh?"

"That's why I was at the haunted house." He smiles, the upturn of his full lips unabashedly seducing.

I swallow hard, crossing my legs, and gulp down the rest of my drink. My cheeks are warm, my neck too, tingles crawling all over my body.

"Hold on. You two already met each other?" Ethan cuts in, his eyes bouncing from me to Ben.

"Oh, we met alright," Ben says, heat swimming in his gaze as he pops an olive in his

mouth and licks his lips.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Ethan protests, fake pouting. “So, what did you two do?”

I chance a glance his way, his imploring and amused eyes sending a shiver down my spine. Yeah, no. There is no way in Hell I’ll tell my brother that I hooked up with his best friend.

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Chapter 6

Ben

It's a little funny how freaked out Charlie looks. I knew there was something vaguely familiar about the sassy twink the moment I saw him, but never in my wildest dreams did I think he might be the little brother of my best friend.

But as I watch him stumble through a very redacted recount of our night together on Halloween, I can't help but smile. A black ghost from your past , the fortune teller told me. She wasn't wrong.

Charlie was a cutie back when we were kids. Wide-eyed like a puppy, always trying to join in whatever Ethan, Ana and I were doing. And now? I give him a slow once over, feasting on every lovely feature as a thrill of heat slithers through my insides. He's grown up to be absolutely gorgeous. It's no wonder I couldn't keep my hands off him.

“Ooh! I can't believe this. What were you even doing at a haunted house, Charlie?” Ethan asks, guiding my attention back to the conversation.

Charlie shrugs, fidgeting in his seat. “Trying to get over my fear or something? Greg and Trish don't know about... And I thought it might be a good opportunity to make some progress?” He aims a hard look my way, but it's not unfriendly. “I had no idea Ben is in the UK or that he works there.”

“You work at a theme park?” my friend turns to me.

“Nah. Like I said, I just subbed in for a day. Was doing Terrance a favor.”

We slip into a catch up, taking turns to probe each other. I learn that Charlie is a professional gamer who makes a rather good chunk of money doing what he’s always loved. Like me, he’s let his sibling deal with the family business while he’s pursuing his own passion. I’m glad.

We both manage to act mostly normal throughout lunch, though Charlie keeps throwing strange looks my way. They are a mix of curiosity, interest and annoyance. I guess it’s a little awkward that we hooked up, but it’s not like either of us knew who the other was. I’m sure he understands that.

Still, he keeps the glares up even as we finish our desserts and head back. When we reach the parking lot, Ethan gets a work call—some kind of emergency that requires his attention—and leaves the two of us with a promise to call tomorrow so we can spend more time together like the old times.

“Right, uh, it was nice seeing you, Ben,” Charlie says once his brother’s white SUV is no longer in sight. He averts his eyes when I turn to him and spins on his heel. “Have a good day.”

I halt him before he’s made a run for it, grasping his arm. “Hold up, Charlie. Did I do something? You were scowling at me the entire time.”

He tenses a little, but then relaxes. I plant myself next to him, cradle his head, and tilt it up so we can look at each other. He positively squirms, a hint of rosiness visible in his cheeks. Is he embarrassed? Warmth floods my chest, turning molten as it travels further across me. God, he’s adorable. I could eat him up right here and now.

Except I shouldn’t because he’s my best friend’s little brother.

“N-no. Aside from, you know...” He takes a deep inhale, aiming those soul-haunting blue eyes at me. “We fucked?”

A shudder goes through me at his words, leaving me breathless. We did. And it was the best sex I’ve ever had. Granted, I haven’t had much of it, because it takes a lot for me to want someone like that. But my body’s been on fire since that night, the flames wild and relentless and burning me alive.

“We didn’t know. And besides, we are both adults now.” I stroke his cheek—the urge to touch him too strong to reel in—reveling in the feel of his soft skin and the way his eyes flutter closed for a heartbeat. “It’s no one else’s business but ours.”

He purses his lips, the action making me want to pepper them with teasing kisses before I push them apart and claim his mouth. “I guess, but... You are Ethan’s Ben. And I’m his brother. It’s weird if we... did it again. What if he finds out?”

I push down another wave of desire, satisfaction pulsing under my skin. Does this mean he wants to do it again? I suck in air through my nose, catching his scent. It’s dark and inviting, arousing even more heat within me. It stirs memories too, ones I have tried hard to forget and bury.

“What if he does?”

His sky-blue depths pierce right through me, anxious and warring. He’s fighting something on the inside, some battle I have no right to know about it would seem. But I want to. I never thought I’d see Charlie again, that I might have him in my life. I had no reason to. He was my best friend’s kid brother, two years younger than me. We knew each other through Ethan.

“I don’t know. I just—” he cuts himself off, pulling on his lip. “I didn’t plan to see you again.”

I had such a suspicion. And I was okay with it, mostly. But after today? There is no way I am letting this cute little fox slip from between my fingers. Not in a million chances.

Because I have a secret. One that I haven't told anyone, not even Ana.

I had a crush on Charlie. I don't know when I even realized it, but by the time I was seventeen, I was legit pining after my best friend's brother. I thought it was fucked up, so I kept it bottled up. I wasn't planning to say anything, hoped it would go away on its own. But it didn't. So I decided to tell him once he was older.

I never got the chance. We moved to Australia the next year, right before his birthday.

"Why?" I whisper, leaning in as I trace my mouth along his ear. "We had such a good time. It's all I've been thinking about."

He trembles, exhaling sharply. "Me, too. I can't stop thinking about the way your cock felt inside me," he whimpers, his moany, gaspy voice threatening to undo me in the middle of a freaking parking lot. I go from hard to extra hard from his words, zaps of electricity crawling across my back. Just as I am reaching for his bulge, he pushes me away, panting and livid. "But you are Ben, Ethan's best friend. And um, I only do casual now. Friends with benefits. I don't date because love is a scam. So, uh, I think it's best that we didn't see each other again."

My mind races, trying to keep up. He doesn't date... Love is a scam... I latch onto those, the statements throwing me into an even bigger frenzy. Does that mean he wants to date me, but doesn't want to because... he doesn't believe I could be serious about him? Where is this coming from? It's some very skewed logic, and I have no idea why his smart mind has even gone there, but he couldn't be more wrong.

My mouth stretches into a smile. I can't help it. He drives me crazy. "No."

He frowns, lines creasing his forehead. "No?"

I tuck my hands into my pockets, leaning against the side of a car. "No. I'm not backing off, Charlie. You do only friends-with-benefits? Fine by me. I don't know what happened to you or what made you believe such silly stuff, but I'm not making the same mistake again. I've wanted you for a very long time. I tried to forget you, to move on. And then you pop into my life, like some ghost haunting me from my past." I grin, yearning to wrap my arms around him and squish him until the suspicion in his eyes leaves. But I don't. I'm up against a bristled cat, I can feel it. I need to approach with caution.

"What are you talking about?" he protests, but even so, his voice is a little breathless and his eyes searching.

"You liked me, didn't you?"

He gapes at me, jaw hanging and cheeks red. "That's not—"

I arch an eyebrow.

He groans, looking like he wants to be anywhere but here with me. "We were kids, okay? It's in the past."

Is it though? Then why say all those things? Why explain the reason he doesn't want to hook up or date me? Why flush even more and avert his gaze?

It clicks then, why he was giving me the evil eye earlier. It's because of this. It's some kind of conflict he's dealing with on the inside, something that's preventing him from enjoying this second chance at us that we are being given.

Well, it's a good thing I'm a great problem-solver, then, isn't it?

I walk over to him and enter his personal space. "Are you free tonight?"

He looks ready to bolt. "No, I have a tournament. Why?"

That's... actually pretty cool. "Text me your address. I'm coming over."

"Wait, you are? Why?"

"Isn't that obvious?" I say and lean down, nipping the tip of his ear. "I want to watch you play. I bet you are hot as fuck when you are in gamer mode. I'll give you a reward if you win."

He's speechless for a few moments, the air around us heavy with tension. God, I hope I didn't push too far. But if I want a real go at us, I need to make things happen or he'll just push me away.

"But I haven't agreed to any of this," he points out, glowering.

I shrug casually, pretending I'm not on the edge of my seat. I don't know what I'll do if he turns me down. "If you want out, now is your chance. So, what will it be?"

He frowns, chewing on his lip. I want to kiss him. I barely manage not to.

"Okay," he breathes out just as I am starting to think that cornering him was a terrible idea and I should've tried to get him used to me first. "But it's just sex. I was serious about the love thing, okay? So you don't have to pretend to be into me or anything. I won't fall for it."

There is a story there, I can tell. The conviction and distaste that crosses over

Charlie's face makes that clear as day. Some asshole must've fucked up royally to give this lovely man such an evil streak. Or maybe he's always had it, hidden and locked. Either way, it's hot.

"Fine. I promise I won't pretend to like you."

Because I already do.

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Chapter 7

Charlie

I walk around my lounge where my computer setup is, tidying up the clothes and fast-food cartons littering the floor. I still can't believe the hot jock from that night is Ethan's best friend, Ben. This has to be some cosmic intervention throwing a curveball at me.

"This was a bad idea," I mumble under my breath, throwing a sweaty T-shirt into the laundry basket.

But, ugh, I just couldn't turn him down. Like physically. He's got this pull I can't fight. I'd forgotten about it since I hadn't seen him in years, but it explains why the sex was so good.

I scoff, then snort. Good? No, that doesn't even begin to describe it. It was mind-blowing. And the fact that it was my Ben—whom I never thought I'd see again, let alone fuck—makes it even more head-spinning.

And he's coming over tonight.

"Fuck, Charlie. What are you going to do?"

My phone rings then, making me jump. But it's just Ethan.

"Hey, what's up? You need something?" I say, rushing out the words as I glance at

the dirty clothes I've collected.

"It's lovely to hear your voice too, dear brother," Ethan says as a video request pops up.

I accept it. "You are calling because you need something. We just saw each other earlier," I speculate, knowing my brother too well.

He hums, a wolfish smile accompanying the suspicious gleam in his eyes. "So, you and Ben..."

I gape at him. Oh god. Please don't tell me he noticed. "What about me and Ben?"

He scowls, bunching his eyebrows so tightly he looks like he's suffering from constipation. This doesn't bode well. "C'mon, Charlie. You think I'm blind or something? What's going on between you two? Did you hookup?"

My cheeks catch fire. Fuck, this is so embarrassing, and he hasn't even started lecturing me about going after his best friend yet.

"Oh." Ethan grins. "About time one of you made the move."

I blink at him. "Wait, what?"

He gives me a conspiratorial smile. "You still like him, don't you? So, good for you that you're finally taking your shot."

My mouth hangs. "You... are okay with that? With us ? Even though Ben is your best friend and I'm your brother?"

He snorts. "If there is one person I trust to have your best interests in mind, it's him."

I look up at the ceiling, my neck tingling with heat. Oh my god. This conversation has become embarrassing for a whole other reason now.

When I don't say anything and just continue to do my best to try and not look my brother in the eyes, he chuckles. "You are both adults. It's none of my business who you date as long as your partners are decent. And I can personally vouch for both of you."

Except we are just friends-with-benefits. But I think I can spare my brother that detail for now. Being called out on what I thought was a secret I was very good at hiding is enough embarrassment for one day.

Someone shouts my brother's name in the background. He sighs. "I gotta go now, but we'll hang out again. I'll give you a call."

Ethan clicks off. I just look at the wall for a few minutes, processing what just happened. I guess my brother knows about me and Ben. And I guess he doesn't mind. That's... good, if a little anticlimactic compared to the reaction I expected.

This new development is still sinking in as I toss the laundry into the washing machine and turn it on. I'm cleaning up because Ben is coming over soon. I take a deep breath. You've got this. It's just sex, nothing more. You're over him. You moved on from your crush years ago. He's just coming here to hang out and have sex with you. It's for fun because you happen to have killer chemistry. That's all.

Slapping my cheeks for encouragement, I slip into the shower. I don't have a lot of time, so I am quick and efficient, spending the majority of it picking what to wear. I probably shouldn't care so much, but I do want to bounce on top of his massive ribbed magic wand, so maximizing my chances of making that happen is what I intend to do.

I glance at the third drawer, a buzz spreading through me. Black jockstrap it is. I toss it on once I've toweled myself dry, and then follow up with the extra snug pair of shorts I almost never wear. They are not the most comfortable, but they make my ass look amazing. They also make it possible to tell exactly what kind of underwear I'm wearing. For my top, I put on the hoodie with my favorite spaceship. It's a little big on me, so it reaches the middle of my ass and partially hides its very prominent outline. That's perfect—it completes the teasingly sexy style I'm going for, so Ben doesn't think I'm throwing myself at him or something.

Which, technically, I am, but I can at least pretend that I'm not. Despite my initial apprehension and how messy this whole thing is, after stewing in my own thoughts all afternoon, I decided I'm going to enjoy the sex part of it. It would be stupid not to. Plus, it's the best way to embrace my new debaucherous lifestyle and erase all remnants of old Charlie who believed there was a person out there meant only for him.

The door rings just as my mind is about to spiral down into that place I hate to visit. I throw a quick last glance at the mirror—I look positively delicious, and I bet he won't be able to keep his hands off my bare thighs—and pad out of the room with a bottle of lube. Stashing that on the bottom shelf of the end table next to the modern couch in my living room, I take a deep breath and answer the door.

“Hi, Char—lie,” Ben fumbles, his eyes sliding up and down my body as if he's never seen another human before. The bag he's holding halts halfway as he lifts it.

I grab it and take a peek. There are snacks, drinks and ice cream. Perfect. “I see you come prepared.”

His forehead scrunches like he's trying to get his brain to brain but the poor thing is having major lag issues because of how hot I am. “Yeah...”

Part One of Mission ‘Get Ben’s thoughts to FilthLand’ accomplished.

I let him gawk at me for a few moments, then I step aside and motion him in, making sure to give my hips a little sway that his eyes most definitely don’t miss. “You coming in, or are we hanging out remotely?”

He shakes his head and chuckles, seeming to regain some control of himself. “Are you trying to chase me away?”

“No such thing. I don’t back out of a challenge.”

He hums, crouching down to take his shoes off. “Is that what this is? A challenge?”

I lean one shoulder against the doorframe of my lounge, tapping a finger against my chin. “I meant me showing you how amazing I am at the game I play. I don’t normally have a live audience.”

If I’m being truthful, I’m a little nervous. Back when Andy and I had just started to date, I invited him over so he could watch me play. He did, for a whopping five minutes, while monologuing about how much of a waste of time video games are, because you could be making money or hanging out with your bros instead. I did try to explain to him that I am actually making money doing the thing that I love, but he wasn’t listening at that point. He’d already called the chads, and, if memory serves, they were discussing the latest sexual conquest one of them had.

So fucking cringe.

A hand snakes up the side of my neck, grazing my jawline. I snap out of my thoughts and find Ben looming over me in my personal space. I hated when my ex did it, but Ben? I shiver in delight, my trapped cock swelling.

“I’m really good as a live audience,” he says, voice low and hoarse. “And I haven’t forgotten that I promised you a reward if you win.”

I frown, replaying our conversation in the parking lot. I’d been so confused and turned on, making it hard to follow. “What happens if I don’t?”

He leans in, brushing his lips against mine. “I’d have to punish you then, no?”

Does it involve spanking? And why does he make it sound just as good as being rewarded? It’s the way he says it in that sultry voice, I think, his proximity, the subtle smirk playing at his lips when he steps back and crosses his arms.

“Right. Yeah. Of course. I’m winning for sure.” I wave him away, feeling warmth spread across my face when he gives me a knowing arch of his eyebrow. “Who wants to be punished?” Clearing my throat, I walk past him and enter the lounge. “Make yourself at home.”

I don’t miss the way his eyes train on my ass when I glance over my shoulder. They are ravenous, and he looks ready to pounce on me. Good, my teasing is working. He seems to catch himself ogling after a few moments, his mouth fighting off a smile. Joining me in the lounge, he settles on the armchair next to me instead of the couch. It’s comfy, but the couch is better, unless... Does he actually plan to watch me? I was sure he was joking.

“So, who are you playing against? I’ll be honest. I don’t have time to follow all the side tournaments, just the championship. Play-ins were in the summer. Did you compete?”

I snap my head at him, squeezing my headphones. “I... did. And I qualified for the solo bracket.”

He blinks at me and smiles, pride oozing off him. “That’s so fucking cool. What’s your tag, by the way? I don’t think you told me.”

I swallow, anticipation twisting my stomach. “NeonNuke.”

He doesn’t react. At least not immediately. Goosebumps erupt all over me, my insides knotting. And then he beams, his entire face lighting up. “Holy shit! You’re NN?”

My screen loads up the lobby then, my character in his black-green suit filling the screen. Ben’s eyes flick to it, going even wider.

“You a fanboy or something?” I toss, trying to play it cool and not squeal and cheer and lose my shit because he actually knows my game name.

“Why? Is that a problem?” he purrs, placing his hand on my thigh.

I suck in a breath, loving the way his rough, long fingers knead my flesh. “No... Why would it be a problem?”

“Does it turn you on, then?” He drags his hand up, then slides it down, caressing the inner side. It’s awfully close to my hardening cock.

“I have tons of fans,” I say, my voice lower than it was.

He cradles my cheek, turning my head so we’re looking at each other. His pupils are blown, excitement and lust stirring within them. I clench my legs together. He smiles and slowly melts the distance between us, his lips sealing against mine.

I moan, my body burning, and open for him in invitation. He takes it, his tongue hungry and searching as it tangles with mine. His distinctively sweet taste erupts in

my mouth, and I fight him for control of the kiss. But he's relentless, dictating the pace and making my head spin as his hand finds the zipper of my shorts and slides it down.

"How long until the game starts?" he rasps, his rich voice vibrating down my throat as I swallow the sound.

"Five minutes or so."

"Not enough time then." He hums and pulls away.

His retreat is slow, filled with feather-light kisses to my lips, chin and neck. I almost pull him back in, hungry for more of his feverish touches and taste, but my headphones ring with the team call. I mostly play solo, but now and then one of my game buddies will ask me to sub in or help.

"Behave and be quiet," I warn Ben, adjust myself, and answer the call. "Hey. Sorry. I'm here. I was having some, uh, technical issues."

My friend, Luna, laughs in her chiming voice. "Should we be worried, Nuke?"

"Nah, all good now." I click on the confirmation as a dialogue box appears on the screen, telling me the load-out menu is about to pop up.

I forget all about Ben from then on, my focus on the game. It's a 4v4 setup, best of three. The map we get thrown into is the abandoned mining space station with the nasty bridges. Everyone hates it, but I actually like the challenge which navigating it adds. I also know a few tricks that I haven't shared with anyone.

My character spawns at the northern end, where the labs are. I switch to a shotgun and head toward the contented point. Two of the enemies are already there when I

make it over, but I slip into stealth mode and run them down before they have time to react. My team takes care of the other two, and then we manage to keep them away, snatching the first round.

“Fuck, you are amazing!” Ben yells from behind when the five-minute break starts.

I spin in my chair. He’s pushed the armchair back a bit so he’s not too close and is munching on hard candy, his excited smile stretching from ear to ear.

“I don’t think I can use the same strategy again though. They’ll be ready for it,” I say, nodding in thanks when he walks over and hands me a can of coke.

“Mm, probably. You’ve got the paralyzing pulse sniper in your load-out, right? If you can get to the CP first, you can find a good vantage point and pop them when they try to approach?”

I blink at him. That could work. It’s one of my newest tricks and I don’t do it very often because not all maps are good for it, but the mining station one is perfect. Plus, I bet they won’t expect it.

“I can tell you like my idea,” he says, pride and contentment rolling off him. “Then again, I’m always full of good ones.”

I snort. “Don’t get ahead of yourself.”

Round two drags out a bit more, but we win, two-zeroing the enemy team.

“Nuke, you are a god!” Luna shouts in my headphones, hyped and livid. “Shit, we are going to the semi. Couldn’t have done it without you.”

“When’s the next game?”

“In two weeks. And the finals, if we make it, are the week after,” she explains, commotion audible around her. “You in?”

That’s three weeks in total. I do a quick calculation in my head to make sure it won’t interfere with the main tournament. It starts in a month. “Yeah, all good.”

“Sweet. I’ll send you our practice schedule in case you wanna join in. Catch you later!”

I lean back in my chair and stretch, the adrenaline from the game still coursing inside me. The period between play-ins and the main part of the championship is a little quiet, so this is actually great timing. Even if I am the loner type, playing with Luna and the rest is fun. The added challenges of team coordination push me to higher levels of creative improvisation, which helps me in my solo matches, too.

When I swivel around, I find Ben observing me from the armchair. It’s so intense it almost seems reverent.

Warmth touches the back of my neck, spreading to my cheeks and down to my chest. “What?”

“You’re really hot when you play.” He spreads his legs a little, biting on his bottom lip.

My eyes cut to the bulge there. It’s shamelessly tenting his pants. Swallowing, I shift in my chair, my dick taking immediate interest. “Did you get hard watching me?”

“Yeah. I’m not sure why exactly. Probably had something to do with you bossing your teammates around.”

I huff air out of my nose. But he’s not wrong. I get carried away sometimes without

realizing it.

“You want me to boss you around, is that it?” I toss, meaning it as a half-joke.

His eyes darken and he palms himself through his clothes. “I—” He bites off a moan. “Fuck. I think so? I’ll do anything you tell me to, babe, just say it.”

Fire roars inside me, wild and unstoppable. The air in the room suddenly charges, crackling with tension as if it’s turned into the sky before a storm hits. My hole twitches, flooded with the feeling of emptiness I’ve been pretending I don’t notice since the night we hooked up.

Pulse hammering loud in my ears, I push up from the chair and approach him. His eyes track my every movement, locked on me like I’m the only target in his crosshairs. I love it. Fuck, I love it so much. It’s like he can’t see anything but me, like I am some kind of a god he’s dying to worship.

No one has looked at me like that before. Or told me they’ll follow my lead. My head swims with all the possibilities, with how fantastical this whole thing is. To have my brother’s best friend who was my first ever crush wanting to fuck me so much I can feel it with every pore of my skin. I never thought something like that might be possible; it’s like a porn fantasy come true.

Planting myself in front of him, I comb a hand through his hair and tilt his head back with enough force to make him hiss. It exposes his neck. I waste no time trailing open kisses and licking his heated skin. The mad beat of his heart seeps into me through the contact, heightening my desire for him.

“I want you to eat me out before you fuck me from behind. And I like it when you manhandle me.”

He stands up, towering above me. I shiver in delight. His hands roam me, stroking my cheeks, then my jaw, then my shoulders while his eyes don't leave mine. It almost feels like he can't look away, like he's entranced, and that deranges me further, spiking the white-hot need within me for him.

"You chose this pair of shorts on purpose, didn't you? To tease me," he rumbles, one hand groping my ass. "I can see the outlines of your jockstrap."

"I got horny thinking about you coming over."

"You were apprehensive earlier," he points out, dragging a finger along my crease.

I purr, my eyes fluttering closed. "Yeah, but then I remembered how amazing your dick feels."

He pushes me with his big hands. The backs of my knees hit the edge of the wooden coffee table. It's low enough so that if I were to climb on it and present my ass to him, it would bring it to the right height so he can rail me without having to bend down.

He surveys the table, arousal causing his green eyes to shimmer. I think he's had the same idea.

"Get on the table, Charlie," he orders, voice deep and commanding.

I hop on and face him. His arms wrap around me, our heights about the same now. My erection presses against his, making my eyes roll as tiny prickles cover me from head to toe. God, he's so big. He could crush me so easily. Or he could protect me, keep me safe from sheeple who can't appreciate how amazing my gaming skills are.

"Open for me," he says, one hand straying from my back to my ass and squeezing

again.

I do as I'm told. He smashes his lips to mine, ramming his tongue inside my mouth. My abs tighten, every inch of me alight as he owns me with a deep, filthy kiss that has no right to make my chest flutter. It's gentle and almost loving despite its obscene nature, but I remind myself that such things have no place here because this is just sex.

Even if the guy who's about to make me lose my mind spent hours today cheering me on as I played and makes it a little hard to remember that I should've gotten over my crush on him years ago.

Chapter 8

Ben

Charlie tenses a little, so I distract him by dragging my finger over his hole. The stupid shorts have been driving me crazy all evening, and I can't wait to get him out of them.

Not letting off on my worship of his sweet, hot mouth, I pry them off him, leaving him in his sexy jockstrap. He quickly helps me get rid of my own clothes, and within seconds I feel the glorious heat of his body pressed against mine. I soak it up, shivers upon shivers of crackling pleasure surging across me.

“On your knees and elbows, babe. Let me taste you just like you wanted me to,” I say when we part for air, drinking in his disheveled hair and red cheeks.

He gets in position and so do I, lowering myself so I can bury my face in his ass. It's proportional to the rest of him, but it's perky, the two globes fitting just right in my hands. His compact size makes me lose my mind. It triggers some instinct in me to protect him, to make sure he gets what he wants and needs.

Charlie wiggles his ass and makes a whiny noise, his balls swaying with the motion. He's getting impatient. It's incredibly hot. Deeming I've teased him enough, I spread his ass cheeks, exposing his little pink hole. It clenches, then relaxes, shamelessly inviting me to claim it. The skin around it is puckered but soft and smooth like the rest of his clean shaven body. He's exquisite, every part of him a piece of art. I could just look at him for hours, memorizing every dip and peak until I remember them all.

“Ben, please, do something. I’m dying over here,” he whines, a note of annoyance lurking in his sing-song voice.

I smile and press my lips to his skin, tongue probing. He keens as his body tenses, the muscles under my hands flexing. I lick along his entrance, his taste and scent engulfing me whole.

“Oh, fuck,” he moans, his hole twitching as I keep lavng.

But it’s still tense, not quite letting me in. I can’t have that. I want him shaking and babbling nonsense from how good it feels to have my tongue in his ass.

“Open for me, babe,” I say as I pull back a little and slap his left cheek. It vibrates, bouncing a little.

Charlie cries out in pleasure-pain, craning his head back. I spank him again, this time the other side, ripping one more sexy groan out of him. Before he has time to say something smart, I dive in, attacking his entrance. I push against it, prodding until I can slide my tongue past the tight rim.

“Oh, fuck, fuck, fuck.” He pushes back, his tight heat inviting me deeper. “Yes... So good. Ben, fuck me with your tongue.”

I rub his balls as I keep devouring him, his hips rocking in need. My cock is leaking, impossibly hard. Just the thought of stretching that lovely hole with it tests my self-control, setting off a hum of urgency under my skin. I want to be inside him, but I need to prepare him first so his small, tight body can take me. I want him to feel every inch and love it, to lose his mind from the fullness as I pump him full of my cum.

I pick up the pace, licking and sucking as he shakes and begs for more. He relaxes

around me, letting me own him. His taste is addictive, the sounds he makes, the damp feel of his skin, the mad dash of his heart. I'm the reason for all of them, my hunger for him driving him closer to the edge.

"Ben, I wanna come," he complains after a while, those imploring blue eyes locked on me. He's propped his head on his forearms, his expression taut and delirious.

I pull on his balls a little rougher, making him grunt. Then I extract myself from his hole and slap his bubble butt. He jumps, eyes fluttering closed. I knead the abused flesh, loving the slight splash of red clinging to it. I'm pretty sure he'll feel some of that tomorrow, and when he does, he'll think of me.

Chest fluttering, I straighten up and bring my hand down again. I'm careful though and don't overdo it as I don't want him to hurt too much. A little twinge when he sits down will be enough.

"Need your cock. Ben, please," he begs, desperation oozing off him.

Scalding desire tightens my stomach. I palm myself, sucking in a breath. "You are so hot when you beg."

"I'm even hotter when I'm getting railed," he counters, a sly smile softening his needy scowl.

He's not wrong. He was so beautiful last time when he came apart for me. I've been fantasizing about it, and it's kept me horny and on edge the past few days.

"Mm, I better give you what you want then," I say, positioning myself behind him as I lather my rigid erection with lube and line it up. "I'll fuck you so good, you'll feel it tomorrow."

“Yess, fuck. Please. Your dick is the best.”

Grabbing his narrow waist with one hand, I push inside him. His hole stretches around my cockhead, letting me in on a guttural moan that shoots sparks down my spine. I watch my shaft get eaten up, one inch and piercing at a time, heat and tightness caressing my nerve-endings. It’s the best feeling ever, the way his small body accepts me and guides me deeper. It demands its pleasure, greedy and hot and addictive.

He has no idea about the things he does to me. One night with him was enough to change my life, to make me crave him like my hands crave tinkering. And that was before I even knew he was my Charlie who’s grown up to become the most gorgeous and funny man that I know.

I bottom out and take a moment to let him get used to my girth. It’s head-spinning how someone so adorably tiny can take me so well. It really is as if he was made for me, his size a perfect fit for mine so both of us can derive maximum pleasure from each other. The squeeze of his ass around me is torturously sweet, the way it gives when I move—mind-numbing.

“I’m gonna move now,” I say, dragging my dick out so only the cockhead is inside him.

He moans obscenely, the sound heightening my arousal. I push back in, snapping my hips. He keens as I tag his prostate, his back arching and his hands gripping the edge of the table. I hope it’s sturdy enough, because I haven’t even started properly fucking him yet.

“Faster, please. I like it hard,” he begs in a delirious voice, eyes glassed over when they meet mine.

“I’ll fuck you so well, babe, you’ll be sore,” I purr, picking up speed.

He clearly needs a good, hard fuck. I’ll give that to him. I’ll make him lose his mind until he’s a mess.

Holding onto his waist, I pound into him deep and fast. The room fills with the sounds of skin slapping against skin and our mixed moans. My balls tingle as I settle into an unforgiving pace, every slide into him raising more goosebumps along my damp skin.

“Yess. Fuck, I love your piercings. Feels so good,” he whimpers, shaking his hips to match my rhythm. “You’re so fucking big.”

Satisfaction slithers through me, fueling my desire. I bend down and slide my hands to his crotch, palming him through the jockstrap’s pouch. His erection is straining against the material, which is wet from pre-cum.

“Should we take this off?” I hum, nipping the shell of his ear. “So I can stroke your pretty cock and make you come for me?”

“Please,” he begs, tensing around me.

He’s close, trembling and panting and seeking my mouth for a kiss. I let him claim it as I clumsily remove the jockstrap, his lean dick springing free. It’s elegant and smooth like the rest of him, leaking so much I don’t even need lube to make it feel good for him.

“You are so horny for me, babe. Fuck. I love it.” I start pumping, scrambling to keep up with his greedy tongue as it licks around my mouth and owns it.

Wrapping my free hand around his torso, I pull him up so his back is plastered to my

front. It changes the angle and drives him ravenous, his ass bouncing on my cock with renewed vigor. I assault his nipples while jacking him off, saliva dripping from our mouths as we battle with our tongues and try to maintain the kiss.

“Close,” he whimpers, bucking in my arms.

I hold him closer to me, thrusting as hard as I can. His heat contracts, pressing against my pierced shaft. My eyes roll back, a groan shuddering through me. His lithe body absorbs it, gracing it with one of its own.

I come first, his tightness too perfect. My orgasm barrels through me, overwhelming and vicious. I pump my release inside him, every spurt dragging those sexy noises out of him as he quickens his movements.

“That’s it, baby,” I coo, pulling on his damp hair. “You are my cute little cock slut. Take from me what you want. Milk me like you did last time.”

“Fuuuck,” he roars, his small hand wrapping around mine that’s still stroking his dick. His pace stutters a bit, turning chaotic.

“You like that? Being my little whore?” I tease, changing to slower but deeper thrusts as more cum spills out of me.

“Yes, fuck. I’ll be your whore, Ben. Just, please... I need to come.”

God, I’m so turned on. He’s a devil. “Use me, babe, however you like. Make yourself come like a good slut. I wanna see it.”

Leaving his hard nipples and dick alone, I push him back down on the table and let him fuck himself on my spent cock with abandon. He is jacking himself off, his voice hoarse and used.

It doesn't take him long before he reaches the edge, his heat tensing around me and making me wince. He spills over the table, screaming my name. I pick him up and sink to the couch, nestling him in my lap as I pump him through the remainder of his release. He goes boneless and pliant in my arms when he stops shaking, sighing with contentment that I feel in my chest.

"I need a few moments," he says, snuggling comfortably and throwing his arms around my neck. I shift so I can slip out, but he halts me with a shy and delirious smile. "Keep it in."

Warmth buzzes inside me, my stomach filling with butterflies. He's so fucking adorable. Kissing his head, I lean back into the couch and get comfortable. I wait for him to drift off, the exertion clearly taking its toll, and then I slip out and clean us before I move us to his bed.

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Chapter 9

Charlie

I wake up with a jolt, finding myself in Ben's unbelievably comfortable embrace. We are in my bed, the covers half-assedly thrown over us. He's softly snoring. His face is peacefully beautiful, and I can't help but press my lips to his nose for a quick peck.

I can't believe I passed out. He fucked me so thoroughly I couldn't think or do anything but let him have his way with me like I'd wanted to. It's like he can just read my body, doing everything in such a way that maximizes my pleasure.

I stifle down a groan, my body singing. And the way he was so excited watching me play before we even got to the sex? Fuck, why is he so perfect?

"Why are you frowning, Charlie?" he says suddenly, cracking one green eye open. It shimmers with amusement. "You channeling your inner troll?"

I snort, swatting his hand away when he pinches my cheek. "You're the troll. I'm an elf, if anything."

He hums, flexing his triceps. "Ok, agreed. Though I think I'm more of an orc than a troll. So, what's with the scowl?"

Why, nothing, Ben. I'm just having a hard time remembering I don't believe in dating and love and that this is just sex.

As if I can say that.

“I’m hungry,” I tell him instead, sitting up and realizing he’s cleaned me up and put a pair of comfy boxers on me.

Fuck. Him. Grr.

Hopping up, he stretches. My eyes track the flex of his muscles, my fingers itching to touch them. “Me, too. You got any stuff in the fridge? I can whip up something. Unless you prefer takeout?”

I stare at him. I haven’t had homemade food in ages. I can make basic stuff, but I’m too lazy, plus shit tastes better when I order it. “There should be some meat in the freezer. And veggies in the fridge.”

He walks over to me, kissing my forehead. “I’ll make something. Go have a shower.”

Blinking, I watch him leave the room. My heart races fast and I fist the bedsheets to keep myself grounded. Don’t get carried away, Charlie . Remember, this is just sex. Besides, he’s probably a terrible cook.

Update: Ben is definitely not a bad cook. He’s made chicken and potato bake with white sauce. It tastes divine.

“Why can you actually cook?” I ask, moaning around a forkful of flavorful meat. “God, this is so fucking good.”

He shrugs. “I used to mostly eat out. But I got bored of how greasy and heavy everything was, so I started cooking my own food. Plus, it’s kind of fun experimenting.” He grins, swiping a bit of sauce off the corner of my lip. “Or having someone enjoy my meal so openly.”

I guess that makes sense. Trish and Greg stop by with homemade stuff once in a while, so I do get a break from takeouts. But I can see how you could get fed up with only restaurant food.

“You want to go catch a movie?” Ben asks after we eat in silence for a few minutes. He picks up his empty plate and eyes mine. “Are you done, or do you want seconds? I made enough so you have leftovers for tomorrow.”

My jaw goes slack as I stare at his fond smile. Why is he so fucking nice? I bet it looks like I’m doing hearty eyes at him... which wouldn’t be far from the truth. My ex didn’t cook for me, let alone care to make enough so I have food for the next day.

I wanna scream. But also hug Ben. And shake some sense into myself for getting so carried away. But he makes it so fucking easy, for no reason. Like, seriously, who does this kind of shit for a hookup? Or... Is he just being friendly? Friend-zoning me because he’s come to his senses and decided he wants nothing to do with his best friend’s little brother?

I fist the edge of the tablecloth, trying not to scowl. “I’m done, thanks. It was amazing.”

“I’m glad you liked it.” He picks up my plate as well and then washes both.

Oh my god, please stop. This is way too domestic for my frantic heart.

“I, uh,” he says sheepishly, opening the fridge and producing two of my small mason jars that are now filled with something brown. “I found one of those chocolate pudding sachets and you had some milk, so I made dessert, too.” He plops it in front of me, another bout of wonder and nerves and contentment surging through me. “Didn’t have much to garnish it with, but I improvised. If we do that movie, we can grab more ice cream or something.”

God have mercy. Or better yet—just kill me already and end my delightful misery. Ben’s used crushed peanuts or cashews—I do remember having a packet lying about—to draw the insignia of One , my favorite General-Commander from RS.

I swallow a big scoop of chocolate goodness and close my eyes. My chest feels too tight, my skin tingling with pleasure. It’s not the sexual kind; it’s the one that you get when an important person shows they care about you in exactly the way you needed them to.

And I just can’t have that. Maybe old Charlie could—the one who believed in fairytale love and charming princes—but new Charlie? He needs to put a stop to this pronto , because his resolve to be badass and need no man is wearing really thin.

“Listen,” I start, chewing the inside of my cheek as I try to organize my thoughts.

I need to end this. I was a fool to think I can just be friends-with-benefits with Ben. My crush is majorly resurfacing, and worse yet, his behavior is only fueling it further. Mr. Perfect needs to go back to wherever he crawled out from before I completely fall for his irresistible charm and end up with a broken heart when he ultimately decides he’s done pretending he’s interested in me.

His thick brows slant, the green of his eyes stirring with a hint of concern. “Or we can stay in, if you prefer? I just thought the alien invasion horror movie that just came out might be to your liking. If I remember correctly, you used to love that stuff.” He sits back in the chair across from me, lacing his hands on top of the table. “But I can probably find it online...”

My heart pounds in my ears. Shit, he remembers even that? I’m dead.

“Um, actually, I think it’s not a good idea for us to hang—”

My phone rings, startling me so hard I jump from the chair. I usually have it on silent, for this exact reason, but I left the volume on because I might or might not have wanted to make sure I didn't miss Ben's call so I could buzz the door to the building open for him.

I look at the screen. It's Trish.

"Hey, what's up?" I say, shaking my head when Ben makes to stand up and give me some space.

There is a pause. Trish doesn't do pauses, so the uncharacteristic start to our conversation immediately puts me on alert. "Trish? Is everything okay? Please don't tell me something happened to Greg, and he ended up in a coma."

"Jesus, Charlie. You've got some wild imagination! I'm fine!" Greg shouts into the phone from somewhere in the background, a trace of amusement palpable in his voice. But there is also a slight note of concern, which only serves to make the worry within me spike.

"Then what is it? Just spill it out. This is flaring my anxiety."

Trish sighs. "Okay, so. But don't freak out, okay?"

"Okay..."

She sucks in a deep breath, as if whatever news she is about to tell me can be worse than one of my two best friends ending up in a hospital. The suspense is killing me.

"Trish. Just spit it out!"

"Okay. I guess you haven't seen it yet..." She sighs again. "There's been another post

and... It's not good."

"Another post?" I blanch, my brain working overtime to catch up. Chills run down my spine, forcing a sudden alertness through my entire body. Ben seems to catch onto it, his pretty eyes narrowing in concern. "Do you mean by... Andy?"

"Yes. It's, uh, the video from that one time you got completely smashed."

I cringe. I don't remember much from that party, but I've watched the video before I personally deleted it from Andy's phone. It really doesn't paint me in a good light. It's mostly me screaming, shouting and going around butt-naked like some lunatic who's gotten too high.

"But I deleted it!" I argue in terror.

While I don't particularly care what people think about me, it's important that I maintain an inoffensive image. I have sponsors and a growing fanbase, so getting stuff dug up that I'd like to keep buried is the last thing I need. It was also a onetime occurrence, something that happened to me because Andy dragged me to a stupid party and forced me to drink with his dumb chad friends.

"I guess he must've kept a copy... That asshole!" Trish groans, annoyance and rage deepening her voice. "We are working to get it taken off, but people have seen it already. I can't believe that asshole did something like this!"

I growl, banging my fist into the table. "He's fucking dead. He crossed a line he shouldn't have."

"Please, don't do anything reckless! Greg and I are coming over! Wait for us."

I groan like a dying beast. "Fine! Just get here quickly. This ass needs to pay!"

I hang up and throw my phone at the couch. It bounces off the backrest and falls to the seat. I might be angry and murderous, but I am not one of those idiots who go around breaking keyboards, phones, or screens because they can't reel it in.

"Charlie, what happened?" Ben pleads, coming over to me and cradling my face. He holds it up, his thumbs stroking my cheeks as his pretty eyes study me cautiously. "Talk to me. I want to help."

God, this man will be the end of me. I should push him away and kick him out and be done with him. I don't need more future drama in my life. But I don't do that. I wrap my arms around his stomach and pull him close, absorbing his heat and his steady, calming presence as I bury my face in his chest.

Shit. It feels amazing, his solidity a grounding beacon that keeps me tethered so I don't run off and strangle that asshole Andy with my bare hands.

"It's my shitty ex. Fuck, I can't believe I dated that piece of shit. We broke up weeks ago, but he's been pestering me to get back together. I told him we are done. So now he's leaking private videos and photos online!"

Ben sucks in a sharp breath, his body vibrating. He's angry, I can tell. For me. I squeeze him tighter. His hands move to my back and rub soothing patterns that actually help me shake off some of the haze my rage is causing.

Exhaling deeply, I launch into an explanation, needing to get everything off my chest. He listens, cursing here and there and hugging me close. I revel in the contact, warmth and uninvited affection blooming in my chest along with the seething need for revenge.

"Tell me where he lives," Ben growls, his voice agitated and sexy.

I push off a little so I can look at him. His face is contorted in distaste, anger on my behalf giving him a wild look that goes straight to my cock. I moan a little and rub against him. I've never had anyone so worked up over me. It's impossibly hot.

When he notices my very indiscrete attempt to dry-hump him, he chuckles. "Did you get horny, babe?"

I flash him a flirty smile, the rage in me contained by a rush of arousal. "A little? You got all angry for my sake and it's really doing it for me."

"Yeah?" he muses, snaking a hand inside my pants. His fingers tease my slit, pressing and rubbing. "Fuck, you are leaking."

I hum in pleasure, shifting my hips so I can guide his hand lower. My own coils around my erection. "Finger me."

He pulls on his lip, his pre-cum smeared finger teasing my hole. "Yeah? You want that, babe? Aren't your friends coming here?"

"They are, but just a bit," I whine, trying to impale myself on his digit. "To take the edge off?"

He slips it in and captures my mouth in a heated kiss. A second finger joins as his tongue dances with mine, his hunger white-hot and deranging. It's like he's kissing me for the first time even though we fucked not that long ago. His hard dick brushes against me, untouched and begging for attention. But he ignores it, focusing only on me and my pleasure until I'm a gasping, moaning mess as he makes me come in my pants.

"That's so hot," he whispers against my ear, his mouth raining soft kisses wherever it can.

“Want me to return the favor?” I ask, hazy and blissed-out and panting as he holds me so I don’t crumple to the floor.

He kisses my forehead. “Nah. Don’t think we have time. Go shower and change. Your friends will be here soon.” He grins then, and it looks evil. “We’ve got a revenge to plan.”

I blink at him, stars and fire exploding within me. I’m done for. I don’t think I can win against him. He’s just too fucking perfect, and when he smiles at me so openly, hope blooms in me that maybe I was wrong about love after all.

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Chapter 10

Ben

I like Charlie's friends. They are fuming, just like he was. The quick orgasm I gave him helped calm him down though, so he's a lot more level-headed than them. We are sitting around his dining table, snacking on jellybeans and chocolate raisins as we try to figure out the best way to make his asshole ex pay.

"Maybe a break-in? Trash his place? I know some people," Trish offers, frowning when Charlie shakes his head.

"No. We need something more permanent. Something that will really hit home and make him regret ever crossing me," he says, forehead scrunched in thought.

He told me the gist. Andy is an aspiring athlete. Football. He's mediocre at best, but due to his good looks and unscrupulous personality, he's made some connections.

"We should target his career then," I suggest, preening when Charlie's face lights up.

"I was thinking the same," he says. "And we should do it the non-violent way if possible. Kind of how he's trying to undermine me."

"But we don't have any compromising videos of him!" Trish whines, exasperation oozing off her.

"No, but..." Charlie chews on his bottom lip. The action makes me want to kiss him,

but I contain the urge. “I met his previous ex once. The guy was livid, but it was just the start of my and Andy’s relationship, so I thought little of it. He was accusing Andy of blackmail and extortion... But, I mean, they parted on bad terms and Andy was the one who broke it off, so I thought he was just being spiteful.”

I turn this information over in my head. If there is an ounce of truth to that, we can work with it. I grin. Good thing I know the right person for the job. “I know a guy,” I start, pulling everyone’s attention to me. “He’s into hacking and stuff. I bet he can help us get some dirt on your ex.”

The adoration in Charlie’s blue eyes almost undoes me. He’s so fucking cute and precious. I can’t believe he ever tolerated someone as shitty as Andy. I was honestly shocked when he told me. The guy went as far as to mock him about his gaming career, even though he makes more in half a year than that asshole will ever make in two. He just did not deserve even a second of this amazing human’s time or attention.

Unable to help the urge to touch Charlie, I grab his hand and bring his knuckles to my lips. A delightful shiver runs through him, his cheeks gaining some color. His two friends give me a look. It’s not a bad one per se, but it carries a hint of apprehension. Good, they know Charlie deserves only the best. Now I just need to prove that I’m the only one who fulfills the criteria.

“But maybe there isn’t anything to be found,” Charlie voices with a scowl, his beautiful face clouding with worry.

Greg, Trish’s partner who has mostly listened so far, nudges him gently with an elbow. “All of us know he’s an asshole. At the very least, he’ll have an embarrassing video or ten. That douche is a chronic alcoholic.”

“Okay,” Charlie deflates a bit, plopping some jellybeans in his mouth. He chews slowly and with a grimace, as if the candy is sour instead of sweet. My heart yearns

to bring the smile on his face, and I am about to proclaim that I will make Andy pay for messing with my Charlie, when my lovely gamer spits out the jellies and aims a nasty glare Trish's way. "You seriously got the shitty mixed ones? You know I hate those!"

Trish grins sheepishly. "Maybe? Thought it might pump you up and fuel that evil streak you have."

I blink, my brain needing a second to process. Charlie doesn't like sour candy. He was actually grimacing because the taste really was sour and not because he's sad or depressed or feeling like the bad guys will get away with crossing him. I laugh, the whole table turning to me. God, I love his energy, his no-nonsense attitude. He's so small and delicate and elegant. He makes you want to protect him and coddle him and take care of him.

But in reality?

He's a damn alpha wolf in sheep's clothing, ready to kick ass.

"You alright there, buddy?" Trish says with a slight lift of her eyebrows, her lips pouty.

"Mhm. All good." I shoot Charlie a heated glance, wanting to let him know just how hot he makes me feel. "Just processing. I think I might have a thing for nerds with revenge agendas."

Charlie rolls his eyes, stifling a pleased smile. "Oh, c'mon. You are practically as big a nerd as I am. Minus the pro gaming career."

Maybe. But I don't think he realizes that he's the reason for that. Teenager Charlie was just too damn cute getting excited about video games and I wanted a part in that.

“Okay, my friend’s got something for us,” I say a week later at the little quaint café Charlie took showed me. I liked it so much, we came back multiple times for breakfast.

We also ended up watching that horror movie at home after our revenge planning meeting was over. The following days, we went around London so he could show me some sights. Today was slower, because of the shitty weather, and we mostly lazed around in his apartment. I’ve been crashing there, and he hasn’t kicked me out yet, or even implied he wants me to leave. My heart couldn’t be happier. We are practically together already, though I am not sure he realizes it. But I plan to make my intentions to date him official once this fiasco is over.

“He works quickly,” Ethan comments, his arms crossed as he gives me a hard look. For whatever reason, he’s not a fan of Nigel, but whenever I try to prod him about the reason, he always waves my question away.

“You know, you didn’t have to come. We have shit under control,” Charlie huffs, his hand absentmindedly trailing up and down my thigh.

Ethan gives him a scathing look. “Just be happy I didn’t disown you for hiding something like that from me.”

Ah yes. He found out about Charlie’s predicament when he visited last night. Charlie didn’t think we needed to involve him or stress him with stupid drama, so we never told him. But I’d left my laptop open and he’d peeked and then peeked some more and then had a go at us. Oh, and he also knew we’re ‘together’, so I guess that either Charlie mentioned it, or Ethan figured it out on his own. If I had to guess, it’s the latter.

Trish and Greg vacate their chairs and plant themselves behind the couch that me, Charlie and Ethan are occupying. They place their elbows on the backrest and lean

forward.

“Sibling love is the best. But I’m dying to know what Ben’s friend dug up, so can you two kiss and make up already? We know you can’t stay angry at each other for more than ten minutes anyway,” Trish says with a pointed look at the two brothers.

Ethan purses his lips. “Fine. But Charlie has to come with me to that stakeholder meeting.”

“Ugh,” my adorable menace grunts. “You know I hate those stupid meetings!” At that, Ethan’s look turns hard and menacing. “Fine! I’ll go with you.”

I grasp his hand and squeeze it. That’s my Charlie. He gives me a cute little smile that everyone pretends they don’t notice.

“Okay, let’s see what Nigel found,” I say and open the folder he sent me.

There are a dozen videos and just as many emails. The recipients are different, but I recognize a name here and there.

“Open the one that says Axel G. That’s Andy’s ex’s name...” Charlie says, his expressive eyes slanted and hard.

I click on the video and press play. A lithe man not unlike him is led into a room where three big guys are playing cards.

“That’s Axel,” Charlie says as I study the skimpy outfit of the blond man. It’s a mesh top and see-through harem pants. I can spy his dick, so it doesn’t seem like he’s wearing any underwear.

“Get on the table and dance for us, baby,” someone says from behind the camera, his

hand groping the guy's ass.

“Andy, I’m not sure about recording this. If something like this falls into the wrong hands, my dad—”

“C’mon, babe. Do it for me. I promise you have nothing to worry about.”

“I know, but still. His company—”

“Axel,” Andy grates, annoyance dripping from his voice. “Do as I say. You know I hate it when you oppose me.” He fumbles with the camera, the video shaking. “Here. I’ve turned it off. Now go and shake your ass for us, love.”

Wearing the most uncomfortable expression I’ve seen a man make, Axel tries once more to convince Andy to call the orgy off, but the asshole is unrelenting. We skim through the rest of the video. He recorded the entire thing. I also realize that I know who Axel is.

Lips curled and nose scrunched, Charlie stiffens a little next to me. “Open the Axel G email.”

I already have a suspicion about what’s on it. Axel is the son of Bernard Grig, the CEO and lead designer for Grig Fashion. So when the nasty blackmail fills up the screen, I am not surprised. Andy is a real asshole, and he’s forced the Grig Fashion Group to be his sponsor.

“Oh my god, this is disgusting,” Trish gasps, looking as dejected as I feel.

“Piece of shit. I can’t believe he put his hands on Charlie,” Ethan growls, murder in his eyes.

I have a sudden itch to find the asshole and bury him six feet under. But that won't do anyone any good and would land me in jail. I clench my fists. This here is how we end him, even if it won't give me the satisfaction of physically hurting him.

We go through the rest of the files. They are similar in nature, some pettier than others. Axel's case is probably the worst one, but that doesn't mean that Andy hasn't caused just as much harm to the rest of his unfortunate victims.

"This ends now. That asshole is going to jail," Charlie professes and shoves me to the side.

His nimble fingers dance across the keyboard without him even looking at it. It's mesmerizing. With a flourish, he presses the enter key and the ping confirming an email has been sent chimes. He grabs his phone then, dials someone and puts the call on speakers.

"Hey, Charlie. You finally had enough of playing hard to get?" the sleazy voice from the videos says, sending my blood into a frenzy.

I see red. I want to punch Andy. I shoot up, panting and clenching my hands, but Charlie pulls me back down on the couch with a scowl.

"Stay calm," he mouths, then turns his eyes back to the phone. "Yes. I'd like to talk about us. I'm lonely."

Andy purrs on the other end, clearly satisfied. "I knew you would be, love. You're nothing without me. I know how hard you've had it since we broke up. But it's fine, I forgive you."

"I didn't know what I was doing," Charlie says, a vein twitching on the side of his jaw. "Come see me? I'll be at the Pothole in two hours."

“I’ll be there. Make sure you have the key to the bathrooms. I can’t wait to feel just how lonely you were.”

The few seconds it takes for the call to end are excruciating. I feel like I’m going to lose my shit. How dare that bastard speak to Charlie like this? And Charlie? My alpha nerdy adorkable cutie? God, he handled this so fucking well. Better than me. I’m so proud of him.

“You are amazing, you know that?” I blurt out, cradling his face. “You are the kindest and funniest and strongest person I know, and you deserve only the very best. That asshole should’ve never put his dirty hands on you.”

He smiles, the fondness in it a balm to my agitated heart. “I know. I’m a real catch. And that asshole”—he tilts his head at the two uniformed officers who walk into the café, and waves them over—“is about to get what he deserves.”

Chapter 11

Charlie

The police officers sit at a nearby table along with the rest, Ben in charge of showing them the evidence I already sent. They've taken off their uniform jackets and kind of blend in with the visitors if you don't pay attention. I didn't expect the authorities would react so fast, but the hacker provided everything I'd need so that asshole Andy can be outright arrested.

It's why I called him here. I want to see it. I want other people to see it.

My heart beats faster as I glance at Ben, his face still taut with disgust. None of this would've been possible without him. He helped make it happen. My stomach flutters, filling with butterflies. He's the best. God, he's fucking perfect and I think I am done pretending I haven't realized how much I want him. After the week we spent together and how far he went for me, I am done denying myself.

I've had a crush on him since I was a kid. I believed I'd gotten over it, but the moment he popped back into my life? Yeah, I straight out got checkmated. The only problem is that I am so scared this might be a repeat of Andy. That I'm fooling myself there might be something real while in truth I'm being played because I'm an amazing fuck and make decent money.

Except that Ben wouldn't need your money because he has his own.

He's successful. He does what he likes, and he helps with the family business, too.

And most of all, he's a bit of a nerd like me. And there really isn't any faking that.

I squeeze my fists. I need to confront this. Call him out on his Oscar-worthy performance and cut him off before he completely conquers my heart. I don't think I could ever handle it being broken by him, so it's best to put an end to things before I fall for him even more.

Ben glances my way, catching me staring. A radiant sun-like smile lights up his face, making my heart hammer like mad. Why does he look so happy just looking at me? It's so bizarre. It's not in the 'I want to bend you over the table and fuck you' way either; it's fond and affectionate, like he thinks about me as much as I think about him.

Which is ridiculous. Yes, we are fucking, but we agreed on being friends-with-benefits only. He has no reason to like me... or hang out with me so much, or play games with me, or cook, or let me drag him around London to quaint little cafes and restaurants I think he might like... He also gets nothing by helping me get revenge on the asshole who used me. Honestly, it's those things that make me read into his actions and consider that maybe I was wrong to write off love so quickly.

Ben frowns slightly, mouthing, "Are you okay?" He looks like some god about to bring on a devastating storm on Earth just because his current hookup was wronged. Like, seriously, who does that?

I nod at him in reply, my chest squeezing, and bite off a smile. He's been so pissed off since he found out. On my behalf. For me. It feels so good, and it's made this whole waiting game a lot more tolerable. My sweet revenge.

The bell attached to the door frame chimes, snatching my attention as someone enters the shop. It's Andy. He's decked out in a white button up and beige pants, looking annoyingly hot despite how big of an asshole he is. Ben recognizes him immediately,

more storm clouds crossing his face. He looks ready to rain devastation.

I hold up my hand, gesturing him to wait. Pursing his lips, he bobs his head.

“Hi, Charlie. It’s been a while,” Andy says, sleazy and oozing self-satisfaction. “I bet you missed me, love.”

He sits down next to me and reaches for my chin. The thought of his hands touching any part of me makes me want to puke, so I lean down and pick up my hot chocolate mug, taking a sip and making it impossible for him to do what he wants.

He eyes me with distaste. “You are drinking this shit again? God, I leave you on your own for a couple of months and you go back to your bad habits. How many times have I told you to stay away from sugar and caffeine?”

Now, if you took his words in isolation, he’s generally not wrong. A good diet equates to good health. The problem is that he’s the biggest hypocrite I know and not only because he gets drunk almost every night. He doesn’t actually care about my health or he’d have known I eat things in moderation. It’s a way for him to control me.

“How many times did I ask you to stop drinking like a sad alcoholic?” I counter, trying to goad him. I need him enraged and emotional if I want to pull his nasty side out.

He bites, his nostrils flaring and his manicured eyebrows slanting. “What did you say?”

“You are an alcoholic, Andy. You need help. I can make a few phone calls if you want. Maybe get you into therapy as well. I think it would benefit you.”

He does not like what I say one bit, his eyes filling with rage. “What is this, Charlie? Did you call me here to throw a silly tantrum?” He scoffs. “I think I need to remind you who’s in charge.”

Me, duh. He just doesn’t seem to realize that yet.

Andy tries to grab me, but I scoot to the other end of the couch. “Why did you make those posts? It was a really shitty thing to do. You had no right.”

He crosses one leg on top of the other and laces his hands together. It’s such a condescending pose, it makes me want to punch his annoyingly handsome face. Instead, I simply glare at him, and in doing so, I realize that while he’s hot, he’s nowhere near the level of hot that characterizes Ben. Ben’s smile is ten times more potent, and his green eyes always make my stomach fill with butterflies when they look at me. Now that I think about it, I don’t remember Andy ever making me feel that way. I was infatuated for a while, yes, but, in hindsight, I have no idea what I even saw in him or why I let him anywhere near me.

“To teach you your place.”

“My place?” I narrow my eyebrows.

He hums. “If you think those posts are the worst I can do, you are fooling yourself. So whatever this”—he flails his hand, gesturing at me—“little rebellion is, it better stop now. I’m done humoring you.”

Red-hot violence flows through my veins. I know what he’s referring to, Ben’s hacker uncovered a lot more than those emails and that one folder. This asshole has secretly recorded us fucking. He’s crafty, if nothing else, a real sleazebag that needs to rot in jail.

Letting my aggression show on my face as I toss him a shit-eating grin, I say, “Yeah? Are you planning to blackmail me like you did Axel?”

His eyes go a little wide, but he recovers quickly. “Did that little shit speak? I’ll need to have a word with him.” Shaking his head in annoyance, he curls his lip and looks at me like he’s some lord and I am his servant who dared oppose him. “Be careful, Charlie. What happened to Axel is nothing compared to what I will do to you if you continue with this.”

“Recording someone without their consent and blackmailing them with a sex tape is a crime, you know,” I toss, draping an arm over the backrest.

His smirk is evil. “You don’t want this stuff leaking, trust me.”

“You’re not particularly trustworthy, I’m afraid to say. No offense.”

He scowls, jaw clenching, and stands up. “What is this, huh? You think you are a smartass? Clearly, being on your own has messed with your head and I need to fuck some sense back into you. Let’s go.” He reaches for me, but I dodge, vaulting over the armrest. “Charlie. Let’s go. Don’t make a scene.”

Oh, a scene is the least of his problems. “Or what?”

His nostrils flare, annoyance rolling off him. “If you don’t come with me, I will leak that video and ruin you. Be a good little thing and do as I say.”

“Why? So you can keep blackmailing me like you blackmail Axel?”

He clicks his tongue, crossing his arms as he notices some people are staring our way. “I was willing to take you back, you know. If only you’d been good and obedient as you should. But after what you just pulled, you need to be taught a lesson. You’ll take

my cock without a word of complaint, or everyone will know what a little slut you are.”

“Hey, asshole,” Ben roars just as I raise my hand to bitchslap that piece of shit.

Andy spins on his heel, eating a very loud and nasty slap to both his cheeks. One from me and one from Ben.

“Rot in jail, because, trust me, you will,” Ben adds, stepping to the side so the two police officers can talk to my ex.

There isn’t really much talking involved. They give him a quick rundown of what he’s being arrested for, citing the video evidence we supplied and the confession he just made that the entire café more or less heard.

“What the fuck?” he aims at me, rage and fury contorting his face. “What the fuck did you do, Charlie? I’ll end you, you hear me? I’m the best thing that happened to your sorry life and this is how you thank me?”

I grin triumphantly, satisfaction coursing through me. “Dream on, asshole. You are going to jail. Kiss your career goodbye , because when you get out, no one will want anything to do with your blackmailing criminal ass.”

He trashes and shit-talks as the police drag him out in handcuffs, the people around recording the whole thing with their phones. Even if he gets off with just a huge fine, the moment this is uploaded online, it’s over for him.

“God, he’s really delusional,” Trish says, hugging me from the side.

I hug her back. “He’ll get what he deserves.”

Ben's arms drape over my shoulders from behind, his solid warmth like a balm to my agitated psyche. Even though I put that asshole in his place, dealing with him has left me aggravated. "You did good, Charlie. I'm so proud of you."

I turn around as I shake off Trish and embrace my brother's best friend. "Thank you. I couldn't have done it without your help."

"Anytime, babe."

My brother and friends leave my apartment after dinner. It's just me and Ben. He's staying over, or that was the plan, except I'm not so sure anymore because I can't even look at him without nerves swamping my stomach.

It's like I've reverted to my teenage self, blushing and squirming every time I'm in Ben's proximity.

"Charlie." He pats the space on the couch next to where he's sitting. "What's wrong?"

I pinch my forearm, frowning. "Nothing?"

He raises an eyebrow. "It's not nothing. You've been pacing for the past ten minutes. Still worried about Andy? I heard from a police officer friend. The evidence is solid and there are some serious allegations already coming in. They'll probably hold him in jail for at least two years."

And it's partly because of this perfect as shit man who's currently worried about me.

I wave his concern off. "It's not Andy. That asshole is done for, jail or not."

"Then what is it?" He stands up and comes over to me, gathering me in his arms.

I melt in his embrace, his big frame enveloping mine. It feels so warm and safe, like my own little heaven.

“If you aren’t feeling like it, we can marathon the RS games some other time? It doesn’t have to be tonight. We could watch a movie instead. We still have half of your Halloween playlist left,” he suggests, his voice vibrating into me through where we are touching.

My heart skips a beat. Mr. Perfect strikes again.

“Why are you being so awfully nice to me? Since the start. It’s making this whole friends-with-benefits situation a little confusing.”

“Confusing how?” he probes, his hands roaming my back.

My eyes blink closed as I inhale into his chest. “Well, you know. It’s about sex, but you’ve been acting...” I bite my lips, my heart banging and my cheeks going aflame.

“I’ve been acting how?” he prompts, a hint of fond amusement in his voice.

I groan. “God, are you really gonna make me say it? This is so embarrassing. I’m having a hard time acknowledging it to myself as is.”

“I won’t know what you are talking about unless you tell me,” he says, making a very valid point.

“Well, you’ve been acting like... a boyfriend. You know? Doing shit that you don’t have to do just because we are fucking. And I know I said I don’t believe in love, but it’s making it awfully hard not to...”

He holds me tighter, and I can’t help myself but lean into the embrace and soak up his

heat. “Not to?”

“Ugh! Not to fall in love with you, okay? I thought I’d gotten over my stupid crush and then you come back and not only are you amazing in bed, but you treat me like the king I am. So, I think we need to stop this, because I won’t be able to keep things professional.”

He laughs with a full body shake. I scowl and want to scold him, but the easy, affectionate way in which he does it just stirs something warm in my chest. So instead of kicking him out for making fun of me, I laugh with him.

Once he calms down, he steps back and cradles my face with both hands, forcing me to look at him. The intense adoration swimming in his beautiful eyes as they drink me in like I’m the most precious treasure in the world almost undoes me.

“Did it ever cross your mind that I might’ve had an ulterior motive from the start?” he says, his pretty smile in full force.

“An ulterior motive? For sleeping with me?” He nods. “What are you talking about?”

His thumbs caress my cheeks, gentle and loving. “You remember I told you I hadn’t been with anyone for a long time? When we first slept together.”

I bob my head. “Of course, I do.”

“Why do you think that is?”

“I don’t know? You were busy?”

He shakes his head and pecks my nose. “No, silly. I’ve had plenty of opportunities, but you see, I just couldn’t get a certain hotheaded nerd out of my head.”

I frown, trying to comprehend what he's saying. He's talking about me. Okay. Thinking about me made him unable to find others interesting. Okay... My chest suddenly feels too constrictive for my wild heart. Surely, he's not saying what I think he's saying...

"Hold on. Ben, this is... You didn't—" I wave my arms around.

He kisses me on the forehead this time. "Did you think you were the only one with a crush back then? But you were my best friend's little brother, Charlie, and it felt like I couldn't do anything, so I decided to wait two years until you were eighteen. And then we had to move. I thought it was best we cut contact, so I could get over you. It worked for a while, but I just couldn't make any relationship I tried last. There was always something missing. And then I ran into you when I moved here and it's like everything just fell into place. I had no idea it was you when we met, and I thought that maybe I'd finally gotten over you." He smiles and the open fondness in it, the yearning, squeezes at my heartstrings. "Imagine my surprise when I saw you sitting at that restaurant."

My mind races with a million miles an hour. This can't be happening, right? "So—"

"So," he cuts in, "from the moment I realized who you were, I intended to make you fall in love with me again because I never stopped loving you."

I can't breathe. Oh my god, this is not happening. "I—You—"

I inhale deeply, trying to center myself. But the buzz his words unleashed in me, the electric current pulsing within me, is impossible to push down. Because I can feel it, with every cell I possess. His love. His adoration. His single-minded focus on me.

"We don't have to rush anything. You don't have to believe me just because I said it. I'll take my time to convince you, but I want you to know that I'm going to make the

most of this second chance I have with you. If you will let me.”

Do I? The truth is that I really thought I’d be forever alone, condemned to meaningless one-night stands and sex-centered arrangements with people who’d laugh behind my back. And then Ben just barreled back into my life and turned it upside down. I’ve had so much fun with him in the past weeks. He supports me. He nerds out with me. He gets excited about the things I love and he never pressures me into doing the things that I don’t.

He’s the biggest curveball of the century, thrown precisely so it can put a dent in my resolve and replace the bitterness with titillating anticipation. With excitement, with the want to share with him every experience from now on.

So, really, why did I ever think I could have him back in my life without falling in love with him all over again when he’s turned out to be such a kind and devoted man?

I never stood a chance, did I?

I throw my arms around his neck and jump, his strong hands digging into my ass to lift me up. “You are such a dork.” I kiss his cheek. “And this is still giga embarrassing, but I guess we are even now.”

He grins, smooching my nose. “So, what do you say? You wanna officially give this dating thing a real try, babe? I swear, I’m gonna make you so happy.”

I melt at the endearment—I love that he just started calling me that for no reason since the very start—and perch an eyebrow. “Is that a challenge? Because you better be ready for it, big boy. NeonNuke doesn’t go down without a fight.”

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:56 am

One year later.

Ben

I enter our hotel room at the Sunset Paradise, my insides squeezing with nerves. It's our one-year anniversary today and Charlie has been in charge of the logistics for the celebration. We agreed we'd take turns when we started dating, and I can't wait for our second year. I'm already making plans.

I've never been to Cyprus before. It's part of the reason I'm buzzing like a student about to stand before the class and introduce himself. But the bigger part is Charlie. He's been here since yesterday, getting everything ready, and I have no idea what it might be. But knowing him, I'm going to love it.

"Babe, you there?" I call out, dumping my suitcase next to the plush couch in the lounge.

There is a balcony, the lace drapes billowing inside at the hands of a sea-scented breeze. I can just about spy the beach from the open door, white and blue sun umbrellas dotting the wide stretch of golden sand. I can't wait to bury my feet in it. I bet it will be glorious.

"You are here!" Charlie ambles into the room, his cheeks rosy and his breathing elevated. He's wearing shorts with seashells and a simple tank top. "How was your flight?"

My chest tightens, flutters filling my stomach. He's so fucking cute. "Good, aside

from the crying baby two seats behind me.”

Charlie throws his head back and laughs. “There are worse things.”

I love his laugh. It rings around the room like a wind chime, soothing my tired soul. It’s just before noon though, so I doubt I’ll get the chance to sit down just yet. There’s too much to explore around here, food to try, beaches to visit. I can’t wait to see what the island has to offer.

“I’ll try to remember.” I plop into the soft seat, sighing as I get comfortable.

Charlie saunters over and places his hands on my thighs. He leans in, his loose tank top hanging off his lithe torso. My hands move automatically, caressing his bony shoulders as his lips meet mine in an unhurried kiss. It’s deliberate and slow, building up sweet tension under my skin as his tongue thoroughly licks every inch of my mouth. It’s ravenous despite the gentleness, mapping and exploring and owning like we haven’t tasted each other in years.

In truth, it’s been just a day, but even that is too much. Charlie is my anchor, my home, and not having him around even just for a night made me grumpy as shit this morning. It’s been tolerable, for the most part, thanks to the underlying excitement that’s been buzzing through me since I woke up. I just can’t wait to find out what he has in store for our one-year milestone.

“I missed you,” he whispers, pulling away. His hands knead my thighs, the touch teasing but firm.

“I missed you more, babe,” I counter, pushing off the couch to peck his chin.

He chuckles. “I’ll make you a coffee. Go change. You look way too overdressed.”

He sways his perky ass as he retreats to the open kitchen and starts up the coffee

machine. Leaning with his elbows on the counter, the fox pushes his hips back, making his flimsy shorts dig into his crease and betray exactly what kind of underwear he's wearing. My cock wakes up, interested and ready. As if he can tell, Charlie turns his head at me, a shit-eating grin stretching on his face as his eyes zero in on my growing bulge.

“Go change, Ben. I'm hungry and want to eat something before we head to the beach,” he says, wiggling his butt.

I groan, burying my face in my hands. God, I wanna pinch it and squish it and bite it and fuck it with my tongue. Or well, just hold Charlie in my arms for a while. Being away from him for just a day is already giving me withdrawal symptoms.

With a sigh like an old man with arthritis, I stand up and drag my suitcase to the bedroom. Once I've changed out of my slacks and hoodie and donned a Hawaiian shirt and a pair of matching shorts over my swimming briefs, I join Charlie in the lounge again. He hands me the coffee and we drink on the balcony as we watch the busy swimming pool and the beach beyond it from the comfort of our two lounging chairs.

“So, what's the surprise?” I toss when my cup is empty. I place it on the glass table and aim an expectant look Charlie's way.

His blue eyes sparkle with mischief. “It won't be a surprise if I told you. But I guarantee you are going to l-o-v-e it.”

“You are such a tease!” I cross my arms, pouting dramatically.

He shakes his head. “C'mon, Mr. Impatient. You got this. You only have to wait until the evening.”

“That's way too much, considering I've been dying to know since we began

discussing where to go.”

He hops up and stretches, the movement making his top ride up. It exposes a delicious strip of his skin. It’s so pale that I make a mental reminder to ensure he’s wearing sunscreen. It also calls out to me. I can’t help myself but reach out, kissing his flat stomach and causing him to giggle like a teenager.

“It tickles,” he protests but doesn’t push me away. My hand strays from where it’s resting at the low of his back and slides down, groping one firm globe of ass. “Mm. Stop what you’re doing right now! We have an agenda for the day and we are already running behind!”

“So we might as well make it count, no?”

He wiggles out of my hold, planting his hands on his hips. “Nice try, dork. Let’s go. I found this really nice restaurant by the cliffs. Our reservation is in ten minutes, and it takes fifteen to get there.”

Charlie wasn’t joking when he said he has an agenda prepared. He keeps me occupied for the entire afternoon after we enjoy amazing grilled fish and salad for lunch, taking me to a secluded beach first and then to the central one. We dip into the clear and warm water more than a couple times, and then we get on a small boat. It takes us on a scenic ride around the paradise-like island. Since it’s past the peak for the tourist season, the sights aren’t as crowded as I imagine they were two weeks ago, making it easy to take plenty of dorky photos without being interrupted.

We are back at the hotel just as the sun starts to set. After a quick shower, we head out for dinner, which takes place in another quaint little restaurant with excellent food. We hit a beach club too, the loud music reverberating through me as we dance for a while under the clear, starry sky.

“This was so much fun!” Charlie says as we get back to the suite.

I wrap him in my arms from behind and inhale him, his scent settling in my bones. “It was. And not just the bar. I enjoyed today.”

“I’m glad.” He spins around and hugs me back, his lips grazing along my sternum. “Hey. You mind swinging by the vending machine at the reception? I’m suddenly craving ice cream.”

“Chocolate and hazelnut?”

“If they have it. Otherwise, anything with chocolate is fine.”

I kiss his head. “Alright. Be right back.”

It takes me ten minutes to locate the vending machine, and then another ten to work out which ice cream is which because there are no pictures and the ladies at the reception are busy with guests. I pick two different flavors and make my way back to our floor.

Then I pause. The door to our suite is open. I’m pretty sure I closed and locked it, since Charlie was about to get into the shower. Did he go out somewhere? But he wouldn’t forget to lock; he’s the paranoid type that checks twice.

Nerves a little on edge, I quietly slip inside our suite. The lights are off, with the only source of illumination being what seeps in through the windows and balcony door. I frown.

“Charlie? I got your ice cream...”

I flick the light switch, but nothing happens. Did the fuse go? In this day and age and without a single cloud in the sky?

“In here!” Charlie responds a heartbeat later, his voice a little breathy.

I narrow my gaze at the bedroom at the end of the hallway, the door cracked open. Golden candlelight seeps out, fluttering and dancing along the floor. Suspicious, I approach. My pulse picks up as the smell of cotton candy reaches my nostrils.

“Charlie?” I push open the door. “What are you—”

“Meow!”

My jaw hits the floor, my eyes trying to pop out of their sockets. Charlie is draped sideways over the armchair by the window, dressed in nothing but a pair of lacy armbands, cat ears, stockings and a cat tail that—I suck in a sharp breath—is plugged into his delicious ass.

“Welcome back, Master!” he says, arching his back and showcasing the collar with the bell he’s also put on. “I see you found me some ice cream. I guess they restocked after I emptied the machine of the chocolate flavor this morning.”

Laughter explodes out of me, my cock swelling so fast you’d think it’s a runner sprinting the last ten meters to the finish line. In its defense, the finish line is very very tempting and I can’t wait to get my hands on it.

“Charlie,” I say, licking my lips as my eyes feast on the gorgeous display he’s put on for me. “What is this?”

“Oh, this?” He aches his back again and pushes out his hips, stroking the cat tail like he’s stroking a dick. “It’s my surprise for you. Or did you think that a fun day full of activities and some fondling on the beach is all you’d get?”

In all honestly, I thought his surprise was that bar. The DJ played all my favorite songs and we sat in the VIP area with the booths, so I could touch and tease him to my heart’s content without it turning into a public sex show.

Dick straining against my shorts, I place the ice cream on top of the drawer by the door and walk further into the room. A leather whip lies on the bed next to a bunch of lube packets, some of them empty. I lick my lips. I'd have loved to see Charlie plugging himself with the tail. Next time, I'll ask him to show me.

"I wouldn't have complained," I confess, my breath hitching when he sits up facing forward and spreads his legs. A pink ribbon that matches the ones on his cat ears is wrapped around his flushed cock. It looks so enticing my mouth waters immediately. "But this here certainly made everything ten times better."

He waves his hand at me like it's a paw, his dick bouncing with the movement. "Meow, meow. Isn't it? Now, why don't you get naked so this catboy can take care of you, Master."

I snort. It's sexy as hell, but also a little funny. In an endearing way. I can't believe Charlie went and made my catboy cosplay fantasy a reality. He loves to dress up and we've visited more than a few conventions in the past year, but he always turned me down when I jokingly asked him if he'd be into something like this. I wondered about it every time—seeing as we both have a penchant for trying out different kinks—and I guess this must've been the reason. He wanted to make tonight special and he's nailed it like a champ. The bar will be extra high for me next year. I'm looking forward to it though, so I can try wowing him like he wowed me.

"Sir, yes, sir!" I salute him, biting on my lip as I rid myself of my shirt and shorts.

My cock springs free, hard and already glistening with pre-cum. Charlie drags his tongue along his lips obscenely, his hands rubbing his little pink nipples. I love sucking them when I finger him, and he goes wild when I do it in the mornings and wake him up that way.

Palming myself, I watch him assault them as he rubs his plugged ass against the chair. Little gasps escape him, each one a caress to my heated skin. I need to feel him

and make him sing with pleasure. I want to drive him crazy and show him how much I love his little surprise.

I crouch in front of him and take his dick in my mouth. His taste is divine, musky and sweet and so addicting. He purrs in appreciation as I lick along his slit and then swallow him to the root where the ribbon is tied.

“Do you like your surprise, Ben?” he teases, voice low and seductive.

“Very much,” I reply around his shaft, feeling the little shivers as they rack through his body.

It usually takes a little more time for him to get this twitchy, which tells me that he’s done what we agreed on and edged himself for me. I had no idea he was planning on something like this, but I did intend to give him an unforgettable time in this fairytale-like place.

Charlie coils his legs around my neck, dragging my attention to his face. “There’s a leash attached to the bed frame. You can clip it on my collar and have your wicked way with me.”

My heart hammers in my chest, liquid-hot desire pumping adrenaline in my veins. “Yeah?” I slide my big palms under his ass, feeling him up. “And I can flog you until your butt is all red.”

He smirks, his eyes full of invitation and lust. “Maybe.”

This devil fox will be the end of me. Or devil cat.

“I hope you are ready, then. Because you are not sleeping tonight,” I say, picking him up so I can give him the best orgasm of his life.

Charlie

I yelp as Ben picks me up with envious ease, his massive body perfect for manhandling me. I just love when he does it, the way his arms close around me and keep me where he wants me. My body is burning for him, more and more with every slow step he takes toward the bed while his mouth annihilates my ability to think with a hungry kiss.

It's dirty and deep, raising goosebumps all over me. His tongue claims me, owning me with its dominant and assertive need for me. By the time I'm plopped on the bed, my head is spinning. I need Ben's cock in me. I've been slowly edging myself since yesterday like we agreed. It was the condition for me to come here before him. It's making everything feel ten times more intense, every touch of his hand, every kiss, a scorching experience that drives my nerve-endings insane.

"I see you did as you were told and prepared yourself for tonight. You are so sensitive everywhere," Ben hums, his big hand gliding up and down his beautiful cock. He's looming above me, his eyes wild with heat.

"I went the extra mile, too." I wiggle my eyebrows, the chuckle I'm tossing his way turning into a filthy moan I can't stop when he squeezes my dick.

"You've got no idea what it's doing to me. Scoot up for me, baby."

Complying, I soak up the heat and firmness of his bulk as it engulfs me. His weight is grounding on top of me, though he doesn't let me bear it in full, careful not to squish me. I'm such a sucker for our size difference. It's one of my biggest turn-ons and he knows exactly how to take full advantage of it.

Ben attaches the leash to the collar, his hands roaming my body as he pulls back. They leave a trail of fire, the need in me to feel his thick cock spiking.

As if he can read my mind, he says, “On your knees and elbows.” Once I’m in position, he smacks my ass with his hand. “Hips up. Push your ass out for me.”

Anticipation twists my stomach, waves of hot and cold mixing inside me as he lifts the cat tail off my crease and swings it to one side.

“You look so sexy plugged with a tail like this,” he comments with reverence, his finger tracing the area where the toy disappears inside me. He grabs my cheeks and spreads them. “Maybe we should make it a rule that you wear one before I fuck you when we go to bed.”

“I’m open to negotiations,” I manage, moaning when he keeps kneading my ass and causing the plug to move inside me.

“If we keep you stretched, I can slide in anytime I want. Like when we go shopping. All we’d need is a changing room.”

I shudder, deep need assaulting my core. “If you don’t slide in the next two minutes, I’m banning sex for a week.”

He chuckles, amusement palpable in his voice. I’m about to complain and tell him how serious I am when heat explodes across my ass from the whip. It comes down with a hiss, the sting it brings to my skin just right.

“You have been a very naughty kitty, Charlie. I must punish you for your disobedience.”

I swallow hard, my eyes fluttering closed as another hit sends a zap of tingling electricity up my spine. “Yes. I’ve been so bad. Please spank me some more.”

Ben obliges, flogging me diligently and thoroughly until I can feel a slight buzz across my butt even when he’s not touching it.

“So pretty,” he says, kissing each globe.

He nestles himself between my legs and pulls out the tail without a warning, humming in appreciation. My hole feels suddenly empty, clenching and unclenching with the need to be full again.

“You look so ready for me, baby,” he praises, tearing open a packet of lube. His slicked cock is dragging up and down my crease a heartbeat later, the press and tension making me hazy.

With one hand clasping my waist, he rams in. Stars dance in my vision, the burning stretch almost overwhelming. I’m suddenly so full of him I don’t know what to do with it, moaning and shaking and gasping.

“Fuck, you feel amazing,” he groans, railing me so hard the bed squeaks and moves with us.

It feels so fucking good. It’s almost too much, but in the best way possible, every cell of my body pushed to its limit. I like it rough, and he knows it. To feel every inch as he claims me, to fight for air as blinding pleasure invades my core.

“C’mon, babe. Move with me. Show me how much you like my dick,” he encourages, slowing down a notch so I can settle into the rhythm of his thrusts. “That’s it. Take what you need and then milk me dry like you love to do.”

His dirty words stir more tension and heat within me, spurring on my desperation to come. I fuck myself on him as he fucks me, my prostate getting hit with every slide. I feel like I’m about to burst, like his huge cock will split me open. But he doesn’t slow down as I whimper and moan; he starts fucking me even faster, pushing me closer and closer to the edge.

I reach it, and a white-hot explosion quakes through my body. My dick throbs,

spilling under me as I shout, and my ass clenches in a vise around Ben. He roars, spurting inside me. The sensation of his pulsing cock is mind-blowing, his cum sloshing against my walls. He fills me up so good, continuing to fuck me as we shake and gasp in tandem.

“I wanna sleep like this,” I say when we lie down, my back pressed to his front, and his cock still pleasantly stretching my rim.

He kisses my neck. “Yeah? Are you sure, baby?”

“Yes,” I murmur, wiggling a little as I relax fully against him. “I like to feel you inside me.”

“You say that now, but I’ll be hard again in no time if we stay like this.”

“Who says this isn’t exactly what I’m after?”

He nuzzles into me, his mouth hot as it licks the curve of my ear. “You want me to wake you up with my cock when you fall asleep, is that it?”

I crane my neck and press a kiss to his chin. “There’s only one way to find out, isn’t there?”

He laughs and holds me tight and close to him, his lips glued to my neck and shoulder. Just like he said, it doesn’t take long before he’s hard again, the hot and rigid fullness of him sending desire straight to my balls. With his hand on my eager cock, he cants his hips slowly and deliberately, torturing me until I’m begging to be fucked again.

“Ride me,” he orders then, rolling onto his back.

I climb on top of him and sink with a deep sigh on his rigid cock, loving how

amazing it feels from his angle. I drive us both to our second orgasms, bouncing on top of him as he pumps into me with the same vicious enthusiasm from earlier.

I really feel it when he comes, his load joining the one from earlier. This time he slips out. He instructs me to my knees and arms on the edge of the bed and then rubs my sensitive entrance while his cum leaks out of me.

“This is so fucking sexy,” he moans, pushing two fingers inside and making me gasp. “I think we should extensively beta-test this from now on.”

I chuckle, swaying my ass. “It’s called breeding,” I toss over my shoulder, catching his smile when it forms as I twist my head so I can look at him. He’s crouched behind me on the floor, looking awed and horny. “And I agree. I love feeling your cum inside me.”

He swats my ass. A hiss escapes me, followed by a tiny moan I only half-assedly try to restrain.

“We have our agenda for the two weeks here sorted, then. Spanking and breeding,” he says. I laugh, but it turns into a yelp when he picks me up. “But for now, we both need a shower.”

I don’t protest as he carries me to the bathroom and takes extra care to clean me up. We snuggle in bed afterwards. I coax his cock to get hard again and he slips inside me, staying there as we fall asleep in each other’s arms.