



The Study Session (The Jocks and Nerds Collection #3)

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Category: Sport

Description: All I wanted was some extra credit by helping other students bring their grades up. I didn't expect to be paired with one broody bad boy who is about to turn my world upside down.

Jax might be from the wrong side of town, but he knows all the right things to say to bring my walls down... and my panties, too.

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CHAPTER ONE

The large clock in the library catches my eye as the rhythmic ticking continues on and on. Ticktock. Ticktock. Ticktock. Still, the student I'm supposed to tutor is nowhere in sight.

"I wonder why you're failing your classes," I whisper to myself and roll my eyes as I open my planner and look at what else I have on my schedule. After saying it aloud, I immediately feel bad and wish I could take the words back, but I'm at least thankful no one was around to hear it.

It takes a lot to upset me, and tardiness is a major pet peeve of mine. If I can squeeze a forty-five-minute study session into my extremely busy schedule with my extracurriculars and double course load, then the least I expect is showing up on time.

The door to the study room opens, and my breath hitches in my throat seeing the man who walks in. He doesn't look like anybody I've seen before on campus. He's tall, with broad, muscular shoulders and a long tattoo down his forearm of a viper with its mouth hanging open to snap. What strikes me most as I look at him, almost forcing me to look away, is the intensity in his green eyes. His eyes are a proper green, too. Not the hazy, subtle green bordering on a murky brown you often see with green eyes. These are intense, vibrant eyes the color of spring moss that almost take my breath away.

He sits down across from me, running his fingers through his short black hair. It's semi curly and tousled, like he just slipped out of bed to walk here. I sit up straighter in my chair as I look at him, studying his face. He doesn't look like a student, and I

wrinkle my eyebrows as his eyes scan my face.

“I have this room reserved. I think you're in the wrong place,” I say, slamming my planner shut and preparing myself to get up and leave. I have my own stuff to worry about, and I can't wait around any longer. Besides, do I really need the extra credit?

The door opens again, and I look up, expecting to see the student I've been waiting for, only to spot Sawyer casually strolling in with his backpack draped over one shoulder.

“Hey, Corinne,” Sawyer says with a slight grin. “Cool, I see the two of you have already met then. I can leave you two alone. I just wanted to show Jax to the library since he didn't know where it was.”

How could someone not know where the library is? It's one of the first things we show on our campus tours...

I catch myself mid-thought, realizing that this is the student I'm supposed to help study. Professor Blake told me it was a student in our English class, so I was waiting for one of them to show up. I've never seen Jax in class before. Not that I would have been particularly looking for him, but he kind of sticks out.

“You're in Professor Blake's English class, then?” I ask the man, double-checking I still won't be wasting my time. He leans back and folds his arms across his chest, raising an eyebrow as he nods one singular time. “Why haven't I seen you all semester?”

My heart drops, thinking I will have to practically teach him everything we've gone over so far. We're already halfway through, with midterms right around the corner.

“Jax just transferred, and he needs to get caught up on things,” Sawyer explains, still

lingering by the doorway to run away as quickly as he can. I'm sure Rowen is waiting for him outside, and the two of them can't wait to escape to their house. "He's on the team now, and it's university policy that he keeps up his grades. Otherwise, he'll get cut from the team, and Coach Emerson will have a heart attack."

Great, so I'll be responsible for someone's heart attack if I don't do this. No pressure. I definitely need to talk to Professor Blake about how much extra credit I'm getting for this. I sigh and lean back in my chair, tapping a pencil against the mahogany table without thinking.

Jax doesn't say a word as Sawyer explains why he's here. That irritates me more than I can articulate. Here I am, volunteering my time to help him, and there Sawyer is doing the same thing. Yet Jax can't even give us the courtesy of speaking for himself.

Instead of speaking up and telling me about where he transferred from and what his working knowledge of the subject is—given his silence, I'm inclined to wonder if he has any working knowledge of English—he stares at me. Even when my attention is turned to Sawyer to listen to him, his eyes linger on my face, studying every curve and groove as if he is going to draw me from memory later tonight.

"Do you know how to get back to the apartments from here?" Sawyer asks Jax, hand on the doorknob, ready to leave.

"Yeah," he says, only giving me a moment to hear his voice. It reverberates and rumbles in his throat, and that singular word almost sends a shiver down my spine I can't control.

Sawyer says goodbye and promptly rushes from the library, leaving the two of us alone once and for all. There's a heavy moment of silence between us as I wait for him to say something, anything to make this easier for me. His eyes stay on me, refusing to leave as he drinks me in.

The attention is unusual, and I don't know what to do with myself. I can feel the heat rising to my cheeks, and I would give anything to be able to control my reaction, not to give him the pleasure of seeing me flustered. But I can't take the silence anymore, so I have to break it.

“Where did you transfer from?” I ask, waiting a moment for a response and not getting one. “Listen, I need you to help me. If I know where you transferred from, I can at least try to understand what you might have accomplished on your curriculum so I know where to start.”

“I just need to pass the midterm,” he says, sitting up straighter and resting his elbows on the table as he continues to watch me. “As long as I get a C or above, I can stay on the team.”

I can't help myself as a disappointed sigh escapes my throat. Of course, someone like him doesn't actually care about the course load. Aside from staying on the team, he won't put in any effort. I might as well just take the midterm for him at this point because I know professors and coaches will do everything in their power to help him over other students like me.

It's unusual enough to have a student transfer midsemester, but then to make it another student's responsibility to help them understand the course load is something else altogether. I'm irritated, and that's not something I feel often.

“Well, let's not waste any more time because, believe it or not, you're not the only one who has things going on,” I say, feeling the venom in my words only after I say them. A rush of heat flows through my body when I realize I've potentially said something to set him off. I don't know if it's fear or excitement, but when I look at him and see a small smirk on his lips, something ignites inside me.

“Have to go see your boyfriend?” Jax asks, cocking an eyebrow as he awaits my

reply.

I don't know why his question makes me blush, but it does. “No. Not like that's any of your business, anyway.”

“You're a little fiery,” Jax comments, a hint of amusement in his normally deep, almost monotone voice. “I like that.”

My body responds to that in a way I cannot anticipate, and I have to look away. I feel silly, almost like I'm admitting weakness by doing it, but if I stare at him any longer, I'm going to explode.

“What's the last thing you remember about your English class at your old school?” I ask, redirecting the conversation to studying. I don't want to have to tell him our boundaries outright because it feels like I'd be assuming something, and if I'm wrong, that would be humiliating. But I'm hoping he can at the very least take a hint.

“So no boyfriend, then?” Jax says, leaning forward as his eyes darken. The smile on his lips becomes more playful, and I don't know what to think about it. “The men in the school really must have no taste.”

God, why can't I stop blushing? This is so unfair...

“You'll have to take that up with them, not me,” I say, trying not to stammer over my words as a rush of heat moves through my body and lands between my legs. I don't understand what is happening to me. Regardless, I can't take this anymore, so I straighten my spine and press my palms flat against the table while I stare at him. “Now, either you tell me what you know or I have to end the session. I'm serious.”

“What do you want to know?”

“I need to know where you're from, what course you were taking, and what you remember,” I say, almost relieved that we're finally getting somewhere.

He leans forward, taking a sharp inhale and momentarily looking away from me as he studies his hands on the table. “I just transferred from Glendale. Honestly, I don't remember anything about my English class.”

I expect to be more irritated about the fact that he clearly wasn't paying attention at his old school, but I'm too preoccupied by the fact he told me he's from Glendale College to care.

Glendale is notorious around here. Their football team has had a historic rivalry with our own, and I hear a lot about it thanks to Sawyer and Rowen talking about it all the time. Glendale is brutal. They don't hold back on or off the field. Everything I know about them has encouraged me to stay as far away from their side of town and their campus as possible.

Looking at Jax now, I can see how his darkened eyes and bad-boy exterior came from a place like that. My stomach twists at the idea of him being in one of the brutalist groups, almost functioning like a gang. I've heard a lot of rumors about men like him, and I don't know how I feel spending every Tuesday and Thursday locked away in a study room across the table from him.

And the fact that every time his gaze falls from my eyes to my lips, a shiver washes over my body, landing between my legs, scares me. I shouldn't be interested in him at all—and I swear that I'm not. Someone like him doesn't work with someone like me.

A student worker knocks on the door and jolts my attention away from Jax. Another student is behind them, immediately telling me that this room has been reserved for someone else, and we have to leave.

Even though Jax is bad news, I can't help being a little excited for our next session.

CHAPTER TWO

The football flies through the air, and my eyes lock on it as I run as fast as I can, pushing every muscle in my body to its absolute limit. It glides into my arms as if a magnet pulled it directly to me, and I ignore the feet pattering behind me as others from the team practicing try to tackle me to the ground.

For a while, I was worried I wouldn't fit in here and find my place on the team. But now that we're officially practicing on the field, I know I'll earn my place just like I had to earn everything else in my life. My eyes are on the end zone, and I pant heavily under my helmet as I run as fast as I can toward it.

Talon appears in my vision, and I ignore the men running at me from either side. I raise the ball in the air, throwing it hard so it cuts through any wind resistance and meets his hands. Mere moments later, I dodge nimbly out of the way as Sawyer tries to tackle me to the ground.

The quarterback catches the ball and runs it into the end zone, followed by a sharp whistle from Coach Emerson. "Take five, everyone!" he shouts, clapping his hands with a wide smile on his face.

I walk back to Sawyer and hold a hand out to help him up. He was one of the first guys on the team to take me in and try to make me feel welcome here. Even though I am a part of the team, a lot of them are skeptical of me, knowing I'm from Glendale. Sawyer doesn't seem to care, and I'm thankful for that.

"Good job out there," he says, clapping me on the back. We head toward the

bleachers to grab our water.

He says something else that I don't quite register as my eyes scan the side of the field to see the band all walking around with their instruments in their hands. She's there.

Her long blond hair is pulled back in a high ponytail that sways back and forth as she laughs with her friends. Her baby-blue eyes are squinted shut to hold out the afternoon sun rays as she raises a hand to her forehead to attempt to see the faces of the people she's talking to. It feels like everything else vanishes, and I zero in on her as her laughter seems to dance through the air to meet me.

Corinne turns away from the group she's talking to, and her eyes meet mine briefly. I raise a hand to wave at her, and the smile falls as she nods slowly, only quietly acknowledging me. I don't know what I expected from her, but it definitely wasn't her immediately turning toward a guy in the band behind her and laughing as he playfully shoves her shoulder.

My mood shifts seeing that. I don't make any effort talking to the other guys on the team as we all joke about what happened on the field and drink our water. My eyes are steady on Corinne as she stands next to a tall, lanky man with shaggy brown hair and jokes with him. What could he be saying that's so funny, huh?

I don't even realize the break is over until the shrill sound of the whistle catches my attention, and everyone around me jumps to their feet to get back to the field. We run the same play over again, and I try my best to focus on the ball and our offensive maneuvers.

This time, as the ball is tossed to me, I grab it and run as quickly as I can toward the end zone. But my eyes linger on the sidelines as Corinne continues practically doubling over with laughter. I'm so distracted that I don't notice our linebacker running at my left side until he tackles me to the ground.

The whistle blows, sounding the end of that practice play. Gerard jumps to his feet with an amused smile, holding a hand out to help me up as I try to wrap my brain around what just happened. My eyes narrow, and I slap his hand away, jumping to my feet and standing in front of him with my spine as straight as an arrow.

“Who the fuck do you think you're playing with?” I ask Gerard, ripping my helmet off and tossing it to the ground. His eyes widen in fear, clearly not expecting me to lash out at him like this.

“I'm just—I'm—” he stammers, trying to come to terms with my reaction.

My hands are in front of me, crashing into his shoulders before I know what's happening. I'm shoving him and he's backing away, still upright because he's built like a brick house, but he has a clearly offended look on his face.

From everything I understand, Gerard is a very nice guy. But that's not in my head right now. All I can focus on is the fact that he is the one who tackled me to the ground. It's not the first time, either. When I was at Glendale, I played against him, and he can be brutal.

“Come on, man,” Gerard says, holding his hands up to let me know he's not willing to fight. “It was just a practice play. Calm down!”

“Oh really? And you weren't rougher than you usually are on others?” I ask, stepping forward as he backs away and shoving him again. He falls to the ground, and I drop my knees on top of him, clutching the fabric of his training jersey in my fists.

Coach Emerson's whistle sounds behind me, and I ignore it. I raise my fist to bring it down on Gerard just as a group of other players swarm around me and pull me off him. I fight back against them, freeing myself as I stand up straight and pace back and forth while running my fingers through my hair.

“What is his problem?” everyone murmurs around me.

Coach Emerson storms to my side and holds his hands firmly on his hips with a beet-red face. “That might be how they did things at Glendale, but that's not how we do them here!”

He backs away from me and looks out at the rest of the team, all seemingly distressed after the minor scuffle between me and Gerard. I can't help but think about how they're all just a bunch of cowards. They wouldn't have lasted a day in Glendale.

“Practice is over!” Coach shouts, turning back to me with an icy stare. “If this happens again, I have no choice but to kick you off the team. Consider this your one and only warning.”

He walks away before I can say anything else, not that my words will do anything to help the situation. Silence surrounds the field as everyone in the team watches me alongside all of the band members. I don't care about anyone on the team right now. My eyes search through the crowd for Corinne's until I spot her standing with her flute at her side and her mouth hanging open in surprise.

After a few moments, everybody gets back to normal. The players on the team all gather their things and make their way to the locker room, and I stand in place in the middle of the field.

Corinne looks over her shoulder and sets her flute down carefully in her case before walking across the field to me. My heart beats a little faster seeing her, watching as her petite frame saunters across the green. Even now, in the shorts and T-shirt she's wearing for practice, she's sexy.

My eyes lock on hers when she reaches me, and I see the concern within them. Her soft, pillowy lips are parted slightly, and my mind immediately wanders to a fantasy

of me sitting at the table in the study room with her on her knees in front of me.

Yesterday, I could tell she was flustered when I hit on her. She didn't respond how I wanted right away, but at least now I know there's some feeling between us.

“I'm tutoring you for extra credit, and I can't do that if you get kicked out of school,” Corinne says, annoyed.

“Who was that guy you were talking to?” I ask, not caring about the study sessions anymore. I see a flicker of confusion on her face, and she backs up slightly and narrows her eyes in frustration.

“What the hell are you talking about?” she asks, shaking her head in disbelief. I take a deep breath and try to calm myself down. I know she knows what I'm talking about. There was only one guy she was talking to during the practice. I saw her with my own eyes.

“Don't play dumb with me,” I say, shaking my head and clenching my fists at my side. “Tell me who he is.”

She shakes her head and opens her mouth like she wants to talk, but no words come out. Her baby-blue eyes squint as she stares at me in absolute confusion. I know what she's thinking. Who the hell am I to be asking her questions like this? I've known her for approximately eighteen hours, and here I am, laying claim to her. I don't know what to tell her. That's just how it is. She's mine .

Her eyes shift to something behind me, and it takes everything in my power to look away from her and see what it is. I toss a glance over my shoulder, immediately turning the rest of my body when I see who it is.

Of course, I should have expected Adrian and some of the other guys from the team

in Glendale to be here. Adrian claps his hands slowly as he moves across the field to me. The other is around him all snigger and smile as they look between me and Corinne.

“Despite what they say, I applaud you,” Adrian says, his voice lithe and filled with amusement. “I was worried you'd lose your killer instinct when you came here. But you're as much of a killer on the field as you are off it.”

Adrian's eyes flutter from mine to Corinne standing behind me, and his lips curl into a smile. I can practically read his thoughts, and I instinctively step between the two of them. That catches Adrian's attention, and he cocks an eyebrow at me.

“I wasn't expecting to see you here,” I say, my voice calm and stoic.

“We're here to support you. Just because you left school doesn't mean you're not one of us anymore,” Adrian says, crossing his arms in front of him as he stares at me.

I know I shouldn't care much about what other people think of me. But since being here, I've felt isolated. The only person who has bothered to be a friend to me is Sawyer, and after today, I doubt that's on the table. I needed this. Adrian, the rest of the team.

“Come on, we're having a party at Greylane Beach later,” Adrian says, nodding to signal me to follow. The others behind him all turn around and begin walking back to the bleachers to grab their things. Adrian follows, knowing I'm going to join.

I hold a finger up to signal I'll be following in a moment, then I turn back around to look at Corinne, who is still staring at me in shock. There's fear in her eyes, and a part of me wants to reach out and comfort her, but I don't.

“I don't want to see you talking to that guy from the band anymore,” I say to her,

looking over her shoulder at a few of her friends watching with concern in their eyes.
“Understand?”

She doesn't say anything, but she wrinkles her eyebrows and nods. My eyes linger on her for a moment, wishing I could reach my hand out and grab her face to kiss her. A part of me wants to. I could stake my claim right here in front of everyone, but I hold myself back.

I leave her in the middle of the field and walk away with Adrian and the rest of the Glendale football team.

CHAPTER THREE

The café on campus is busier than I would like, but I force the useless din out of my head as I stab my fork into my salad. The prongs pierce a cherry tomato and juice oozes from the small holes as I violently bring it to my mouth and bite into it.

“We're going to have to call a crime scene analyst to deal with your salad by the looks of it,” Rowen says, staring at me with one eyebrow raised. Her arms are folded across each other on the table as she watches me curiously.

“What are you talking about?” I ask, dropping my fork in the salad bowl.

She takes a sip of her chai latte and shrugs. “The way you're violently eating tells me something has to be bothering you. What is it?”

I take a deep breath and tap my fingers nervously on my knee, not knowing how to explain this to her. All of it seems a little silly looking at it objectively. I don't know Jax from Adam, and he thinks he has some say in who I spend my time with. It's preposterous. So much so it's borderline comical to me.

But something about his protectiveness stirs in my chest, and I find myself intrigued. Replaying what happened on the field yesterday only makes it more confusing. He attacked Gerard out of nowhere. I don't know a lot of the other guys on the team aside from Sawyer and Talon, but Gerard has never been anything but kind. He's huge and terrifying, but he's a gentle giant. I can't imagine a world where he did something to provoke Jax the way he did.

That's not even mentioning Jax's friends coming to support him. Something about the way his friend looked at me, piecing together Jax's feelings about me, sent shivers down my spine. It scared me. Jax scared me.

“I'm not so sure I want to help Jax catch up on his English assignments anymore,” I finally say, shaking my head slowly as my blond hair rustles against my back. “I think he's bad news. With what happened yesterday at practice and seeing his friends pull him away the way they did... I just don't feel comfortable being around him.”

“Has he said anything to you specifically to make you uncomfortable?” Rowen asks, narrowing her eyes protectively as she leans forward to hang on my words without thinking.

I hesitate to respond for a moment, not sure how she will take what I say. Rowen used to be my roommate before she moved out to live with Sawyer, but I still consider her my best friend. If she thought Jax was going to do something to upset me, she would tell Sawyer in an instant, and she would sic him on Jax.

“He saw me talking to Ben at practice, and that set him off. He told me not to talk to him anymore,” I admit, wrinkling my eyes at how ridiculous it sounds.

Rowen's mouth hangs open for a second, and she leans back, shaking her head in disbelief. “Oh, so he's into you then?”

Hearing her say it, having another person confess to having the same thought as I do, is weirdly validating. I will admit that a part of me is turned on by the idea of Jax being as protective as he is. There's something attractive about that. But even if a very minuscule part of myself is attracted to that, I know he's bad news. I spend a lot of time studying, dedicating myself to my extracurriculars, and really trying to prepare myself for a life outside of college. Jax does none of that. He has football, and that's all he cares about. He and I are opposites, and I'm not interested in the problems that

will bring me.

“I don't know if that's the case,” I say, immediately rejecting the idea and sipping my iced green tea just to keep myself busy so she can't read my face.

“Come on, what are those oversized glasses for?” Rowen asks, laughing under her breath as she points at my thick frames. Instinctively, I push them up and roll my eyes at her. “You've seen how hot he is. All of us have. You can't tell me there isn't a little part of you excited by the idea of tutoring the bad boy.”

“Trust me, there isn't.” It's an obvious lie, but Rowen doesn't point that out. “For my own safety, if there's anything else you've heard about him, I would appreciate it if you told me. It's probably best if your best friend doesn't get killed by a Glendale lunatic.”

“You've probably learned more about him than any of us at this point.” Rowen shrugs, sitting back and eyeing me curiously. “All Sawyer knows about him is that he is a little bit aggressive, which isn't a surprise to any of us. Apparently, he's friends with a pretty bad crowd in Glendale. Coach Emerson saw him play and knew he needed Jax on our team, so he convinced the dean to offer him a pretty lucrative scholarship to transfer here.”

I can't help but roll my eyes. Yet another reason to dislike Jax. I had to work so hard in high school to get any scholarships. My family did not have any means to pay for my college education, so I will be in considerable debt for the foreseeable future to be here. The fact that someone like Jax, who doesn't even care about academics, is offered a scholarship to come here just because of football is infuriating.

But at the same time, knowing that scholarship is the main reason he came here, that might force him to be on his best behavior from here on out. I may not have as much to worry about in our study sessions as I thought.

The alarm on my phone vibrates, and I quickly turn it off, reading study Jax on the alarm name. “Duty calls,” I say, standing and hugging Rowen goodbye before grabbing my drink and lunch to go.

Of course, Jax isn't in the study room when I get there, but he arrives only a few minutes after me. I can't help but raise my eyebrows in surprise.

“You're only two minutes late this time,” I say, smiling at him.

“What can I say, I couldn't wait to see you,” Jax replies, sitting down across from me and smiling. He pulls out his notebooks from his bag and sets them down on the table. He grabs a pen, prepared to work.

This side of Jax is new to me. I'm surprised he even owns a pencil.

“Did you bring your textbook?” I ask, seeing him set his backpack on the floor beside him. He shakes his head, and I'm not surprised. “Okay, I'll share.”

I nod to the empty seat beside me, and he walks around the table to join me. He sits down and spreads his legs wide, bumping into my knee slightly. There's no doubt in my mind that it's intentional. Even if he is here to study now, he still wants to see me flustered.

We begin our lesson, going over the first chapter of the textbook. There are a few short stories printed within it. We're supposed to look for common themes and tropes to discuss. I explain the difference between those two things for Jax as he reads over the stories, and I search through my notebook for my own homework responses.

“I'm not sure what this question is asking,” Jax says, pointing at something in the question and answer section of the textbook.

I set my notebook aside and lean toward him to read over what it says. When I get close enough, he moves the textbook aside slightly, forcing me to look up, and I fully intend to roll my eyes. Instead, his hand reaches for the side of my face as he cups it, pulling me closer to him.

“What are—” I begin, intending to pull away from him and chastise him for tricking me. Before I can, his lips crash into mine.

I gasp, my breath hitching in my throat from the sheer surprise of it all. Jax's lips are on mine. We're in the library, and I'm supposed to be helping him study, and his lips are on mine.

He's kissing me, and it feels good. I try to ignore his soft lips and how their warmth against mine ignites a fire that grows in my chest and elicits quite the reaction in the rest of my body. My brain is shouting, telling me I need to stop.

Regardless of what the logical, sensible part of me is arguing for, my hands reach for his face to hold him closer as I part my lips and let his tongue slide in my mouth. He tastes amazing, and I can't get enough of him right now.

I moan as his tongue searches my mouth, moving swiftly and teasing my tongue. His hands fall from my face and brush against my leg. I don't think anything about it at first. In fact, I instinctively part them for him. It must be read as an invitation because his hand slides up my thigh, lingering around the outside of my skirt for a moment before sliding inside and climbing up my leg.

Jax's hand is warm and calloused against my skin, a stark contrast to my soft, creamy skin. His fingers inch closer and closer to my already wet pussy, and I want him to touch me. I want his hands on me, pressing against my throbbing core to give me some release.

But then reality sets in, and I remember who he is. I remember he's from Glendale, with friends who scare me. I remember how he attacked Gerard for no reason whatsoever. I can't kiss a man like him. And I certainly can't like it.

I back away, pushing his hand to the side and scooting back in my chair. He stares at me with disappointment in his eyes, reaching out to grab me and pull me back in. "We're here to study," I say, my voice as stern as I can possibly muster.

Jax is silent for a moment, his eyes scanning my face to see how serious I am. He knows I like what happened, so I can't hide that anymore. He already has the upper hand in the situation, but I still have some power here. He needs me. He's not going to find anybody else in this school as willing to catch him up and help him study as I am.

"Go on one date with me," Jax says, and I immediately shake my head and laugh incredulously. "I'm serious, go on one date with me, and I promise you I'll take these study sessions seriously after."

He has an earnest look in his eyes, and I know he's being truthful. It's a small price to pay to make sure the study sessions are as painless as possible for the rest of the semester. But at the same time, I can't help wondering what's going to happen on this date. Clearly, that kiss changed things between us. I don't know how I can handle being with him in another setting.

But we won't get anything done if things continue this way during our study sessions. I won't be able to help him, and I won't have my extra credit. If I want to solidify myself as first in class, I have to do this.

"Fine. One date at the café on campus," I say, bartering my way into a semi-normal study situation. "It'll be nothing romantic."

His green eyes darken as he stares at me, and I can tell he doesn't like this counteroffer. He doesn't want me to set boundaries with him. He wants control over our date, and I won't give it to him.

“Fine. The café on campus works perfectly,” Jax finally says, turning his attention back to his book.

I settle in my seat, trying not to act too uncomfortably after everything that just happened. It's silent between us as he continues reading, and there's some tension in the air. Everything Jax wants is incredibly clear, but there's an aura of a mystery around him. I have to fight against the part of myself that wants to figure out who he is. I have to fight against the part of myself that wants to figure out why I like him.

CHAPTER FOUR

The hiss of the coffee machine pouring out the steaming liquid is nearly drowned out by the cacophony of sound around me. With midterms just around the corner, the café on campus is packed with study groups cramming for their respective classes. Sitting at a table by myself, a few people turn and stare at me, raising their eyebrows curiously as they try to place what's off about me. They haven't seen me around campus before, and until our first game, they won't recognize me.

I'm not afraid to look back at them, narrowing my eyes to force them to look away. Just because I'm not from any of the posh neighborhoods they grew up in doesn't mean they get to stare at me like I'm an exhibit at the zoo. If I told them I was from Glendale, they would all be quick to judge. They would think I'm some kind of a monster, a brutal thug just waiting for the first opportunity to shove them to the ground and steal their wallet.

Maybe there was a time when that was me, when I was an angry teenager who couldn't understand why life had dealt him such a bad hand. Or how I could grow up with a father who was as unstable as mine. All the people around me in the café need to count their blessings they didn't have to deal with half the shit I did. They certainly couldn't take it.

Football was my way out of the streets. I wasn't even planning on trying out for the team at first. Adrian actually dragged me to the tryouts during our freshman year in high school. Afterward, we were going to drive around in his brother's car, and he wanted me to wait. While I was waiting on the sidelines, the coach looked me up and down and thought I might have what it takes, so he threw me in the tryouts. I was on

the varsity team not long after.

That was my foot in the door to make a better life for myself. I didn't want to work in the steel factory like my father and his father before him. I didn't want to be angry anymore. So I focused on football as much as I could. Sure, there were times Adrian and the rest of the guys on the team would want to get up to something, and I was forced along. But I knew I could focus on football and it would take me away.

But now that I'm no longer just some kid from Glendale, now that I'm on the right side of town, I feel like an outsider.

The bell on the door chimes as it opens, and I turn to see Corinne walking in with a stack of books in her hands. My heart warms seeing the wind blow her hair slightly, letting her long blond locks fall in her face. Her eyes lock on mine, and I wave slightly, standing up to invite her to the table. She offers me a tentative smile and joins me, taking a seat across from me.

“Do you want anything to drink?” I ask, standing up and motioning toward the register.

“Just a tea is fine,” she says, noticeably a little jittery.

I walk away from the table and place an order at the register for her. I wait for a moment as the barista puts some boiling water in a paper cup and hands me a tea bag to put in it. Corinne watches me curiously as I sit across from her at the table.

“I should have known you'd be more of a tea drinker than a coffee drinker,” I say, teasing her as I watch her steep the bag in the water.

“Is that supposed to be an insult?” she asks, wrinkling her brows. A faint smile plays at the corner of her lips, and I wonder if she's trying to tease me like I am her.

“No, it's not. You're just so well put together, it makes sense that you would want tea in the afternoon,” I say, shrugging my shoulders before taking a sip of my own black coffee. “I can imagine you taking your cotillion and etiquette classes, practicing how to drink it is all.”

“Is that really what you think of me?” she asks with a faint laugh. I raise my eyebrows, inviting her to correct me. “That couldn't be further from the truth.”

“Enlighten me.”

She takes a deep breath and leans forward, noticeably resting her elbows on the table as if trying to prove a point.

“My family definitely couldn't afford etiquette classes. We're not some wealthy socialite family, if that's what you're thinking,” Corinne explains with an eye roll. “I know people from Glendale look at us and think we've had everything handed to us on a silver platter, but that doesn't apply to everyone. Both of my parents worked hard, and I had to bust my ass to make sure I could get into college.”

She wraps her hands nervously around the cup of tea and looks down at them as she talks. I study them for a moment, noticing how she shakes ever so slightly. Her cheeks are tinged pink, and she struggles to make eye contact with me. It's clear she's nervous, and something about that excites me. I want her to be comfortable, but knowing that she's nervous about this date means some feelings must be involved.

“You're really nervous,” I say, sitting up straight and leaning forward, close enough for me to whisper without anyone else hearing. She looks up, her face inches away from mine. “Is this your first date ever?”

She wrinkles her eyes slightly with a mischievous smile on her lips. “No.”

I stay exactly where I am, motionless as I stare into her light blue eyes. Corinne doesn't look away from me as I expect her to. But something in her eyes shifts when she sees exactly what I'm thinking. She knows my mind wanders back to the other day on the field when she was talking to the guy in the band. I can't help but wonder who else she's been on dates with. My grip tightens around my coffee, and I take a deep breath before speaking again.

“Why don't you give me a list of their names so I can visit them then,” I say just as I sit back and stare at her from a near painful distance.

The pink on her cheeks turns red, and she looks away, pushing up her oversized glasses with three fingers. She looks away bashfully, but when she meets my eyes again I can see a hint of amusement on her face. She might have been confused about my possessiveness at first, but she likes something about it.

My phone is face down on the table in front of me, and the sudden vibration almost makes me jump. Corinne's eyes fall to it as I attempt to ignore it for a moment. It doesn't stop vibrating, which means I must have a call coming through, so I turn it around to silence it.

It's Adrian.

My chest tightens at the idea of him calling me right now. Of course, he doesn't know anything about this date, but when Adrian calls, it's not usually good news.

“Do you need to get that?” Corinne asks, and I shake my head, pressing the silence button twice to send the call to voicemail.

“It can wait,” I say before shoving my phone in my pocket. I try to focus on the conversation again, but I can feel vibrations against my thigh as text messages come through, then more calls. After a few moments, I stand and pull the phone out of my

pocket. "I'm sorry, this might be an emergency. They keep calling."

"Of course, take it. I can wait," Corinne says, flashing me a courteous smile before I stand and leave the table. I walk outside to the empty patio and finally answer the phone.

"What the hell took you so long answering? You ignoring me now?" Adrian's voice cuts through the speaker, anger dripping from every syllable.

"I'm busy. What is it?" I ask, not making any effort to apologize.

"Blake got in a fight with some punks, and he's really hurt. We need you to help us. We're going to find those fuckers and show them who they're messing with," Adrian explains, practically yelling over the phone.

The word yes is on my tongue, and I'm almost ready to drop everything I'm doing to go with him and jump whoever hurt Blake. But I freeze. I turn around and stare at Corinne through the glass window as she sits in the café, nervously tucking her blond hair behind her ear. In the past, I wouldn't have thought twice about saying yes to Adrian. I would have jumped at the opportunity to roll up to someone's place and show them we're not to be messed with.

But the risk is too great now. Corinne already doesn't trust me entirely, and I want to change that. I can't do something to jeopardize my place here on the football team, and the potential relationship I have with her.

"I can't," I say, bracing myself for Adrian's response.

There's a pregnant pause between the two of us, and I almost wonder if the call dropped. Before I can pull it away from my ear to see if it's still on, I hear a sharp inhale as I clearly envision Adrian running his fingers through his hair and clenching

his fists tight.

“You think you're better than us now?” Adrian asks, and before I can answer, I hear a loud crashing sound on the other side. “I guess I need to remind some people where the fuck they come from.”

I open my mouth to reply, and the distinct sound of the call hanging up is all I hear.

CHAPTER FIVE

I don't know what that phone call was about, but Jax hasn't been the same since. A part of me wants to reach out and make sure he's okay, but I don't know if that would be overstepping. There's probably a lot about his past I don't want to know about, and if reaching out to him now would open my eyes to something, I'd rather not.

Ignorance is bliss. The Jax I'm with right now is one I want to get to know more. The last thing I want is to learn something about him that makes me want to run for the hills.

“You never told me what you're actually studying here,” I say, swaying my hands at my side as the two of us slowly walk toward my dorm building. The afternoon sun quickly fades, painting vibrant orange and pink hues along the sky, illuminating the clouds to look like something from a painting.

“Right now, I'm just general education,” Jax says, the back of his hand brushing softly against mine and immediately reminding me of our kiss in the library. “Let's just say I didn't have the best education growing up. I never really found anything I was passionate about pursuing other than football.”

“So you don't have a backup in case the whole football thing doesn't work out?” He looks at me with surprise in his eyes, and I regret asking the question. I've seen him on the field. He is incredible. The odds are he will go very far in his football career. “Not that I'm saying you're bad. It's just that the field can be dangerous. You never know when something is going to take you out for good.”

“I have to make sure football works out then,” Jax says, shrugging slightly.

There's something he's not saying, and I can't even imagine what it is. People like him—people from Glendale—don't have things handed to them very often. Jax got his scholarship here through football, and if he weren't on the team, that scholarship would be dropped in an instant. I don't even know what would happen to him after.

After about ten minutes of walking toward the dorm as slowly as we possibly can, both of us linger outside. As strange as it is to admit, I don't want this to end. Jax is surprisingly present with me, and getting to know more about him has opened my eyes to another side of him.

“Here we are,” Jax says, nodding to the door behind me. I stand there and nod, not knowing what to say like an idiot.

All I can think about right now is the kiss in the library and how incredible that felt. Maybe I was a fool to suggest we don't do anything romantic because I regret it about now.

“This was surprisingly very fun,” I admit, staring at him with an inviting smile. I'm trying to make it as obvious as I possibly can that I want him to make a move. I even back away from the door and lean against the cold brick wall as I watch him. His eyes fall from my face to my body in front of him, and I can see the thoughts running across his mind.

“Well, only one of us was surprised then. I knew this would be a good time,” Jax says, teasing me slightly. “It sure is a shame you said there couldn't be anything romantic about this.”

I blush as a smile crosses my lips. Of course he would call me out on that now. “It sure is. But I know a guy like you would never break any rules.”

He lets out an audible laugh, one filled with surprised joy that I don't think I've ever heard from him. It morphs his entire face from the dark, angry, and intimidating yet oddly attractive one he usually wears to something else entirely. His green eyes sparkle as he looks at me, and I know this is a side of him I want more of.

Jax takes a step forward, bridging the gap between the two of us and immediately moving his hands to my waist. "There's a lot you need to learn about me," he says a moment before his lips fall on mine.

I don't do anything to fight against it. In fact, I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him closer to me. My lips part and his tongue slides inside, dancing with my own as I hold him close. I can taste coffee and mint on his tongue, and it's strangely intoxicating—a unique mixture of things that make him him.

Some students walking by clap their hands and cheer for us as our intense make-out session goes on. Eventually, I pull away and laugh, feeling a little embarrassed about our public display.

"I should get to my room. I have an early day tomorrow," I say in a hushed voice as I push him away.

"I'll walk you there," Jax offers, and I know better than to refuse at this point.

I open the dorm building with my ID, and we make our way down the halls to my room. Jax follows close, keeping his eyes on me the entire way. I feel them boring into my back, and it's oddly exhilarating. When I stop in front of my room, I linger by the door for a moment as I turn around to give him one last kiss goodbye.

"We should do this again," I say, then turn around to unlock the door with my key.

The moment I open it, Jax's hand is on the back pushing it open for me. At first, I

think he's just being a gentleman and letting me walk through with ease, but then he steps through behind me and closes it. I stare at him confused, wondering what he's doing. There's a brief flicker of fear in my chest, but something about him eases that discomfort. Jax might be incredibly intense, but I don't think he would hurt me.

“What are you—” I begin, about to tell him to leave, when he drops to his knees in front of me and starts kissing my thighs. He pushes the bottom of my pink plaid skirt up and stares at the white lace panties I'm wearing in awe.

I want to tell him to stop, to let him know it's too soon to do anything like this. I've never been with a guy before physically. Sure, I've had a couple of dates with guys every now and then and a few crushes from time to time. But it's never progressed beyond a first date. I'm woefully unprepared for anything that's about to happen.

Every thought in my brain goes stagnant, forming briefly before fizzling out and dissolving before I can even birth them. His hands caress my skin, sending warm shivers through my body. I feel the heat of his breath against my pussy, and I can already feel the arousal throbbing. Whatever's about to happen, I'm surprised, but I want it.

“Tell me, has anyone ever done this to you before?” Jax asks, staring up at me as he opens his mouth and presses it against my clit. Even over my panties, the sensation is intense, and I close my eyes and moan. “Has another man ever licked your pussy?”

“No,” I admit, knowing it's what he wants to hear too. I look down at him as he smiles, digging his fingers in the waistband of my panties and slowly lowering them.

“Good,” Jax says, his hands wrapping around my waist to grab my ass and squeeze it. “No other man ever will. It's all mine from here on out.”

I almost want to contest that, to let him know he has no say in those matters, but

before I can even try, his mouth is hot against me, and my mind goes blank.

“Oh my God,” I say, completely breathless as his tongue explores me.

He teases me slightly, pressing his mouth hard against me as he grazes my clit with his tongue. Every moan and whimper I give is enough to pull him away to stop. It feels like torture every time he pulls away, and he's getting off on that.

“Lie back on the bed,” Jax commands, standing and moving me closer.

I don't hesitate to do exactly what he says. I fall back on the bed and spread my legs wide for him. He pushes the skirt up slightly to see my fully exposed pussy. He breathes heavily as he stares at it, tracing his finger along my folds.

“I want you to come on my tongue,” Jax whispers, pressing his mouth against me once again before lapping his tongue over my clit. “I want this pussy to be all mine.”

He doesn't say anything else as his mouth locks on me. His hands caress my body as he grips me tightly, his face buried between my legs. His tongue swirls around my clit, teasing it before he presses his lips against it and sucks gently. I cry out and whimper from the pleasure building.

I've touched myself from time to time, but that doesn't compare to what I'm feeling now. Jax feasts on my pussy in a way I never thought possible. He moans from the satisfaction of pleasuring me, sending small vibrations directly to my clit. It's enough to nearly send me over the edge itself. Jax pulls away slightly, letting my pleasure recede before building it up once again.

Before I know it, my hands are fists clenching the sheets tight, and my entire body is shaking as his hand holds me down to keep from pulling away. The pleasure is too much and I can't hold back my voice as I cry out and scream. I don't care about the

people in the dorms around me and all the things they might say after hearing this. All I care about is every wave of pleasure crashing over my body as I writhe against the mattress.

“Jax! Yes!” I scream, almost crying from the intensity of it all.

When my body finally calms down, Jax pulls away from me and stares down with a satisfied smile. He sits up on his knees, and I can see how turned on he already is, and I want more. Everything I just experienced was more intense than anything I've ever felt, yet I could have more of him right now.

I'm ready to lean forward and take off his pants when he stands up and jumps off the bed. Without saying a word, he walks out of the room.

Panting on the mattress, I stare at the door and wait for him to return. He doesn't. I'm so confused, but if I try to understand anything about Jax, I will drive myself insane. Eventually, I fall back on the mattress and close my eyes, exhausted from the pleasure.

Knocking on my door wakes me up, and I look around in confusion, wondering what it could be. The sun is out, and I don't know if that means fifteen minutes have passed or a full twelve hours. I look at my phone and see that it's 7:30 a.m. I slept through the night.

Whoever's at the door knocks again, and I hop out of bed, straightening my skirt, to answer it.

Of course, it's Jax. He's holding a tray of drinks in one hand and a box of donuts in the other. I step aside to let him in, and he sets it down on my desk.

“Same clothes, huh?” Jax says, casually taking a seat at my desk chair and opening

the box of donuts. He grabs one and hands it to me alongside a piping-hot cup of coffee. "I thought you could use this."

"Thanks." I stare at him, wondering if he's going to address what happened between the two of us. "I passed out after you left."

"I'm sure that took a lot out of you," Jax says, a smug smile on his lips. He looks me up and down, licking his lips as his eyes linger on my thighs. For a moment, I wonder if he's going to do the same thing again, and I would very much like that.

As I stare at him, I see a faint light in his pockets indicating his phone is going off, but he seems to ignore it. I don't say anything about it right away as I lean against the bed and watch him.

"You should really eat. These are the best donuts in town. I swear by them," Jax says, gesturing to the donuts in my hand as he picks one up for himself. He takes a bite of a chocolatey Boston cream donut and nods in approval. "Though, they don't taste anywhere near as good as you do."

Even after what happened last night, I blush. I'm starting to worry I'll never stop blushing around Jax. I'll have to get used to being permanently red.

I take a bite of the donuts and close my eyes, holding back a moan as the sweet, doughy flavors sink into my taste buds. Jax's phone rings once again, and he seems to want to ignore it.

"You're very popular," I say, nodding to it. "If you want to take that, be my guest."

He shakes his head and pulls his phone out of his pocket, looking down at the screen for a moment. I see a flash of something in his eyes that vanishes before I can register it. But I think it's either anger or anxiety. He turns the phone off and sets it down on

the desk before I can ask him about it.

“Let's not worry about that,” Jax says, forcing a smile that doesn't meet his eyes on his face as he leans back.

I guess it's just another mystery about Jax I'll never get to solve.

CHAPTER SIX

It takes everything to hold back my anger in front of Corinne. I already told Adrian I'm not going to help him. Right now, I need to focus on getting my grades to where they need to be and football practice. Plus, now Corinne and I are going to be a thing. Whatever he wants to do will jeopardize my entire future, and I can't have that anymore.

If Corinne knew the things I've done in the past, and the things Adrian is asking me to do now, she would run far away from me. Just the thought of her leaving, never looking back, and potentially being with another man later down the line is infuriating enough for me to stop thinking about Adrian.

“Are you okay?” Corinne asks after she sees me a little upset.

“I'm fine. I just want to focus on you right now,” I reply, offering her a slight smile. She blushes, and it warms my heart. I love how nervous she can be. It tells me she's exactly what I'm looking for, and I'm excited. “So I know you've been on dates, but you've never slept with a guy before, have you?”

She inhales sharply at the sudden change of pace. The blush on her cheeks turns darker, and she shakes her head delicately, her tousled blond bedhead shaking with her.

“No. I haven't.” Her voice is barely a whisper as she watches me through cautious eyes. This is a leading conversation, that's for sure. “In high school, I had to work really hard to make sure I could get into a good school. Ever since being here, I've

been on the straight and narrow, you might say. Any date I've had has fizzled out when the guy realized I wasn't going to sleep with him.”

My heart beats a little faster hearing her admission. Last night, she told me no man had eaten her out before, and that excited me. But just because no man ate her pussy didn't mean they didn't do something else. There's an abysmal number of guys who don't go down on their girls.

“Well, I've hardly been able to stop thinking about fucking you since I met you,” I say, watching as her eyes light up for a moment before she turns away from me. She brushes her fingers through her hair and sips her coffee to avoid the topic. “I can see it in your eyes yesterday that you wanted it too. After you came.”

She doesn't say anything at first, and I worry I've overstepped. But then she looks at me, and I can see the desire clouding her eyes.

“Tell me you want it,” I say, leaning back and spreading my legs while I watch her, knowing she's probably already getting wet at the thought of it. “Tell me you want me to fuck you. I know you want to say it.”

Corinne bites her lip, looking around the room nervously. Her eyes land on mine, and a devilish grin grows on her face.

“I want it. I want you to...” She trails off, almost nervous to say the words. “I want you to fuck me.”

I stand and slowly close the distance between the two of us, standing in front of her with my arms wrapped around her waist. She doesn't move, but she stares at me with desire heavy in her eyes. Without saying a word, I lift her and toss her back on the bed. She squeals as she falls through the air and crashes against the mattress.

“Take your shirt off,” I say, immediately ripping my clothes off to be bare against her. She obeys and quickly tosses the olive green sweater she's wearing to the side and unzips the side of her skirt to kick it off. Of course, she is not wearing any panties after last night. “Bra too.”

When we're both undressed, I climb on top of her and feel her soft flesh against mine, nuzzling my face in her neck. I breathe her in, savoring the way she smells and tastes as I kiss her. She moans in my ear, making my cock immediately rock hard.

“Just please be gentle,” Corinne whispers in my ear, her fingers digging softly into my flesh. I nod my head in acknowledgment, but I don't know how I'll be able to hold myself back.

I sit up on my knees, watching her face as her eyes fall down my bare chest to my cock sitting up perfectly straight for her. She bites her lip, licking the swollen flesh as she eyes me.

“You do this to me. You know that?” I say in a low voice, gripping my cock with my hand and massaging it while I stare down at her. “You turn me on so fucking much.”

I press a hand between her legs, feeling how slick she already is. I smirk at her, tracing my finger along her folds to soak it in her juices before rubbing it along my own cock. She closes her eyes and moans as I slide a finger in her pussy. I nearly gasp feeling how tight it is. I'm hardly able to hold myself back, knowing my cock is going to be stretching her out any moment.

“You're going to feel so good wrapped around my cock,” I say before leaning down and kissing her. Her mouth opens to mine and invites my tongue inside. She tastes sweet thanks to the donut, and I can't get enough of her.

She moans softly as I grind myself against her, letting my hard cock brush against her

pussy lips. “You ready?” I ask, sitting up straight and positioning my cock outside her entrance.

She nods, leaning back and resting her hands at her side. I watch her face as her eyes widen when I slowly insert the length of my cock inside her. Her pussy envelops me, throbbing as she takes all of me in.

“You feel better than I ever thought you would,” I groan in her ear, taking a moment to let her adjust to my length before moving. Her body twitches and spasms below me, rapidly getting used to the feeling of me inside her. After a few moments, she nods and raises her arms to my neck, holding me closer to kiss me.

I start rocking my hips against her, feeling as her body twitches and trembles while she moans breathlessly in my mouth. I have to consciously keep myself grounded right now. If I let my mind slip, I'm going to fuck her relentlessly, which is not what she wants for her first time.

But as she kisses me, pulling me closer, I can't stop thinking about what I really want right now.

I sit up on my knees, grabbing her waist with both of my hands and holding her steady as I pump long and hard into her. Her eyes roll back as she moans, not making any effort to quiet herself.

My fantasy starts clouding my mind, intruding on this moment. I imagine her running away from me, or at least trying to, while I hold her down on the mattress and pump my cock in her. I want her to squirm under me, begging me to stop.

Her pussy tightens and throbs around me moments before her entire body stiffens, and she cries out from an orgasm that ripples through her. I reach forward and squeeze her breasts in my hand, rubbing my thumb over her nipple while her entire

system is rattled.

Watching her come on my cock is about the hottest thing I've ever seen, and I get closer to spilling over the edge. Even still, the fantasy is present.

“I usually like things a little rougher,” I say, slamming my cock into her again after she finishes, letting her feel just how hard I am for her still. “I like a little fight.”

Corinne nods and shoves my hand away, pushing against my chest with a playful smile. I feel the fire ignited in me, and I thrust harder, still mindful of the fact that it's her first time and holding back just enough.

I lean forward and press my hands on her shoulders, holding her down to the mattress while she tries to wiggle out. Her hands press against my chest, but I don't relent. She pushes against me, her hand running up my chest to my face to move me away from her. Her fingernails dig into my skin, and I find myself on the cusp of losing control.

“Come on, baby. Come on, know you like this,” I growl as she moans beneath me again, her breath quickening with every hard thrust inside her. “You want my cock to fill you up, don't you?”

She pushes against me harder, shaking her head to play along with my fantasy. I thrust hard, sheathing the full length of my cock deep inside her, and come. Her walls clench and tighten around me, practically begging to drain me of every ounce I can give her. I grind my hips hard against her, milking every last drop of cum.

As I do, she continues to push me off, struggling against me as I look down at her red face with a satisfied smile. Her body shakes under me while her second orgasm ripples through her. She stops fighting when she comes and gives in to the pleasure.

When I'm done, I pull out of her and stare down at her petite, exhausted body with a

wide grin on my face. She's breathless and panting, her cheeks bright red and her lips swollen from biting down on them too hard.

“That was incredible,” Corinne says, too exhausted to sit up and kiss me. I stare down at her, watching as my cum pushes its way out of her pussy.

“You're all mine now,” I say, locking eyes with her as she nods.

I hop off the bed and get dressed, saying goodbye to her shortly after. I know she probably wishes I could stay around and cuddle, but I have football practice. As much as I would love to spend the day with her, fucking her senseless, I can't ignore my responsibilities. Though she makes that hard.

It's late morning by the time I leave, and the cool morning air is refreshing against my skin. I focus on what's important. Getting to football practice and getting through it without another incident like last time. In fact, I should probably apologize to Gerard for acting out. If I want to fit in, I'll have to anyway.

My thoughts are interrupted as I catch the reflection of a tan El Camino in a dorm window behind me. My blood runs cold at the thought of it being Adrian's car. I know he's pissed at me, but would he really come here right now? He has his own responsibilities back home, so certainly following me around wouldn't be a smart use of his time. But then again, Adrian has never exactly been smart.

I don't look back because that would be admitting weakness. Instead, even though a part of me thinks I'm just being paranoid, I continue moving forward and ignore it. What's Adrian going to do anyway? Jump me?

No, I'm safe to ignore him for now. But sooner or later, I'll have to answer the call.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Around here, Friday night is for football. Before meeting Jax, I never actually cared about what happened at the games. I was obligated to go because I'm in the band, but other than my dutiful performance during the halftime show, I would normally sit under the bleachers with everyone else and play card games. Even after Rowen started dating Sawyer, I stayed as far away from the sport as I could.

But that's different now. I want to see how Jax performs. So Rowen and I are the only band members still sitting on the sidelines and cheering as the game goes on. Jax is incredible.

I knew he must have been a talented player because of the situation for him being here to begin with. He was transferred midsemester, which is highly unusual at any college. Not to mention, he was given a prestigious scholarship that basically gives him a free ride here. When I first heard about that, I thought it was undeserved, and I was angry. But seeing him now and how hard he must train every day to be as incredible as he is, I get it.

“Run, Jax!” I find myself shouting, my vocal cords trembling in my throat at how loud I'm being. Rowen is next to me and laughing at how excited I am for the game.

“I take it things have changed between the two of you,” Rowen suggests as Jax tosses the ball across the field to Talon. “I've never seen you this into a game before. Usually, you're counting down the minutes until we can leave.”

I haven't seen her since Jax and I slept together, and it's not something I wanted to tell

her over text message. It's a big deal to me, and I wanted to wait for the right moment. But now, with her asking me about this, and how my face turns the same shade of red as a tomato, she knows.

“Oh my God,” Rowen says, running her fingers through her hair and staring at me with an awestruck smile. “How was it?”

“It was good,” I say in a low voice, making sure none of the other screaming fans can hear us. “I can't stop thinking about it either. About him .”

Rowen starts going on and on about how I need to come over to the house with Jax so I can hang out with the couples there. She and Sawyer live with Talon and his girlfriend, Merit, right now. I consider giving her some broad answer to placate her, knowing that Jax might not be as interested in that as they are. But before I can even try, my bladder demands I go to the bathroom. It's almost halftime, and I don't want to wait until after to stand in the obscene line for a stall.

“I have to pee,” I tell Rowen before walking toward the bathroom.

I head to the bathroom and promptly do my business, ready to run back toward the field for the halftime performance beginning any minute. After washing my hands, I leave only to see three men standing in the doorway. I freeze, my blood running cold.

I recognize the one standing in the center as the guy Jax walked away with after practice a few days ago. He smirks at me, raising an eyebrow as he slowly crosses his arms in front of him. His brown eyes turn black, like he is staring at the epitome of evil in front of him. A bitter taste fills my mouth, and I want to scream for help.

Before either of us says anything, he grabs my arm and drags me away from the bathroom door. I fight back against him, trying to yank my arm away, but the others all hold me and pull me behind the building. When I'm there, they slam me up against

the wall, forcing me to bang my head on the cold stone behind me.

“So you're the reason Jax can't be bothered to return my calls, huh?” he says, practically spitting at me through his rage.

I remember being around Jax and watching him look at his phone and silencing whoever it was calling him. He always told me not to worry about it, ensuring me it wasn't anything important. Now that this guy is towering over me, his face scrunched into a furious grimace, I'm not so sure I believe that.

“I don't know what you're talking about,” I say, shaking my head and unintentionally cowering in front of him. He's big. Bigger than Jax and almost everyone else on our football team. This guy's arms are as thick as a watermelon, and if he wanted to he could reach out and wrap them around my neck to strangle me. By the look in his eyes, I fear he wants that.

“Your boyfriend thinks he's better than us now,” he says, inhaling sharply before spitting on the ground near my feet. “He's got his new fancy friends, and his posh little fuck toy now he can't be bothered to help a friend in need.”

His friends behind him snicker and glare at me. My skin crawls as their eyes move from my face down my body, looking at me in my band uniform as if I'm some kind of object to be ogled. I can't help but wonder what they'll do to me. It brings me back to the bedroom with Jax and how he told me he wanted me to fight against him. I wasn't scared of him then. I trusted him. But these guys are painting a bad picture in my head.

“Tell your little boyfriend that he can't just leave town and turn his back on the people who gave a shit about him. It's not that easy,” the man in front of me, who I assume is the ringleader of their little group, shouts. “If he thinks he can just forget about us and all the shit we did to back him up when he needed us, he's got another

thing coming. Let him know I'm going to remind him of where he comes from.”

He backs away from me for a moment, still watching me closely as the others keep their eyes glued to me. Before I know what's happening, his hands are on my shoulder, and I'm sliding from the wall and crashing to the ground. All of them laugh seeing me shoved to the ground, and I try to scramble away from them, not knowing what they're going to do next.

Thankfully, they walk away. I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding and watch the three of them leave before jumping to my feet and running back to the field.

Just when I get there, Rowen sees that something is wrong. She tries to ask me about it, but we're all signaled onto the field for our halftime performance. Everything else happens in a blur. We perform a rendition of our school's fight song and “Sweet Caroline” before we're ushered off the field. Rowen tries to follow me, but I ignore her, keeping my eyes glued to Jax on the field without saying a word.

As soon as the game is over and we're declared victorious, the players all disperse to their friends and family on the sidelines. Jax sees me and immediately makes his way over, a smile on his face with the taste of victory still on his lips.

He sweeps me up in his arms and goes in for a kiss, but I dodge out of the way. He lets me go and stares at me in surprise, clearly expecting me to be excited for him, especially after how I was screaming for him before.

“What's wrong?” he asks, a curious wrinkle on his sweaty brow.

I grab his hand and walk away from the field as briskly as I can, nervously looking around for any sign of those three guys. When we're in a secluded alcove, away from prying ears, I step forward and look at him as I whisper, explaining everything that happened.

Jax runs his fingers through his already tousled black hair, his lips pulled into a thin line. "I could fucking kill him," he mutters under his breath.

"What was he talking about, Jax?" I ask, feeling as if I'm owed an explanation. I know Jax's past is probably more checkered than I would like, but that doesn't mean he can keep things like this from me. "What did they do to help you? What kind of stuff were you getting into in Glendale?"

He stops pacing back and forth and stares at me with a hurt expression on his face. I feel a pain of guilt questioning him, but I feel like I have to ask. I don't know who he is. Every time I try to ask him something, he's evasive.

"Look, everything's going to be fine," he says, approaching me and tentatively putting his hands on my shoulders to try to calm me. My body relaxes under his touch, and he gives me a reassuring smile. "People in Glendale have stronger bonds than you can ever imagine. I'm sure they're just upset that I'm changing. I'll talk to them, I promise."

He pulls me close to him and wraps his arms around me, kissing the top of my head gently while stroking my hair. It's not lost on me that he didn't answer my question. I know he has his past and his secrets, so his evasiveness does not make me feel any better. But I know now isn't the time to bring that up.

I stand on my tiptoes to give him a kiss, telling myself I'll find out the truth another time. For now, it's business as usual.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The music at Talon and Sawyer's place is loud, and everyone is clamored inside, bumping up against each other as they dance. I'm sitting on the couch next to some other guys from the team with a nice cold beer in my hand and watching my girl have fun. I should be happy.

Even though I should be enjoying this moment, finally feeling like I belong among these people, I can't stop thinking about what Corinne told me. Adrian had the nerve to approach her and try to spoil what we have and that pisses me off. I could wrap my hands around his thick fucking throat and kill him right now.

I try to forget about it, I really do. But the idea of him putting his hands on my woman and shoving her to the ground makes my blood boil. Am I really going to let him get away with that? Who the hell does Adrian think he is?

Adrian is just a constant reminder of the baggage I have from where I came from. How am I ever supposed to move on and make something of myself when that life is still pulling me down? I need it to be over. I need Adrian to know that our friendship is done. If he's half the friend he says he is, he'll accept that. I just wish he can realize I have something good here, for the first time in my life, and let me go.

“You are amazing out there on the field,” someone shouts in my ear. I turn to see Gerard sitting on the arm of the couch, a pleasant smile on his face. He holds a hand out to me to shake, and I take it, offering him an unspoken white flag.

“Someone's got to carry this team to state,” I joke, sparking laughter from the guys

around me.

“Honestly, we would have made it there before, but winning is a whole other ball game,” Sawyer says behind me. “With you on the team, that trophy's ours already.”

Some of the guys high-five behind me, and I feel happy. This is the camaraderie I've always wanted in a team. Back in Glendale, being friends with the team meant petty crime and rivalries with other kids in the neighborhood. This is normal.

Corinne is in the center of the living room with her friend Rowen, both of them holding hands and jumping while they scream to a song playing over the stereo. I watch her with warmth tight in my chest before standing up and making my way outside.

I'm not going to let Adrian ruin another moment of my life.

A few people straggle outdoors smoking their vapes with red Solo cups in their hands. They shout their congratulations at me as I wave, walking toward the curb with my phone in my hand. Adrian picks up on the third ring.

“It took me sending a message to get a call back, I see,” Adrian says with an annoying chuckle.

“I'm going to tell you this one time, and I need you to get it through your thick fucking skull,” I begin, keeping my voice low to avoid drawing eyes from the others around me. “You stay away from me. Leave me alone, and don't you dare come near Corinne ever again. I don't want any more threats, any more warnings. It's over.”

There is a pause on the other end, but I know Adrian is still there. I can imagine him sitting at home on his front porch with a can of Coors Light in his hand, clenching it tighter so the frothy beer spills all over him.

“You need to learn your fucking place,” Adrian seethes through the phone. “I made you who you are. And you're going to turn your back on me? You're pathetic. You're going to regret ever fucking talking to me like this.”

The only thing I regret is not doing this ages ago. My life is already on an upswing now that Adrian and the rest of the gang are out of my life. Right now, I have a bright future ahead of me and a beautiful girl at my side. This is all I could have wanted for myself. It's time to leave the past behind.

“I mean it, Adrian. It's over,” I say, not waiting to hear his rebuttal because I hang the phone up immediately after. I almost expect him to call back, but surprisingly, he doesn't.

For the first time in my life, I feel good. Everything is working out in my favor, and I want this feeling to last as long as possible. Nothing is holding me back anymore. All I have ahead of me is the future, and it's mine to shape.

I head back inside, walking through the crowd in the living room to find Corinne still dancing with Rowen.

“Where'd you go?” Corinne asks with a wide, drunken smile on her lips.

I don't say anything back. Instead, I pull her in close and press my lips against hers, tasting the fruity cocktail thrown together in a punch bowl for the party. She wraps her arms around my neck, pulling me close to her as people nonchalantly bump into us as they dance.

When I pull away from her, she looks around with a mischievous grin on her face before grabbing my hand and pulling me away from the crowd. I don't ask where we're going because I don't care. Right now, I'm going to let whatever is to happen happen.

She opens the door to a bathroom and pulls me in behind her. She leans against the vanity, grabbing the top of my shirt to pull me down to kiss her again. My tongue infiltrates her mouth, and she moans while she tastes me.

“I can't stop thinking about the other night,” she says, pulling away from me with a tipsy grin on her face. “There's so much I want to do with you. You have no idea.”

Her hand falls from my chest to the front of my jeans as she presses her palm against it. My cock responds, stiffening under her touch and ready for action.

“Like what, Corinne?” I ask, leaning forward and kissing her neck gently.

“I want to know what you taste like,” she replies, her fingers swiftly unbuttoning my pants before pulling them down. I don't do anything to stop her as she slowly sinks to her knees in front of me.

She eyes my already hard cock intently, reaching to touch it with her hands for the very first time. She smiles as her fingers wrap around my shaft, and she starts tugging on it delicately. She hears me respond and looks up with a smile.

“Why don't you lick it?” I suggest, running my fingers through her perfect blond hair as she opens her mouth to get closer. Her tongue starts at the base of my shaft, slowly working its way to the tip. My cock twitches as the warmth from her mouth connects with my head.

Corinne soaks my cock in her spit, letting it drip from her tongue as she coats it. I can't help but moan as I watch her teasing my cock with her mouth. “You're so fucking hot,” I say, waiting for her to wrap her lips around the head.

She giggles as she presses her lips against the bottom, giving it a loud, overdramatic kiss before opening her mouth and taking me in it. The warmth of her mouth wraps

around me as she bobs her head up and down, taking more of my cock down her throat. She groans a little as she takes me in, clearly struggling with her jaw.

After about a minute, she pulls away and gives her jaw a break while she pumps my cock with her hand, licking the tip and practically drinking up all the precum dripping from it.

“You can't start something you're not going to finish,” I say, reaching down and tracing my thumb over her beautiful, plush lips. “I want you to open wide so I can come down your throat.”

She dutifully obeys, smiling at me before opening her mouth wide and letting me shove my own cock in it. She closes her lips tight, creating as much friction around my shaft as possible. I move my hips forward slowly, fucking her throat as she sits on her knees and takes it.

Her tongue curls around my cock as I move my hips back and forth, feeling how she teases me with it. Corinne's eyes never leave mine as she sucks my cock.

“Lift your shirt,” I say, wanting to see her plush, pink nipples on display for me. She does while I throat fuck her, running her hand up her flat stomach to her breasts to tease them in front of me. She moans from the pleasure, sending the vibrations through my cock.

After a few minutes of teasing my cock in her mouth, I pull away and watch as a mixture of her spit and my precum drips from her mouth down her chest.

“Lick it for me while I watch,” I say, leaning back and looking down at her as she traces her tongue up and down my cock. She pays extra attention to the tip as she swirls her tongue around it, smiling as it twitches and spasms with every movement.

Once I've had enough teasing, I open her mouth for her and shove my cock back inside. My fingers entangle with the back of her head as I hold her close, thrusting my hips against her while my cock twitches and throbs, an explosion of cum dripping down her throat. She gags on my cock, swallowing rope after rope of cum, her throat milking it from me.

When I finish, I let go of her hair and back away. I'm pulling my cock out of her mouth as more saliva and cum drip from her lips. "Did you like that?" I ask her as she stares at me with a satisfied smile.

"I loved it," she says, looking down at her bare chest with her own saliva dripping all over it.

By the look in her eyes, I can tell the night is not over. All I want to do now is forget everything that happened today and take her home to fuck her hard. I help her up and think about everything that's happened to me today. If every day could end like this, life couldn't be any better.

CHAPTER NINE

Even though Jax and I are on much better terms, I still need to help him study for midterms. At this point, I couldn't care less about the extra credit. If those guys at the football game the other day are any example of what Jax could be, I want him as far away from that as possible. That means keeping him in school.

I grab all of the books I'll need to help him study today, then walk from my dorm to the library across campus. Jax had practice earlier in the day, so our study session is later than I would normally like, but he promised me he would be there by the time I arrive.

My heart flutters in my chest at the idea of seeing him again. I've seen him pretty much every day since we met, and it doesn't get old. I love watching his face more from the overall unfriendly demeanor he has into an excited, loving grin whenever he spots me.

Today, as I'm walking along the sidewalk toward the library, a few cars pass me and I don't think anything unusual. That is until a long, strange looking tan car drives by and comes to a halt beside me. My blood runs cold as I look at it, spotting three familiar faces in the car.

I want to take off running, and I know that I should. But my fight or flight doesn't kick in. It's rare, but some people don't have either of those instincts. Rather, they have a freeze instinct. Why did I have to be one of the unlucky ones to draw that straw?

Two guys jump out of the car and reality sinks in, forcing me to drop my books on the ground and start running back to the dorm. Before I can even move a foot, arms are grabbing me and shoving me into the back seat.

This is it. Whatever they wanted to do at the football game that they were holding themselves back from, they're going to unleash all of it on me right now. If they're going to kidnap me and do God only knows what, I'm at least going to make my mark.

I sink my teeth into the arm of one of the guys holding me back, and he screams, letting me go. The car is moving by the time I get away from him, and I hold my hand over the door handle, threatening to jump out on my own.

“Calm down!” the driver, the one who was doing all the talking at the game, shouts. “We're not going to hurt you, we're just going for a drive. I swear.”

“There's something you need to see,” the man beside me, the one I bit, says through an angry grunt.

I settle into the seat, pressing my back against the door to keep an eye on all three of them. The car is old and beaten up in some respects, but it smells like gas station patchouli thanks to the tree-shaped freshener hanging from the rear view mirror. The driver looks at me through the mirror and nods to the man beside him.

He turns in his seat and holds his phone out for me. I'm extremely confused, but he nudges it without saying a word, signaling for me to grab it. I do and hold it in my hands, not understanding what this is about.

“Press play,” the driver says.

I take a deep breath and look at the small screen, tapping it to reveal a play button. I

don't know what's on this, but this has to be what they wanted me to see. My heart sinks to my stomach at all the possibilities of what it could be. Obviously, they have problems with Jax, and I know this is their attempt to separate the two of us. But to go to all these lengths, it has to be something bad. Right?

“Anytime now,” the driver urges, an exhausted tone in his voice.

I bite my lip anxiously and press play. A cacophony of laughter and indistinguishable voices replaces the silence of the car. Flashes of the driver running, his camera first facing him before he reorients it to the ground in front of him are all I see at first. Then he stops running and focuses the camera on a man kneeling on top of someone and swinging his fists hard against them.

It's not clear who it is right away, but I know why they brought me here. I feel sick to my stomach, and the sounds of bone hitting bone and the guttural cries from the pain don't help. I need to look away, but I can't bear to take my eyes away from the screen until I know who that is.

Toward the end of the video, the man pummeling the other to a near pulp on the ground stands up. He turns around with blood painting his fists, splattered on his white shirt and face, with a devilish smile on his lips. It's undeniably Jax.

“You did him in good,” the driver says in the audio, holding a hand out to excitedly shake with Jax. He runs toward the man on the ground to show him half-heartedly moving his head back and forth, coughing up blood as he begs for help. By the look of his clothes, I would imagine he's destitute, a homeless man on the street who has already had enough troubles in his life. I can't imagine what led to this.

The video stops, and I pause it before it replays. Once again, silence surrounds all three of us, and the only noise is that of the wheels treading over pavement.

“I think I'm going to be sick,” I say in a meek voice.

“You think you know him, but that is who he is,” the driver says, stopping at a stop sign and looking over my shoulder. “You need to break up with him, or we're going to show this to the police. Trust us, you don't want to be with someone like him. Consider this a favor.”

I blink a few times, nodding to acknowledge I heard what he said. My mind is racing, and I still don't know what's going on. After their warning, I don't think they're going to hurt me. They need me to relay the message to Jax.

“Where were you going?” the driver asks, and I don't respond right away. He slams his hands on the top of the steering wheel to signal his impatience.

“Library,” I manage to say, trying to force myself to calm down.

They drive away, taking me up the long hill toward the library and barely stop in front of it to let me out. Instead of giving me a moment to set my feet on the ground, they open the door and push me out of it, sending me crashing to the ground in front of the building.

“Hey! What the fuck did I tell you?” Jax shouts, racing toward the car as it speeds off.

I watch him in horror for a moment as he runs after the car, anger simmering in the air around him. When the car is out of sight, he turns around to see me cowering on the ground and offers a hand to help me up. I back away from him, the memory of him assaulting someone too fresh in my mind.

“They showed me a video of you,” I say, standing up on my own and backing away from him. He takes a step forward and I hold my hand out to stop him. “You could

have killed him.”

“It's not what you think,” he says, trying desperately to explain.

“What I think doesn't matter. I saw what I saw,” I say, shaking my head vehemently.

“Oh, and your friends are going to show that video to the police unless we break up.”

“The man in the video was threatening people on the street,” Jax explains, stepping in closer even though I asked him not to, his arms flailing at his side. “There were women and children he was threatening with a knife. He forced my hand.”

“You enjoyed it, Jax. You were smiling when you were done. You didn't just take a knife, you nearly killed a man!” I shout, trying to hold back the emotion in my voice without success. “I've seen that rage in you before. On the field. When you think about guys I've been on dates with.”

“That's not who I am anymore!” Jax argues, putting his hands on my shoulders momentarily before I shake them off. “It's who I thought I had to be.”

My heart breaks hearing the desperation in his voice. He wants this over, and I want to believe he's changed. But I don't know if it's a risk I can take.

“I think it's best that we break up,” I say, choking back the tears threatening to break through.

I don't wait for his response before I turn around to walk back to the dorm, eager to get away from him and break down in private. Jax strides to walk next to me, joining me on the small trek.

“Let me at least walk you to the dorm,” he says, shaking his head subtly beside me.

For a moment, I consider telling him no, but then I remember being shoved into that car, and I don't know where they are. If Jax is with me, I can at least make it to my dorm safely.

We walk in silence with me a few paces ahead of him. When we get there, I stand in front of the dorm building, my ID in hand. Jax is right behind me, and I stop after I swipe my key card by the sensor, holding the door open slightly.

“Don't follow me up,” I say, walking in and letting the door close behind me. I don't look back as I walk down the hall to my room.

CHAPTER TEN

Without Corinne, I don't know what I'm still doing here. Sure, there's football, but everything I do feels painful knowing she's not there to support me. Even at band practice, she somehow manages to avoid me.

Even though she wants nothing to do with me, I have to keep my eye on her. With Adrian and the rest of his goons following her around, I need to make sure they don't lay a hand on her again. If they do, I'll kill them.

Over the next several days, I keep a close eye on her. I linger outside her dorm room in the morning, watching her as she makes her way to her classes, stopping at the café to get a fresh cup of tea, and eating with Rowen. For the most part, I keep my distance because I know she doesn't want anything to do with me. It hurts, but I can't blame her. After what she saw...

It makes me sick to my stomach thinking they would use a video like that against me. They knew as well as I did what the truth behind it was. That man was a criminal, and he was going to hurt people. Police had been called on him countless times, and they did nothing. If it weren't for me, who knows what he would have done that night. I certainly didn't want that on my conscience.

“I thought I told you to stay away,” Corinne says as she walks out the back entrance of the café and confronts me on the patio with no one around. “You're only making this harder for both of us.”

“I can't stand being away from you,” I say, leaning forward and cupping the side of

her face with my hand. She instinctively leans into it, and while I have a moment with her, I lean in to kiss her. She kisses me back. Her lips part as she lets my tongue gently coalesce with hers, clutching my arm with her fingers, clearly not wanting to let go.

After a moment, she tears her mouth away from me and jolts backward as if struck by electricity. She covers her mouth with her hand and shakes her head. "I can't do this."

Without saying another word, she jumps to her feet and storms off. I watch her, intending to follow and keep an eye on her, but my phone buzzing in my pocket catches my attention. It's a text from none other than Adrian. "I thought I told you to stay away from her?"

I hop to my feet and look around, searching for him. I was right to follow Corinne because clearly Adrian has been following her too. In the distance, I watch as his tan El Camino speeds off, and my heart drops.

This is it. I'm done with him for good. He's not going to hold something over my head and ruin any chance of happiness I have in the future. Not now, not again.

Not when Corinne is in the mix. This isn't about me anymore. I need to protect her at all costs.

Standing outside the Glendale Police Department, a place I never thought I would willingly go, I send a quick text message to Corinne letting her know I'm taking care of the video. I tell her I'm sorry and that I'm doing the right thing thanks to her.

I turn my phone on silent before walking in, stopping at the front desk and talking to the middle-aged woman in reception and telling her I need a detective. She asks a ton of questions I don't have the answers to, and I can feel myself getting frustrated.

“Look, there was a string of burglaries a few years ago, and I know who it was. I'm willing to give the information to the police now. I might not have another chance,” I say, urging her to work with me.

Eventually, she walks away and talks to a few officers before dragging me into an interrogation room. It definitely feels like I'm the one on trial here even though I'm the one helping them. After about half an hour, a tall man in a wrinkly suit walks in the room and stares at me in silence for a few moments.

“I'm Detective Carson. I hear you're the one to talk to about some recent burglaries,” Carson says, leaning forward casually without taking his eyes off me. “I take it you've known about these for a while. Why are you coming forward now?”

“Trust me, if I could have come forward like any Good Samaritan, I would have,” I say, rolling my eyes at him. “You know as well as I do things aren't that easy around here.”

“So you hanging with the wrong crowd then?” he asks, shrugging.

“Let me just be blunt about this because I don't have all the time in the world. The people I used to hang out with in Glendale are bad people. They have a video of me...” I trail off, not believing I'm about to tell the police about this incident for real. “There was a man next to Pendrake's Pub who was threatening people with a knife. He was yelling disgusting things at women and young children, and nobody was doing anything about it. I know for a fact you guys were called about it and did nothing. So, when I was walking by and he pulled a knife on me, I took matters into my own hands.”

“You're confessing to the assault of Peter Lochley?” he asks, narrowing his eyes at me. “We've been looking for the assailant for quite some time. Why now?”

“Because those assholes you're looking for for those burglaries are lording it over my head. If I don't turn them in, they're going to do something really bad to someone I care about,” I admit. Leaning forward, I stare him in the eyes and hope we can come to terms with this together. “Now, either I help you retrieve thousands of dollars of stolen goods for some of the wealthiest people in town, or you arrest me for the assault. Your choice.”

He walks out of the room to think about it for a moment, no doubt going to his superior and seeing if he can do anything. He comes back about ten minutes later with another officer who sits down across from me, ready to take my confession. I told him everything that happened the night of the assault, then Detective Carson goes into the details of our arrangement.

Because I'm helping them with an active investigation, I won't be tried for the assault. I exhale a long breath of air as I tell them everything about the burglaries. I wasn't at any of them, and I only heard about them after, but I knew what was stolen and where it is now.

“Trust me, if you go to any of these guys' houses, you'll find souvenirs,” I say, nodding while I wait for them to dismiss me.

After what feels like an insurmountable amount of paperwork and a long explanation of what they'll be doing, which may involve further statements from me if they get arrested, they finally let me go. I'm more relieved than I have been in ages. Adrian and the other guys have nothing on me anymore. I have a clean slate ahead of me to do whatever I want with it. I can work to get Corinne back and show her I've changed. I have to.

Walking out of the interrogation room, my breath hitches in my throat as I spot Corinne in the waiting room, her foot tapping nervously against the tiles. She stands when she sees me and walks toward me as quickly as possible.

“What are you doing here?” I ask, not able to control the smile growing on my lips. Even after everything, I told her I was doing this, and she came here. I know that she still cares about me.

“I didn't know what was happening. I thought maybe you might need bail money,” she says, shrugging and looking up at me with an almost apologetic look in her eyes. “Did you really tell them the truth?”

“I did. This is my way of severing ties with my past once and for all,” I say, nodding and walking toward the front door with her beside me. The fresh air kisses my skin, and I've never been more thankful for it. It feels like a fresh start for me, one I've been yearning for my whole life.

“You're doing the right thing. But I guess it's scary that you have to worry about them coming after you,” Corinne says, shaking her head and looking around nervously.

“I don't care about that. You and our life together are the only things I care about now.” She looks up at me with a surprised grin and an excited glint in her eyes as the sun shines through them. “I've never been happier than I am with you. Corinne, I love you more than anything in the world. I would do anything to make you happy.”

She stares at me in shock for a moment, then a giddy look crosses her face as she smiles wildly at me. “You don't know how much it means to hear you say that. I love you, Jax.”

I lean down and wrap my arms around her, holding her close as I press my lips firmly against hers. For the first time in my life, there's hope in the future. Not the abstract, vague meaning of the word, but something tangible that I can hold on to.

None of this would have happened without her. For that, I'll be forever grateful.

EPILOGUE

Three months ago, the only contact I thought I would have had with Jax Fuller was our study sessions. If you had told me then that I'd be anxiously waiting by the computer next to him, my hand swallowed by his, constantly refreshing a page for his grades, I wouldn't believe you. It would seem uncharacteristic of both of us to say the least.

The past few months have been hectic. Jax was busy with football season, and with that, I had to do a lot of band practice. We spent every spare moment we could studying, and every moment between them exploring each other's bodies. On top of everything, there were the arrests of Adrian and his friends in the center.

Now, though, they're all awaiting trials for their crimes and no longer breathing down Jax's back and trying to break us up. Jax and I are stronger than ever, our football team has demolished everybody this semester, and I'm confident Jax aced all of his exams. Life couldn't be better.

"It's in!" I shout, shaking with excitement. Jax and I have been studying relentlessly over the past few weeks. Because he was so new, professors ended up being a little lenient with him and letting him skip the midterm exams. However, they couldn't do that with the finals. I busted my butt to make sure he would pass his courses.

"Oh my God," Jax says, looking at the row of A's and B's on the website. Both of us jump up and down together excitedly, knowing this means he is solidified here at school, proving that he's willing to work hard to carve a place for himself. "I couldn't have done this without you. Thank you so much for your help, babe."

“Trust me, it was my pleasure,” I say, wrapping my arms around his neck excitedly and planting a kiss on his lips.

He pushes the computer aside and sets me down on my desk, opening his mouth swiftly and letting his tongue slide against mine. “Since I passed, does that mean I get the present you promised me?”

Even though Jax and I have spent a lot of time together romantically and sexually, the innuendo still makes me blush. It's something I fear I will never get used to.

“What are you talking about?” I ask, playing coy as I walk away from him. He grabs my wrist to pull me back, and I yank it away. “Get away from me!”

A flicker of excitement lights in his eyes, and I know this is exactly what he wants. It's something I was hesitant to try at first, not entirely sure I was comfortable pretending I didn't want to sleep with him. But the idea grew on me, and I figured now is as good a time as any to give it a real try.

“Where do you think you're going?” Jax asks, pulling me close to him while I struggle against him. He plants a kiss on my lips while I try to push him away. He holds me closer, constricting his arms tight around me to hold me in place. Something about it is oddly comforting, like having a weighted blanket surrounding me.

“Let me go, or I'll scream,” I say, fighting against him as I finally free myself and run to the door.

“Oh, I want to make you scream,” Jax says, grabbing me and lifting me before tossing me back on the bed.

My breath escapes my throat, and I try to catch it as he pounces on me, immediately letting his hands fall between my legs, caressing the outside of my panties. I'm already wet, and he can feel that, which only makes his smile grow more devious.

“Look at how wet you are for me,” Jax says, sitting up right as I immediately try to get out from under him. He rips my panties off and tosses them aside, licking his lips as he stares down at me.

“Please stop,” I say, trying to hold my legs together to keep him from seeing my pussy splayed out before him.

His finger slides inside me, and it takes everything I have not to immediately melt into the mattress and give up on his fantasy. It feels good, and the pleasure starts mounting between my legs. I moan from the sensations, and that causes him to raise an eyebrow, shaking his head slightly.

“Something tells me you don't really want me to stop,” Jax says, his voice a low whisper. “I think you want me to fuck that little pussy of yours.”

“Please,” I say, intentionally ambiguous. Of course, I want his cock more than anything right now. But his fantasy demands otherwise.

He holds my thigh with one hand, keeping me firm in place as he frees his cock with his other hand. It's already rock hard with precum dripping from the tip. I stare at it, feeling a very familiar stir in my chest.

“I think I want your pretty mouth to taste it first,” Jax says, climbing up my body and holding me in place with his weight as he brings his cock to my mouth and holds my mouth open for me. I try to fight against him and keep my mouth closed, but eventually, I give in. He stuffs his cock in my mouth, moaning as my tongue slides along his shaft. “Just like that.”

He grinds his hips back and forth, slowly moving his cock in and out of my mouth. I don't do anything to stop him except push against his chest to try to give some space. The more I resist, the more frenzied his movements grow.

When he finally moves away, I immediately try to claw my way off the bed, which he allows for a moment. Then hands are on my waist, pulling me closer to him. His cock grinds against my ass, which is arousing enough for me that I almost forget the game we're playing.

“You don't know how long I've wanted this,” Jax whispers in my ear, leaning over my body to press my face down into the mattress. I gasp, when he grabs my ass cheeks and spreads them apart slightly. He lets go of one, slapping his hand across it and leaving a sting that makes me scream.

Not even a moment later, he shoves his cock in my pussy, massaging my ass and holding me as close to him as possible. My eyes practically roll back in my head, feeling all of him so suddenly. I'm already trembling and on the cusp of coming as he starts moving faster and faster.

The bed rocks back and forth, slamming against the wall with force. I know the people beside me must have a lot of thoughts about this, but I do not care right now. All I'm focused on is Jax behind me, fucking me senseless.

I bury my face in the mattress as I cry out, gripping the sheets in my hand. His fingers dig into my hips, holding me as close as possible as he pumps himself long and hard in me. His cock stiffens, ready to explode inside me. As he gets closer, he moves my hips for me, pushing them up before slamming me back down on him, making each move harder and harder.

By the time I'm coming, I'm looking over my shoulder at Jax completely lost in his movements and crying out, unable to control my screams.

“I bet you like that,” Jax says through a strained groan as his cock twitches inside my throbbing pussy. “You like my cum deep in your pussy, don't you?”

I don't say anything. The only thing I could say is that I would agree with that, which

goes against his fantasy. All I do is whimper against the mattress as an orgasm rattles every nerve in my body. Warmth explodes inside me as his cum fills me with each thrust as he finishes.

When both of us are done, I lie flat on my stomach, my arms and legs far too weak to move. Jax falls on the bed beside me, draping an arm over me while he catches his breath. The dark look in his eyes as he took me is gone, replaced by a softer, loving look I will never tire of seeing.

“That was better than I thought it would be,” I say, laughing slightly as I shake my arms to regain feeling in them.

“Can that be the reward after every class instead?” Jax asks through a playful laugh. I raise my eyebrows, pretending to contemplate it for a moment.

“Sounds good to me,” I say as I roll over and sink into his warmth. “I love you so much.”

Jax kisses my ear gently and whispers, “I love you more.”

Thank you for reading the Jocks and Nerds collection! If you want another short and spicy book, don't worry, I have many more!

Read His Ballerina next.