



The Rookie vs The Ace

Author: *Nicole Dykes*

Category: LGBT+

Description: Carson

I'm the Rookie. That's how they want to label me. The new guy.

But I'm damn good at what I do. I don't have anything to prove.

Except maybe to him.

I've watched his career for years. So yeah, maybe I want to impress him a tiny bit. But I also can't help riling him up and ruffling his feathers.

He wants me to do things his way, but I don't work like that.

I may be the Rookie, but I'm about to school the Ace.

Brayden

I'm the Ace. I know what I'm doing, and I can't stand arrogant newbies who come in, thinking they know it all.

I've always hated that. But I've never despised anyone more than Carson Hayes when he saunters in like he owns the place.

The kid is good, I'll give him that. But he has a lot to learn.

I'm the Ace around here, the one everyone goes to when they finally realize they don't know it all. And the Rookie is about to learn why.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

I stand on the track, breathing the hot summer air into my lungs. Goddamn, I love that smell. Oil and sunshine. Maybe even a little sweat.

There's nothing better than being at the track. I love every single part of it. The sound is even better than the smell, as racecars slide around the curve and race by. There's no race today. I'm here today with my agent, Jenny, to meet with the race team owners.

Apparently, they're thinking about adding a rookie to the team. As long as they keep their head down and their nose clean, I don't give a fuck. I've been on this team since I was a rookie myself—ten years now.

Jesus, I'm getting old.

I scrub a hand over my face and try not to think too much about the fact that we already have three guys on this team and wondering why they're bringing on someone new.

Thirty-one isn't that old, but in the world of entertainment—which racing is—they're always looking for the new up and comer.

It's fine. I can share the track. My ego isn't nearly as large as some people I race with. Axel Lennon for one. Talk about an ego. I'm surprised he can fit that big head into his helmet. He's mellowed out a little over the years though—especially now that he's a married man.

Married to another racer, I might add. Sebastian is all right though. Not usually a

cocky bastard like his husband, but that doesn't mean he's not competitive. Not at all. We all want that win.

Doesn't matter if it's our first win or our hundredth. It's all the same to us.

I hear the rumble of a motorcycle and turn my attention to where it's coming from, annoyed that anyone would dare bring a motorcycle out here to interrupt the zen the track was providing.

I don't recognize the rude rider as he parks his bike and climbs off. All I see are tight black jeans and black boots. The guy looks to be a pretty good size. The white t-shirt he's wearing doesn't hide the bulge of his biceps, which flex as he raises his arms to slide the black helmet off his head.

"Looks like the rookie is here," Jenny says, not bothering to take off her black sunglasses as we both watch the newcomer.

I watch in horror as the guy slides his helmet off and then saunters over to us. No. No fucking way.

The rookie is the actual Rookie of the racing world. Carson Hayes.

A twenty-one-year-old pain in my ass.

He walks over, definitely loving his little reveal, a sly smile on his stupid pretty-boy face. His brown hair should be all smashed down by his helmet, but somehow it looks immaculate, with the longer locks on top blowing in the breeze. "Brayden," he says smugly and then looks over at Jenny. "My favorite agent."

I can't see her eyes, but I know she's rolling them. That pretty-boy bullshit doesn't play with Jenny. She doesn't like anyone, which is one of the many things I respect

about the woman. “Carson. Behave,” she says deadly calm, but his lips only turn up in a wider smile.

Miles Tanner, the owner of the racing team, makes his way over to us with a huge smile on his old, weathered face. “Carson, my boy. You made it.”

Carson beams at Miles. “Of course, sir. Thank you for having me.”

Gag.

No way is Miles hiring this asshat. He’s a child. A fucking toddler. And even worse, he’s a dirt-track racer. He doesn’t know this track.

“Did you know about this?” I keep my voice low and aimed only at Jenny.

She purses her lips and gives me a clipped nod but doesn’t turn her attention to me. No—she’s already in full negotiation mode as she talks to Miles about contracts and first-year bonuses. This is not happening.

But it is.

It so is.

Carson should really get the hell away from me right now, but instead, he only moves closer to me. His elbow nudges my side. “Don’t look so grumpy, old man. It’s not like they’re hiring me to replace you.”

A sharp knifelike pain activates in my side, but I do my best not to show how direct that hit was. “Like you could,” I bite out. “Don’t you have to be at least sixteen to drive a car? Let alone race one?”

He cackles at that, totally unbothered, because he's a cocky little shithead who drives me crazy. We aren't in the same racing circuit—at least we weren't—but because of his good looks and cocky-ass attitude, which seems to make the women swoon, we've been in several photo shoots together promoting the overall sport of racing. And we frequent the same charity events—especially since we both live in the Kansas City area.

“Aw, don't be like that.” He's too calm and way too damn happy. It annoys the shit out of me. “I'm sure you'll still be some fan's favorite.”

Asshole.

I grit my teeth and try to remain calm as Miles and Jenny's attention moves back to us. “Well, it sounds like a done deal,” Miles says proudly as he pats Carson's shoulder. “Let's go sign some papers.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Carson agrees happily.

Miles then moves to me, patting my shoulder with his heavy hand. “What do you think, Ace? Ready to show this rookie the ropes?”

Jesus Christ. No.

I'm about to tell him where he can shove his goddamn ropes when Jenny nudges me with her boney-ass elbow. “Of course he is. That's what a true legend does.”

I glare at her, but she's just as bothered as Carson was, which is not at all. I'm losing my damn edge.

“Fantastic.” Miles pats me again, and I resist the urge to growl at him like an angry dog. He directs Carson toward the offices, along with some fancy lawyer types, and

Jenny tells them she'll be there in a minute.

I know I'm getting a talking to even before she removes her dark sunglasses and her eyes meet mine. "I don't need to tell you to behave, right?"

I want to get snippy, but honestly, Jenny scares me just a little bit. I mean, I'm not risking my balls to throw her any type of attitude, and it's not like this is her fault anyway. We're both her clients. This is a huge opportunity for Carson, I know that. Of course she's going to go after it for him.

"Nope," I say instead.

She nods. "He's good, Brayden. I know you don't believe that, but he is."

I can't help the dismissive snort that escapes me. "Good? He's a child. He's a dirt-track racer."

She huffs and rolls her eyes at that. "You racers and your fucking snobby attitudes about types of racing. I'll never understand that shit."

I smirk, and she rolls her eyes again. "I'm not his teacher."

"You're the one with ten years of racing under his belt. What happened to camaraderie and all that shit?"

"I'm not teaching him, Jenny. It's not my goddamn job." And yeah, sure, I've taken plenty of racers under my wing over the years. I don't mind that in the slightest, but when they're arrogant little shithheads that call me old man? Hell no.

She puts her sunglasses back on, sliding them over her eyes gracefully. "Do what you have to do, but if you play nice, the odds of your contract being extended are much

higher.”

I grit my teeth again. She did not just say that to me.

But she did, and we both know why. My image is growing tired. The team has been thinking about dropping me for years now, according to chatter, and now that they have their young new hothead signed on, they don't need me.

Unless I'm willing to help said hothead.

Now I just have to decide if it's actually worth it or not.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

I sign on the dotted line in one of the executive offices at the stadium, surrounded by lawyers, Jenny, and Brayden goddamn Beckett.

He's here.

I can't believe I'm officially signing onto the same team as Brayden Beckett. The man is a legend. And he may only be ten years older than me, but that doesn't mean I haven't followed his career since I was in grade school.

Haven't fantasized about being on the track next to him—and okay, maybe I've fantasized about some other things as well, but right now is so not the time to think about that. The man is gorgeous though. He has that brooding, angry, sexy thing down. With piercing blue eyes, sandy brown hair, and a little bit of scruff on his chiseled jaw—yeah, he's a gay dude's wet dream.

And he's, for sure, this gay dude's greatest fantasy come to life. But getting a boner while signing in this stuffy room with a bunch of lawyers and my new boss just isn't a good look. So I force myself to not look in Brayden's direction.

The man just does something to me. I swear. He's standing in the corner, his face set in a stern, angry mode and trying to look bored. But I know it bugs the shit out of him that I'm now on his team.

Why? I have no idea. I think we'd make the perfect pair.

His experience and skill and my fearlessness and eagerness to win. That's a recipe for success if I've ever seen one.

“Welcome to the team.” Miles Tanner slaps my shoulder happily and lights up a cigar, offering me one.

I take it, but I don’t light it up. And no—not because I’m actually a minor like Brayden implied. I’m twenty-one, thank you very much. I could even have a beer to celebrate.

Hmm. I wonder if Brayden would go out with me to celebrate.

I look over in his direction, making it almost a full minute before doing so. He’s glowering at me from his spot in the corner, and it takes everything inside me not to shrink back.

I won’t be a withering little flower around the Ace. I don’t shrivel up and grovel at his feet like most do either. Hell, I swear even Axel Lennon kisses his ass. Perhaps that’s why he can’t stand me. Maybe he needs his big bad ego stroked, but it’s not happening.

Sure, I respect him for what he is, but I’m not kneeling to anyone. Well I mean, I would kneel if he’d let me suck his dick, I suppose. But again, can’t let my mind go there—no-boner zone—and I’m still not praising his racing skills.

He’s good. But so am I.

And I’m going to prove it to him.

We finish up, and soon, everyone else leaves except Brayden and me. I swear it makes me stupid when I’m near him. I can’t quite think.

“You really think you’ve made it, don’t you?” he asks coolly, still standing by the door. His arms are crossed over his broad chest, cloaking that arrogant air around him.

“I know I did,” I say cockily because I can. Because I know I belong here. I’ve worked really damn hard to be here, and no one is taking that away from me.

He walks toward me, placing his hands on the table I’m seated at and meeting my eyes. “This is playing with the big boys now. You really think you’re cut out for that, kid?”

“I’m not a kid,” I say, standing up to my full height, which is only about an inch taller than him, but it counts.

“Yes.” He steps closer to me, his chest nearly bumping mine now. “You are.”

I hate that he sees me that way. Like I don’t belong here. Like I’m a damn child, when I’m not. “I’m not,” I restate. “Not even close. What are you afraid of, Ace? You really afraid to share that track with little ole me?”

His eyes roam over my body, his expression giving nothing away, but shit, I feel it. It’s like his eyes are stroking me, his fire licking at my skin. “I’m not afraid of anything. If anyone should be scared, it’s you.”

I stand up a little taller and try like hell not to show how he’s affecting me, or mainly my dick at the moment—fucker wants to perk right up in his presence. It wants to escape the confines of my jeans and introduce itself to Brayden, but I can’t let him have that satisfaction.

“I’m not scared. I’m excited. You remember what that’s like, right, old man?”

He growls—and I mean full-on growls—and it does things to me. And now, I have no control over my dick any more. It’s at full mast, seeking him out and trying to punch through my damn zipper. “You’ll be shaking in your damn boots the first time you’re out there with the real pros.” He leans into me, and holy hell, I might pass out

from the rapid blood flow going from my head to my dick. “Watch yourself, rookie.”

His shoulder bumps mine as he walks past me and out the door. Not saying another word and not needing to.

An excited shiver goes through me as I think over the day’s events.

Nah, I’m not scared.

I am fucking ready.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

Back on the track. We're one week from the first official race, and the entire team is here today to race our cars without the crowd. It's time to test out the rookie—to see if he's actually going to listen, but I'm not holding my breath.

I know this kid. He's a hotshot wannabe. And Jenny isn't here today to wrangle him either. She had to go deal with another client of hers—some new football player who got caught with his pants down—literally.

And of fucking course, the rookie shows up later than anyone else. He drives his loud-as-hell motorcycle up, like he's perfected being fashionably late, and is so damn proud of himself.

The team owner isn't here though. No one is clapping for him today. No, if anything, the pit crew and the racing team are already annoyed with his antics. Not a great way to start.

He quickly suits up in his gear, clearly eager to get out there. Of course, he doesn't ask for any direction whatsoever. He acts like he owns the damn place. He's in for a really rude awakening. There's no doubt in my mind.

I've seen him race before—call me curious—and sure, I don't mind going to dirt track and even motorcycle races from time to time. There's a spot for all of it in this world, and he's good. I can't deny that he is, but he takes risks he doesn't need to.

He's reckless. A child. Impatient and too damn eager.

That's what I learned from watching him on the track, but people put up with it

because he flashes that great big smile and makes his eyes twinkle for the cameras, and they eat it up.

Not. Me.

I don't want to die on the track because of some asshole who thinks he's above the rules, and I don't want to watch anyone else die either. Racing is unlike any other sport on Earth.

It's not a game.

You can die. You can lose your life out here by making one stupid, simple mistake. There's no room for error. It takes extreme precision and know-how.

I try to ignore him as he climbs into one of the cars—the brand-new shiny ones with lots of sponsors' names and logos all over it. I'm sure they creamed themselves when they found out Carson Hayes had signed on. Goddamn pretty boy.

Honestly, his looks put Sebastian Harris to shame, if you ask me. But you didn't, and I really shouldn't be having those sorts of thoughts.

I'm not attracted to Carson. That would be crazy. He's too mouthy. Too arrogant. Too fucking everything for me.

I haven't made it a habit to let the world know I've been sexually attracted to both male and females and have identified as bisexual for most of my life. I don't need to. It's no one's business, but I've seen Carson eyeing me.

I can feel the heat coming off him any time I'm near. I don't know how he identifies, but he'd for sure be up for some fun off the track with me, there's no doubt about it in my mind.

But it's not happening. Not ever.

I'm still lecturing myself when I hear a loud bang and turn around to find the source of the sound. I see the brand-new shiny car with its side all dented up because this arrogant motherfucker slammed it into the wall. The pit crew races over to assess the damage as I stalk over there, my fists clenching at my sides as I try like hell to keep myself under control.

Doesn't work though because as soon as I see his cocky-as-hell grin from where he's still seated in the car, with no helmet on, I lose my shit completely.

I grab the collar of his jumpsuit and pull his ass out of the car. "What the hell were you thinking?" I growl.

"I was just taking it for a spin."

"A spin?" I hiss and then gesture toward the wrecked car. "You spun it into the wall on your first lap. And where the hell is your helmet?"

He tries to shove me away, but I don't budge, caging him in between my body and the car. "Relax. I wasn't going very fast. I just wanted to try it out."

"You don't try out a fucking car. You have to know that. This isn't a game. This is real life. And these..."—I motion to all the people around us—"these are real lives you can take out here by making one stupid, dumbass mistake. Please tell me you get that."

He tries again to get out of my iron grip, but I don't let go. I only hold onto him tighter, my eyes narrowed and my tone deadly serious because he needs to understand this. "Get off me. I was just messing around. It's really not that serious."

“It is that serious.” I want to throttle him. I can’t believe he’s this damn clueless. “This isn’t preschool, kid. This isn’t the juniors. This is the pros. You’re playing with the big boys here. You do that shit on actual race day, one of them will take your ass out just so they don’t have to deal with you.”

I hear one of the other guys on the team grumbling about it being him, but I ignore it. “Okay. I’m sorry the car got away from me a little bit.” He pouts, no longer trying to get away from me, but I think maybe... just maybe his pride is hurt. Good. He could use being knocked down a peg or two.

“Every single thing you do out on this track matters. Every single thing,” I say carefully. “It’s not a game or a show.” I’m trembling from rage, and I hate it. Hate that it brings back too many damn memories for me.

“Bullshit,” he seethes. “You may be getting up there, but I’ve seen you work the crowd, Brayden. The untouchable Ace. The expert. You love it. You eat it up. I know you do.”

I clench my teeth, my jaw ticking because yes, some of that is true. It’s part entertainment, but he doesn’t know what can really happen. He’s never been in a serious wreck. I doubt he’s even really seen one.

I. Have.

I don’t tell him that though. It’s none of his goddamn business, and I’ll be damned if I give him any intel into my life. But how is he this damn stupid?

“This is not the dirt track. You’re playing with the big boys. I’ve told you before, and I’ll tell you again and again. Keep your nose clean and follow the goddamn rules.”

“Or what?” he challenges me.

“Or I will end you myself.” I don’t mean it, but I see the visible chill go through him when I say it. I’m not sure, but I swear I also see a glimmer of desire there. Of pure damn lust so hot it nearly burns me. I release him, shoving him away. “No more of this playground bullshit. You’re a professional now. Act like it.”

With that I’m off, away from him and all the prying eyes.

I’m not going to take this rookie under my wing. There’s no helping someone who will not listen.

He’s going to have to learn it the hard way.

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This is a little different from what I'm used to, that's for damn sure. But it's a high like none other when I walk to my car and see the full stadium—and I mean, completely and totally full. Not one seat is open, and the crowd is loud.

It's hot as hell here too.

Excitement is flowing through me as I get into the car, belted up and with my helmet on this time. My body grows heated for another reason besides the heat outside now, just thinking about Brayden's big body pressing up against mine. He was seething mad, but all it did was turn me the hell on.

I'll likely do it again just to get him to yell at me like that. I mean, don't worry, I won't hurt anyone or anything—well, maybe myself, but I'm tough. I always bounce back.

I hear the engines around me start up, and that familiar spark unlike any other races through me. I love the sound of an engine. Always have. Always will. There's nothing on Earth like that rumble for me. Does it for me every single time.

And when we take off around the track, I'm free. I don't worry about another thing in this world other than going for the win. For being the best. The fastest.

I know how to race, and it's admittedly an adjustment from dirt-track racing, but at its core, all racing is the same. The speed. The precision. The desire to win. It doesn't matter if the track is paved or dirt. It doesn't matter if you're on four wheels or two. The essentials are all the same.

Brayden may look down on me for starting out in dirt, but I'm a grinning fool as I pass him on the second lap. I'm going to show them all I belong here. No doubt in my mind.

I know what the hell I'm doing, damn it. I don't need Brayden to babysit me like it was implied at my contract signing. I'm not stupid. I know what they're doing. The Ace and the Rookie. They want to spin this for a story, but they don't really know me, and they don't know Brayden either.

It's not going to happen. We'd sure be explosive together though. There's no doubt about it. But he's such a stubborn motherfucker. He's never going to let that happen. On or off the damn track. Though it may have just been my hopeful imagination, but I swear I saw a spark in his eyes when he was spitting fire at me. When he was angry because I wrecked that car a little bit.

A hint of desire.

But I can't think about that now. Right now, I need to focus. Someone spins out ahead of me, and I have to go around them, which makes me lose my spot for a moment. But I'm going to catch back up.

I finish the race in twentieth place, but I'm not frowning when I climb out of my car. Hell no. My first professional race, and I kicked ass. I hung in there, and I'm proud of being number twenty to cross that finish line.

I'm only going to get better as I go on.

It's still a damn high as I look around the crowd and see signs with my last name on them. They're holding them high and screaming my name. Hell yeah. This is where I'm supposed to be.

I loved the dirt track and the smaller stadiums, getting up close and personal with the crowd. But this is checking off boxes I didn't even know I had. I fucking love the attention.

Most people will tell you it's not about the fame, that it's about the race. But I think they're full of shit. You can race anywhere. They love this part too. They love being admired and cheered for.

Brayden took second place, and I'm watching the smug son of a bitch as he does an interview, just grinning away—flirting with that camera and flashing those good looks. He's eating this shit up.

That's the thing I don't get. They say I'm too cocky. That I'm arrogant. But the way I see it, I'm just honest.

And honestly, I'm just damn good at what I do.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

Who the hell even knows I'm here? And if they know I'm here, why are they knocking on my hotel room door?

I swear, I was in a good mood. I took second in the race today. I did my interviews. I came back to the hotel and took a shower. I was going to order some dinner and relax, but no... someone is knocking on my goddamn door.

I tear it open, and I swear my vision goes red.

“Why are you here?”

Carson looks at me, his eyes devilish as he cocks his head to the side playfully. “I'm here to celebrate.”

I stare at him. And stare some more. He cannot be serious. There's no way. “What the hell are you celebrating? You took twentieth place today. You should be licking your wounds.”

He clearly isn't bothered in the slightest though, just brushing past me and walking into my hotel room like he owns the goddamn place. I grumble and close the door behind him, knowing Carson well enough to know that telling him to leave isn't going to make him go anywhere.

“Please. Make yourself at home.” I say dryly as he plops down on the sofa.

“Twentieth is pretty damn good for my first race. We have to celebrate.”

I stare at him incredulously. He cannot be serious. “Twentieth? You’re seriously proud of twentieth?”

He just shrugs, that happy smile on his way too handsome, way too arrogant face. “Hell yeah. I hung in there. We have to celebrate. Plus, you didn’t do so bad yourself.”

I roll my eyes and try to ignore the easy way he just walked in here, like nothing bothers him. I don’t understand that at all. I’m not sure I’ve ever been that comfortable in my home—let alone the room of someone I barely know. “Second and twentieth aren’t even in the same range.”

His eyes are bright and shining with mirth. “Well, you do have ten more years on me. Really, it’s not even close, comparatively.”

I might kill him. I’m still trying to decide if the prison time is worth it or not.

“What did you get your first ever race as a pro?”

I just want to eat a good meal and maybe have a nice, slow glass of whiskey. I do not want to be talking about racing with this kid. “In my first race, some cocky little shithead wrecked me and ruined my car. I didn’t get to finish the damn race.”

Bitter? Yes. I’m still bitter. It pissed me off then, and it pisses me off now.

“Huh.” He sits up a little straighter, and I’m not sure what he’s going to say, but I guarantee even before he says it, it’ll irritate me. “So see, at least I finished my race. We have to celebrate that.”

“You’re missing the point.” I glare at him. “Some cocky little shithead, who reminds me a hell of a lot of you, wrecked my goddamn car because he shouldn’t have been

out there. And now you want me to celebrate that there's another one just like him racing?"

He just grins and stands up, walking over to me confidently, his stride unrestrained and not worried. "What ever happened to him?"

I grumble something under my breath, and he lights up laughing.

"No. Way. Max Wallace?"

"I'm not talking about this with you," I say and head toward the door, hoping he'll get the hint, although he never has before.

"He was really good. He was there when you started?"

I glare daggers at him. "Yes. He was already in his third year, and the fucker never learned. Always wrecking."

He grins, and I want to strangle him.

"It's not funny."

"I mean, he was entertaining as hell to watch. Racing has been boring since he retired."

Retired. At thirty-two. I don't want Carson to pick up on how badly that messes with my head. I'm one year younger than he was when he retired. He said he was just over it, but I'm not so sure.

I think he lost his edge and his entertainment value to the team, and they let him bow out gracefully. But I'll never know the truth, just like the rest of the world.

“Come on. Let’s go downstairs to the bar. It looks fun as hell, and you need some fun.” He looks around my clean hotel room. “This is goddamn depressing.”

“What do you mean this is depressing? It’s a hotel room.”

“You’re a professional racer who got second place in the first race of the season. You should be throwing one hell of a party. There should be people packed to the brim in here. Drinking, making out. Dancing. It should be a party.”

My eyes roll. “Second place isn’t anything new to me, neither is first. I don’t need a damn party for everything. I’m not a child.”

He laughs. Damn him. He just laughs. There’s no sadness from my jab. He couldn’t care less. “Come on, old man. Live a little.”

“I don’t want to go hang out with you. You get that, right?” I try because surely he understands that.

He just laughs and wraps his arm around me. “Humor me, okay? It was my first race, and we’re on the same team. Live a little.”

He’s not going to give up. I know that.

“Fine.” I give in because what’s the damn point. “I’m hungry. Maybe they have food there.”

He pats my stomach, and I could kill him. “Careful. Your metabolism is bound to slow down at some point.”

I roll my eyes at him and look down at my blue shirt covering my sculpted abs, lifting it at the hem and showing off a hint of my stomach. “No fucking way.”

I swear his eyes are burning my bare flesh as he stares at the patch of bare skin, licking his lips. There's definitely a streak of lust there. Shit. Was that weird that I did that? Feeling a little awkward I lower my shirt. He smirks at me, releasing me from his grip. "I stand corrected. Let's go get you some food."

He starts toward the door, and damn it, I follow him. We go down to the bar, and I order a steak. He orders too, and we eat like civilized human beings, but I don't want to talk. Every time he tries, I just grumble, hoping he'll get the point and stop talking to me. But of course he doesn't.

Then the shots of whiskey start. I should say no, but I don't. If I have to sit here with Carson, I'm going to need a drink. Multiple drinks.

And drink we do. A hell of a lot.

I haven't been this drunk for a long time, but after a while, I actually start to have a good time. I mean, good for me, I guess.

I've never really been one to let loose. I work hard. I don't embarrass myself. I do my damn job, and I keep my personal life my own. I've seen enough scandals over the years to know I don't want any part of that.

So I've behaved.

And I see some flashes from people's phones, taking pictures, but I'm not doing anything wrong.

Just two guys out at the bar, celebrating one hell of a race for me and a mediocre one for him.

I laugh at that to myself, but it must have been out loud because Carson is laughing

too. “What’s so funny?” I ask.

He laughs again, his cheeks flushed from the booze. “You’re shitfaced.”

“No more than you are,” I shoot back because I guess that’s a good argument. I don’t really know. The alcohol has for sure gone to my head.

He wraps his arm around my shoulder, and I realize he’s swaying to the music playing in the bar, singing with the crowd around us, who seem all too happy to be hanging out with us.

This is strange.

I’m not used to hanging out with fans off the track. I don’t do that.

But it’s okay.

I suppose it’s okay to let my guard down sometimes, and I am having a good time. I guess I’ll just let myself have this one.

What can it hurt?

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

Oh fuck, my head is pounding. Shit. Is the bed moving? Or is the room spinning? Fuck. I don't know. I haven't been that drunk in a while. I wasn't really planning on getting that drunk last night, but I wanted to celebrate.

My first professional race.

And okay, yeah, maybe twentieth isn't as good as I thought I'd do, but it wasn't that bad. I finished. I did good, damn it. I feel like I've finally made it, and I wanted to celebrate.

So celebrate I did.

With the hottest fucking guy I've ever seen in my life.

I smile to myself. Brayden. The guy hates me, but he went with me to the bar. We had dinner, and we drank. Hell, Brayden was even singing in a crowd of people. Never thought I'd see the day.

Of course, it did take a hell of a lot of alcohol, and I'm paying for it now. But it was worth it. So totally worth it.

I can't really explain why I decided to beg him to celebrate with me, other than I like getting under his skin. I knew it would irritate the shit out of him, me showing up at his nice, boring hotel room, and I just had the urge to do it. Riling him up is just too fun, and I couldn't pass it up.

"Holy fuck. My head is going to explode." I startle at the sound of his voice.

Brayden?

I look to my left on the large king-sized bed. Oh holy fuck.

It's Brayden. Nearly fucking naked and sprawled out on the bed, lying on his stomach like my wildest wet dream.

Last night, when he lifted his shirt, showing off just the barest hint of toned stomach, I nearly swallowed my tongue. Or got down on my knees and begged to swallow his cock.

Thankfully, I didn't do that. I'm pretty good at playing it cool. But Jesus Christ, I wanted to.

But today, there's so much bare skin in front of me, I'm really not sure I'm capable of keeping my composure. I'm not a saint. He's cut. Which I already knew. I'm a gay man who loves racing, so of course I've seen his many nearly nude photos over the years. Calendars. Jesus Christ, the calendars.

I've even been part of some of those photo shoots, but this is different. This is Brayden Beckett in bed with me, no one else around, and only wearing a snug pair of black boxer briefs.

Lord help me. Maybe I died last night and this is my heaven.

I watch the muscles in his back flex as he stretches. The colorful tattoos on his right bicep move with each flex.

Phew. If this is my heaven, I'm okay with it. I had a good run. Totally worth it.

"Why the fuck are you naked?" I look at his face, which is now turned toward me

with a deep scowl as his eyes creep over my skin. I feel it everywhere, like an angry caress. “And why the fuck are you in my bed?”

I grin, turning on that cool attitude I’m so good at portraying. “I think you’re actually in my bed, champ.” I’m lying on my back, naked as the day I was born, and yeah, my cock is standing tall and proud.

Could be morning wood, but my guess it’s the hot-as-fuck, nearly naked, broody racer in my bed. That’s probably it.

His eyes settle on my cock, and it twitches at his perusal. I lick my lips and keep my eyes on his face, waiting for any sign of lust. Any sign that he might want me even half as bad as I want him.

“Jesus, fuck. Please tell me we didn’t fuck last night.”

My mouth opens, and a hearty laugh leaves me. I don’t get the impression he’s freaked-out to be in a bed with a man, but I think he might be more freaked-out that it’s me in bed with him. “Well, my ass isn’t sore, so either we didn’t fuck, I fucked you, or your dick sadly didn’t leave an impression.”

His glare just deepens. “We didn’t fuck.”

I grin widely, knowing it drives him insane. “You sure?”

He shuts his eyes and rolls his body to sit up on the edge of the bed. All his muscles bunch with every movement, and I’m pretty sure I’m drooling. “Shit. How much did we drink?” he groans.

“Oh, come on. It’s not that bad.” I mean, yeah, my head was a little sore when I woke up, but I’m starting to feel better.

“Must you be so fucking loud?” he asks, and I chuckle.

“Aw, feeling your age?” I tease.

He tosses a pillow at me, and I catch it. “Fuck off.”

“Wanna shower? It’ll make you feel better.” I waggle my eyebrows at him as I stand up and start toward the bathroom.

“How the hell are you not hungover?”

“I am.” Because yeah, I don’t feel the greatest but not close to death. “Just not old, so it’ll pass.”

He looks like he wants to punch me, and I laugh, moving to sit next to him on the bed instead of going to the bathroom. My dick has waned a little, but it’s still pretty hard. I wonder if he woke up the same way.

If we touched last night.

I don’t remember anything past singing and dancing at the bar, but I do remember my arm being around him down there.

My eyes move to his lips, and he grumbles, “Stop looking at me like that. Nothing happened last night.”

I cock my head to the side, studying him. “You sure?”

“Positive.” Hmm, he does look really sure.

“So you’re straight then, huh?”

He sighs heavily, and an odd sense of hope makes its way through me. “That’s really none of your business.”

Holy shit. That wasn’t a yes. “Not so straight?”

Another very heavy sigh. “If you must know, I identify as bisexual. Have for a really long damn time too.”

“How did I not know that?”

“Because I know how to keep my shit private.”

I roll my eyes because, yeah, he does keep buttoned up, that’s for damn sure. His interviews are always boring as all hell. Just about racing. Nothing else. Not ever. “Well, I’m gay as fuck, and I bet you didn’t know that.” I sound like a kid, and I kind of hate that because that’s how he sees me.

He studies me carefully, and I fidget a little under his gaze before he nods his head slowly. “I’m surprised.”

“That I’m gay?”

His eyes roll now, clearly irritated. “No. That it isn’t public knowledge.”

“I’m not an idiot,” I say. “I know how hard it is to be out in the public eye in the racing world. Hell, in the sports world. I’m not fucking up my career.”

He looks like he wants to ask me something, and God, do I want him to. I don’t even care what it is. We’re talking. Like actually talking, and I don’t want it to stop.

But then he steels his expression and stands up from the bed, grabbing his discarded

jeans and pulling them on very slowly. It's clear he's in pain from drinking too much.

I'm sure he regrets it.

Still, my eyes rove all over his body as he gets dressed, like the total damn creeper I am, and my dick only gets harder. He eyes it, not missing a damn thing and then looks back up at my face, unimpressed.

Fuck him. I have a nice cock.

I know I do. I've been told many times when I have a discreet hookup here and there.

"Don't get any ideas. I don't fuck teenagers."

"I'm not a goddamn teenager," I say petulantly. "And who said I wanted to fuck you?" I would. I so fucking would. "You really aren't my type."

He smirks at me, the smile confident and strong. "Your dick says otherwise." He smooths down his t-shirt, his hand sweeping over those firm abs I want to lick.

"My dick gets excited by a hot guy, but my brain knows I don't want you. I like guys around my age. They can go for hours. Don't have to wait for them to get hard, and they don't need rest and a sandwich before fucking me again."

His gaze hardens, and I can't tell if it's anger or something else, but then he just chuckles and shakes his head at me. "Whatever you need to tell yourself, rookie. But when we're on the track, you keep your desire and your dick to yourself."

"Don't dry hump you out on the track. Got it," I say dryly, and he just laughs again like I'm ridiculous.

I want to punch him now, but he just leaves. Striding out of my hotel room, totally unbothered.

Well, that was weird.

Usually, I'm the one playing it cool, and he gets all riled up.

I don't like this change.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

I'm still nursing my hangover when there's a loud banging on my hotel door. No. Not again.

No matter what Carson wants, the answer is no. And not because I'm old, damn it. Just because I'm not an irresponsible idiot. Waking up nearly naked next to a very naked Carson this morning was not a good experience.

I mean, okay sure, if I didn't know him—if we were total strangers—yeah, I'd have been happy as hell to wake up next to a warm naked body. I'd have been all over him.

It's been far too long since I've gotten laid.

But it wasn't a stranger. It was Carson. The goddamn Rookie. What the hell was I thinking? I mean, I know nothing happened, but still, we got drunk together and passed out in the same bed.

That's crossing the professional line, no matter how you look at it.

More knocking.

I grumble and groan all the way to the door, pulling it open and ready to chew Carson out for being a pain in my ass. But I stop short when I see Jenny standing there, dressed in a black pant suit and heels, hand on one hip and ready for a fight.

Shit. Am I in trouble?

“Have fun last night?” she asks. She looks angry. But I also just think that's her face.

Shit.“No.” It comes out more like a question than a statement though. Clearly something is up.

She raises her hand, her phone unlocked, revealing a picture of Carson and me at the bar. His arm is around my shoulder, and we’re both smiling like goofy goddamn idiots.

“Fuck.”

She laughs. She actually seems entertained by this, and I just glare at her as she puts her phone in her pocket and walks past me, moving into my hotel room. Just like with Carson, I don’t bother fighting it.

I close the door and walk back into the room, sitting down next to Jenny on the couch. “Fuck,” I say again.

She keeps laughing. “I didn’t know you knew how to smile.”

I glare at her, and she only laughs harder. “Could say the same about you.”

“I know, right?” she says totally seriously. “I love my resting bitch face, and I thought we had that in common, but you sure looked like you were having fun.”

“I was drunk.”

She cackles, and I glare. “So he got to you, huh?”

I bristle. “Of course not. He’s just a pain in the ass and wouldn’t go away. So I went to have a drink with him.”

“Lots of drinks.” She smirks. “I’m assuming you were totally shitfaced, according to

the video.”

I groan, covering my face and leaning back into the couch. “There’s video?”

“There’s always video,” she says, but she doesn’t sound mad at all, so at least there wasn’t anything truly unsavory.

No pictures of Carson bare-assed and me in my boxer briefs. That’s good. Thank fuck for small favors.

“So I’m guessing you’re not in love with him.”

I drop my hands and turn my head to look at her. “Are you kidding? Love? I don’t even like him.”

Again with the cackling. I groan, but she doesn’t stop laughing for a bit. She’s enjoying this way too much. “Okay. Well then, I’m here to talk business. So sit up. Man up and get ready.”

I want to argue and tell her to get the fuck out, but that’s not the way things work with Jenny. She’ll leave, but she’ll take my balls with her. Just carry them right out in her designer handbag.

“Fine.” I sit up and turn my body a little so I’m facing her. “What’s going on? Here to tell me that they’re canning me because I’m way too fucking old now?” It’s supposed to be a joke, but my throat nearly closes up when I say it.

My greatest fear is way too close to the surface.

Thankfully, her pretty eyes only roll and roll hard. “Do not say you’re old. You’re thirty-one, and I will fucking cut you if you say that’s old again.”

I can't fight the very small smile on my lips, but it quickly turns into a deep frown. "But it's been ten years, and they're tired of me?" It wasn't supposed to be a question. I hate being so damn vulnerable, but that's the way it came out, regardless.

"No." She sighs though. "They just have a vision."

"A vision?" I ask, already knowing I'm going to hate this. I hate the PR bullshit. Always have. Always will. I don't want to play their games. I just want to race.

"Yeah, they brought Carson on because he's new and fresh." I try not to wince, but I do, and she sees it. Luckily, she just carries on. "But you, you're experienced. Polished. You're the legend."

I want to roll my eyes. I'm thirty-one. But I get it. There are more and more rookies these days. "So what does that mean?"

"It means they want that. They're very excited about a possible bromance."

"What?" I swear my jaw has dropped. "A bromance? Between Carson and me?"

She's smirking, but luckily she's stopped laughing or I think I'd lose it. "Yes. They love it. The brand-new rookie and the experienced ace—best friends. They want full-on hanging out all the time. Best men at each other's weddings. Going on vacations together. Mahomes and Kelce. Bromance."

She's dead serious too. I can see it on her face. It says do not fight me on this, but how the hell could I not? This is crazy. "No."

Her mouth turns into a firm, straight line. "I won't bullshit you, Brayden. You know that. I'll always give it to you straight."

This is so not good. I know it before she even says it.

“This has to happen. It’s why they recruited Carson. It’s why he’s here. He’s here for you and the PR team’s vision.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

She cocks her head to the side, her eyes deadly serious, and I know she isn’t joking. I already knew that. “You’re smart, Brayden.”

I fill in the blanks with what she’s not saying. “They’ll cut me from the team if I don’t do this.”

She gives a clipped nod. “But it doesn’t matter because you’re going to do this.” She stands up from the couch, the conversation pretty much over. Jenny doesn’t ever stay longer than she needs to. Too many fires to put out all over the place.

“Maybe I’m tired of playing their games,” I say with no conviction because even if I am, it doesn’t matter. I can’t leave this team. It’s part of me. It has been since I started. It defines me, no matter how much I hate it.

I stand up, and she looks me in the eyes. “Maybe you are. And if you are, I’ll help you get signed to another team or retire. Whatever you want, but...”

But we both know I don’t want that. It would kill me. “Right.”

She looks like she wants to say something, and when she doesn’t, I’m surprised. She usually doesn’t hold back.

“Look, he’s a good kid. And he’s a talented racer.”

I snort at that. “Come on, Jenny.”

A small smile graces her lips. “He is. We both know he has raw talent. You can’t teach that. You’re born with it, and he was. He just needs fine-tuning. They want to see you do that for him. They want you to teach him, take him under your wing, and then befriend him. Nearly inseparable.”

I fight a deep, dying sort of groan, but just barely. This is not me. I don’t want to do this. “Careful, you sound like a racing fan.”

She grins now, heading toward the door. “I now manage seven of you racing shitheads. Of course I have to pay attention to the sport. And you know I’m right.”

I do know.

And it pisses me off.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

“Did Jenny talk to you?”

I’m still trying to figure out why Brayden is on my front porch when he asks the question. Surely he’s not here to talk about Jenny. I just got back to Kansas City after the first race, and I’m sure Brayden did too.

I’m the first stop?

“What?”

“You heard me.” He looks annoyed.

I step out onto the porch instead of inviting him in, closing the door behind me. The house is new, and nothing is unpacked yet. I don’t need that judgment. “Well, she texted me and told me to not be a shithead. That was it.”

He rolls his eyes at that, clearly annoyed. He sits down on the porch swing I managed to hang up before I left for the airport. I always wanted this. A front porch where I can sit and swing, just doing nothing for a bit. It calms my mind.

I have it now. I maybe went a little crazy with my signing bonus and new contract, but investing in a medium-sized, decent-priced house isn’t that wild. Still, I’m sure it’s nothing like Brayden’s house. The guy likely has a bigass mansion.

“Why?” I have to ask, leaning against the porch railing directly across from him.

“She wants us to be best friends.” I raise an eyebrow, not expecting that at all. Before

I can ask what the fuck though, he sighs. “Well the PR team wants us to be. I don’t think Jenny cares.”

That makes a little more sense, but I still don’t understand why. “Why?” Not that I mind. I’m not the one that hates him. Hell, I’d be totally fine with more time together. Naked or clothed, I’m not too picky. But seeing the stubborn set of his jaw, he’s obviously not that happy about it.

“I have no fucking clue. I guess that’s why they signed you. They think we’ll be good together. They want some stupid-ass bromance.”

I chuckle. “No way you’re capable of that.”

He glares at me. “I’m going to do it.”

I study him carefully, surprised. “You are?” I’m cautious. This has to be a trap. No way Brayden wants to be my friend. The thought is bonkers.

“Of course I am. I’m owned by the team just as much as you are.”

Except his contract is up at the end of the year, and mine is for three more years. But I don’t dare say that. “It’s not like you can’t just go to another team, Brayden. Come on.”

I’m starting to think this is an elaborate joke or something. But there’s something on his face that says it’s not. He’s clearly upset by this, but he’s not going to back down, and I want to know why. “I’ve been part of this team for a goddamn decade.”

I admit that’s a long time, but I still think it’s weird he’s that attached to a team. “Well you could go to another team for another decade.” I like to give him shit about being an old man, but Brayden isn’t old. Not even close. He has a lot of years left in

him.

“I’m not going to another team,” he grits out between clenched teeth. Okay, I obviously struck a nerve.

“Look, Miles is a fucking dick,” I try again because even I know that. Yeah, he was being overly nice to me when I signed, but I’m not an idiot. The guy is slimy. Only cares about money, and I have no doubt he’ll cut Brayden if we don’t do exactly what he wants.

“He is, and he isn’t.” I’m shocked he didn’t full-on argue with me just to argue, but he seems to actually believe what he’s saying. I raise an eyebrow, staying still and studying Brayden. Waiting for him to say more, and holy hell, he actually does. “His son was a racer on this team.”

“Was?” I ask, my jaw suddenly dropping. “Oh my God, did he fire his own son?”

Brayden’s face is grim, but it’s not like the yeah, he fired him kind of grim. It’s darker than that. Sadder. “No. He was my friend.”

“Was?” I ask again, then my eyes widen as reality hits me. “What happened?” I know you aren’t supposed to ask, but my curiosity is too great not to.

“An accident.” He’s looking away, his eyes stormy and distant, but then he looks back at me. “On the track.”

I gape at him. “How did I not know about that?”

He stands up from the swing, clearly over the discussion. I’m surprised he’s told me this much. “You were probably still in diapers. It was a long time ago.”

I want to ask him more. He's only ten years older than me. Did it happen when he was a rookie, or before? He said they were friends, but there's more to it. The guy looks haunted as he walks toward the stairs.

"Look, I'm going to play their stupid-ass games. I don't want to leave this team. I won't. So I'll do this. When we're on the track, we're best friends. I'll try my best to teach you what I can and smile for the damn camera."

"If they truly want us to be best friends, wouldn't that mean we need to be friendly off the track too?" I can't help dropping my voice a little, flirting shamelessly because I really can't help myself.

The glare he gives me isn't surprising at all.

It still makes me laugh.

"Don't do that. They want us to be friends, but believe me, there's a line we aren't allowed to cross."

I stand up a little taller, staring him down and wondering if he'd cross that line. Sue me—he's gorgeous, and he really is exactly my type. I fucking love the big strong brooding type.

It's like my goddamn catnip.

"Aw, but you want to, don't you?" I beam at him. "Admit it. You totally saw something you liked." I waggle my eyebrows at him, way over-the-top, and it makes him only brood even more.

He just walks down the stairs and toward his car, grumbling the whole way—something about me being a goddamn kid. And I can't keep the smile off my damn

face.

Friends.

Best. Friends.

I toss my head back and laugh.

Totally doable.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

Being friends with Carson is weird, and really, I'm not sure I can do it. I don't think I'm going to get through it. The kid doesn't listen. He's stubborn and pigheaded about the dumbest fucking things.

He won't listen to me about anything on or off the track. It's been one week since Jenny told me the plan, and it's not going well.

"Carson! Pull your head out of your ass and listen," I say abruptly as I try like hell to go over some strategy for today's race. We're in the pit, so no one can hear us in the stands, but I do try to keep my face neutral.

I swear to God this is going to be totally impossible.

There's no way I'm going to make it. I'm going to end up being on the news for strangling him right here around the pit crew and the crowd. But I'm weighing my options because it might be worth it. The arrogant little smirk on his face makes me homicidal.

I can't believe I told him about Jeff. I certainly didn't mean to. I don't talk about Jeff. Not ever. I don't talk about our friendship when I was a teenager or about his death. I barely even allow myself to think about it. And then I just went and blurted it out to Carson like we were just chatting about the weather.

I don't know what the hell I was thinking. He hasn't asked any more about it, though, and for that, I'm grateful. I guess I can spare his life for now. "You need to pay attention out there," I try again.

“I do pay attention, but don’t you think maybe you overthink a little bit?”

I stare at him—well, glare is more like it. Both of us are already in our jumpsuits for the race. Zipped up and ready to go. It’s over a hundred degrees today, and I’m sweating my balls off and am annoyed by that. But that doesn’t even compare to how irritated I am right now with Carson. “That’s not a thing. You could die out there. You could kill someone.”

I swear to God, his eyes roll, and I almost poke them out. “You got to live a little, Brayden. Come on. We have the best job in the whole damn world. You overthink it, and there’s no way you’re going to be a champion. You love it, and the track will love you back.”

“Jesus. Fuck.” I grip the bridge of my nose, trying to breathe deep. “The track is a track. It can’t love you. But it can kill you if you drive with your head up your ass. And more than that, it could kill someone else.”

He just huffs, his face showing his annoyance. Well, the feeling is for sure mutual. But then I look over Carson’s shoulder, and I see Jenny’s stern face. Goddammit, she’s like a hawk. She has her hip cocked in annoyance, and I can feel her telling me to get it together.

I take another deep breath and force a smile onto my face. Carson looks momentarily horrified until he must catch on to what’s happening. “Jenny watching?”

I nod my head, keeping the smile in place. “Yup. Which means the world is too. And we’re friends.”

“The very best.” His smile is way brighter than mine, and I’m sure it even looks more natural, which annoys the shit out of me. But I can’t let my smile fade. Jenny gives me a clipped nod, telling me I’ve been a good boy, and I want to vomit.

“Look, just don’t do anything stupid out there, okay?”

“You think Mahomes says that to Kelce?” he asks with an easy laugh that makes me want to punch him.

I just stare at him. “Probably.”

He laughs and smacks me on the shoulder before wrapping his arm around me, knowing damn well I can’t push him away. “Yeah, he probably does. Okay, let’s do this thing.”

“Try to get better than twentieth,” I jab, but he’s grinning as we make our way to our cars. Not bothered.

Never fucking bothered.

What the hell must that be like? I’ll never know. Everything drives me crazy. Especially Carson fucking Hayes.

But when the crowd can see him clearly and he starts his waving, winking bullshit, it’s apparent I’m the only one. They love him. The crowd eats him up. Another thing to add to my list of things that annoy the shit out of me about Carson.

He doesn’t even really have to work for it. He just goes out there with that ridiculous smile, and they eat it up.

But when I go out there, I get the same amount of screaming. I’ve still got it.

This rookie has nothing on me, damn it.

The cars start, the engines roaring, and the crowd is drowned out. I do love the crowd,

don't get me wrong. I wouldn't be here without them, and I sure as hell wouldn't have all the things I have now without them. But this is the part I love.

Where it's just me behind the wheel. It's euphoric, and yes, I do love the race. I do live when I'm in this car. But I've earned that right, and I still pay attention. I'm not going to wreck anyone on purpose. I avoid wrecks when I can.

The thought of getting in a wreck actually sends a shiver down my spine, but I push it away. I won't let Carson get under my skin or memories of Jeff either. Of the ambulance and the reporters everywhere. Of the questions and riding to the hospital, knowing he didn't look good. Knowing my friend was gone long before anyone told me.

I can't focus on any of those things.

I have a race to win.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

Holy fuck, that felt good. Fifth place. Hell yes! Suck on that, Brayden. I don't know why that has to be my first thought after getting out of my car, but it is. Him with his don't do anything stupid bullshit.

Like I'm a kid who doesn't know what the hell he's doing. I know exactly what I'm doing. I'm a damn good racer, and I'm on a high as I step out of my car, top five of this race. And yeah, Brayden did take first today, the asshole. But I'm coming for him, and I think he knows it.

Nothing wrong with a little friendly competition between friends, right?

It's pure chaos as the media and our agents surround our cars. Microphones are shoved in our faces with questions that'll air on the news tonight. Plenty of sports bloggers are here too. It's exciting as hell, something I'm not sure I'll ever get used to either.

I love answering the questions.

"Carson, it looked like you were going to have an epic spinout there at the end, but you recovered just in time. How did that feel?"

"Carson, how does it feel to be the youngest racer out on the track today?"

"Carson, how is it racing right next to The Brayden Beckett?"

Now that one, of course, gets Brayden and Jenny's attention. Both of them just waiting for me to fuck up. I want to roll my eyes at them, but I also make them sweat

a little, so I just rub my chin thoughtfully. “Hmm, how is it racing next to Brayden?” Jenny glares, but Brayden can’t. I grin wide and waggle my eyebrows. “Wouldn’t you all like to know?”

The reporter laughs, just like she’s supposed to do for the camera. We all know our roles out here, and you wouldn’t know whether she actually finds me charming or if she just knows how to play the game. We’ll never know. “Yes. We’d love to know.”

I grin over at Brayden. “It’s indescribable. I’ve looked up to Brayden since I can remember. There’s some things in racing you just can’t teach, and he has that.” I look away from Brayden now, feeling a little vulnerable, spilling the truth like that. “And he’s a great teacher. He kicks my ass when I need it, but I’m just along for the ride. Happy to be here.”

The reporter is now grinning ear to ear. She knows she got her soundbite for the evening news. “Thank you, Carson. I think I can speak for everyone when I say we’re all happy to have you here.”

She goes onto the next racer, and another reporter comes my way, and I’m ready. I love the banter and the questions. I could do even more, but soon we’re being ushered away from the track, and the media is packing up.

Jenny grabs Brayden and me, and we walk toward the pit to get out of the stadium. She looks fairly pleased, and I can’t help but ask when we’re out of range of everyone else, “So, you think we sold the bromance well enough?”

Her eyes just roll as she stops walking, standing in front of us, and I know she’s ready to lecture. I quickly try to go over everywhere I messed up to prepare myself, but I don’t think I did. “Please. Not even close.” She looks over at Brayden. “Did I see you mouth ass at him during the interviews?”

I grasp my heart playfully. “I’m hurt. Devastated.”

Brayden flips me off, and Jenny just turns her focus to me. “And you. What the hell was that dramatic pause, huh? When someone asks you what it’s like to race next to Brayden, you play up the goddamn legend bullshit, okay? Right away.”

I smirk but do so carefully because I happen to really like my balls and don’t want her to take them. “You guys did fine.” She sighs. “But we’re going to have to do more off the track.”

Knew it.

Brayden grumbles, but he doesn’t argue loudly, and I’m pretty sure she wasn’t expecting either of us to. She knows her shit, and we both respect her enough to listen.

“There’s a charity event in Kansas City on Thursday. You guys don’t fly out for the next race until Saturday, so it’s perfect.”

“What kind of event?” Brayden asks cautiously.

“You know Maverick’s guy, Coop?” I swear to God she actually smiles fondly, just mentioning the cute guy’s name. And Cooper Moon is fucking adorable. There’s no getting around that. I’ve only seen him a couple of times, but yeah, adorable.

We both nod in answer.

“Well, his animal shelter is having an adoption event, and of course, since he’s dating Mav, a lot of racers are going. It would be good to see you guys there.”

She’s not asking. She’s telling, but it sounds good to me. I love animals. Just don’t

have a lot of time for them. And before I bought my house, I lived in a shitty little apartment, so I didn't have the space.

"As long as I don't have to adopt anything," Brayden says.

Jenny just shrugs. "You see if you can resist Coop. Thanks to him, I now have a fucking cat." But she smiles fondly. "He's really cute though." She shrugs and then drops the smile. "Okay, I'll send you both the information. You did okay today. Go celebrate. Maybe even go to dinner together or something. It's good PR."

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Brayden asks, and I can't help grinning wide. He hates this so much.

"No." Jenny looks at him. "I'm not. Probably take it easy on the alcohol. I don't want to have to do any damage control. I'd love to go home, take a nice bubble bath, prop my feet up, and open a bottle of wine without having to babysit tonight."

He just grumbles.

"Fine. I'll take the toddler to dinner."

"Fuck off," I say, and he chuckles. "I'm not a toddler." I don't know why I have to say that out loud, but damn it, I do.

Seriously, what the hell will it take for him to see me as an equal?

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

I've been spending a lot of time with Carson. I mean a lot of time. We went out to eat at a trendy, crowded restaurant after the race, just like Jenny ordered. Then we were booked on the same flight home—and sat next to each other.

Jenny even had us go to a restaurant in Kansas City together when we got back home, and I gotta tell you, it's getting exhausting.

Now we're at the animal shelter, surrounded by puppies, kittens, and a bunch of racers. Hell, there's even a baseball player and a rockstar here. I swear, Coop has some reach. Doesn't hurt that Jenny loves the guy.

I've never seen Jenny love anyone, but she totally dotes on him, and it's fascinating to watch. I think she'd adopt him if she could.

I watch Cooper with Maverick Adair, a motorcycle racer I've known for a while. Cooper has his arms looped around Mav's shoulders, their foreheads resting against each other's. They both look so damn calm, content, and happy. A burning sort of jealousy races through me, not for either man in particular, just at what they have, I guess.

That kind of love is something I've never experienced. I've had relationships here and there, but they all get sick of the traveling and the fame. Sometimes it's just nice to go out to dinner without having a camera in your face.

"Does it bother you?" Jesus. Fuck. I jolt when Carson's voice is suddenly right next to my ear.

“Does what bother me?” I ask with way too much bite, but the man did just about give me a heart attack.

“Seeing them together,” he answers easily, nodding over at Maverick and Cooper, who’ve been joined by Jenny and Sebastian.

“Why would it bother me?” I narrow my eyes in Carson’s direction. “You know I don’t have a problem with two men together.”

He grins brightly, knowing he’s getting on my nerves. “Not that.” His breezy tone is driving me crazy. “The fact that those two men are out and proud.”

I don’t know what the hell he’s getting at, and I haven’t had enough coffee to deal with him yet this morning. I should probably fix that before I strangle him. “Everyone should be.”

“But you aren’t.”

I roll my eyes. “I’m not part of a couple.”

He’s studying me too carefully, and I don’t like it. “So if you were, you would be out? You’d risk your career?” His voice is quiet, like it’s a secret, even though there are four out and proud racers in the same room as us right now. But he seems to be truly interested in my answer. Like he doesn’t know.

“I’d say Sebastian, Axel, Mav, and Royal are all doing just fine in their careers.”

He frowns at me, looking a little frustrated, and I like when the tables are turned. He deserves to be the irritated one for a bit. “But I mean, you’d be fine with being out? If you were in a relationship?”

“Why are you asking me this?” I have to ask, though I don’t know why the conversation is making me so uncomfortable.

He shrugs, and I think he’s just trying to play it cool now. “Just wondering.”

I sigh heavily and watch Mav and Coop, standing there, so damn in love, with the googly eyes and everything. Meanwhile, Sebastian and Axel are playing with a few puppies now and talking about taking one home—to their home they share together. Royal is hanging all over his reporter boyfriend. I’ve known all these racers for a long damn time, and I’ve never seen them all so happy.

Ever.

“Yeah. I would.”

Carson raises a brow. “Really? Even if Miles was pissed off about it? The guy isn’t exactly known for being understanding.”

“It wouldn’t be up to him,” I bite out angrily. My history with Miles Tanner is complicated.

“Really?” He cocks his head to the side, and I grind my teeth together.

“Stop asking me that. Yeah. He wouldn’t have a say over my love life. Not ever, okay? Now drop it.”

“Interesting.”

“It’s really not,” I say dryly.

“Boys.” I don’t know when Jenny started walking over to us. Somehow I missed it.

But she's standing in front of us now. "Everything okay?"

She's not really asking. It's a warning. Saying we need to put on our show now. "Of course," I say, forcing a smile. "Just hoping to get out of here without adopting a pet."

She grins. "Good luck. There are a lot of cuties here." Her eyes lock on mine. "And a lot of cameras."

I nod, my eyes scanning the place and seeing the news crews everywhere. This many celebrities at one animal shelter is going to attract a hell of a lot of media attention.

I nod in understanding, and she smiles in approval. "Let's go check out the kittens," I say, and Carson dutifully follows me.

But I'm not getting a goddamn animal.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

“You sure your old ears will be okay in here?” I joke with Brayden, shouting over the loud music in the club. Jenny thought this place would be a good idea for Brayden and me to be seen out together, but I’m not so sure. Brayden looks highly uncomfortable, sitting in a booth at the back with a drink in his hand.

We have VIP seating of course, but he doesn’t look happy. His blue eyes just glare at me. “I’m fine.”

“You don’t look all that comfortable, man.”

“That’s because I’m not,” he says back, but I can barely hear him over the music.

I look around the dark club. It’s packed tonight, with it being a Friday in the summer, but I’m not really feeling it either. “Let’s go back to your place then.”

“What?” He looks at me with that irritable, confused look I’m growing addicted to. “No.”

I sip my drink, trying to play it cool, but I really want him to say yes. I know he’s hanging out with me out of obligation, and it may be pathetic, but I’ll take it. I enjoy spending time with Brayden, and let’s be honest, he’s damn nice to look at. “Why not? We’ve been here for an hour. I’d say we did what Jenny wanted.”

“You don’t want to stay?” he asks suspiciously. And yeah, maybe I love dancing and having a good time. I’ve gotten a bit of a reputation for hanging out at clubs in the past—even if they weren’t really the ones I wanted to be at. I still had fun flirting and dancing with women. Doesn’t matter if they do absolutely nothing for me physically.

I love women. They're fucking fun, and I love letting loose. But tonight, all I want is to go back to his place with just him.

"I'm not really in the mood for this tonight."

He gives a clipped nod and surprisingly doesn't argue with me. We grab a ride back to his place, and when he unlocks the door, we're instantly greeted by the little beagle puppy he adopted last week.

He shoots me a look. "Don't say a word."

I try to keep my laugh to myself, but it doesn't work. "I still can't believe Cooper got to you."

He grumbles something as he picks the puppy up in his big arms and scratches its head affectionately. "He's cute."

"Who? Coop or the puppy?" I tease, and he rolls his eyes, placing the dog back on the ground as we walk further into the house.

"Both."

I grin. I like seeing this side of Brayden, but I can't help wondering if he told me the truth at the animal shelter. If he was in a relationship with a man, would he really not hide it? I've followed him for years and know he's had a couple of girlfriends in the spotlight, but never a guy.

"You want some?" He holds up a bottle of whiskey, and I nod.

"Sure."

He pours us each a glass and slides one over to me. “What are you thinking so hard about? You’re going to hurt yourself.”

I raise my middle finger in his direction, and he chuckles, sipping his whiskey. “Just wondering why I’ve never seen you with a guy.”

He raises a brow, a small smirk on his lips. “Really?”

“You know what I mean. I’ve seen you in pictures with women you were dating, but never a guy.”

Why I care so much, I’m not sure. “I’ve never dated a guy.” I frown, and he laughs at me, shaking his head. “I’ve fooled around with guys but never been in a serious relationship.”

“You think you can only be in a serious relationship with a woman?”

Again with the eye roll, and he sips his drink again. “Of course not. I don’t date a lot anyway.”

“Why’s that?” I take a sip of my whiskey, letting the alcohol burn deliciously as I swallow.

“Why do you have so many questions?”

I shrug, feeling a little embarrassed. “We’re besties. I should know everything about you.”

He good-naturedly laughs at that, and it makes my entire chest warm. “I’ve been racing for a decade. We travel a lot. We have a dangerous job. It’s not really the best for relationships.”

I scoff at that. “Mav, Seb, Axel, and Royal seem to be doing just fine.”

I wasn't imagining the wistful look on his face when he was watching them at the charity event. He has the same expression right now, but then he catches himself and schools his appearance. “True. Maybe it's possible, but I haven't found anyone I want to date in a long time.”

“Hmmm.”

An eyebrow raises, and he places his glass down, walking around the counter to stand right in front of me. “Why so many questions?”

His voice is husky, and he's watching me with intensity, standing so damn close. If I didn't know any better, I'd say he's thinking about kissing me. And because I've had a little bit to drink and am a little buzzed, I open my mouth and say just that.

His eyes don't roll. He doesn't laugh. His hand just goes to my nape, wrapping around it. “That would be a really bad idea.”

“Why's that?” I challenge, placing my glass down and standing tall, looking him right in the eyes.

He licks his lips, and I can't help watching the motion of his pink tongue swiping over those cherry-red lips. I groan. I can't help it. I'm young and horny as fuck. I've been locked in this foreplay with him for weeks, and I want him so damn bad, I can barely keep it at bay. “So many damn reasons.”

But he doesn't drop his hand, his fingers only tighten around the back of my neck, digging in. “Like?” I prod, seeing the hunger in his eyes.

Oh yeah. He wants this too. But I know Brayden pretty well by now, and I'm sure

he's going to overthink it.

"Like, I'm ten years older."

I scoff, my hand moving to his hard-as-fuck stomach over the soft cotton of his shirt and dragging up to his defined pecs. "Age is just a number, and ten years is nothing."

I watch his prominent Adam's apple bob in his throat as he swallows. "I'm your teacher."

Again, I scoff. "Reluctant teacher, and I don't need one anyway. I'm a damn good racer."

"You're a child, and you're too damn impulsive. You need to learn control."

My control nearly snaps, and I want to kiss him so damn bad. Taste those lips. But I don't. I can be patient. For a minute. "Maybe you need to learn to let go sometimes," I challenge because I know he does. He's wound too tight.

I wonder if he's even capable of it.

"We work together. No matter how much I hate that fact, it's true."

"So? Don't fuck me on the track." I grin widely and know he's not amused, but really I just turned myself on even more. How fucking hot would that be? Me bent over a car on the track, his large body pressed against mine...

"Stop that," he says sharply, but he doesn't let me go. "It has to remain professional."

"Fine with me. I'd probably get bored pretty fast." I put both my hands on his chest now, leaning into him. "It's just scratching an itch. I've been a little fascinated with

you for a long time.”

He looks surprised by that, and I know it’s honest modesty. The guy doesn’t really buy into the whole legend thing. “You need to know what you’re getting into.”

“I’m not afraid,” I say, leaning even more into him, my lips brushing over his. Just a taste. God, I’d kill for a taste.

Finally, fucking finally, his control snaps, and his lips press against mine. They take. It’s aggressive and hard, his lips attacking mine, and it’s the hottest damn thing I’ve ever experienced in my life. I open for him when his firm tongue seeks entry, sweeping over mine and exploring every single section of my mouth. His hand goes to my hair, gripping it tightly.

Somewhere, I hear his dog scamper off, probably not wanting to watch this. I pull his hard body into mine, grabbing his hips and pulling him flush against me. His hard cock drags against mine through our jeans, and we both groan loudly.

He nips at my lips, and I can’t take it anymore. I need him naked. I have to see this body, up close and personal. I lift up his shirt, and he takes the hint, pulling it off over his head and tossing it behind us before his lips find mine again.

I pull away though, looking down because holy fuck, he’s hot. I mean hot, hot. He has a dusting of dark chest hair over his pecs and a trail from his belly button that disappears into his jeans. “Wow.”

His hands go to the hem of my shirt, and he lifts it up and off. His eyes assess me. I’m proud of my body. I know I look good but don’t have nearly as much chest hair as him. It barely exists, and suddenly I wonder if he thinks I’m as hot as I think he is. Shit. When the hell did I lose my confidence?

“You’re fucking hot,” he says, his lips crashing against mine again, and okay, so that answers that. He’s devouring my mouth, eating it, as I try to unbutton his jeans, my fingers failing me a few times. These fuckers. But finally, I get his jeans open and push them down, leaving him in black boxer briefs with a large bulge and the head of his cock poking out of the top.

“Holy shit,” I breathe. I knew he had big dick energy, and it did not lie.

He just undoes my jeans and pushes them down, my dick just as hard and leaking, trying to get to him. I shove my boxer briefs down, and he mirrors my moves, revealing his hard, leaking length.

I pull my socks and shoes off, kicking out of my jeans and briefs as he does the same, leaving us both gloriously naked. He is perfection personified. Hard muscle covered by sprinkles of hair in all the right places. His hard cock stands tall and proud against his abs.

I don’t think about it, just drop to my knees and swallow his cock as far as I can before I gag—but I’m no quitter. I keep going, taking more and more, schooling my gag reflex and grasping his firm ass in my hands. His fingers go through my hair as he leans back against the kitchen counter. “Yes. Just like that,” he praises, and I preen, sucking harder and swallowing around his hard throbbing length.

Spit is dripping down my chin, and my cock aches, wanting release, but I focus all my attention on him. On making this strong, beautiful man lose control, if only for a moment.

“Come here,” he gasps, and I reluctantly remove his cock from my mouth, standing up and letting him steal a hard kiss. His hand wraps around both our cocks, not entirely making it but almost, and we kiss and grope each other’s warm skin, thrusting together.

“Oh shit. I’m close,” I breathe as his hand strokes both our hard lengths.

“Wanna fuck you,” he says, and holy shit, my cock jerks, nearly losing it.

“And what if I want to fuck you?” I ask, my voice full of gravel.

He grins against my lips, panting. “It’s been a long time for me...”

“Fuck it,” I say because I’ve been dreaming of this moment too long to mess around. I pull out of his grip, nearly weeping from the loss and grab my jeans, pulling out a condom and lube. I toss him the condom and quickly open the lube, reaching behind myself and prepping the bare minimum.

I haven’t had a real cock inside me for over a year, but I have plenty of toys at home, and I’m ready. He’s covered by the time I finish, and he turns me around, shoving me against the counter before placing the tip of his cock at my eager, ready hole. “You want this?”

“Yes,” I say, pushing back against him.

He doesn’t make me beg, even though I would have, before he starts to push slowly inside me. Too damn slowly.

“I won’t break. Fuck me. I’m ready.”

“You’re too damn impatient,” he says, biting my shoulder, one hand gripping my hip as the other wraps around my waist, and he bottoms out inside me. The stretch and burn is beautiful. So damn perfect as he stills, his teeth still sunk into my shoulder.

Finally, when I’m about to plead with him, he pulls almost all the way out before snapping his hips forward and sinking back inside me. His strong body behind mine

as I hold onto the counter.

I love this part. Just letting go and giving up the control. Taking it. I groan as he slams into me over and over, nailing my prostate at the perfect angle and making me cry out, precum leaking from my tip and drizzling down over the head of my cock.

“Touch yourself,” he orders, his grip tightening on me and his thick cock pulsing inside me. He’s close.

I did that to him. I brought this man to the edge.

I wrap my hand around my cock, stroking with no intention of letting go until I’m coming all over my hand. “Feels so good.”

“Yes,” he breathes, biting into my shoulder again as he slams into me repeatedly.

I feel that rush, that heat flowing from my spine all the way to my balls. “Close,” I grit out.

“Yes. Fuck your hand. Pretend it’s my ass gripping your cock so damn tight.”

Oh fuck. I let go, groaning loudly as cum spurts from my dick, shooting fucking everywhere, but I can’t be bothered to care. I come and come, my cock jerking in my hand as I jerk it, and I hear the deep guttural cry Brayden makes as he unleashes into the condom, making my dick jerk again and release the last bit of cum.

I nearly fall forward onto the counter, but Brayden has me, holding me up as he blankets my back, his cock still inside me. “Damn it.”

Well, that’s not the reaction I expected. I turn to look at him over my shoulder. “What?”

“It wasn’t supposed to be that damn good.”

I grin and blush slightly when I realize he’s looking at where we’re still connected. “What? Afraid you’re going to get addicted?”

He laughs at that, pulling out of me and making me wince slightly. He drags a hand down my spine, and I shiver. Then he smacks my ass, and I laugh. “Get dressed. I’m starving.”

I stand up to my full height, wincing a little at the soreness in my ass. “Tell me you have something to eat around here that isn’t a protein bar.”

He disposes of the condom, then pulls on his boxer briefs and nothing else, and I really, really like seeing this side of Brayden. He tosses me his t-shirt and grins, looking at my spent, wet cock. “To clean up.”

“How chivalrous.” I use his shirt to clean up and pull on my briefs, opting to leave my jeans off too, as I follow him to his pantry.

“I have protein bars.” He grins and closes the pantry as I chuckle and follow him to the freezer. “And frozen pizza.”

“Sounds good to me,” I say and hop up on one of the bar stools, watching him move around the fancy kitchen and pop some pizza in the oven.

When it’s finished cooking, we eat silently with him glancing at me occasionally.

“This doesn’t have to be weird, right?” I have to ask as I finish the pizza. “It’s just two buddies fucking.”

“Two buddies who fucked,” he says, and I don’t like the past tense at all.

“Fucking,” I say, and he glares at me, but it slowly morphs into a smile as he stands and puts our plates in the sink.

“Carson...” he starts, turning toward me, folding his arms, and leaning back against the counter.

“Don’t,” I say firmly and walk to him. “I’m not a kid, despite what you think, and I’m not going to get attached. But that was good, yeah?”

He looks conflicted, his brow furrowing. But he licks his lips, and I see the lust in his eyes. “Yeah,” he says huskily.

I nod, trying to sound mature. “Okay, so it’s no big deal. We’re both adults. I know what this is. I’m not going to fall for you or anything.”

“Right,” he says firmly, nodding his head. “Of course not.”

“Don’t worry, Brayden.” I punch him in the arm. “Not looking to have your babies.”

He rolls his eyes at me and shoves me playfully. “You wanna watch Netflix or something? I’m not really ready for bed yet.”

“Yeah. I get wired after fucking too.” I grin and walk into his living room, making myself at home on the sofa. “Come on. Come cuddle me,” I say with a wink.

He grumbles, but he does plop down on the sofa and lets me cuddle into his warm body.

This is totally fine.

Just two friends having a good time.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

“Stop looking at me like that,” I scold Carson, who’s just too damn happy right now, grinning in my direction and not bothered by my angry tone. Okay, it wasn’t all that angry. I think I may have even smiled a little bit when I said it.

“Like what?” He’s ready for the race, already dressed in his black jumpsuit. I hear engines firing up all around us, and damn it, part of me wants to kiss that stupid smile off his face.

This is so not good.

We fell asleep on the couch together this weekend after our hookup. And instead of making him go home when we woke up at two in the morning with his drool on my arm, I brought him to my bed.

We got off again, grinding together until we were covered in sweat and cum. We took a shower together, where I blew him, making him come for the third time that night before we passed out.

You’d think the next morning would have been awkward, but it wasn’t. It was easy and simple. We made coffee and grabbed the protein bars he teased me about for breakfast before he left to go pack. Then we met at the airport and boarded a plane to North Carolina.

That was yesterday, and so far, it hasn’t been weird.

It’s been business as usual, getting ready for today’s race, but now he’s looking at me like I’m naked and we aren’t surrounded by thousands of people. “Like you’ve seen

my dick,” I growl, making sure no one around us can hear me.

His grin only widens, the little shit. “Oh, but what a pretty dick.”

“Stop that,” I say, but it’s not convincing at all.

“Can’t help it,” he says in that sultry voice, and I know I’m fucked.

“You need to focus,” I say seriously, nodding toward the track. “I mean it.”

“Don’t worry about me. I’m a professional,” he says, but I am worried. I hate that. I shouldn’t have hooked up with him. I know that. But it was too damn hard to resist. It’s been far too long since I’ve had sex with a man—or anyone—and I wanted it.

And it was good.

Way too damn good. But there has to be a line. I know that. I’m not his boyfriend. He’s not mine to protect. But he is a rookie, and I am the ace. I know what I’m talking about, and since Miles made it my job to teach him, I need him to be safe out there.

That’s all this is about.

Not sex.

“I mean it. Nothing stupid. Don’t take huge risks. You don’t have to be a hotshot out there to get attention. You’re the new guy. They’re already interested in you because of that.”

He frowns, and damn it, he looks cute. “When the hell are they going to respect me?”

He says they, but I hear the unspoken you there. And the truth is I know he's a good racer, but he's green. He'll need a few more years before he'll be at the top of his game. And if he'll listen to me, he'll do great things.

"Just do what I'm telling you, and you'll get there."

He pouts but then tugs his helmet on. "Fine. No fun."

I roll my eyes and grab my helmet, smacking him on top of his playfully. "You can have fun but not be stupid."

"You can have more fun when you're being stupid," he says, and I laugh, wrapping my arm around him—you know, for show—and then heading out to our cars.

The engines start, and the race goes on as scheduled. But the entire time, it's really damn hard not to think about that pliant body under mine as I thrust into him. It was a fucking high as much as this race is.

Being inside Carson may have been a mistake because I can feel myself growing addicted.

Yeah, this is a damn problem already. I feel it. But I can't seem to stop it as my back hits the wall of the hotel, and I grunt, my lips attacking Carson's. I got third place. He got tenth.

It was a pretty good day, and I guess we're celebrating.

That's all this is.

"We need a shower." It was hot as fuck in those cars, and we're both sweaty and dirty.

He just licks up my neck and then kisses me hard, not bothered at all. I don't seem to be either, with the way I'm attacking his mouth like I'm starved for it.

This is a bad idea.

I can't seem to peel my lips off him though as we make our way to the bathroom in my hotel room. I turn on the spray, and I'm thankful it's a large, luxurious shower. I remember the days when I first started, and the hotels were shitty.

We get naked in record time and climb into the shower, letting the spray rain down over us. My muscles ache, and the water feels good, but not nearly as good as Carson's hands and mouth all over me.

I nearly come when he drops to his knees, looking up at me with those pretty eyes as he wraps a hand around my cock and starts to stroke, teasing the head with his tongue.

"I am so fucked."

He chuckles at that. "Not yet. Someday." He winks up at me, and I shake my head but can't scold him because he's swallowing me whole.

"Holy. Fuck."

I feel him smiling around my engorged cock, but it all feels too damn good to be annoyed. He works me over expertly, switching between licking and sucking. Driving me totally crazy, while my body is threaded with need.

It's not long before I'm spilling down his throat, then returning the favor when he stands up and I kneel on the shower floor. He's not as long or thick as me, but he still has an absolutely gorgeous cock. It fills my mouth beautifully as I suck him off,

reaching around to play with his hole until he's screaming my name and spurts of cum hit the back of my throat.

I swallow it all, tasting him and relishing every drop before I stand up and kiss him hard on the mouth.

We stay like that for a while, just kissing and groping like we can't get enough before we scrub up and rinse off.

We dry off but both walk fully naked back to the bed, falling onto it. My body is drained after the race and the shower sex, but of course, Carson seems energetic and ready to go.

"We should go out."

"Out?" I say lifting my head and looking at him like he's insane. He's rolled to his side, facing me, his head propped up on his hand.

"Yeah. Go eat or something."

"We could order in."

He grins, the smile a little crooked and mischievous. "You ashamed to be seen with me?" he teases.

"Always."

He laughs and hits me with a pillow. "It's early. And we're supposed to be seen out together a lot. We're besties, remember?"

I laugh. But yeah, it's true. "No clubs," I say with a heavy sigh and sit up.

“Fine, old man. Nothing with loud music.”

“Damn young’uns,” I joke, and he laughs. It’s a beautiful, easy laugh. Funny how it doesn’t seem to annoy me.

Must be the orgasm.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

“Holy fuck,” I groan, grabbing my shoulder. I hit that wall hard. And I’m a little out of it as someone starts to examine me. I see the fire in the engine and the mangled front of my racecar, but I can’t really focus on anyone around me.

“Goddammit, Carson. Are you okay?” Brayden. A goofy-ass smile falls over my face, even though he’s yelling at me.

“Back up, Beckett.” One of the EMTs says as they check me out. My helmet is pulled off, and they carefully examine me. “Can you move?”

I nod my head slowly. I’m a little foggy but otherwise okay. The impact was hard and loud, but I’m okay. I grin. I’m totally fucking fine.

They finally let me out of the car, and I see the race has stopped. Brayden and Jenny stand close by, their expressions worried.

“That wasn’t my fault,” I say dumbly, oddly needing Brayden to know it was an accident.

“I know,” Brayden grits out, and then I notice Tony, the guy who hit my car, is standing tensely near us, glaring at Brayden. Brayden is glaring right back. Did I miss something?

“I told you, the kid cut me off,” Tony says.

“You fucking clipped him on purpose. You put him in the goddamn wall, you motherfucker,” I hear Brayden say, and my head swings in his direction. Holy shit.

He's mad for me. Not at me.

That's new.

And kind of hot. Kind of really damn hot.

"I did not," Tony says stubbornly. "Fucking prove it, Beckett. I didn't maim your puppy on purpose."

"Fuck off," Brayden says, his fists clenched at his sides.

"Watch it," Jenny scolds him. She's not Tony's agent, but she gives him a mean glare, and the man is smart enough to shut his mouth. She turns to me. "Are you okay?"

I nod. "Just jolted me a little. I'm fine," I say honestly. I hit that wall hard, but we have a lot of safety equipment, thank fuck. But I can already feel the soreness all over my body, even with all of the protections that were there.

No way I'd have lived if I wasn't wearing it.

Brayden studies me carefully, and I swear he looks like he wants to come closer. He wants to examine me, but he stays put. I'm glad because even if we want to look like best friends for the crowd, that's not really how he's looking at me right now.

He looks like he cares. Like really, really cares about my well-being.

Which is odd. I mean, I guess you care about friends, but there's an intensity in his eyes that makes me tremble.

I can't wait to get out of here and get him alone. By the look on his face, I'd say the

feeling is mutual.

The rest of the day sucked. I couldn't finish the race, and they made me go to the hospital to get checked out while the others did finish the race. I'm annoyed. I wanted to finish.

I should have been allowed to. I could have gotten a new car, damn it.

My body is sore and bruised as I sit on the hotel bed and aimlessly flip through channels. There's a knock on my door, and I instantly jump up, assuming I know who it is, wincing only a little at the pain my quick motion caused.

I pull open the door, and it is Brayden, but he's not alone. Damn it. Jenny is here too, and she breezes past me as Brayden eyes me warily, then walks inside.

I close the door as Jenny makes herself at home on the sofa in my suite. "You okay?"

I nod, forcing my gaze away from Brayden. "It was nothing. I could have finished."

Brayden snorts and takes a seat next to Jenny. "Right. I know how bad that shit hurts. You should be soaking in a tub."

I want to say I will if he'll join me, but I manage to keep that to myself.

Jenny seems oblivious, which is good because I really don't want her to kick my ass—which I'm pretty sure she'd do if she found out we've been fooling around for a couple of weeks now. Pretty much every chance we get.

I've never felt like this before. At least not about a person—a hookup, I mean. I guess I did whenever I first started racing. I still feel that way every time I get behind the wheel, but not with a person.

“Well the team is happy,” Jenny says with an irritated sigh.

“They’re happy I wrecked?” I ask. I mean, I know Miles is pretty much a cold-blooded businessman, but damn. A little concern would be nice.

“They’re happy Brayden went apeshit when you wrecked.”

“You did what?” I ask, amused as I stare over at Brayden, a little startled.

“I didn’t go apeshit,” he huffs, and it’s really damn cute how flustered he is.

Jenny scoffs loudly at that, not having it. “Right. Punching another racer is totally fucking calm and collected.”

I remember thinking Tony looked a little roughed-up. I stare wide-eyed at Brayden. “You punched Tony?”

He shrugs his big shoulders. “He hit you on purpose. I know that fucker. He meant to do it. He could have killed you.”

Heat washes over me. Heat and pure lust. I want him so fucking bad right now. So bad I hope it’s discreet when I adjust my cock. Jenny will hurt you, dumbass. Don’t let her see, I try to warn my body.

“Yeah, yeah,” she says, thankfully paying attention to Brayden and not my predicament. “You’re a big strong guy. Hope you enjoy that fine they’re going to give you. Lucky you didn’t get your ass suspended with that shit.”

I cringe now, my erection softening. “Fine?”

“He punched a racer during a race,” she says, like I’m an idiot. “Of course he’s going

to be fined.”

“It was worth it,” Brayden says, and my erection is suddenly back. Shit. That can’t be healthy for my body.

“Right.” Jenny stands up and walks over to me. “You sure you’re okay?”

I nod. “Yup. All cleared at the hospital. Just bruised up. I’ll be fine. Nothing can touch me, sweetie.”

Brayden smirks, and Jenny grabs my chin firmly, her eyes deadly. “Call me sweetie again. I fucking dare you.”

“Fuck.” I wince. “Sorry.”

She nods and smiles sweetly, but it’s fierce. “No problem, sweetie.” She winks at me, emphasizing that word, and I laugh. I really like my agent. She’s tough as hell, and I know she has to be. “See you boys later. I don’t think anyone would think anything of you guys not going out tonight.”

I nod. “Yeah. I think I’m staying in.”

She nods, and we say goodbye before she leaves my room with a click of the door. But as soon as it does, Brayden is on me, his hands cupping my face. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

This level of concern is surprising, I can’t lie. But I like it.

He just likes fucking you.

I try to remind myself that’s where the concern lies. We’re having regular sex. He

doesn't want to lose that...

"I'm fine. How many wrecks have you been in?" I ask, hoping that will make him lighten up a little. Wrecks happen on the track.

"We aren't talking about me," he says through clenched teeth, and I can see he's shaken. He drops his hands, but I grab his face, not letting him pull away.

"Hey. Are you okay?"

We've only been fooling around for a couple of weeks, but in that time—we've grown pretty close. I mean, we actually talk about stuff. I know he's an only child. He knows I have two younger sisters. We both grew up in small towns in Kansas.

But I'm not sure what exactly is bothering him right now.

"I'm fine. I just..." He's breathing hard. I realize he's really freaked-out. "I saw you hit that wall. I saw the fire. I..."

"You were worried about me?" I try to keep it light and teasing, but his eyes remain serious.

"You know I was," he says gruffly before his lips crash against mine. I kiss him back, both of us fighting for dominance and neither giving in.

We kiss and make our way to the bed, losing our clothes as we go. My body hurts, but I want this more than anything. It's the adrenaline, I know, but I won't be satisfied until he's inside me.

I crave his touch. He grabs condoms and lube, quickly prepping me while I lie on my back and stroke my aching cock. "You too sore for this?"

I shake my head. “Never.”

Still, he’s gentle with me as he climbs between my parted thighs and slides into me slowly.

His forehead touches mine when he’s fully seated, and we just breathe. I watch his chest rise and fall as we breathe each other in, his cock filling me.

“Fuck,” he says just before his lips meet mine again in a hearty kiss.

Yup.

We’re fucked.

That’s for sure.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

I'm totally fucked. This is not good. I felt like my heart was going to explode when I saw him crash into that wall. Fear like I've never felt coursed through me in that moment, and I saw red.

I yanked Tony out of that car and was in his face so fast, he didn't see it coming. He was shocked when the first blow struck him in the cheek, and I wasn't surprised when his punch hit my stomach. I hit him again before we were pulled apart, but in that moment, I wanted to kill him.

I want to say I'd have done that for anyone, but I'm not so sure. I also want to say it's because I've been fucking Carson for a couple of weeks now and I've gotten used to having that, but I don't think that's it either.

I've never felt like this before, and it's terrifying.

I move inside him, taking my time, making sure the angle is just right and I'm pressing against his prostate. He's naked under me, and I can see the bruises starting to form. Each one pisses me off and makes me thrust into him harder, owning him. I want to climb inside him and never leave.

I don't know what's happening.

"Harder," he groans, stroking his cock as his back arches. All his muscles are strained tight, and I drag one hand over his pecs and down his stomach. He's fucking perfect. Absolute perfection. All wiry muscles and firm masculinity.

I can't get enough of him.

My other hand is braced by his head, and he reaches his free hand up to grasp mine, interlocking our fingers. I thrust into him harder and harder, hitting his sweet spot and making precum leak from his slit.

“You look so goddamn hot like this,” he says breathlessly.

“You don’t look so bad yourself,” I say and plunge into him, making my body go taut with need. “Tell me you’re close.”

“So close.” I hear the wet squelch of his hand working his cock, and I bat it away, taking over and stroking him hard and firm. “Yes,” he breathes, his body going rigid. “Fuck yes.” He comes all over my hand, and I stroke him faster as I move in and out of him, chasing my own orgasm.

When it hits, my vision blurs, and I let go of his cock, locking my fingers with his on his other hand. Our hands remain clasped together next to his head as I finish inside him, cursing the condom. I want to come deep inside him, to leave part of me behind every single time.

My cock twitches with need, wanting that more than I ever thought I would. When I’m spent, I gently pull out of him and roll to my back at his side, not bothering with the condom just yet.

“We should get tested.”

“What?” he asks, still panting and rolling to his side to look at me. I don’t miss the wince he makes when he puts his weight on his ribs.

I shrug, trying to remain calm. I can’t believe I blurted that out. “I mean, it’s no big deal.”

“You want to fuck me bare?” He’s grinning too wide.

I roll to my side and eye him. “Maybe.”

He laughs, way too damn happy with himself. “Just say it.”

Damn him, always pushing my buttons. “Yeah. I’d love to come deep inside you.” I lean in and grasp his chin between my fingers and thumb. “And when the cum tries to escape, I want to push it back inside you where it belongs.”

He shivers, his voice trembling when he speaks. “Oh, okay.”

I grin, having the upper hand now, and kiss his lips hard again before releasing him and urging him to his back. I kiss his neck softly before I lay my head over his heart, grateful it’s beating.

“Will you tell me about your friend?”

My entire body goes still, not expecting that question. “What?” I barely croak out.

His hand smooths over my hair, and he doesn’t seem startled by my surprise. “Your friend. Miles Tanner’s son.”

“Jeff,” I say, my voice cracking a little.

“Jeff,” he says quietly.

“He was a little older than me. About two years. We met in school. He was a cocky shithead. Always talking about his dad and how he was the owner of a huge racing team. No one really believed him. We knew he didn’t have much more than us, and he lived with his mom in our small town.” He seems to be listening as I recount my

time with Jeff. “His last name was Rock. Not Tanner. But when he graduated, he told me he was going to find his dad and was going to race.”

“Was Miles really his dad?”

I nod, still letting my head rest on his chest. Needing to feel his heart. “He was. Apparently, Miles wasn’t too happy that Jeff just showed up, but he gave him a chance. Jeff had natural talent, and Miles, being the asshole he was, was happy to claim him then. He added him to his team.”

“And then you?”

“After a few years, yeah. I hung out with them over the summers. I had to prove myself, but I did eventually and was added to the team.” I swallow hard, thinking about Jeff and that day. That horrible fucking day. It was my third race.” I can feel him tense under me, probably sensing what’s coming. “Freak accident. Four cars hit the wall. Everyone else was fine.”

“But not Jeff.” It’s not a question, but I answer anyway.

“No. There was a safety equipment malfunction. One in a million chance, they said. But that didn’t really matter because he was dead.” Odds don’t comfort you when you lose a friend that way.

“I’m sorry,” he says softly, his hand still stroking my hair. I have to admit it feels nice.

We’re quiet for a while, just lying there in bed, my thoughts on that day—and today, when I saw Carson go into the wall. A cold washes over me.

“Were you in love with him?”

I look up at him, lifting my head, shocked by the question. “What? No.”

“You sure?” he asks, and I swear there’s a hint of jealousy on his face now. A little defiance as he eyes me. “I mean... it would make sense.”

“We fooled around a couple of times,” I admit, and I swear he pouts. It’s the cutest fucking thing I’ve ever seen.

“Oh.”

I shake my head and grasp his chin again as we both sit up. I kiss his full lips and laugh. “We really were just friends. It was just convenient. He was gay but not out. I was bi and not really out either. Had no experience with guys, but...”

“But what?” He looks hopeful.

“There weren’t any feelings there.” The moment hangs heavy between us. There are words we aren’t saying.

Words I’m terrified to say.

I think he must be too because instead of rubbing it in my face or being a cocky little shithead, he just rests his head on my shoulder. “How about we order something to eat and watch mindless TV?”

I smile and nod. “Yeah, that sounds like a plan. And after, a bath.”

I can feel him smile. “Only if you join me.”

“As if that wasn’t part of the plan,” I deadpan, and again, I feel him smile.

Yeah, I may be in trouble here.

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“I gotta say, I think I’m getting a little spoiled here.” I lean back against Brayden’s wide, hard chest, bubbles surrounding us in the large hotel tub. The feeling in the air is heavy.

I probably shouldn’t have asked about his friend who died, but I couldn’t help feeling curious about it. He had this haunted look on the track. Like he’d seen this before. There was fear there I never thought I’d have seen on his face, and now I know why. He has seen it before.

Only the results were grim.

A sting of jealousy goes through me, thinking about the dead man, which makes me feel like shit. But I can’t really help it. He and Brayden were lovers, even if he says there were no feelings. They fooled around like we do.

They raced together like we do.

Brayden is still haunted by his death, but I also believe him. Maybe they never got a chance to be together. But if it’s different and there really weren’t feelings between them, what does that mean for us?

My head is swimming in thoughts, and I smile when I feel Brayden’s strong arms wrap around me, his voice in my ear. “You’re thinking too hard.”

I grin and relax back into him. I can’t believe I actually want to ask him what’s going on with us. I’m twenty-one. I’m capable of a hookup with no strings. But then again, the thought of this ending makes me really uncomfortable.

There's no part of me that wants this to end. When I saw his worry today—his fear—something changed. Maybe it had even before that, but today cemented it for me. Though it probably hasn't changed for him.

Brayden is a natural leader, so it makes sense he was worried. Even if he doesn't like to show it, he cares about all his teammates. That's probably what it was, and my stupid mind is making it into something else.

Not to mention his past trauma. Of course he was a little freaked-out. It makes sense. If I'd have made Tony wreck, he probably would have punched me too.

I really need to get it together. It's not like we're in love or anything.

I laugh to myself and then turn around, sitting on my knees in the water as I face Brayden. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing," I say and wrap my arms around him. "You think we could get tested this weekend?" I find his cock, standing proud and tall in the soapy suds of the bath, stroking it slowly. "I'd really love to ride you right now, but I don't want to get out and grab a condom."

His forehead rests against mine as he pants softly, clearly enjoying my hand. "We should probably wait until we get back home."

I stroke him slowly, still looking down and watching his thick cock in my hand, precum leaking from the tip. "First thing when we get home."

He grins, and his mouth searches for mine before he pulls me closer to him, our cocks grinding together as I use my hand to stroke us both. It's not long before I'm coming all over him and he's joining me.

“We kind of ruined the bath water,” he says, not looking all that bothered.

“Or we made it better.” I wink at him, and he smiles, looking calm. That’s kind of unusual for him.

“How about a shower?” he asks, and I’m not going to argue with that. We drain the tub and climb into the large shower, kissing and touching, but not going any further than that.

I’ve never had this before. My hookups in the past have been just that. No cuddling really. No washing each other in the shower without the promise of an orgasm. This is different and kind of strange, but I like it.

And I’m not sure how the hell I’m going to let this go when the time comes.

After we dry off, we head to the bed, climbing under the covers, fully naked, and roll to our sides, facing each other.

We’re quiet for a while, each of us lost in thought before Brayden puts his hand on my hip and looks into my eyes. “Were you scared?”

Normally, I’d play it off. Make a joke. Tell him I’m not scared of anything. I’d say anything but the truth, but it’s been a long damn day, and orgasms apparently wear me out. “Yeah.”

He seems surprised by my answer, probably shocked I didn’t try to play it off, even knowing, of course, I was afraid. “The first wreck I had after Jeff died, I barely clipped the wall, but it sent me spinning and into another car. I thought for sure I would die.”

“Were you hurt?”

He licks his lips slowly and shakes his head, his voice quiet. “No. Not a scratch. I was barely even bruised.” He seems sort of... disappointed? I’m not sure what’s going on there, but he looks away from me, over my shoulder toward the window. “My wreck looked worse than the one that killed Jeff, and I was totally fine.”

Oh. “Survivor’s guilt,” I say grimly.

His eyes meet mine. “I was pissed. It wasn’t fair.”

Suddenly, the thought of him dying hits me right in the chest, and I feel like I’m choking, like I can’t fucking breathe. The thought is terrifying. I reach out and place my hand over his heart. “Don’t die.”

A sad smile washes over his face. “You don’t die either. You’re the reckless little shithead.”

I grin and bark out a surprised laugh. He’s totally insulting me during a serious moment. “You’re an ass.”

He laughs and covers my hand that’s still over his heart. “I realized that day we don’t really have control over anything. But I still think you need to use your head a little more out on the track.”

“You know I do, right?” For some reason, it’s important to me, more now than ever, that he respects me. “The bravado... it’s...”

“An act?” he supplies, and I nod. “It is, and it isn’t.”

I roll my eyes and sigh. “I mean, I’m damn good. So yeah, some of it’s very real. We have to have confidence, or we’d never get out there.”

“True. But brains over balls.”

I can’t help teasing him, letting my hand roam down his chest and stomach. “I mean, I think I’d have to choose balls.”

He grabs my hand and brings it up to his mouth, kissing the palm. “Brains are sexy too.”

“Fifty-fifty,” I compromise, and he just pulls me into him for a fierce kiss. Once again, my heart starts to race, and I want to ask him so many damn questions.

I want to know what all this means. I want to know what we are to each other. If this is real.

But I force myself not to speak.

It’s just supposed to be some fun between sort-of friends.

I’m not going to be the idiot who catches feelings. No, thank you.

If I think he doesn’t fully respect me now, wait until he finds that out. That I can’t even fool around without falling.

I won’t do it.

I refuse.

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Something has changed. I not sure what it is, but seeing him in that wreck really messed with my head. It brought back a lot of memories, but it also made me realize how fond of Carson I've become.

Which is not great, since we're mixing that with really, really hot sex. I mean, the best sex of my life, if I'm honest. I can't seem to get enough. I find myself wanting to get done racing for the day so I can get Carson alone.

That has never, ever been the case before. I don't really know how to navigate this. I don't think we're in a relationship. I mean, we agreed to keep it casual. But today, we're at a photo shoot—some promo bullshit I've always hated—but I hate it for another reason today.

A whole new reason I never saw coming.

The photographer, who I've known for a while—who has recently had a very public divorce from his husband of three years—cannot seem to keep his damn hands and eyes off Carson.

I'm not jealous.

I'm not.

I don't get jealous. I've never been a possessive lover. But if this fucker sweeps Carson's hair back one more fucking time, I might break his arm off and beat him with it.

So there's that.

"You okay?" Sebastian leans over to ask me, and I can't pry my eyes off Carson and this photographer fucker.

"What?"

"You look like you want to murder someone. And we aren't out on the track, so it's kind of freaking me out," Sebastian says.

I finally pull my eyes away from Carson and eye Sebastian, who's standing there shirtless, with his jumpsuit unzipped and hanging off his hips. They've put makeup on the Pretty Boy to make his eyes pop even more, and he looks goddamn ridiculous, if you ask me. We're racers. We shouldn't have to look pretty for the camera.

But the annual calendar is a best seller, and the proceeds go to charity, so I tolerate it. "I'm fine. I just don't know why the photographer isn't taking the fucking pictures."

Axel—who's dressed just like his husband and standing behind Sebastian—just has to chime in, "Aw, are you a little pissy because he's touching your rookie?"

"He's not my rookie," I grit out.

But my stupid-ass eyes drift back over to him, of course, because I can't seem to keep my eyes off him. I don't like that people are noticing either. I can hear Axel and Sebastian chuckling, but I'm still watching Carson as the photographer leans in and whispers something in his ear. I see red.

"Dude, did you just growl?" I turn to look at Axel, who looks surprised.

Did I?

Shit.

“No. I didn’t growl. I just want to get this fucking shoot over with. I want the photographer to take the damn pictures, like it’s his—you know—job.”

They both snicker, and Axel shoves my shoulder. “Hey, at least your nipples aren’t out, man. Mine are about to fall off. It’s too fucking cold in here.”

“You’re always complaining about your nipples,” I grumble. Some things never change, I swear.

“Well, your jumpsuit is zipped up.” I can’t help the smile on my face. We have this same conversation during every shoot.

“I’ve earned it.” I go with my usual response. I look at Carson, whose nipples are also out, his broad muscular chest on display—a chest I had my mouth on only hours ago. He grins at me, like he knows where my thoughts have gone, but I don’t smile back.

I’m too pissed off. Wanting to know what that photographer is whispering to him. Wanting to get that motherfucker away from Carson.

Finally, he’s able to pry himself away from the rookie and get in some shots before we wrap it up and get to change out of the racing outfits and into street clothes. I’m walking out to my car when Sebastian and Axel race up to me, with Carson and Maverick not too far behind.

“You guys want to go out to that new club in downtown KC?” Axel asks, and I stop walking.

“You two are married. Aren’t your partying days over?”

“They’re married. Not dead,” Maverick says, eyeing me.

Royal, who I didn’t see before, catches up to us as we all stand out in the parking lot. “I’m in. Soren is in town, and I’m sure he’ll want to go too.”

They all seem to be looking at Carson and me now, waiting for us to chime in. Axel wraps his arm around Carson. “What do you say, rookie? Wanna go party? Got your fake ID?”

“Fuck off,” Carson says, shoving him away playfully. “I’m legal.”

He looks over at me. Is he asking if I want to go? I don’t know, but I’m itchy. Wired. Something just feels off for me after this shoot, and all I want to do is get him alone. “We can’t,” I say, answering for Carson, and I realize that’s weird.

Carson looks surprised. “We can’t?”

“Since when are you a we?” Sebastian asks, looking way too amused. I want to punch him in his pretty-boy face.

“We aren’t,” I say defensively. “But we have plans to hang out. We’re best friends now, remember?” I try to say it sarcastically, but we are friends. Friends who fuck, yes, but still friends. I have no idea how the hell that happened.

“We do?” Carson says, and I grit my teeth. He’s enjoying this.

“Yes,” I say through my clenched teeth.

“Jesus, fuck,” Royal says. “They’re still trying the best friend/mentor angle with you two? When are they going to stop with the roles?”

“Never,” Axel says easily. “It works too well. They’re eating this shit up.”

I grimace, hating that it’s just supposed to be a role. We’re supposed to be playing up the best-friend roles but kind of crossed a line. I cringe, thinking about what would happen if Jenny found out.

She’ll likely kill me. And tell me I should know better.

Which I really should.

Look at today, I’m shaking with barely contained rage, all because the photographer was ogling Carson. I’m a professional. I’ve been doing this for ten years. This shouldn’t bother me, but I’m off-kilter and just want these guys, who are my friends, to go the hell away so I can be alone with Carson.

So I can claim him like a caveman.

Maybe I should go out to a club with them and get far away from this situation. But I can’t force myself to do it.

“You guys have fun,” I say dismissively, hoping they’ll get the point.

Finally, they all leave, teasing me about being an old man, which is totally fine by me. When it’s just Carson and me, I look him over, utilizing every bit of strength I have not to jerk him into my arms and tell him he’s mine.

He’s not yours. I try to remind myself of that.

“Meet me at my place,” I demand, and Carson’s eyes widen a little. I don’t back down though.

He studies me quietly for a moment, and for whatever reason, he only nods instead of arguing with me.

He just climbs on his motorcycle, pulls on his helmet, and then takes off. I climb into my car and head to my house, hoping the entire time he'll be there when I get there.

This is not good.

I'm really losing control here, and I hate it.

But I also can't seem to stop it.

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What an asshole.

But I can't seem to stay away. I certainly shouldn't be waiting on his front porch like a little puppy, but here the hell I am. What am I thinking?

I don't let people speak for me. Not ever.

But I just stood there and said nothing as Brayden went all caveman and told the guys we had plans, like we're a damn couple when, in fact, we are not a couple.

Idiot.

Shit. I really am behaving like a rookie here. Like it's my first taste of dick or something. I can't let him get away with this. I have to be strong.

I see his car pull into the drive. He parks and climbs out, walking over to me. Why the hell does he have to be so damn hot? His hair is styled from the shoot, but he's wearing tight ripped jeans and a t-shirt which stretches perfectly over his broad chest.

I swear my knees nearly buckle as I stand up to meet him, trying to keep a pissed-off look on my face but probably failing. Okay, totally failing because, when he meets me by the front door and his hand goes to the back of my neck, pulling me to him, I kiss him.

I kiss him hard and biting. I wrap my arms around his neck as our bodies squish together. I don't want to talk. I don't want to yell at him. I just want to go inside, get naked, and make him scream in other ways.

But no. Mad. I'm mad.

I put a hand on his chest and push him back away. "What the hell was that?"

He definitely doesn't have a hard time looking pissed off. He's angry when his eyes darken and his breathing is rapid as he glares at me. "What? The kiss?"

"No, you asshole." I fold my arms over my chest, trying to keep from touching him.

He sighs heavily and pulls his keys from his pocket, going to the door to unlock it. "Let's talk inside."

I know that's probably not the best decision. Being alone behind closed doors makes it really hard to concentrate. But I nod my head anyway and follow him inside when he has the door unlocked.

His puppy runs up to both of us, yipping and excited, so I scoop him up and sit down on his couch—a couch I'm becoming increasingly comfortable with. Stupid. This is all so damn stupid.

"You going to tell me what the hell that was about with the guys? You speaking for me. We didn't make plans," I say as I scratch the puppy's ears and get in some puppy belly petting. Not looking at Brayden.

I see him out of my peripheral vision, sitting in a large chair near the couch. He looks almost sheepish, but I'm not going to look at him directly. I can't. "What did the photographer say to you?"

"What?" Okay, I look at him now, my gaze cutting sharply to his face. "The photographer?" I mean, yeah, the guy was flirting with me nonstop, even told me where he'd be later tonight if I happened to stop by there. But he wasn't even on my

radar. I couldn't keep my eyes off Brayden.

Is he jealous? Is that what this is?

No. Can't be.

"He was awfully fucking flirty." His jaw is clenched tight, and he for sure looks jealous, but I don't know. I can't read him, and it's driving me crazy.

"So you spoke for me with the guys because the photographer was flirting?"

"No," he says instantly, but again, I think he looks sheepish. "I just didn't want to go to the club."

"But you told them we," I say, and the puppy seems to sense the tension because he quickly runs off before I sit forward a little on the couch. I want to ask him if we are a we, and that's just... nope.

Not going to do that.

What the hell is wrong with me?

He looks conflicted and grumpy. I want to kiss his damn grumpy mouth and make him talk to me, but I don't. I resist. I sit there on the couch and wait for him to talk.

But he doesn't. He doesn't say a thing.

"You know, I'm supposed to be the young, naive one who doesn't know what he's doing, but for the more experienced one, you sure are being dumb. Just tell me what the hell is going on." Okay. So I probably didn't play that right, but his silence is making me crazy.

“We got tested.”

I frown. We did. As soon as we got back this week. I cock my head to the side. “O—kay.” I don’t understand. We haven’t even fucked each other bare yet. Having stuck to hand jobs and blowjobs this week. Not for any particular reason, but that’s just how it seemed to go this week.

His face is flushed red—I think with anger—but I don’t understand why. “So if we’re fucking bare, you can’t be fucking anyone else. Those are the rules.”

I stand up and walk closer to him, my body shaking with rage. “I’m not fucking anyone else.”

He scoffs angrily. “That fucker was in your ear. I’m surprised he didn’t throw you down and dry hump you in front of all of us.”

He’s jealous.

Holy shit. The Ace is jealous.

“Look at me,” I say firmly, and slowly, he does. His eyes meet mine, and I swear he looks afraid. I don’t know why, but he does. “Just say it. You’re the grownup, right? Say it.”

He stands up, his chest bumping mine. “Say what?”

I’m not intimidated, and I don’t back down. I stand there, tall and in his face. “Say you want us to be exclusive. That you don’t want me fucking anyone else.”

I watch him swallow hard. His eyes narrow on mine as he stares at me. “You can do what you want.”

Goddamn him. What the hell am I doing?

“Okay then,” I start to leave, pissed off at myself mostly. I knew this was a horrible idea, but I still did it. Maybe he’s right. Maybe I am just reckless.

“Wait.” Don’t wait. Just keep going. This is nothing. This is not a big damn deal. You’re blowing it up. But my feet stop and ignore my thoughts.

I turn to look at him. I didn’t get very far. “What?”

“Why the hell do you have to be so damn stubborn?”

I swear my jaw drops. I’m the stubborn one? “Fucking really?” I point at my chest. “I’m willing to talk, but you don’t want to. You won’t say what’s actually going on.”

I take a step toward him when he comes closer to me, meeting me halfway. “And what exactly is going on?”

You’re jealous. You want me far more than you let on. Say. It. I stare into his eyes and huff, annoyed. “You don’t want me fucking anyone else.” Kind of the truth.

His jaw ticks. “Of course I don’t. If we’re fucking without condoms. I don’t want to catch something while you’re fucking everyone who shows a hint of interest.” I glare hard at him, my chest thumping with rage. “And you’re not even out. What the hell were you thinking?”

My glare intensifies. What a fucking asshole. “So you’re slut-shaming me and telling me to stay in the closet, all at once?”

He at least has the decency to look a little guilty, but he doesn’t back down. Of course he doesn’t. He’s Brayden Beckett. Never backs down. He’s always fucking right. It’s

always his way. Damn him. “No.” He swallows hard, and I try not to watch the motion. I don’t want him.

Okay, I don’t want to want him. “No?”

“No. I just...” He looks so damn torn, but I’m not letting him off the hook. “I’m not slut-shaming.” He says it like it’s the most ridiculous thing ever. “But if we aren’t using condoms...”

I hold up my hand to stop him. “I get it. I also took sex ed in high school. Which wasn’t all that long ago, so I still remember it clearly.”

“Fine.” He’s for sure uncomfortable and looking shifty. “And I’m not telling you to stay in the closet, but...”

“But I’m not exactly out,” I finish for him. This conversation is just goddamn painful. I huff loudly. “But that doesn’t mean I won’t always be. And you’re not exactly waving the rainbow flag.”

He slowly nods his head, looking ashamed, which isn’t what I wanted. None of this is what I wanted. This is a mess.

“Which, for the record, is fine. It’s no one’s business.”

He nods, clearing his throat softly like he’s nervous. “Right.”

I’m frustrated and throw up my hands. “Just. Say. It.”

“Say what?” he says, equally as frustrated it seems.

“Say you don’t want me fucking anyone else.” I get in his face, our breath mingling,

our chests and feet touching. “Say it.”

“Fine,” he bites out. “I don’t want you fucking anyone else.”

My lips crash against his, and we both grunt but don’t part. My hands clench in his shirt, and his hand goes to my hair, threading through the locks and holding me there for the punishing kiss.

It’s not really anything at all, him saying that. But I’m counting it as a win.

For now.

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Tell him that you don't want him fucking anyone else because you're a jealous shithead who didn't like seeing him flirt with another guy.

Tell. Him.

But I don't. I just keep kissing him instead. Ripping our clothes off and making our way to my bedroom. I felt fear like I've never felt before when he started toward the door. It felt so final.

Like I wouldn't see him again. Which is crazy because I knew I definitely would. We're on the same damn racing team, but it didn't matter. Fear went through me, and I could barely speak or move.

But I'm glad I did.

So damn glad.

I'm so beyond fucked. But I won't let myself stop and just talk to him. We aren't in a relationship. He didn't say it, but he's not out, not really. And I'm not sure he's ready to be.

Not to mention, we're supposed to be BFFs, not really supposed to be fucking. I can just picture Miles's face if he found out. But I try like hell to push that thought away. The point is the vision of the PR team is that we're friends, and I'm his mentor. I'm supposed to smooth out his rough edges.

This isn't supposed to get messy.

It's just a little bit of fun.

I try to remember that as I yank his jeans open, pulling them and his boxer briefs off. We've already lost all our other clothes and shoes along the way. Now he's standing before me, naked and beautiful.

So very mine.

Except he's not.

Which only makes me kiss him harder. I drop to my knees and stare at his flushed cock before taking him into the back of my throat, working him over and making him moan. I don't know what we are, but I know I don't want it to end.

I pull off him, stroking slowly before putting my finger in my mouth and getting it nice and wet. I hear the faint sound of him moaning as he watches me, but I take him back into my mouth and move my wet finger to his hole, circling around the rim. I add one finger and then two, stretching him. Needing him.

My other hand rolls his balls gently, feeling how heavy and full they are as I taste the burst of precum on my tongue.

"Please," he gasps. "Lube. We need lube."

I agree silently, but I don't want to release him. I'm enjoying the taste of him too much. I can't let go. I suck him harder, using two fingers to massage over his prostate as his fingers dig into my shoulder.

"Yes." He's close. So close, and I want it. I need it.

He comes with a yell, his hips jerking forward and his cock destroying the back of

my throat. I'm hard as steel by the time I swallow every last drop of his cum, licking and sucking him clean and milking his prostate until he begs for mercy.

I remove my fingers and let his still semi-hard cock fall from my lips as I stand up and slam our mouths together, letting him taste himself on my tongue.

His cock slides against mine, and I swear he's already getting hard again. I smile against his lips. "I guess there are perks to being twenty-one."

He just kisses me harder, moaning and grunting into my mouth as we move toward the bed. We barely break apart long enough for me to grab the lube. He climbs onto the bed on all fours, presenting that perfect, firm bubble butt of his, and I can't help myself. I toss the lube next to us and lean forward, swiping my tongue over his already-softened hole.

"Oh, fuck yes," he grunts, holding himself up and looking over his shoulder at me. I don't let up. I lick him, swirling my tongue around his rim and getting him nice and wet before I stick my tongue inside him and lick at his insides.

He's moaning, his hips thrusting backward and chasing my tongue.

"Fuck me. God, I need it. Fuck me."

Hell yes. But I'm not quite done with him yet. I suck over his hole, driving him wild before licking him again and then fucking him with my tongue until he's a pleading, writhing mess. He all but throws the lube at me, and I'd laugh, but I'm not fairing much better.

My cock is rock-hard, leaking and red. I quickly open the lube and slather my cock with it before adding some on two fingers and dipping them inside him.

“Fuck me. Come on,” he complains, and I toss the lube away again before lining up at his hole and pushing forward all the way until my balls meet his ass.

“Goddamn, you feel so good.”

“Yes. Fuck me,” he urges, reaching back and trying to pull me deeper. I do laugh now, but it turns into a groan when I pull back and thrust into him.

I grip his hips as I push into him over and over again, making sure to hit his sweet spot. I revel in each gasp and moan. My fingers dig into his skin as he moves one hand to jack himself off while the other holds his weight.

As one of my hands moves over his spine, I watch the muscles in his shoulder and back flex with each stroke of his cock. “I’m close. Holy fuck, I’m close. I’m going to come.”

I stop moving then, pulling out and flipping him over, desperate to watch him come apart. He doesn’t miss a beat, arching his back when I plunge into his tight heat as he strokes his dick.

I marvel in the way his abs tighten and the veins in his neck pop. He’s a beautiful sight, and my entire body is strung tight with the need to come. “Fuck yes. Come for me. I want to watch you,” I plead with him.

He bites on his bottom lip, groaning as he lets go. His entire body goes rigid before cum spurts from his cock all over his hand, stomach, and chest. I moan deep in my throat, stroking into him again before I let go. I come deep inside him, leaving my cum behind. Scorching his insides with my release with no barrier between us. I feel like a fucking king.

His hand drags over my stomach, touching where we’re connected, and my cock

jerks, dribbling more cum inside him before I collapse.

“Oomph,” he grunts but wraps his arms around me and holds me in place.

We should talk.

But we don't. I pull out of him and roll off him, but immediately, I'm on my side and looking between his legs, watching my cum run out and using my fingers to push it back in where it belongs.

“Fucking caveman,” he complains, but he doesn't push me away, and I don't think he actually minds. In fact, his cock gives a small twitch, and I can't help but laugh before bringing my mouth to his for a heated kiss.

This is fine. We'll talk later.

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“And Carson Hayes, the rookie from southern Kansas, took third place.” I grin as I hop out of my car, listening to the reporters, who are already surrounding my car. Brayden snuck in right before me and got second place today, but I’m gaining on all of them.

A little healthy competition never hurt anyone, and I swear, from the way he’s looking at me now, he doesn’t look too bothered by it at all. No wrecks today. Just a standard race. I’ll admit, getting back behind the wheel was a little daunting, but this is where never overthinking comes in handy.

Brayden, on the other hand, was worried. Not that he said so—because he never fucking uses words. But I know how to read him now. When I left his bed this morning, he kissed me hard, trying to silently tell me to be careful. That he was worried. I know he was, but he won’t say it.

I’m not sure how damn long we can go without having an actual conversation, but we seem to be in denial mode, and that’s just fine with me. I’m young and at the start of my career.

I can’t be part of a couple anyway.

“Nice job, rookie,” says Sebastian—who took first today—with a pat on my back.

I beam proudly, knowing this will definitely be on the news. People back home will see this. They’ll know I wasn’t full of shit when I told them I’d be a famous racer.

I wasn’t really unpopular growing up, but no one really leaves the small town I’m

from. And everyone scoffs when you tell them you're going to. But I feel like a champion today, taking the time to answer all the interview questions, even though I can't seem to pry my eyes off Brayden.

I need to. Someone could easily pick up on what's going on between us if I don't and if they're paying close enough attention.

After the interview, we have a meeting with Miles and Jenny. Jenny looks fairly pleased, so I don't think she's picked up on anything between Brayden and me—although if anyone would, it'll be her.

She remains quiet as Miles pats me hard on the shoulder, clearly pleased. "Three racers in the top five today, boys. That is damn fine."

I grin, beaming proudly. It's always good when your boss is happy, but Brayden looks tense as hell. I mean, yeah, he always kind of looks like that, but I've noticed he gets even more tense around Miles.

I can't help but wonder if it has something to do with his friend. Miles's son.

Miles wraps an arm around Brayden, and I swear he looks like he might punch him, cringing hard but then quickly schooling his face. I wonder if Jenny notices it. I can't read her, and Miles's voice is loud and booming as he holds onto Brayden. "And they're eating up this best-friends thing between you two. Some think you could be his big brother the way you dote on him." Vomit. I might actually puke. I, for sure, do not think of Brayden as a big brother, and judging by his face, he's just as grossed out. Miles, of course, doesn't notice and just goes on, with one arm around Brayden and the other patting him excitedly on the chest. "You decking that Tony fucker for barely touching your boy's car. That was pure gold."

I cringe again. Not wanting to be his boy either.

Brayden is forcing a smile that looks downright painful. “He put him into the wall.”

Miles just chuckles and pats him again. I’m honestly worried about his safety right now because Brayden is close to clocking him. I can see it on his face. Not that I wouldn’t love to see it, but he looks murderous.

“Well, it’s done wonders for merch. Both of your sales are up, and the crowd is going crazy for it.” He finally releases Brayden but slaps his shoulder hard. “Keep it up, boys. This is beautiful.”

Miles leaves with his mini-entourage of people who are happy to kiss his ass, and it’s just us with Jenny. “God, he’s such a fucking tool.”

A surprised laugh bubbles from my throat at her statement. I’m not sure why it caught me off guard, but it did. “Yeah. He really is.”

She shakes her head and grips the bridge of her nose. “Okay, but if he’s happy, I guess we’re doing our jobs. You guy should go celebrate with dinner. One drink each. Don’t get sloppy.”

We both agree without any fight, then leave and grab a ride to the restaurant, just Brayden and me. There are plenty of pictures taken of us as we enter the restaurant, and I suppose that means mission accomplished.

But my mind is on Brayden and Miles. I want to know what happened in the past. I wonder if Miles was always an asshole or if he became more of an asshole after he lost his son. Honestly, I bet he was always like this.

He’s greedy and only business-oriented. It’s hard to imagine him ever actually having a family he cared about. But grief can do strange things to people.

“What’s his deal?” I try to ask casually as I pick at my meal.

“Who?”

“Miles,” I say, cutting into my juicy steak. My stomach grumbles. I was starving.

“What do you mean?” His answer is clipped, and it’s clear he’s uncomfortable. I should probably just drop it, but my mouth doesn’t seem to get the memo.

“You seem tense around him. I know you two have history, so I’m just wondering what happened after...”

I wince, not really wanting to make him talk about this again. What the hell is wrong with me? I want to talk? What I should be doing is shoveling food into my face as fast as I can so I can get back to his place and get naked.

But there’s something inside me that wants to know more. I want to know everything about him. I want to take my time eating dinner and talk to him... like a couple.

Well, fuck me. This is so not good. And he’s not having it. Of course he’s not.

“I don’t want to talk about Miles,” he says, his tone sharp, and I know I’ve crossed a line with him. His whole body is tense, and he’s angry. No doubt.

I really need to get it together. Play it off. We aren’t a couple. This is just some no-strings-attached fun. I told him I could handle this, and I have to keep my word. He didn’t sign on for some kid catching feelings.

I wince and take a bite of my steak, trying to swallow the bitterness threatening me right now. Threatening to make me say something really damn stupid. Like you know how I said I wasn’t going to fall for you, well guess what? Seems like I really am just

a dumb kid who can't separate a good fucking from love.

Love.

I laugh at myself now. Let's not go that far. This is fine. It's probably just a little bit of a crush or something. Hell, maybe it's hero worship. As fucked up as that would be, it's better than love.

"Right. Sorry."

He studies me carefully for a moment, probably wondering what the hell has gotten into me. I try my best to change the subject with talks about the race and how I'm going to beat his ass on the track someday soon.

Thankfully, he seems totally fine with this easy sort of conversation.

That's right, Carson. Keep it simple.

You're fucking. That's all it is.

He's here to fuck you until he gets bored and not talk about deep-seated feelings.

Remember that.

Somehow, though, my mood is sour after repeating those thoughts over and over.

It's just fucking.

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Something seems off with Carson. I'm not sure what it is. We had fun at dinner. Just laughing and talking, giving each other shit. But something feels... off. I don't know how to explain it.

He's on me as soon as we get back to my place, his lips attacking mine, but it feels almost robotic. The kiss is hot, don't get me wrong, but I can't shake the feeling that something is wrong.

Maybe he's bored with all this.

He's young. Maybe he's ready to move onto the next.

"You okay?" I pull back away from his mouth just enough to ask him.

"Of course." It's clipped with no other explanation, and his voice sounds strange. But his hands go to my shirt, and he pulls it over my head quickly before removing his own.

His lips are back on mine, and it feels so damn good as his tongue strokes over mine, a sweet caress before he's nipping on my bottom lip. But I can't shake this.

"Carson..." I start, putting my hands on his shoulders to push him back a little more so I can look into his eyes. "Are you sure you're okay?" I ask again, hoping for the true answer, even if it's going to suck.

"I'm fine. Let's get naked." He grins, but it's forced. It's not his real smile, not even close. He starts to undo his jeans, but I put my hands on his to stop him. "What?" he

asks, looking perplexed and annoyed.

I just stare at him, unsure what to say, and he pushes my hands away to undo his jeans and push them down and off, leaving him in only boxer briefs. “Come on. This’ll be good.” He reaches for me, pulling me into him and kissing me. “No talking. Just get naked. It’s good to keep perspective.”

I get lost in the kiss for a moment, of the feel of his skin against mine, but I finally manage to ask, “What does that mean?”

“You don’t want to talk,” he says, biting at my lips, hungry for the kiss, but my stomach has a sinking feeling deep inside. “We shouldn’t talk about our pasts or anything other than what position we should fuck in.” He kisses me hard, breathing heavily. “I’m thinking I feel like some wall sex tonight. You think your muscles are up for it?” He nips on my bottom lip. “Hold me up against the wall and fuck me stupid?”

Well shit. My cock is for sure on board, but I can’t seem to get past his words before he told me what kind of sex he wants. “Why shouldn’t we talk about our pasts?”

He pulls back a little, his brow cocked. “You’re kidding, right? This is just pure sex.” His hand runs down over my naked stomach, through the ridges of my abs. “We don’t need to complicate it with talking.”

The way he says talking isn’t normal. He’s not joking around. He’s upset. I upset him when I said I didn’t want to talk about Miles, I realize. “Listen... earlier at dinner... Miles. He’s just a tough topic for me.”

“Right,” he says, but his smile is still fake, and it’s starting to piss me off. His hands go for the button on my jeans. “So let’s just get naked. I get it, okay?”

“You get what?” I ask, my hands on his again to stop him.

He’s still trying to smile, but he just looks pissed off now. Well good. So am I. “You want me for sex. You think I’m just a kid and don’t respect me, but you can use me for sex. So let’s have sex,” he grits out.

I swallow hard, watching him. I hurt him. I realize I hurt him, and I feel like shit. “I do respect you.”

He scoffs madly at that. “Right. Are we fucking or not? Or should I just go?” He drops his hands from my jeans, but before he can take off, I grab his wrist.

“Don’t go.”

He remains there but doesn’t speak, which for Carson is strange, I have to admit. I don’t like it at all. I’m so far out of my element here. I’m used to being the loner. The older guy the other racers may look up to but don’t necessarily hang out with. “Miles didn’t know about Jeff being gay.”

He studies me carefully, his bottom lip poked out in a small pout of confusion.

“Jeff knew his dad wouldn’t approve. Wouldn’t be okay with it at all and would likely kick him off the team.”

“What an asshole,” Carson says, just standing there in his boxer briefs, his brow furrowed.

“That he is. But we fought about it that day.” My throat is thick with heavy emotions, cracking at the end of my sentence. I hate thinking about that day.

He seems conflicted now, taking one step closer to me. “You sure there wasn’t

anything real between you two?”

I swear I see a hint of jealousy there, but his concern is real. I grin because I get it. “We were friends. So yes, that was real. I cared about him, but I wasn’t in love with him. When we hooked up, sometimes it felt wrong. Like fooling around with a cousin or something.” He makes a grossed-out face and same. I chuckle. “Exactly.”

“But you cared about him.”

I nod, even though it wasn’t a question. “We were close friends. I hated that he wouldn’t tell his father he was gay. That he let his dad set him up with numerous women. It was almost like the asshole knew and was challenging him, but Jeff wouldn’t tell him.”

My stomach aches, thinking about our fight that day. I must look pained because he takes my hand and leads me to the couch, pulling me down next to him and into his arms. “I’m sure that was difficult.”

“It was, but I fucked up. I shouldn’t have pushed him to tell his dad. No one should be told when they should come out. He always wanted Miles’s approval. I knew that. I shouldn’t have pushed.”

He hugs me tight, and I just cling to him. How he could think I still think of him as a child and that I don’t respect him, I don’t know. Because I respect the hell out of him. I’m quickly realizing he’s one of the toughest people I know.

“I always wondered if he was distracted by our fight when he wrecked. If that was what was on his mind.” My stomach aches even more, and I hang onto Carson tighter. “Miles saw us arguing. I thought he’d blame me.” I stop for a minute and look into Carson’s concerned eyes. “I blamed me.” Before he can say anything to try to offer comfort, I go on, “I thought he’d kick me off the team, for sure, but he didn’t.

It's always been strained between us, but he kept me on."

"I think Miles cares more about money than anything else," he says bluntly, and I have to agree. Even if he did blame me for Jeff's death, he wasn't giving up his new top racer.

"I just hate thinking about that time. He always reminds me of it, and it puts me in a bad mood," I say honestly. "I didn't mean to shut you down."

He stares at me quietly for a moment before placing a light kiss on my lips. "I'm sorry."

I offer him a small smile and kiss him softly for a moment before pulling back and looking into his eyes. I don't want to do this anymore. Lying to myself is one thing, but hurting him is another. One I'm not willing to do. "I like talking to you. It's not just sex for me." My heart is pounding so hard and fast, I swear I can feel it in my ears.

"I like you talking to me too. It's not just sex for me either."

I nod my head, letting out a relieved puff of air. "We're in trouble here, aren't we?" I have to ask because I never saw this coming. I never saw any of this coming. Not sleeping together and definitely not...

"Like we might be a couple," he says carefully, his eyes searching mine.

I think that over. Think about all of the nights we've spent together. We haven't spent one apart in a long time. About the meals together, even when Jenny hasn't set up the reservations and told us to go. We went without anyone else on our minds. About hanging out in quiet peace, just watching Netflix together.

About staying awake at night, stroking his hair while he slept.

“Well, damn,” I say with a small laugh.

He looked slightly nervous before my laugh, but it looks like he’s relieved now, releasing air from his mouth. “Yeah.”

“I’m okay with that, but you’re ten years younger than me. Are you sure you want to be in a relationship?” Doubt starts spearing through me. I wasn’t necessarily looking to settle down, but I’m definitely open to it.

“Yes, I’m sure.” His chin lifts a little in defiance. “I’m not an actual kid, you know?”

“Calm down,” I say with a laugh and pull him closer to me, wrapping my arms around him now. “You might have some wild oats to sow.”

“That’s stupid,” he says with a laugh, and I laugh too, just holding onto him. Everything feels oddly right.

“But you said if you were in a relationship, you wouldn’t hide it. If we’re a couple, that’s you in a relationship.”

I stiffen at his words. At the question he isn’t asking out loud but I hear all the same. I don’t know if he wants to come out yet or not. He’s young, and he’s new. It would undoubtedly be dangerous for his career if he did.

“That was before I started dating the rookie,” I say.

He looks up at me and scowls. “What does that mean? You’re ashamed of me?”

I roll my eyes at him. “You’re fucking ridiculous.” I place a kiss on the tip of his nose

affectionately and pull him back into me. “No. It means I’m not going to force you out. Ever. You decide when you want to come out. It’s up to you.”

I realize I’m squeezing him a little tighter now, but I can’t seem to loosen my hold on him. I fucked up once, and I won’t do that again. Not ever.

Now the stakes are even higher. I care about Carson more than I’ve ever cared for anyone.

“But you don’t want to hide. No one should have to hide,” he says thoughtfully, but I hear the fear in his voice. He’s not ready.

And I’m oddly okay with that. I always thought if I was going to be in a relationship, I wouldn’t hide them and wouldn’t let them hide me. But I didn’t prepare for this.

I’ll never do anything to cause him harm. Not ever.

“We should keep it quiet for a bit. You’re a rookie.”

He huffs, and I don’t know if it’s because I called him a rookie or if he wanted to tell people about us. But I feel like I need to protect him.

“Trust me?” I ask, lifting his chin with my hand and looking into his eyes.

He thinks about it for a moment, but then he relents with a real smile on his beautiful face. “Yes.”

“Good.” I kiss him on the mouth. “We’re a couple, but we should keep that between us until you and your career are ready.”

He nods, resting his forehead against mine. My eyes close as I breathe him in. “Okay.

But don't think I like hiding you. I don't want to."

My heart swells with his confession, and I nod my head against his. "I don't either, but we have to be smart."

"Fine. We'll play it your way." He smirks, and I laugh.

We can do this.

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“Holy fucking shit, rookie! Second place!” I’m greeted with a side hug from Axel Lennon, the Bad Boy himself, who looks pretty damn happy for me, even considering I kicked his ass on the track today.

It’s the last race of the season, and I got second place. I got so damn close to beating my boyfriend, but not quite.

Brayden saunters over to me, with that cocky walk he’s perfected over the years and likes to pretend he doesn’t do. “So close, rookie.”

“I’ll get you next season, old man,” I say with just as much arrogance. I was close. That’s for damn sure. It came down to the last second. But I don’t even mind. He looks so damn happy, and I’ve realized over the past few months there’s more to life than just racing.

Gasp.

I know. I was surprised too.

But I’m stupidly happy with Brayden. Nothing has changed since we finally realized we were a couple. We still spend pretty much every night together. Go to events together. He tries like hell to teach me while I push back. To the world, we’re best friends, and he’s the Ace mentoring the Rookie.

I don’t love hiding our true relationship, but part of me was really damn grateful he didn’t seem to mind. In fact, he seemed hellbent on keeping us a secret. I know, without a doubt, it’s his protective side kicking in.

I wish I was stronger and was able to tell him I didn't want to hide, but I'm not, and I was afraid to come out. My career just started, and I'm not sure it would go well for me this early in the game.

It's a shitty reality, but it is reality.

But as we stand there, giving interviews to the press for the last race of the season and answering all the questions, all I want is to kiss him. I want to pull him to me, lay a big kiss right on his lips and claim him as mine.

The overwhelming urge surges through me to do just that, but I can't seem to make myself do it. And not only because I'm a chickenshit but also because I'm not sure that's really Brayden's style.

That's more Axel's thing.

Brayden would probably be more comfortable with a simple press statement and then for us just to live our lives together.

A goofy smile forms on my lips, thinking about that. We're an us.

After the interviews end, getting an approving report from Miles and Jenny, we're back at the hotel. Our rooms are on the same floor, but I haven't even looked at my room. If anyone were paying really close attention, it would probably be obvious that we're more than friends.

But I can't be bothered by that. Yeah, I may not be ready to officially come out and deal with what that means for my career, but I also refuse to be paranoid about it. I'm in my boyfriend's strong arms as soon as the door clicks shut behind us.

"You did damn good today, rookie," he growls near my ear, setting my body on fire

with that low timbre.

“Yeah? You proud?” I tease, lifting his shirt up and off him like the fabric offends me. I think it kind of does. This body should never be covered. I drag my hands over his muscled chest appreciatively.

Goddamn, I can’t believe he’s mine. And he is mine. I’m his too.

It doesn’t matter if we work together. If we have to be careful because of our very public personas. It doesn’t matter that I’m only twenty-one. This is it for me.

“Damn proud.” He nuzzles into my neck, and I lean my head back, letting him kiss and suck my sensitive skin. “Couldn’t have been any prouder even if you managed to get first.”

I grip his hair and pull him up to look at me. “Hey now. I was close.”

He laughs, not pulling out of my hold, his lips skimming over mine. “You were. You were damn close.” He’s smiling, and I see the pride in his eyes. Pride I feel as I beam back at him. Good lord, I am so far gone for this man. “You were patient though. You listened to me,” he observes.

My cheeks heat a little with a blush. I wanted to get up to that first spot, but there was no way through, and if I’d have nudged him or anyone around us, it could have easily taken all of us out of the race. No way I was going to do that. “It wasn’t easy.”

He grins, and I loosen the hold on his hair a little. “You did good.”

The praise should annoy me, but I only preen proudly, my chest puffing up. “Why aren’t we naked?”

He chuckles but pulls out of my hold as we quickly work on remedying the situation, both of us removing every scrap of clothing until we're naked, kissing, and making our way toward the bed.

"So what should your prize be for getting second place?" he asks, his body slowly covering me and his lips skimming over mine, but he doesn't deepen the kiss. His strong arms are holding his weight as he looks down at me questioningly.

I snort, my hands running up and down his strong arms, feeling the tightly pulled muscles. "Do you have to say second place?"

He grins and leans down, kissing the corner of my mouth on one side and then doing the same thing to the other. "Second is damn good for your first year. You know that." He moves his strong, full lips to my jaw, kissing softly. "You definitely deserve a special prize."

I cock my head to the side, letting him have better access to my neck. Thankfully, he takes the hint and starts to lick and suck on my neck and down over my collarbone, his words almost totally forgotten. This is my prize. Whatever the hell he wants to give me, I'm more than happy to take.

"Carson..." His voice is deep, husky, and sexy as hell as he settles between my thighs, his hands dragging down over my chest and stomach, eyeing me like a starved man. "What do you want?"

"Everything. Anything," I answer honestly. I don't even have the energy to be embarrassed about how desperate I sound because holy shit, how did I get so lucky?

"What about my ass?"

I sit up so fast, he has to lean down so I don't knock him out with my excitement. I

don't care. I'm too excited. Not that it really matters all that much. If he doesn't want to bottom, I'm more than happy doing that for the rest of my life. But now that he's put it out there, I want it.

I fucking crave it.

"You want that?" I grasp his face in my hands, and he smiles.

"It's been a long time since I've done it." He sounds nervous, his eyes on mine as he swallows tightly. "I didn't exactly love it the few times I did." He is nervous.

I nod and kiss his lips softly. "It's okay if you don't want to. I'm more than happy to offer up my ass." I kiss him hard, my cock twitching and my hole clenching, more than okay with being filled. "I love when you're inside me. Can't get enough."

He chuckles and wraps his arms around me. "So damn greedy." He laughs. "I want this with you though. I want everything with you. I'm just... I'm not sure..."

I kiss his lips with a smile. "If you don't like it, we'll switch." I waggle my eyebrows at him excessively. "I'm more than happy to have this big cock..."—I grip said cock in my hand, relishing in the weight and girth, the warmth of the silky flesh—"inside my tight hole. I love when you stretch me out." I stroke him slowly. "When you wreck me."

"Fuck." His cock jerks in my hand, and I grin. "You're something else," he says fondly as he shakes his head.

"Okay, let's do this. I want it." He kisses me hard, but I feel the tremble of his body. I'm not sure I've ever seen him so vulnerable. So nervous.

"If you don't like it, tell me to stop. I mean it. It doesn't matter to me. I'll take

anything you can give me.” I should cringe at my own desperation, but when I see the admiration in his eyes, the pure awe there, I don’t. Because I know he feels the same, even if my big tough guy doesn’t say it out loud.

“Okay,” he says softly, and I kiss him hard.

“Roll over,” I instruct, and he eyes me warily. “Trust me,” I say firmly, and he does. He releases me and rolls to his stomach, his whole body pretty tense. Yeah, that just won’t do.

I smack his ass playfully, and he grunts, looking back at me over his shoulder.

“On all fours. Let me see that pretty hole.”

I swear a blush forms on his cheeks, and it’s so goddamn endearing. He looks almost bashful, but he does what I say, climbing up on all fours and presenting that beautiful round ass to me.

“Holy shit. You’re too hot for words.”

“Can you get to it now?” He’s trying to sound bossy, but I hear the shake in his voice. I see the tremor in his muscles, and I know he’s nervous. I don’t want him to be nervous. I want to blow his fucking mind.

It’s a little intimidating, I’ll admit. He’s older and more experienced, but I want to make this good for him. I use my hands to spread his cheeks, nearly coming when I see his pretty pink hole. “So perfect.”

He starts to wiggle in my grip. “Carson.”

I grin. “Patience, remember?” I have to tease him. He says I’m the impatient one, but

look at him.

He grumbles something I'm glad I can't hear, and then I lean forward, giving him a long swipe of my tongue from his balls to just over his hole. He grunts slightly, but I can't tell if it's in annoyance or pleasure, so I do it again. This time paying a little more attention to his hole.

Definitely pleasure. He moans softly, "Yes."

I can't help grinning, swirling my tongue around his tight pucker, licking and sucking and doing everything I love, everything that drives me insane and turns me into a writhing, moaning mess.

"Fuck. So good," he pants, and I grin against his ass, still spreading him wide with my hands, eating him out like my life depends on it. I can't help myself from grinding against the soft bedding, my cock hard and leaking. Desperate to be inside him.

His hole softens for me, letting my tongue in as I lick his insides and hold onto the tight globes of his ass.

"Fuck me. I'm ready," he complains, but I don't agree. He's not desperate enough. I want him pleading. I want him to be so desperate for it he can barely think straight. Until he can't even form words.

I release one of his cheeks and use one finger along with my tongue, pushing the finger deeper into him and feeling him clench around me. He pants, his hips thrusting back, trying to get more.

"Fuck. Me."

I grin and add another finger, licking down over his full, tight balls. "Patience."

“I swear to Go—” he gasps when my fingers stroke over his prostate. “Oh, holy fuck. Ngh...”

There we go. I remove my mouth from his balls and sit up, grabbing the lube. “You want this?” I ask, knowing the answer.

He glares at me over his shoulder, he’s flushed red and sweating, fairing no better than I am. “You know I do.”

I remove my fingers from him, and he groans, looking away from me and lowering his head to the bedding. I don’t tease him long, adding lube to my fingers and moving them back to his hole, filling him and stretching him more. Getting him nice and wet, ready for my aching cock.

I slick myself, slathering lube all over my dick, careful not to linger too long because holy shit, it feels so damn good. I remove my fingers and line my cock up at his hole. “You ready?”

“Yes. Jesus. Just fuck me already, damn it.”

“So impatient,” I tease, leaning forward and sinking into him slowly. He’s tight as hell, and it takes everything inside me not to come. I try to think about anything else, but it’s impossible as I’m sheathed in his warm, tight heat. “Holy shit, you feel good.”

He’s gone still, but when I bottom out, I do too, not moving until he starts to squirm. “Are you going to fuck me or not? So far, this is a little disappointing, rookie.”

I roll my eyes at him and lean forward a little more, pushing even deeper inside him as I nip at his shoulder. “Your body says otherwise. I bet that fat cock of yours is ready to explode.”

“Yes,” he says, not denying it, his hips moving a little, and I realize he’s humping the bed, trying to get some friction. “Please. Just move. I need to come.”

I pull back a little and snap my hips forward, knowing I nailed his prostate by the whimper he makes before he thrusts backward, trying to fuck himself on my cock. It’s so damn good.

My vision nearly whites out as I stroke in and out of him, quickly losing my control. Wanting to race to the end but not wanting it to be over. “You know, if you hold off on coming...”—I bite at his earlobe—“you can have my ass.”

“Oh, holy fuck.” He shudders, and I feel it everywhere. His hole clenches tight around my dick and nearly ends it all right there. “Yes. That.” He pushes himself up more now, no longer grinding against the bed. Then he starts to fuck himself against me even more, moving fast, knowing the pace will make me blow.

I grip his hips tightly, getting lost in his tight heat. I come with a guttural cry, filling him up, my cock jerking inside him over and over before it softens slowly. I watch in awe as it slips from him, my cum running out of his hole. “Holy fuck, that was good.”

Before I even know what’s happening, I’m lying flat on my back, and his hard body is covering mine, his wet cock dragging against my thigh. He’s still hard as hell, leaking precum and soaking my thigh. “It’s not over yet.”

“Hell no, it’s not,” I agree, grabbing the lube and quickly preparing myself, not wanting a lot of prep. I slather it all over his dick and place him at my ready hole. “Fuck me.”

He grins slowly, but no matter how horny he has to be, he doesn’t rush. He moves slowly, pushing inside me and making us both feel it. Every single inch. Every second of him being inside me.

My own cock is already starting to grow hard. I can't get enough of him. And by the time he comes inside me, I'm coming again. When we catch our breaths, he rolls off me but doesn't go too far.

He hugs me to his side as we lie on the bed, both on our backs. "We should go on a vacation," I blurt out. Maybe it's the high from two orgasms, but I mean it.

"A trip?" He sounds amused but not opposed. "Where?"

I shrug. "Somewhere warm. It's almost winter. I always hated the winters. Too fucking cold. I want to go somewhere where they've never seen snow."

He seems to be thinking it over, but then shrugs. "Okay. Let's go on a trip. Somewhere warm."

"Yeah?" I roll to my side and look at him in awe. "You really want to?"

He rolls to his side too, both of us ignoring the sticky mess between us. "Yeah. I do. It's been a long time since I've taken a trip for leisure, and we have time before the next race."

"All winter," I say waggling my eyebrows.

"I'll have to talk Coop into watching the dog." He grins. "But I doubt that will be too difficult."

"I'm ready."

He frowns slowly though, and I'm worried he's rethinking it. "We'll have to sell it as a bromance vacation."

I grin at that. “Sure. Mahomes and Kelce do that all the time.”

He grins and kisses my nose. “We’ll go. Soon, yeah?”

“How about tomorrow?” I ask all too seriously. I am fucking ready.

He grins and hugs me to him. “Maybe give us a few days to plan, at least.”

I huff, but I’m not actually upset.

“Fine.”

He kisses me softly. “So impatient.”

When it comes to him and me, though, I’m pretty sure I’m the most patient man in the world. I want to claim him every chance I get, but I’ve been pretty careful. I know it’s because I get these moments with him, and now we’re going to be traveling together.

As long as he’s mine, I can be patient.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

“Brayden! Carson! Is this a bromance trip?”

“Brayden! Is this how you’re celebrating winning the last race of the season?”

“Carson, did he make you pay for the trip since you got second?”

“Hell no, he’s the winner. He has to pay,” Carson teases the woman with a camera behind her and a microphone in her hand. How they were alerted to us being at the airport so damn fast, I’m not sure.

But we just landed in a tropical paradise, and somehow, we’re already dealing with the media. Most of them seem to be social-media influencers, bloggers, and not the news media, but there are a couple of news crews there.

I’d be annoyed if I wasn’t so damn excited to be here with Carson. The only part that sucks is I can’t pull him to me and kiss his lips anywhere other than our room. We booked a bigass suite with several rooms, so we can at least share without any suspicion, and I’m eager to get there.

When we finally get behind closed doors, my lips are all over him. I can’t get enough. Don’t want to.

Mine. Mine. Mine, keeps flashing through my brain, and I keep trying to tell myself it’s okay that we can’t tell the world we’re together, but it’s getting harder and harder. They still portray me as a forever bachelor, and they’ve started to try to link Carson to several famous women.

Some he's never met. Some he's met in passing. All wanting to pin him as a womanizer and a player. It would fit the narrative. It would give them something interesting to report during the offseason.

But here we are on our bro trip, and all I want to do is claim him. Thankfully, Jenny didn't even blink when we told her our plans for the offseason. She told us to try to relax and have fun but not too much damn fun.

I grinned at that, not wanting to be a headache for her. Jenny has been good to me, and she's by far the best agent I've ever had.

"Three months here," Carson gasps, after kissing the hell out of me and dropping to his knees to undo my shorts.

"Almost," I say, stroking through the soft strands of his hair.

He wastes no time undoing my shorts and pulling them and my briefs down, freeing my already hard cock. He strokes it slowly. Expertly. We both know each other's bodies as well as we know our own at this point, but it never gets old. Everything is still so damn exciting with him.

He envelops me in his warm mouth, and it doesn't take him long before I'm spilling down his throat and moving him to the bed to return the favor. I make him come fast and hard, gloating with my eyes when I fall onto the bed on my back next to him.

"I had the disadvantage, you know."

"How so?" I ask, knowing what we're talking about. Loving the banter back and forth. He keeps me on my toes. I didn't realize it before, but I think I was bored. Complacent. Just going through the motions.

No one really challenged me. And I'm sure it mostly came from respect, but I didn't realize how much I love the competition of it all until Carson came along and pushed every single button I have.

I'm no longer sleepwalking through my career or my life. It feels like I'm living for the first time—maybe ever.

And it's because of him.

He gives me a look, cocking his head to the side. "Seriously? I had your cock in my mouth. That's enough to make me a horny mess. I had to wait for you to come. I was ready to go off the second you put your mouth on me. Total disadvantage."

I chuckle and pull him to me, so his head rests on my shoulder. "Fine. You win."

"Damn straight," he says with a little nod of his head.

Goddamn, I love him.

My heart stutters in my chest, and I nearly gasp for air. I love him. The thought hits me hard and sure. I do. I know I do. I think I have for a while now, but I haven't let myself think about it.

"Hey, you okay?" He looks up at me worriedly.

I stare at him, opening my mouth and then slowly closing it. I don't want to scare him off. On the off chance that he may love me too, I'm not sure we should say it out loud either.

The situation sucks, but he's still a rookie.

Miles wouldn't have been fine with Jeff being gay. I know that deep in my soul. I've heard stupid-ass comments he's made over the years. He's a homophobe, through and through. When Axel and Sebastian got married, he even made a comment that he was glad they weren't on his team.

That they would have been gone.

It's a bitter pill to swallow, and I'm not sure why I've stuck around. The truth is I'm a creature of habit. I don't like change, and I don't deal with it well. And part of me likes being on the team Jeff was on. It felt like it would be a betrayal to leave.

Sensible or not, it never really mattered.

But now?

I'm not sure. Maybe I could switch teams. Hell, maybe I could be content with being done with racing. But Carson is just starting out. If he comes out now and Miles dumps him from the team, others might be hesitant to pick him up.

Stating publicly that they just couldn't fit him in, but behind closed doors, it would be more likely they don't want any type of scandal. I grit my teeth. As if being gay or bisexual is an inconvenience to any of them. Like it should be handled as a problematic thing.

I hate the world sometimes.

"Bray?"

Right. I need to stay calm. "Just thinking about what we should do first. Maybe go hang on the beach? It's a nice day."

He's studying me carefully, not believing me, but thankfully, he drops it. "We have three months here. I say we just stay in and fuck."

I chuckle, pulling him into me. "I'm old, remember? I can't go again yet."

He laughs, but then it turns kind of stoic. Both of us are quiet and lost in thought. "I hate that we can't just do whatever the hell we want, even though we're on vacation."

I squeeze him to me. "We can." I try to reassure him. "What do you want to do? Go swimming? Surfing? Snorkeling?"

He glares at me, barely lifting his head to look at me but still manages it. "You know what I mean. I want to walk on the beach with you and hold your hand. I want all the bikini-clad chicks to look the fuck away because you're mine, and they need to know they can't touch."

I snort at that. "Going all caveman on me?"

"Damn straight," he says instantly, snuggling into my side. "But I can't, and it's bullshit."

I stroke my hand over his arm and side. "I know. But we can still have a good time, and we have this suite. We have each other."

I don't feel him smiling, and believe me when Carson smiles, I can feel it. "Yeah."

"Hey," I say, trying to get him to look at me, but he won't. "It won't always be like this."

We just have to get him to a safe place in his career. Well, safer anyway. People think the world has changed, and in a lot of ways, it has, but it doesn't matter. Anything

that can appear to make you “complicated” when you have a fan base can potentially fuck it all up for you.

“Yeah, but part of me just wants to say fuck it and have sex with you out on the beach.”

I laugh easily but shake my head. He’d probably do that. “Yeah, somehow I don’t think Jenny would approve of that coming-out method.”

His finger traces over my abs. “Do you think she knows?”

I shrug. “I’m not sure. She hasn’t said anything to me about it. But I wouldn’t be surprised.”

He smiles now. “Yeah, she’s pretty smart. She’s probably already working on how to fix our fuckups.”

I lift his chin now, forcing him to look at me. “This isn’t a fuckup.”

His eyes look a little glassy as he nods slowly. “No. It’s not. Not at all, but she’ll see it that way. As me being an immature kid.”

“Nah, she’s smart. She knows better.”

I kiss him hard and want to tell him how much I love him, but before my mind can make my mouth speak, he hops out of bed. “Okay then. Let’s go shower and head down to the beach. If I can’t walk hand in hand with you, I’m gonna need a fruity cocktail.”

I grin and hop up, walking over to him to plant a firm kiss on his mouth.

I love you.

And someday, I'm going to actually say the words out loud.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

“Now this is how you should spend Christmas,” I say, settling my head on Brayden’s chest. Both of us are still naked and totally cum drunk. Goddamn, he tastes good. I can’t help myself when I’m around him.

We’ve been here on vacation for a month now, and I gotta tell you, if I could get away with it, I’d move here and never leave. Of course, I’d have to build a racetrack here because I’m starting to get a little twitchy, missing it, but still.

Being here in Brayden’s strong arms is really enough for me.

Which is a little scary. I’m young. I know that. But some people find the person they want to spend their lives with at this age all the time. I’m just one of the lucky ones.

“You don’t miss a white Christmas?” He sounds genuinely interested in my answer, not judging me in any way.

“I don’t. Not at all. I never wanted snow, not even on Christmas.” He chuckles. “Do you?”

He shrugs. “My mom wasn’t thrilled I wasn’t coming home this year, but I think she’ll get over it, and no, I don’t miss the snow. I’m happy right here.”

I grin. I met his mom once or twice at races. She’s nice, but kind of stern. She wasn’t thrilled about our fake bromance. Maybe she knows. “Does your mom know you’re bi?” I blurt out and curse my lack of filter.

He just strokes through my hair, and a laugh rumbles from his chest. “Yeah. She

does. I think she knew before I did. She's not an asshole though. Doesn't bother her."

"Good," I say firmly.

"What about your parents?"

I shrug, not really wanting to talk about this, but hoping I can play it off. I can feel Brayden's body go tense, and yup, here we go. He's in full-on protective mode now. "They're fine. They just don't ever want to talk about it. They don't ask me about my dating life. They're really big into their church back home." I try to say it casually like it doesn't rip my heart out, thinking about it.

My mom shushing me any time I'd bring it up. Wanting her approval, even though I know I shouldn't.

"So they're fine with it, but they don't want you to talk about it?" I hear the anger in his voice.

"Yeah. It's fine," I try.

"No. It's not," he says firmly, and damn him.

I huff out a sigh. "No, it's not, but it's strange. They're my family. I don't want to just tell them to fuck off, you know? But I also don't want to be around them if I can't be me. It's a mindfuck."

He hugs me to him. "I love you."

Holy shit. Did he just say what I think he just said? I think he broke my brain because I can't seem to move, and I for sure can't get a word out of my mouth. Maybe I heard him wrong.

There's no way he just said that to me.

I'm freaking the fuck out because I want him to have said that. I want him to love me the way I love him. I'm so desperately in love with him.

"Carson?" He sounds worried. Say something, you dumbass.

But I'm just blank. My brain totally offline. What if he didn't say that? What if he doesn't mean it if he did say it?

Does it really matter?

Does it change anything for me?

No. I realize it doesn't because that's how I feel. I look at him, rolling my body so I can look into his eyes. "I love you too."

A whoosh of air leaves his lungs, and he hugs me tight. "Jesus, fuck. Are you trying to kill me?" He chuckles fondly and kisses me softly. "Always keeping me on my toes."

"So you did say it?" I ask dumbly, still unable to believe it.

He cocks his head to the side, studying me, and then sighs, shaking his head at me. "Of course I did. I'm so far in love with you, Carson. I'm..." He looks unsure for a moment but then determined. "I'm happy with you."

"I'm happy with you too," I say honestly. I grin. "Who'd have thought you'd fall in love with me? The little impatient shithead who drove you crazy."

He kisses me hard and then laughs. "You still drive me fucking crazy. And you are

impatient.”

I frown, my eyes narrowing. “I’m getting better.”

“No doubt,” he says easily, pulling me back down so I’m snuggled into his side where I really love to be.

“Does it bother you that I’m not out yet?” I have to ask, my chest tight with fear. How long can I really expect him to go on like this? He’s a grown man. I’m sure he’s ready to settle down.

Maybe even start a family. Even though we haven’t talked about that yet, I’d totally be cool with a couple of kids running around.

“It bothers me that I know you can’t,” he says, placating me and brushing his hand down my spine.

“I could,” I say defiantly, even though the thought of it terrifies me.

“No.” I can feel his eyes on the top of my head, but I don’t look at him. “You can’t, and we both know it. Miles is an asshole.” He confirms what I already knew.

If I come out, I’ll lose my spot on the team. They’ll make something up, not able to say it’s because I’m gay. And even if I sued or made a big deal about it, my career would likely be over.

We both know it, and we both don’t talk about it.

“I’m sorry,” I say honestly. I hate this. I want to claim him as mine. I need to claim him as mine, but I can’t.

I'm so damn in love with him, and I can't tell anyone.

It's not fair.

"Hey," he says softly, brushing his hand over my hip and holding me close. "We're going to figure this out. We have time."

"Do we?" I ask bitterly. I can't help it. I hate when he's so calm when I want to be irrational, damn it.

"Yes," he says easily. Damn. Him. "We do. I'm not going anywhere, Carson."

I bite my bottom lip, pleading with myself to not say what I'm thinking, but of course I do. "Eventually, you're going to want more. You deserve more. You shouldn't have to hide. You're established. You've worked hard. If anyone deserves to be living his truth, it's you."

"My truth lies with you, Carson. Nothing else matters to me."

"I believe you," I say honestly, and I do. I can feel his love, and I know he'll sacrifice his happiness for mine. But it makes me angry because he shouldn't have to.

I know it'll get old eventually. He's only human. I'm sick of it already.

"I love you," he whispers in my ear.

It just isn't fair.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

Goddammit, I hate charity events. And no, I don't hate charity, but I hate dressing all fancy and being surrounded by a bunch of other people dressed all fancy too. I'd much rather write a check and be at home.

Not the most endearing quality, I realize, but it's true. I hate having to be on. I also hate the fact that my boyfriend looks damn good in his tux, but he's all the way across the room from me.

Because even though we're supposed to be best friends, we can't let on that we're lovers. Because we have to play the game.

I'm so damn tired of the game.

We just got back from our long-ass vacation two days ago, and already, we had to go to an event. It's a good cause. Cash Phillips, former racer turned sports agent, throws this event to honor his young daughter he lost. But my heart isn't in it.

Especially when there's a camera and microphone in my damn face. The local news is here trying to cover the event. "So how was your vacation, Brayden? We saw you took your buddy along."

I want to punch this reporter. My hands tense at my sides. I want to scream that he isn't my buddy—he's my fucking everything—but I can't. I put the polite, fake-as-hell smile on my face and answer, "Yeah it was nice. Warm and sunny. Can't beat that, especially when you look outside in KC." He jokes about the dreary weather, but goddamn, he means it. "But there's nothing like being back home." I offer the soundbite because that's what they need.

And I'm really damn good at playing this game after all these years.

I do love it here. I love the community, but I'm bitter and pissed off because my fame—and Carson's fame—are like a double-edged sword. It's why we have the nice things we have. It's why we have solid careers. But it's also why we can't be out and free. It's goddamn tragic.

“Well, I also couldn't help but notice you two didn't bring along anyone else. There's no one special in your life?”

I grimace, again wanting to punch this motherfucker. I notice almost too late that Jenny's eyes are on me. She's always watching. Always ready to swoop in, and I don't really want to make her job any harder, so I set my jaw and try to play it off. “Not at the moment. I'm just living my life, you know?” It makes me sound like a player douche, but it works, getting the guy to move onto racing season and the event before I finally sneak away.

I hope my nod is subtle when I make it in Carson's direction, but a slow smile teases his lips as he returns it. I take off for the elevator, knowing he's on board with my plan.

I go to the room I secured before we got here, and it's only moments later before he joins me, already undoing his tie and tossing it as he makes his way to the bed. “This is fucking torture.”

I stand and meet him just in time for his lips to meet mine. He removes his jacket, and I do the same, kissing him hard, needing to feel him. I hate when we're out in public and can't touch.

I hate every fucking thing about it.

But I won't ask him to jeopardize his career for me. I won't do that.

We quickly remove our shirts, the buttons taking forever, before we land on the bed, both on our sides and kissing. My soul feels a little more settled now that it's just us in our own little world.

"Maybe I could come out," he says softly against my lips.

"No," I say simply because he can't. Racing season is about to start. He needs to do well here. Maybe he can leverage this season and get on a new team. One with an owner who isn't a prick.

"I can't keep doing this," he whines as my fingers move to his pants, and I undo the button, lowering the zipper.

"We're going to make it through this. I promise you. We'll look back on this someday, but we won't laugh because it sucks." I push his pants and boxers down, and he helps me by kicking off his shoes and pushing them down all the way. "But we'll know we made it."

He smiles softly, but I know he doesn't feel any better. Neither do I, for the record. None of this is fair, and it's really starting to piss me off.

"We'll make it," he says firmly, kissing me and undoing my pants.

"We will." At least that part I do know. He's it for me.

How the hell did that happen?

He does drive me insane. He challenges me every single chance he gets, but I wouldn't change that for anything in the world.

Carson is mine.

And as soon as possible, I'm going to make sure the world knows it.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

We're flying out today on the same plane to head to the first race of the season, and while I'm excited to be back to racing, my thoughts are on the fact that I want to be holding Brayden's hand right now.

How fucked up is that?

But it's true. I want to be like a normal fucking couple. I want to hold his hand. I want to kiss him, and I want everyone to shut the hell up about it. But I know he's right. We need to be careful.

This racing season is important. I have to do well. So well that other teams start vying for my attention. So I can get signed to another one. Maybe Brayden can too. I don't think he'd be against leaving this team anymore.

He hasn't so much said it, but I can feel it. Brayden is all-in, and damn, I want to be also. Stupid fucking rookie status. I've never hated it more.

I'm in a terrible mood by the time we land and then get to the hotel. We can't even cuddle or anything because we immediately have to go to a meeting with Jenny in her room.

I'm prepared for the usual speech, the no fighting, and don't say fuck on the air—that kind of thing. But when we get to her room, finding her perched on the sofa, and we take our seats across from her in separate chairs, she shocks the hell out of me. “Okay, so how long have you two been fucking?”

I look around the room, I guess looking for cameras or something, I'm not really sure.

But Brayden remains stone-faced. “What the hell are you talking about?” Uh-oh. That’s his don’t fuck with me voice, and he really shouldn’t use that on Jenny. But at the end of the day, I know he’ll wreck his career for me.

Something I don’t like at all.

I keep my tone soft and curious as I look at Jenny. “What he means to ask is why do you think that?”

Her eyes narrow in my direction, and I’m pretty sure if she could turn me to stone, she would. I try not to shrink back too much. “Don’t. I’m not stupid.” She turns to Brayden, who has his jaw locked tight and looks tense as hell. “I’ve had my suspicions for a while, but the plane pretty much cemented it.”

“What are you talking about, Jenny?” Brayden says in a harsh tone that makes me flinch. “Nothing happened on the plane.”

“You two were eye-fucking each other the entire damn flight.”

“That’s not true,” he says, but there isn’t as much bite to it. Are we really that obvious? Shit. Does anyone else know?

“Relax,” Jenny says to me. “No one else knows. I’ve checked thoroughly, and while there are some fans who want you two together, no one actually thinks you are.”

I’m surprised to hear there are people who want us together but decide that’s really not the point right now.

“So how long?” she asks again, and I’m so damn tired. Of the secrets and the hiding—something I shouldn’t have to feel. But I’m seriously just plain tired. I look her in the eyes and give her the answer.

“For a while.”

Brayden is tense, but he doesn't look at me, keeping his eyes on Jenny. “Why the hell does it matter?”

“It doesn't,” Jenny says easily, not threatened by his tone. “But you should have told me so I can get ahead of it.”

“We aren't...” Panic goes through me. Panic that I'm ashamed of but can't hide, my voice cracking. “We don't want to come out.” I wince because that's not the real truth. I do. I do so damn badly, but I can't.

Brayden must pick up on what I mean because he clarifies for me. “He can't.”

Jenny frowns at that. “And why can't he?” Her right brow lifts as if we're totally insane. She's been a sports agent for a long time. She has to know why.

“Is that a joke?” Brayden bites out. “You know damn well why.”

I cringe. I don't think he actually groups Jenny with the PR team, but at the end of the day, she kind of is. Her job is to keep our images up to par for the PR team and for the racing team we work for. “I don't actually. What's your plan exactly? Just hide as much as you can? Because soon enough, other people will pick up on it. It was just the eye-fucking, Brayden. It's obvious to anyone who's paying attention that you two truly care about each other.”

“So sell it like it's the bromance,” he bites out, and I swear to God my stomach hurts. I don't like this. I don't like any of this at all. I hate that he's so angry, I swear I can hear him grinding his teeth.

“You want to fuck your bro,” she says just as tense.

Brayden's jaw ticks with anger. I know he won't punch her, but damn, he looks mad. "Maybe you're just super paranoid."

"I don't understand the problem here, Brayden. I'm not an idiot. You love him. So why not tell the world?"

My heart clenches tight in my chest, so hard I have to put my hand over it to try to sooth myself. It's not fair. I want to do that. "I want to," I say it out loud, and Jenny looks at me curiously. "But I can't, and you know I can't. I'm a rookie. I need my spot on the team. I need my reputation."

She purses her lips, and I think she's breathing deep and trying to calm herself down. "I'm not an idiot, and I've been doing this for a long time. I know the difficulties that come with this, but I'm also getting really sick and tired of my clients having to hide who they are."

That surprises me. I don't know why. I thought this was just another problem for her to solve. A headache. But she actually seems to really care about this. I think—holy shit—I don't think she's mad at us. I think she's mad for us.

She sighs softly, and I notice Brayden's attitude has also cooled down a little as we watch her. "It's not fair. You guys haven't done anything wrong. I'm not thrilled with teammates fucking because it can become a headache, but the fact that you're two men shouldn't matter. Not at all."

I nod my head with her because duh, but it does. "Miles is a slimy asshole. He'll fire me," I say honestly.

"I don't give a fuck if he fires me, but Carson..." Brayden starts. "He's too new to risk his career."

I hate this. I hate this. I hate this.

I chant it in my head over and over because I'm really thinking about just giving up. I don't quit. I never have, but for Brayden, it's worth it.

"You both have contracts until the end of this season," she says matter-of-factly. And yeah, he can't fire me this year, but it won't be enough.

Brayden voices the concerns. "But he can at the end of the season, and he can spread the word like toxic fire. He can end his career. Sabotage him. You know this. You're not stupid, and I'm sorry if I ever implied that you were, but you know he can't come out right now."

There's a flicker of a smile on her lips, and she shakes her head. "You two need to trust me. And yes, you might need to keep a lid on this for a little longer, but I'm going to get you out of this, if that's what you want." Her eyes meet mine. "Of course, I don't ever want to push anyone to come out. It's up to you, but..." She frowns. "Sometimes the media doesn't seem to care. If they can get a good story, they're going to run with it, and today on the plane..."

"I can't seem to help it," I say with a slight blush.

She grins at that. "Nor should you have to."

No. I really shouldn't.

"What's your plan?" I ask cautiously.

Brayden is listening but not saying a word. He seems intrigued too though.

"Well, since I had an inkling before today, I've been thinking on it. And I think you

two have a shot with this new racing team I know about. The world doesn't know about it yet, but I'm almost positive you'll fit right in."

I look over at Brayden, trying to figure out if he'd be okay with it. I know he's said he doesn't mind leaving the team now, but I also think it's more complicated than that. He's very loyal, and it's what he knows.

I'm not sure he's ready for this.

"What racing team?" Brayden asks, and I hate that I can't get a good read on him right now.

"I can't say yet. But I think you'll like it." Jenny doesn't lie. That much I know. She's to the point, but she's always very real.

"But maybe he won't have to leave." I look over at him. "I know how important that team is to you."

"No," he says simply, and I want to smack him until he opens his mouth again. "You are important to me. The team doesn't matter."

"Aw. See, you two are just fucking adorable," Jenny says with a hint of sarcasm but also fondness. I glare at her anyway.

"So what do we do?"

"Nothing," she says simply. "You two keep doing what you've been doing. Play the bromance. At least you two aren't supposed to be enemies. Trust me, that's way more difficult to navigate. This will be an easy sell when it's time. You two are friends who fell in love. Easy peasy."

“Except for the whole racing team thing and him being new,” Brayden deadpans.

Jenny just waves him off. “Please. I’m the goddamn come-out queen. I’ve got this. I’m not worried at all, but you two have to trust me.”

I don’t believe it’ll be this simple though. I can’t believe it. It could get very messy.

Brayden snorts a laugh, though, and he actually looks kind of relaxed now. “Just don’t fuck up his career. Mine—” He waves his hand in the air. “I could retire and be happy about it. But he’s young.”

Jenny’s pretty eyes roll. “I know. I’ve got this.” She looks over at me. “If this is what you want. If you need time to think about it, I’ll come up with another plan.”

“No,” I say immediately. “I don’t need to think about it. I want this. I want my career too, but I want this even more.”

I hear Brayden suck in a sharp breath, and I know he’s going to argue. “Your career is important. I’m not going anywhere.”

“A-fucking-dorable,” Jenny says, and Brayden flips her off.

She just laughs. “Okay, so go win that fucking race tonight, and no eye-fucking, if you can help it. For sure, don’t get caught with your pants down.”

“I think we can manage,” Brayden says, and she smiles.

“Good.” We both stand to leave, and she stands too, joining us by the door. “You two deserve to be happy. I mean that with everything I am. I’ve watched people hide who they are for far too long. It’s time for change.”

Brayden nods, and I have the urge to hug her, but she gives off a firm no-touchy vibe, and I'm not about to lose my balls.

“Thank you, Jenny. Really.”

She grins. “Don't thank me just yet, but I'm going to figure this out.”

We both leave, agreeing to go to our own hotel rooms to get ready for the race. It sucks, but I think at this point it may be necessary.

We might need to start being more careful for a little while.

I just hope I can stand it while we wait for Jenny to work her magic.

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I want to go to his hotel room. I want to so fucking badly, I can taste it. But I know I shouldn't, and I also know he agrees with me. I got one stolen moment with him after the race when we were riding back to the hotel. The driver probably wasn't paying any attention to us.

But we couldn't touch.

We agreed we shouldn't sneak into each other's hotel rooms. Someone could see. And if Jenny is working on an actual plan for us to come out as a couple, I don't want to mess that up.

But goddamn, do I miss him.

This is getting kind of pathetic. I should be able to go a night without needing him in my arms, but I don't like it at all. I want him.

I need him.

And maybe Jenny had a point about us being obvious on the plane because it's getting harder and harder to hide the fact that I'm in love with Carson.

I smile when I see my phone light up with his name and answer it embarrassingly fast, but I can't be bothered to care. "Hey," I say with a smile.

"Hey."

"Why didn't you video call me? I want to see your face."

He snorts a laugh. “So needy.” But I don’t think his heart is actually in it to tease me. “I don’t know if I can handle seeing your face right now.”

“Gee, thanks,” I try to joke, but I don’t feel it either. I hate this so damn much, and I don’t know how to fix it. “It’s going to be okay,” I offer lamely.

“Do you really think Jenny has a way out of this for us? I mean, the woman is fierce, but it seems kind of hopeless, and I don’t know how many nights I can go not in your bed.”

My heart squeezes tight at his honesty. “You’re spending the night in my bed tomorrow. We’ll figure everything else out, but yeah, this sucks.”

I swear I can hear him smile. “Well, you’ll never believe this, but I am exceptionally horny.”

I snort. “Shocking.”

“Right?” he jokes. “But I have this really hot boyfriend I can’t seem to stop thinking about.”

“That hot boyfriend can’t stop thinking about you either,” I answer honestly, but my cock starts to stir in my loose sweatpants. I can’t help it. The guy turns me the hell on, and it’s not just the sex I miss, but hey... the sex is definitely one of the good parts of our relationship.

“Are you fucking your hand?”

I grin at his question, since his voice is husky as hell. I know, without a doubt, what he’s doing right now. “Not yet. Patience, remember?”

He groans low and deep, and I can hear the wet squelching sound of him working his cock over. “Fuck patience. I miss you so damn much. I want you here with me. I want your hands...” He pants. “Your mouth. Your fucking tongue.” He sounds downright wrecked. My cock is rock-hard now, so hard it hurts. I pull my sweats down, grasping my cock and giving it a slow stroke. “Goddamn, your tongue drives me wild. There should be statues erected of your tongue.”

“You’re fucking ridiculous,” I say, but my neck pulls tight with tension as I stroke myself, using my own precum as lube because I’m leaking like crazy.

“Fuck. I’m close,” he pants, his voice almost a whisper of pleasure. “Yesssss.”

I go over at the same time. I swear my body is hard-wired to come when he does. After cleaning up and hearing rustling on his end of the phone—I assume he’s doing the same—we sit there in silence for far too long.

“Do you think anyone knows about us besides Jenny?” he asks quietly.

“I’m not sure we’ve actually been as subtle as we thought, but I don’t know...”

“Do you hate me for having to hide who you are?” I can actually hear the nerves in his question. Like I could ever actually hate him.

“I didn’t even hate you when I wanted to hate you. Now that I love you, I could never hate you.”

“But you want to come out, right? I mean...” Again with the nerves, and I hate what this situation has done to him. My cocky asshole of a racer knocked down. I always thought I wanted to see him knocked down a peg or two. Turns out, I fucking hate it. I want him to have his confidence back.

That cocky attitude is what made me fall in love with him.

“I want you. Period. However we can make that work, that’s what I want. We’re going to figure this out,” I promise him, and we say our goodnights before hanging up the phone.

My heart aches as I stare up at the ceiling and try my best to keep myself under control. To stop myself from going to his room and spooning him.

It’s too damn hard to have to wait to openly love the person you love.

We shouldn’t have to.

“Brayden, thank you for meeting me today,” Miles starts, and I swear I already want to punch him in the face. This isn’t going to go well. I woke up to a message from Miles, asking me to meet him downstairs at the hotel’s restaurant for breakfast.

I tried to tell him I have a plane to catch, but he already knew it doesn’t take off until this afternoon and insisted.

I can only assume he knows. How, I don’t know. Maybe he picked up on it just like Jenny did, but my only instinct is to protect Carson. Fuck my career. I’ll be fine. I have plenty of money saved. No debt and likely some endorsement deals I can procure.

But Carson deserves his career, goddammit. I’m going to do everything I can to make sure I don’t mess it up.

“No problem, but I really don’t have a lot of time. I don’t want to miss my flight.”

He just waves off my worries with a flick of his hand, ordering breakfast for both of

us before his eyes narrow in my direction. “Listen, I know what’s going on and have for quite a while. It’s fine.” I stay completely still. “Well, I wouldn’t say fine,” he sneers. “But I was willing to look the other way as long as the world just sees a bromance they love.”

Shit. Shit. Shit.

He knows. How the hell does he know?

I stay quiet though. “But it’s been brought to my attention that you and your...”—he waves his hand again, like he can’t find the word and he’s disgusted by the thought—“your boy are thinking about making it public.”

I swallow hard, the word boy pissing me off, but how the hell would he know that? “Did Jenny say something to you?” It doesn’t seem like her style, but what the hell do I know? Miles is rich as hell, and I suppose he could pay her well to alert him.

“Jenny.” His nose wrinkles. “Hell no, that bitch barely ever says two words to me. But you admit it’s true?”

I feel slightly relieved that Jenny didn’t betray us, but what the hell? I don’t say a word.

“Now is not the time to stay silent,” he scolds. “Listen, I knew you and my son had...” Again he looks almost green. He’s that disgusted by two men together? Jesus, fuck. I can’t believe I was ever loyal to this man. “Whatever you had. I was willing to look the other way, but you wanted him to make a spectacle out of himself, and now you’re doing it to this kid.”

“You knew?” My voice is calm, but my nerves are on high alert.

He snorts. “I have a lot of money, and I know how to protect it. Plenty of people you’d never expect are in my pocket. Yes, I knew you wanted my son to come out to me. For him to be loud about his...”—he clears his throat, and my fists clench, wanting to punch him—“being...”

“Gay,” I say for him, rolling my eyes. “Jesus fucking Christ, your son was gay. Not a murderer. Not a fucking narcissistic prick, like his father. Not a bad person at all. He was gay.”

He looks horrified, his eyes wide, looking around before he looks at me. “Keep your voice down.”

“Were you glad when he died?” I ask coldly. “So you didn’t have to deal with all this?”

He scoffs loudly, looking flushed. “Of course not. I loved him, but it would have ruined his career. It would have been his choice though.”

“You wouldn’t have backed him, would you?”

“No,” he says simply. “And if you and your little friend decide to come out, I won’t stand for it either. I’ll ruin you.” His voice is cold, and his eyes are dead as he stares at me.

“You don’t own me.”

“You, maybe not...” His eyes narrow. “But Carson’s career will never recover, and you know it. Keep your mouth shut.” I swallow hard, hating this man with everything I have. “Give him ten good years, and then you can slink off and do whatever the hell you two want to do together. It was the advice I was planning to give Jeff, and it’s the advice I’m giving you now.”

“To just put our lives on hold?” I ask angrily. Who would be okay with that? Who would want that for their own child?

“Yes. It’s the smarter move. You two come out, and America believes you lied to them. That this adorable little bromance was actually some sort of gay love affair... They’ll never forgive you.”

“Fuck off.” It’s not a great response. I know that, but right now it’s all I have. I’m shaking from rage. “Jeff may have taken your advice, but I won’t.”

“Then you’re a fool.”

“A fool who still has a season left with you on your team.” I stand up from the table. “But after that, we’re done. I want nothing to do with you.”

“If you two get caught or decide to come out on your own, I’ll wreck his career.” His cold, dead eyes meet mine. “That I can promise you.”

Whether I like it or not, he has me. And we both know it.

I’ve never hated another human being more, but my hands are tied. I have no idea how the hell Jenny could ever get us out of this.

I’m losing hope fast, and I don’t know how to fix it.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

No. No. No.

This isn't happening. I run to Brayden's wrecked car and pray with everything inside me that he's okay. It was a bad wreck. His fucking car flipped twice that I saw. He has to be okay.

It's been a month of hell, where we've had to play it cool. Barely looking at each other but still keeping up the bromance charade. Make sure we look like friends but not that we want to fuck each other senseless.

We find moments alone. We spend the weeks at his house behind closed doors, being a couple, but in public, we always have to be on. Brayden told me about his meeting with Miles. Told me that he knows about us.

It feels so damn hopeless, but Jenny has assured us she's working on it. That we just need to hold on a little longer. And now look. He's in a smashed-up car with the paramedics trying to assess his injuries to see if they can remove him without doing any more damage.

He could die.

And the world wouldn't have ever known he's my entire world. That I'm so damn in love with him, it hurts. They finally get him out of the car, carefully checking him over. The crowd is deadly silent.

I think about his friend Jeff. How, even with all the safety equipment, he still died. It still happens. You can't fight fate.

I can barely breathe as other racers and the pit crew surround him. Waiting to hear if he's okay. Praying quietly to ourselves.

Sebastian places his hand on my shoulder in comfort, but it feels like my heart might beat right out of my chest. He can't die. He's so damn strong. He can't die.

Finally, he's able to stand, looking beat-up but alive. So very alive. They're telling them they're going to take him to the hospital to get him looked at, and Brayden is waving them off. "I'm fine. Just sore. The safety equipment did its job." His eyes are searching around, and I know he's looking for me.

When our eyes meet, that's it. My control snaps, and I can't take it anymore. I'm rushing toward him with my arms out and pulling him into a tight embrace. His arms wrap around me, and I sob into his chest.

"You're alive," I barely breathe out.

"Hey, I'm okay. Carson, I'm fine," he says, keeping his voice low. But I can barely breathe, holding onto him as tight as I can, feeling his warmth and his strength. "Baby," he says softly. "People are watching."

I don't care. I can't care. I could have lost him today. "I don't care," I say out loud, grabbing his face in my hands and looking into his eyes before crashing my lips against his. I feel his hesitation for just a moment before he relents and kisses me hard, letting me devour him. Letting me feel that he really is alive. And mine. So damn mine. "I love you," I say and kiss him again, tears running down my face. "I love you so damn much."

"I love you too," he says, but I can hear the worry in his voice, and I just don't care. I'll find something else to do for a career. Maybe I can go back to dirt-track racing. Who knows? I don't give a fuck right now.

“Boys.” It’s as effective as cold water being tossed on us when I hear Miles’s voice behind us. I close my eyes and refuse to look at him. “I’m glad you’re okay, Brayden.” His voice sounds off, but I know he’s putting on a show for the cameras. “I’m sure you’re both feeling an adrenaline rush.”

Ah, he’s trying to find an explanation. Fuck. Him. I turn around now, glaring at him. “I’m just glad my boyfriend is okay.”

There are a couple of stunned gasps around us, several cameras pointed our way, but I don’t care. Miles’s eyes narrow, and his jaw clenches. “Don’t.”

“Don’t what?” I say, challenging him, and I feel Brayden’s hands on my hips. “I’m not ashamed of my relationship with Brayden.” I can feel his hand smoothing over my hips, supporting me. Always having my back. If I thought for a second he wouldn’t want to come out, I’d keep my mouth shut. But I know he’s been keeping quiet for me.

No more.

I won’t ask him to hide for me.

Miles looks like he might turn purple with rage. He’s well on his way to a grape color, but I don’t care. I find Jenny’s eyes—she’s standing near Leslie, Cash Phillip’s wife and sports reporter—her eyes on me, but she’s not angry. She looks ... approving.

Thank. Fuck. Someone actually has our back.

Leslie, who I don’t know well, but know enough to know that she’s my favorite reporter, pushes through the crowd, her camera crew behind her. “So this bromance we’ve all been obsessed with is actually a romance?” She’s saying it lightly, with a

happy tone and smile. Guiding her audience. Letting them know this isn't a scandal but instead, something beautiful.

And I could fucking kiss her right now.

I look over my shoulder at Brayden, who smiles and kisses my nose affectionately before redirecting my attention to the camera. "It started out as a friendship, but it became so much more." I lick my lips nervously because I do care about my fans. "We didn't like keeping it a secret."

"So why did you?" Leslie asks, but it isn't accusatory. It's more about giving us a platform to speak our truth.

Brayden does it for us. "We weren't sure if we'd be accepted. It's a scary thing, even now, in this day and age. You don't know how people will react." His strong hands move to my shoulders. "And even though it shouldn't matter that we're both men, we know it'll likely matter to some."

"Not to anyone who matters," Leslie says firmly, letting everyone know where she stands. "I, for one, cannot wait to see the cute couple photos, now that we all know it's so much more than a bromance." She winks at us. "I thought you both were cute before, but to know you're in love,"—she smirks at the camera—"that's a beautiful thing no one should ever have to hide."

My heart is thumping hard in my chest as I melt back into Brayden. Her attention turns to him too. "So Brayden, what the hell happened on that last turn? You were well on your way to first place."

Brayden chuckles at that, and they go on with the quick interview before Brayden is rushed off to the hospital, where it's confirmed that he's totally fine. He has a couple of bruises, but he's fine.

Thank. Fuck.

The news is everywhere about us being a couple, and as much as I want to ignore it, I can't help perusing the articles and posts on my phone while he gets signed out of the hospital. Surprisingly, for the most part, they all seem supportive.

Of course, there are some assholes, but like Leslie said, they don't matter.

If my career is over, I'm surprisingly okay with that. I'll find something else to do.

There was a time I didn't think I could love anything more than racing, but I was so very wrong.

My love for Brayden outweighs my love of racing by a longshot.

Crazy.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:31 am

“Why are we here?” I ask Jenny, looking at Miles with contempt. I hate this motherfucker.

He wanted so badly to cover up the truth, but it came out anyway. I would have kept my cool on the track and not done anything when Carson hugged me. But when he kissed me, I knew.

It was time. We couldn't hide it anymore, and he didn't want to. I wanted to save his career, but not as much as I wanted him. Miles didn't say anything to us that day or the day after.

Or the five races after that. We were both waiting for it, but I assumed he was just going to let it go, hoping it would fade away if he just ignored it until our contracts were up.

But the media definitely wasn't going to let it fade. It's been a top story since that day, mostly positive. Color me shocked. I never thought I'd see the day where racers could be out and proud, but guys like Sebastian, Axel, Royal, and Maverick have really paved the way.

So far, we haven't had to deal with much hate.

But here we are in a room with Miles, his entourage, and Jenny. So something is for sure up, and I don't like it.

I take Carson's hand in mine and hold it in my lap and just wait. “Someone bought out your contracts,” Miles says, his eyes on our hands.

“What are you talking about?” I ask, surprised but trying not to get too excited. This can’t be this easy, right? Nothing is this easy.

“I’m talking about the fact that neither of you work for me anymore. You’re off my team and on this person’s.”

“Whose?” I ask, but Miles just stands up, buttoning his suit jacket and directing his team toward the door.

“You’re not my problem anymore. That’s all I care about.”

Then the fucker just leaves, closing the door behind him. “What a prick,” Carson grumbles, and I smile.

I look over at Jenny, who nods her head in agreement. “So who bought our contracts?”

She’s beaming now as she stands up. “Let me go get them.” She leaves the room, and we just wait. I have no idea who it could be, but anyone is better than Miles. When she walks back in with Cash and Leslie Phillips, I swear I can’t hide my shock.

“You’re a sports agent,” I say to Cash, who just grins and shrugs.

“And she’s a sports reporter.” He points to his wife. “Who better to own a racing team?”

Holy shit. I didn’t see that coming. “And you want Carson and me?”

“You kidding?” Cash looks between us. “The Rookie and the Ace? Hell yeah. I can’t think of a better start to my team, and when Jenny told me what was up, I was ready to buy you out months ago.”

“Why didn’t you?” My eyes narrow with suspicion.

“Miles is a motherfucker.” He grins. “Didn’t want to give you up until you forced his hand.” Cash looks over at Carson approvingly. “That took guts, man.”

Carson shrugs almost shyly. “Didn’t exactly think about it.”

Cash wraps his arms around his wife. “Yeah. I get that. It was fucking beautiful though. I even teared up a little.”

Leslie rolls her eyes. “He’s getting sappy on me.”

Cash just laughs and nuzzles into her neck, leaving a kiss before he looks back at us. “So what do you say? I can offer you both a three-year contract where you’re free to proudly be whoever the fuck you are. No hiding and also absolutely no requirements to do a goddamn thing except race.”

I can’t stop the great big grin that forms now. “That sounds fantastic.”

“Let’s get it done then,” Cash says, clapping his hands and bringing out the paperwork.

I pop open the champagne and pour it into two glasses before settling in next to Carson on my couch. We just finished signing the paperwork, and I’ve never felt lighter in my life.

Like nothing bad can touch me.

“I fucking love you, you know that?” I say to Carson before we clink our glasses together and take a sip.

“I fucking love you right back,” he says before taking another drink and then putting his glass down on the table and straddling my thighs.

I grin, putting my glass down too and wrapping my arms around him. “You happy with the way everything went?” I have to ask. I have a pretty good idea, but I need to know for sure. This matters.

“I am. So damn happy,” he says, looping his arms around my neck and leaning in to kiss me. We take our time kissing, no rush. We know that whatever our future holds, the other will be in it.

It feels damn good.

We slowly strip before he finds some lube that was stashed somewhere in here, quickly prepping himself and then riding my cock as we kiss and celebrate in our own way. My hands smooth over his back as he rises and falls on my cock, milking me and making me see stars before I come deep inside him. He finds his release at the same time, and we make a sticky mess between us that neither of us mind.

I didn’t expect to fall for the rookie, but damn, am I glad I did.

WAYLON

“Where have you been?”

Justin doesn't look all that surprised to see me in his apartment when he walks in. A trick I've learned from my good friend Jenny. And I wouldn't have done it if he hadn't been dodging me for months now.

I'm his goddamn manager. It's my job to manage him, but I can't do that if he won't talk to me. I don't get it. He was riding a damn high. Immoral—his rock band—has been back on tour all summer. He should be happy, but now he doesn't want to be bothered?

It makes no damn sense.

Grady Bell, the lead singer, was happy as hell to be back with the band over summer break, but he's now back at home with his kids and husband—who came on the tour with him.

Maybe that's why he's mad. That the tour ended. I mean, it was only supposed to be three months. He knew when he signed up what it would be, but I don't think that's it.

He tosses his keys on the table by the door with a heavy sigh and closes the door behind him. Then he's stalking into the living room, where I'm currently camped out on the couch. “What the hell are you doing here?”

I shrug. “I have a key.”

“For emergencies,” he deadpans and walks over to the bar tucked into the corner of his apartment.

“Yes well, I haven’t talked to you in months. It damn well could have been an emergency. I had to check to make sure you didn’t slip and fall getting out of the shower or something.”

He rolls his eyes at me, pushing his dark hair with his fingers, his sharp green eyes hitting me from across the room as he grabs a bottle of scotch and pours some into two glasses. He screws the lid on the bottle and walks over to me, holding out one of the glasses.

“It wasn’t months.”

I take the glass as I respond, “Seven weeks. Almost two months since the tour. I’ve texted back and forth with you maybe twice since then. And you gave one word answers the entire time.”

I hate that my voice sounds hurt. But I’ve been his manager for a decade. Off and on, yes, because Immoral has taken some hiatuses, but still. I was there if he needed me, and now he’s shutting me out.

I’m not sure why it hurts so badly. But it does.

He sits down in an armchair near the couch, his long legs spread as he leans back with the drink in his hand.

My eyes trail over him slowly. He looks ready for a concert—complete with ripped black jeans, a plain white t-shirt, and a black leather jacket. It’s the look he’s known

for. His dark hair and bright green eyes make the fans squeal in delight.

Doesn't hurt that his face is so pretty it could make you weep, and his hair is thick and full, always looking like it's been swept with his hand and blown by the wind. He's mastered the I don't give a fuck look.

"I'm fine. The tour is over. What do you want from me?"

"What do you want from me? I'm your manager. I work for you. But I'm the one who's been chasing you down to see what you want the next step to be."

He laughs bitterly, taking a long sip of his drink and swallowing it down, his eyes on me as he lowers the glass from his full red lips. "Next step? What next step? I'm one step up from a former boy-band member."

"Hey. Don't knock boy bands. Their fan bases are unmatched."

He rolls his eyes, and I can't help but smirk, knowing boy bands drive him crazy. "I don't want anything, Waylon. I want to drift off into nonexistence."

"What the hell does that mean?" I place my glass on the side table and lean forward a little, hoping to keep his attention.

"Don't worry about it." He downs the rest of his scotch and stands up, heading to the kitchen and placing the glass in the sink. But I'm right behind him.

"Don't worry about it? Are you kidding me?" I ask angrily when he turns around. "You can't say something like that and then just walk off. What do you mean?"

"I mean I don't want to be famous anymore. I'm sick of it. I'm sick of being told what I can wear. Where I can go. What I can do. Someone even runs my social

media.” He’s standing close to me now, and I resist breathing in his clean scent.

“You hate social media. You wouldn’t even have it if someone didn’t run it,” I point out.

“That’s not the point,” he says, moving even closer to me. So close, I close my eyes and remind myself that Justin is a client. He’s untouchable.

I’ve known, or at least suspected, he’s been interested in men for a long time—even though he’s never said it out loud. He’s had girlfriends—high profile ones—and I don’t think it was for show, but I’ve seen him glancing longingly at men too. A curiosity or a wanting—I’m not totally sure. But I see it. I’ve seen it.

I’ve never asked him to talk about it because he has to know if he wants me to know, he can tell me. I’m openly gay and have been my whole damn life. Grady Bell, his own damn band member, is married to a man.

I open my eyes now, standing a foot away. And I could be wrong. Except the way he’s looking at me right now. His eyes homed in on my lips, his breath coming faster and faster as he crowds against me, and his nostrils flaring. “What is the point?”

“The point is I don’t want to be Justin St. James anymore. I don’t want to be that guy from Immoral anymore.”

I poke his chest with my finger, and let me tell you, that’s a mistake because his chest is solid. “You are Justin St. James.”

His eyes flare with anger, but then they’re right back on my mouth. I know—I can feel it—that if I leaned into him right now, I’d be met with the kiss of my life, and I absolutely cannot do that.

I won't.

I've worked too hard and too long to get to where I am to throw it all away on someone who doesn't seem to know who he is or what he wants. He's lost. That's for damn sure.

"I don't want to be." His voice sounds so damn tortured, the sound strained as it falls from his lips. And goddammit, I lean in. I shouldn't. It's so damn stupid, but I do it anyway.

I tell myself it's just to comfort him. That maybe when I reach my hand around the back of his neck and wrap my fingers around it, it's to give him some sort of hug. But it's all a damn lie.

I use that hand to pull his mouth forward, and when his lips meet mine, the spark that ignites into a full-blown inferno is my own damn fault. I know that, but I can't seem to stop it as he grunts against my lips as we connect.

We kiss hard, both of us pushing against the other one for dominance. Years of pent-up frustration, back and forth, of having to fight him to get him to do every fucking thing, comes to the surface. And when my tongue moves over the seam of his full lips, he opens for me, letting me sweep inside and take the taste of him I've been dying to for years now.

We're around the same age. I'm two years older, but I've been babysitting his ass for years, and he's been pissing me off since day one. So when I thread my fingers through his perfect hair, I grip it a little too hard, making him grunt again but not push me away.

No. He leans into me, his hard cock pressing against my erection through our pants, making us both pant and moan. I should stop this, but I can't.

I'm tugging at his jacket before I can stop myself and it falls to the floor. His shirt follows before he starts working on the tie around my neck. "I hate this fucking thing."

"No, you don't," I breathe against his lips, my fingers still in his hair, holding on tight as I kiss him hard again, commanding him with my mouth. He removes the tie and then starts to work the buttons on my shirt.

I pull my suit jacket off and let it fall to the floor—a crime against the designer fabric, but I'm not really working with my brain at the moment. He removes my shirt as we work to get each other's pants off.

Before I can take my time and take in the sight of his nearly nude body before me, his hand wraps around my aching dick, and his mouth is on mine again. I grip his hard shaft at the same time as we kiss and rut together.

It's rushed and frantic, like we couldn't slow down for even a second. Like we're afraid it's a dream, and if we blink, the other one will be gone.

His mouth slides down my jaw and to my neck, his teeth leaving little bites as he goes. It only intensifies every moment. My head falls back as his big hand drags over my dick, twisting when he reaches the engorged head and then using the precum to slide back down. I pull his lips back to mine and kiss him hard, my fingers in his hair.

He cries out just as I feel his hot cum dribbling down my hand and landing on my hip. It sets off my own orgasm, and I nip and kiss his lips in a hard punishing kiss as my cum shoots from my dick and lands all over him.

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“You need to go.”

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“What?” I pull back to look into his eyes that are intensely watching me.

“You heard me.” He steps back, and I watch as he tucks his wet dick in his pants and fastens them. He grabs my shirt and tosses it to me. I catch it, but I don't move or speak. I just watch him.

He grabs his shirt and jacket from the floor but doesn't put them on.

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I slowly pull my pants on and grimace at the mess, tucking myself away. “So that's it? You aren't even going to talk to me?”

“I'm tired, Waylon.” Somehow I know it's not the kind of tired that's fixed by sleep that he's talking about. His shoulders are hanging heavy, and his eyes are wary as he watches me.

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“Okay, so apparently you aren’t going to answer your phone,” I say, sipping at my wine as I sit out on the deck of Grady and Ryan’s massive home on Christmas night. It’s snowing, and I’m freezing but bundled up. “You could though, you know. Give me a call. Let me know you’re alive.” My tone is dry, and to most I’d probably sound bored.

Really though, I’m just worried. Really, really worried. I’ve managed Justin for a long time—well before he decided he was done with Immoral. Done with the band. Done with traveling. Done with everything and just took off. The day after our little hookup—or the Incident, as I refer to it in my mind—he was just gone. I went to his place, and everything was packed up.

The place was empty except for the furniture that came with the place, and that was it. I knew it was a bad idea to hook up with a client, but I didn’t think he wouldn’t ever talk to me again.

He just disappeared without a damn word. It’s been months and nothing at all.

“Okay, well...” I swirl the red wine around in the glass as I stare out at the snow—thankful the deck is covered and snow isn’t currently pummeling me. I need to move the hell out of Kansas City, I swear, but most of my clients decided to live here. “I guess that’s all I can say. Merry Christmas. I hope you’re alive.”

I hang up the phone and just stare at the dark sky as the snow falls, and I watch my breath as it puffs out of my mouth into the cold night. There was more I wanted to say. So much more, but it’s pretty damn clear I didn’t mean much to him. I try not to let bitterness take over.

I'm fine. I'm a strong successful gay man in my prime, and he's not my problem anymore. Good riddance to the over-hyped brat.

I wince at my own thought because that's what the world thought of Justin St. James—but I know him better than that. I know how passionate he is. How much he actually loves the music and can't stand the over-the-top grand performance of it all. I knew he was struggling, and instead of forcing him to talk to me...

Well... the Incident. The stupid fucking mistake. I crossed a line with my client. I know that, and I regret it. I want him to answer his damn phone so I can tell him how sorry I am, but he won't fucking answer.

"There you are. You cannot leave me alone with the chaos. You know this. It's in our friend contract." I chuckle as Jenny shuffles outside through the sliding glass door. She's of course dressed spectacularly in a stunning black shimmery dress and to-die-for heels. I mean—she could literally die wearing those things out in this weather, but the woman fears nothing.

"Where is your coat?" I ask her.

"I'm hoping I won't be out here long. Are you fucking crazy? It's like zero degrees."

"Hence the coat," I say as I motion to my warm attire and shake my head as I take in her bare arms and legs. It's fine inside in the heat, but the woman is nuts, coming out here after me. "I'm fine."

"You're not," she says matter-of-factly. I hate how well she knows me. We met when her client Ryan rekindled his friendship with my client Grady and then fell in love—or they were already in love and finally pulled their heads out of their asses and decided to be together. But out of that marriage, I've gained my best friend in the form of the ball-busting badass standing before me now, freezing her ass off.

“I’m fine.” I stand up and start toward the door to make her go inside, but she stops me. Her bony little hand pushes on my chest and forces me to stop and look at her.

“What’s going on?” I sigh, knowing she won’t let me by.

“Just checking on Justin,” I answer her honestly because there’s really no point in not answering her. She already knew what I was doing out here.

With a heavy sigh, she confirms that she did in fact know. “You sweet, sweet moron.”

“Gee, thanks,” I say but can’t help the smirk. I’m being an idiot. I’m a manager for musicians. They’re finicky fuckers. They come and go. I know this, and I don’t know why I’m so damn hurt by Justin ghosting me. Hell, he ghosted the rest of the world too. They’re fine. With the exception of some very dramatic preteens and diehard fans.

Of course, they probably don’t know exactly what he sounds like when he comes and probably haven’t kissed his sweet lips, but still. I’m not special. I know this.

I’ve had so many hookups over the years, I don’t even remember all their names. But this is the one that’s getting to me?

Why the hell my brain is choosing now to be all needy and clingy is beyond me. It makes no sense.

But I cared about Justin before the Incident, and damn it, I still care now. I need him to be okay. That haunted, lost look the night I left his place can’t be the last time I see him.

I, however, can’t stop worrying about the man.

“He’s gone. But he won’t be gone forever. You know he’ll be back. Probably when he can’t figure out how to use the Uber Eats app and is starving to death. Or has to fill up his own car with gas.”

I laugh, but he’s not helpless, and he can do all those things with no problem. He’s not a child. He’s nearly thirty. Still, she does have a point. He was a member of Immoral—a wildly popular band. He’s had the privilege of money for well over a decade and hasn’t had to do much on his own for a long time. “He’s been gone for months. Surely he’s figured it out.”

“Hey.” Her voice softens, and so does her attitude, which is pretty weird for Jenny. “He’s fine. He’s doing some damn diva bullshit—probably off on a wild vacation, partying and being a dumbass—but he’s totally fine. He’ll come back.”

“Why wouldn’t he tell me he was going to do that?” You know, other than me being a total dumbass and putting my hands and lips on him, even though I know I shouldn’t have.

“That, I have no answer for, other than he’s a thoughtless shithead.” I wince because she doesn’t know what happened between us. Why? I’m not totally sure. We’ve always shared our disastrous hookup stories before. And our triumphant ones. But for some reason, I just couldn’t tell her what happened with Justin.

The sliding glass door slides open, and there’s Grady wearing a Santa hat on his head and a jovial smile, “Jen-Nay! Where did you go?”

“I will smother you,” she says with a dead-eyed stare I know isn’t full of hatred the way she wants it to look. She’s grown awfully fond of Grady over the years. Don’t tell her I told you that though.

I smile to myself as Grady stumbles out and wraps his arm around her small

shoulders. “You’re freezing.”

“You’re drunk,” Jenny says, and again, she doesn’t sound nearly annoyed as I’m sure she wanted to.

“Nah.” He waves her off easily. “Just festively tipsy.”

That actually gains a smile from Jenny as she shoves him off her. “What do you want?”

“We’re going to play charades. You’re on my team.”

“Goddammit. Why do I always draw the short straw when it comes to you?” she asks with a smile she let slip, and I can’t help but laugh.

“You’re on our team too, Waylon, my boy,” Grady says happily, and I can’t help feeling some of that festive joy he seems to be having. The kids went to bed shortly after the dinner Ryan and Grady had catered, but some of the adult guests are still lingering.

“Sounds good. Who else do we have?”

“Okay, if we’re going to discuss teams, I’m going inside. I’m freezing my tits off,” Jenny interrupts and pushes past Grady, walking into the warmth of the house.

Grady and I follow as I tuck my phone into my pants pocket and remove my coat and gloves. Grady answers my question while pulling the door shut. “We have Sebastian, Dawson, and Royal also.”

I look around the fancy living room—that still seems really homey, despite the price tag of it all. “So that leaves, Axel, Maverick, Ryan, Cooper, and Soren on the other

team?”

Grady grins. “Yup. And if we lose, Ry will never shut up about it, so we have to win.”

I shake my head at him. Ryan is a nice guy, but the dude played professional baseball for years and is competitive as fuck. But most of the other guys here are professional racers—somehow even more arrogant and competitive than any other sport I’ve seen.

So who wins is anyone’s guess.

“I need more wine,” I say, walking over to the bar in the living room.

“Me too,” Soren says, sauntering over, and I wrap my arm around his shoulder.

“Good to see you, by the way,” I say happily as I give my cousin a squeeze. I was thrilled when he fell for the Hotshot, I gotta say. Having my cousin at every social event I attend has been really damn nice.

“Good to see you too. You look a little tired though.”

“Gee thanks.” I grin and pour more wine into his waiting glass as he stands there, eyeing me with those investigative reporter eyes, brows raised.

“What’s wrong?”

Did I say it was nice, him being here? Maybe I’m nuts.

I sigh and pour some more wine for myself and take a sip. “Nothing.”

“Waylon . . .” He’s still eyeing me.

“Justin is still not returning my calls.”

He frowns at that and then brings his glass to his lips, taking a drink. “I’ll do some digging after the holidays.”

I start to tell him not to bother—that I’m moving on—but I don’t get the words out. I’m too curious. I need to make sure he’s okay. I want to know what the hell he’s doing. Why he left. And Soren is a damn good reporter.

I just give him a nod before Grady hollers at us, and we join everyone on the large sofa and start the game that most don’t take seriously but is really fun, all the same. Because with this group—everything is fun.

Eventually.

Sebastian

“Are you kidding me?” I climb out of my car, anger flooding through me as I try like hell to calm myself. He knows that was dangerous.

Axel Lennon may be a rookie, just like me, but he knows the track. He knows he can't cut off a fellow driver at the last minute like that. He spun me into a wall and messed up my car.

Though, it could have been so much worse.

And now he's being congratulated at Victory Lane as if he's some sort of hero. I begin to make my way over to him, but I'm stopped immediately by my agent. “Sebastian, remember what we talked about?”

I narrow my eyes at him. Yeah, I do. I signed with Kevin when I was brand-new to NASCAR racing and thrilled just to be signed by anyone. But now, I'm regretting it. He created this whole image for me.

But it's not me.

“Yes. He could have killed me.” Shouldn't he be worried about that?

“Axel knows exactly what he's doing. If you go over there spitting fire, you'll destroy everything we've created.”

He. He created. I had nothing to do with it.

All I want is to race.

I look over in Axel's direction, his cocky grin and that dark hair matted with sweat, which he rakes his fingers through. He's conducting an interview, but the motherfucker has the nerve to shoot me a wink. My feet are moving before I can even think.

But Kevin, despite being portly, catches up quickly and intercepts me. "No."

I glare at him. "No?"

"You heard me. No."

I point at Axel, gesturing wildly. "That motherfucker is proud of himself for nearly killing me."

My entire body thrums with angry adrenaline, but Kevin stands firm, his body blocking mine. "Language," he scolds. "Anyone recording you right now could read your lips. You're the good one, remember? The angel to his devil."

I glare over at said devil, who's watching me with that cocky, arrogant air surrounding him. He's not worried I'll punch him right in his face—just like he has coming.

He knows it. I know it. But he's also confident my agent will wrangle me because that's what I've let him do for the past year.

"This is bullshit," I spit out.

"Be that as it may—and watch your damn mouth—here's what you're going to do." Kevin leans in close, his coffee breath wafting into my nostrils. "You're going to go over there, head held high, and shake his hand. Tell him that was a good race."

My jaw nearly drops as I look into my agent's eyes and listen to what he's suggesting. But then it clenches tight when I realize he's not joking. That's actually what he expects me to do.

God, I wish he was kidding.

"I'm not congratulating him on playing dirty."

Kevin glances over his shoulder at Axel, then back at me. "He's playing his role. He plays dirty, and they're eating it up. Now is the time for you to go over there and play yours."

"I just want to race." My jaw hurts from the way it's clenched so damn tight as I grit my teeth.

"And you can. But as I've explained to you repeatedly, there's still a role you have to play. You're in the entertainment business. Just like an actor. Just like a social media influencer. It doesn't matter. You have to entertain the masses, and trust me on this, the more you play into this good-guy role, the more money you'll make. And the more you can secure for your retirement."

That hits me directly in the chest, just like I'm sure he intended.

Racing doesn't expect you to retire as young as some other sports, but you can't keep it up forever. I need to plan for the future now. Set up my security.

And if that means playing a role now so I'm more memorable, then that's what I need to do.

"Fine." I finally get my mouth to say the word, but Kevin already knew it was coming. He straightens and moves to my side to escort me toward my fate.

I try my best to calm my heart rate as I make my way over to Victory Lane, where Axel Lennon stands like a king.

My hands clench into fists at my side as his dark eyes run over my firesuit all the way up to my face, studying me. Waiting to see if I'll finally hit him or if I'll let Kevin keep that hold on my balls like he's had for a year.

When I reach my hand out to shake his, a wicked smile slides over his features, and his devilish eyes meet mine. "Ah, Sebastian. So good of you to join us."

Some of the people around us snicker, but I just breathe deeply, steeling myself to do what I'm told. "Axel, good race."

My hand is still outstretched in his direction as he lifts his and firmly grabs hold. "So close, Sebastian. You're getting a little better at this."

More snickers.

Eating up his cool demeanor like they always do.

The camera loves him.

The bastard.

"Yes, well, that was a little risky at the end." I can't help myself.

He just smirks at me, squeezing my hand a little tighter. "Only if you don't know what you're doing." The bastard releases my hand with an arrogant wink, and again my fists want to swing, but I keep them at my sides.

"How about a picture of you two?" a reporter asks, and our attention shifts in their direction.

Axel—the cocky shithead—wraps an arm around my shoulder before I can shove him away and pulls me tightly to his side, flashing a huge, white smile at the camera. “Of course.”

My entire body tenses at the sensation of his pressed against me, but fury rages through my blood. I force a smile, and there are a few flashes of the camera.

When they’re done, I start to pull away, but Axel only pulls me in closer, his breath hitting my ear as his voice comes out with expert smoothness, “Good boy.”

I turn my head quickly, glaring in his direction, but I don’t say anything. And I still don’t hit him.

He just winks again and then releases me so I can finally get away. My feet are fast on the asphalt, my rage threatening to explode, but thankfully Kevin doesn’t follow me.

I don’t think I could take talking to him right now.

Good boy.

That motherfucker knows my role in this.

Although he normally calls me pretty boy, which he knows I can’t stand either.

And he’s very good at playing his role.

You see, while I’m the good one. The pretty, all-American, clean-cut one...

Axel Lennon is now, and will forever be, the bad boy.