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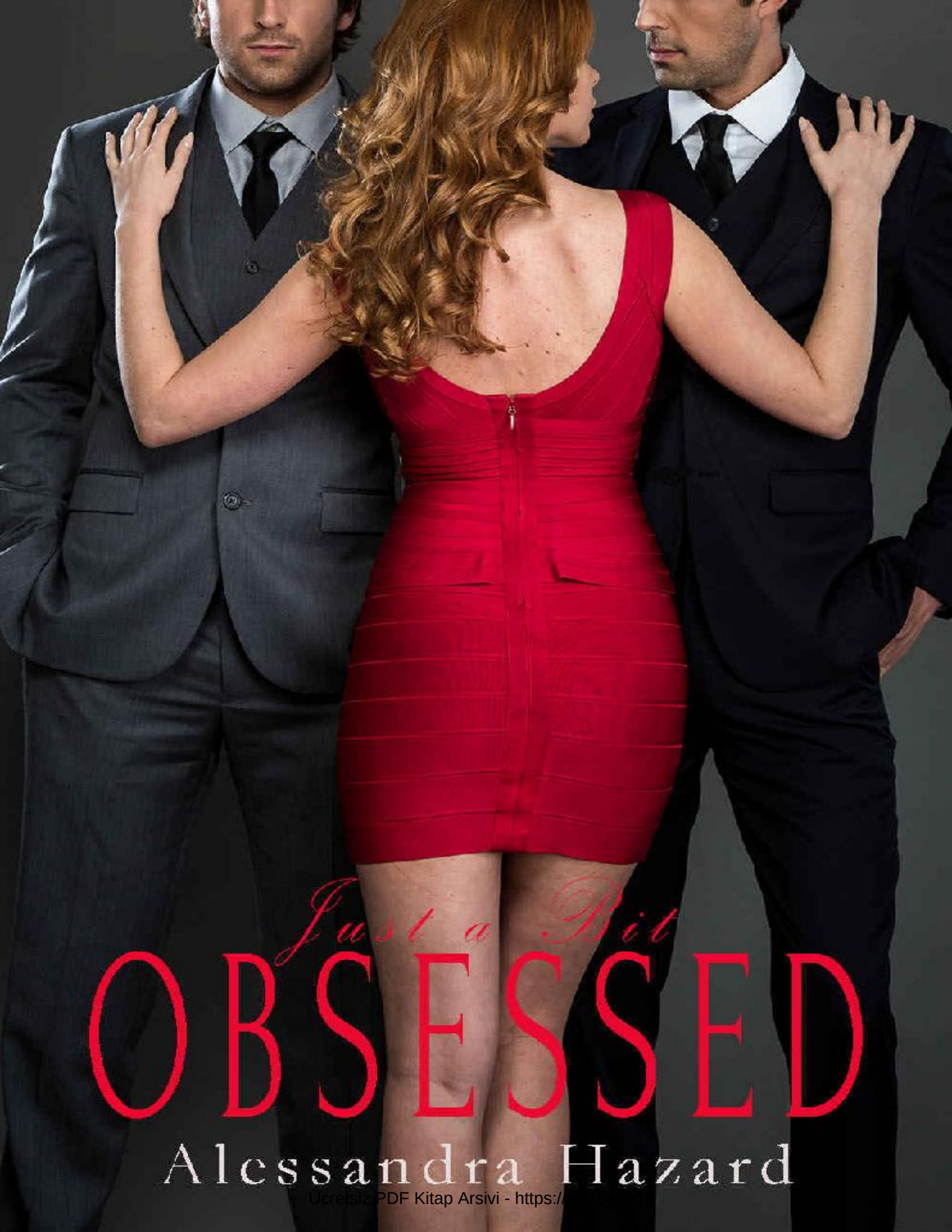
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Just a Bit
OBSESSED

Alessandra Hazard

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Just a Bit Obsessed

(Book #2 in the Straight Guys series)

Alessandra Hazard

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Editor: Elizabeth Balmanno

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Derek and Shawn: [Just a Bit Twisted](#) (Book #1)

Alexander and Christian: [Just a Bit Obsessed](#) (Book #2)

Jared and Gabriel: [Just a Bit Unhealthy](#) (Book #3)

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Chapter 1

The beginning of the end of Alexander Sheldon's perfectly orderly life came on an ordinary Saturday evening.

His girlfriend was snuggled up against his side, her head on his shoulder, as they watched her favorite series.

"Honey?" Mila murmured during a commercial break.

"Hmm?"

"I've been thinking..."

Alexander looked at her dark head. "What?"

Mila's fingers played with the hem of his shirt. "I... what do you think about trying something new? I mean sex."

Alexander studied her curiously. Mila normally wasn't shy when it came to sex.

"Sure," he said with a slight smile, burying his fingers in her hair and stroking her nape. "What do you want?"

Mila chewed on her lip and looked up at him, her gray eyes full of hesitation. "How about a threesome? With a guy?"

Alexander's smile froze on his lips before slowly fading.

"You don't have to decide anything right now," Mila said quickly. "Take your time and think about it. No pressure, though."

If she hadn't said that, Alexander would have refused outright. But he knew her. It was obvious she really wanted it.

Alexander averted his gaze. He wasn't very good at sharing his things and he believed in monogamy. But he owed it to her to at least give it some thought, regardless of how much he disliked the thought of another man touching her.

"All right," he said. "I'll think about it."

He did think about it.

It was constantly at the back of his mind over the next few days, even when he was at work. The thought of Mila having sex with another man left a sour taste in his mouth, but he wasn't jealous per se—just uncomfortable, displeased, and faintly irritated with Mila. She knew what Alexander thought of having multiple sexual partners at the same time, but she had asked for it anyway. On the other hand, ignoring his girlfriend's request wasn't something a good boyfriend would do.

Dammit. He was thinking in circles. He needed a fresh perspective on this.

Alexander ended up calling Jared, his cousin and closest friend. Lately they rarely saw each other face-to-face, since Jared worked in England, but they had been close since their childhood. He could always count on Jared.

"If you're jealous, just say no," Jared told him.

"I'm not jealous," Alexander said, leaning back in his chair. "I never get jealous, you know that. I just hate sharing what's mine."

"It's not like she can force you. If you don't want to share her, just tell her that."

"You don't know her," Alexander said with a sigh. "If I tell her I don't want a threesome, she'll sulk, pout and give me the cold shoulder for weeks. And I hate when she does it."

"Is it really such a big deal for you?" Jared said. "Some men like watching their women have sex with another man."

"Not me," Alexander said shortly.

Jared was silent for a moment before saying, his voice careful, "You know, it's not cheating if it's done with your partner's consent."

Alexander looked blankly at the picture on the opposite wall. He had to make a conscious effort to keep his voice casual and offhand. “You got any other advice, Captain Obvious?”

Jared heaved a sigh. “I don’t think she has the right to pressure you into doing something you don’t want, but on the other hand... good relationships are based on compromise.”

“I know,” Alexander said, pinching the bridge of his nose. That was why he was considering it at all. “When are you coming home? You’re getting a stuffy British accent.”

Jared laughed. “In a few months, actually. Got a vacation coming up.”

When Alexander hung up a few minutes later, he closed his eyes and sat still for a while, thinking. Jared was right: relationships were based on compromise.

Alexander turned off his computer and left his office, after making sure it was locked behind him.

“Going home, Mr. Sheldon?” his secretary said, smiling at him widely and batting her eyelashes.

He nodded, choosing to ignore her flirting, as usual. Erica was an excellent secretary; that was the important thing. She was fast, she was smart, and she required little direction. She was good at dealing with clients, despite the fact that most of them didn’t speak English well. In time she would learn that her flirting was pointless: Alexander didn’t cheat. Ever.

“Anything urgent, Erica?”

“No, nothing urgent. Neville said he’s almost done with the Russian translation. It should be finished by tomorrow.”

Nodding, Alexander left the office.

He drove straight home. He often picked Mila up from school, but if he remembered correctly—and he always remembered correctly—her classes had finished early that day.

Mila was at home, as he had expected.

Alexander kissed her briefly, removed his tie, and started unbuttoning his shirt.

“I’ve thought about your idea,” he said quietly.

He heard her breath catch in her throat. “And?”

“I have a few conditions.”

“Okay.”

Alexander removed his shirt and put it in the laundry basket. “First, he will not have full-on sex with you.”

“Oh.” There was clear disappointment in her voice. He ignored it.

“Second,” he said, his voice even and controlled. “It will be a one-time thing, and you’ll make it clear to him.”

“Yeah. Okay.” Mila walked over and pressed her body against his from behind, wrapping her arms around his waist. She kissed him on the shoulder. “You’re the best boyfriend ever.”

Alexander unzipped his pants. “Do you have anyone in particular in mind?”

“Yeah, I’ve already picked someone,” Mila said. “We have a few classes together.”

The fact that she’d apparently been attracted to some guy for a while didn’t sit well with him, but Alexander didn’t comment.

“What’s he like?” he asked instead.

Mila laughed. “How am I supposed to answer that? He’s younger than you, about the same age as me—probably twenty.”

“Handsome?”

She laughed again, burying her face in his back. “He’s... very attractive, but don’t worry—Christian’s nowhere near as handsome as you. All the girls envy me when you come to pick me up.” She went quiet for a short while. “You’re not mad at me, are you? It’s not that our sex life isn’t satisfying or something—it couldn’t be better, but it’s just—”

“I get it,” Alexander said shortly. “You just want to try something new.”

“Exactly. If you want, at some point we can have a threesome with another girl.”

Alexander couldn't say it was something he wanted, but he accepted it as the olive branch it was obviously intended to be.

“Fine,” he said.

“Great! I'll tell him, then. Think he'll agree. He's pretty easy.”

Alexander suppressed a grimace and just nodded.

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Chapter 2

The day the guy was supposed to come arrived too soon.

“You told him it’s just a one-time experiment, right?” Alexander said.

Mila nodded, checking her reflection in the mirror and brushing a lock of her hair away from her face. “Yeah, I told Christian that. How do I look?”

“Good.” He poured himself a drink and downed it in one long swallow.

The doorbell rang.

Alexander tensed but forced his body to relax. They were a modern couple. He was twenty-seven years old, hardly someone new to sex. He and Mila had been together for two years, and their sex life wasn’t exactly vanilla. A threesome was among the few things they hadn’t tried. There was nothing to get worked up over. Nothing.

Mila opened the door.

Alexander eyed Christian critically.

The guy was definitely good-looking. He was maybe an inch shy of six feet—about three inches shorter than Alexander. A surfer’s body, messy brown hair, big chocolate brown eyes, strong jaw that seemed at odds with full lips. Yes, he was good-looking, but truth be told, Alexander had expected someone more handsome. The guy was nothing special.

And then Christian smiled at Mila, revealing a pair of dimples.

Some people had a nice smile. Some people had a beautiful smile. And then there were a lucky few who had a smile like that guy did. It transformed Christian from just good-looking to stunning when he smiled.

Realizing that he was staring, Alexander grimaced. He had never had a reason to complain about his looks—women seemed to love the combination of dark hair and blue eyes that was so common in his family—but the Sheldon looks tended to seem cold and unapproachable to most people. This guy practically radiated warmth and charisma when he smiled.

Christian kissed Mila on the cheek and turned to him.

Alexander forced himself to walk forward and stretch his hand out for a handshake. “Alexander Sheldon.” He was pretty impressed he’d managed to sound neutral and not at all like he wanted to kick the guy out.

The guy shook his hand, his grip firm and strong. “Christian Ashford.” His voice was deep and low. Christian’s eyes flickered over him before meeting his gaze again. “Are you sure you’re all right with this?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

Christian shrugged a bit. “You look kinda tense.”

“It’s just the first time we’re trying a threesome,” Mila cut in before Alexander could say anything. “My boyfriend’s really okay with this,” she told Christian, smiling at him. Then she kissed him.

Alexander stood still and watched it, wondering how he would even manage to get an erection. He was as far from being turned on as it was possible to be. He didn’t get those men who enjoyed watching their women have sex with someone else.

Christian broke the kiss and looked at him over Mila’s shoulder. “Okay, just to clarify: you didn’t ask me to join you guys because you knew I’m bi, right?”

Alexander sucked a breath in. “I’m not into men.” His voice came out sharper than he had intended.

Christian stared at him and nodded slowly before looking away.

Mila chewed on her lip. “Are you disappointed?”

Christian's eyes flickered to Alexander. "No," he said after a moment. "Of course not."

Mila beamed at him and grabbed his hand. "Let's go to the bedroom, then."

Christian let her pull him to the bedroom but looked back at Alexander. "Coming?"

"Yes," Alexander said.

Their gazes locked, and amusement flashed across Christian's face, without actually surfacing into a smile. "Don't worry, I don't have anything contagious that you can catch by being next to me."

"If you're implying I'm a homophobe," Alexander said, following him into the bedroom, "you couldn't be more wrong. My favorite cousin is gay." He pulled his T-shirt off and put it on the chair. "There's nothing wrong with being gay."

"Hmm," Christian said, starting to undress, as well.

Unzipping his jeans, Alexander fixed him with a look. "What is that supposed to mean?"

Christian smiled, shrugging slightly. "Nothing."

"No, let's hear it," Alexander said, removing the rest of his clothes and putting them on the chair. He looked at Christian's discarded shirt on the floor and pursed his lips.

"You sure you want my honest opinion?" Christian said, shimmying out of his tight jeans. "I think you might have some repressed negative feelings about homosexuality. Sure, you might be 'open-minded' and all right with your cousin's sexuality, but it's a completely different thing when it concerns you."

"You've known me for a grand total of five minutes."

Christian shrugged again, that infuriating smile still on his lips. "What can I say? I'm good at reading people," he said, stepping out of his briefs.

"Pick them up," Alexander said.

Christian blinked. “Huh?”

Mila started giggling. “Your briefs, Chris. Alexander hates sloppiness and disorder.”

Christian looked between them. “Is this a joke?”

Mila laughed harder. “I wish! When we first started going out, I reorganized his DVDs and he forced me to reorganize them again until I got it right. I did, seven hours later, and I was pissed as hell. We almost broke up because of that. Now I know better.”

“I did warn you not to touch anything,” Alexander murmured.

Christian looked at him. “Do you have OCD?”

Alexander snorted a laugh. “No. I don’t obsessively clean things. I just really dislike sloppiness. Pick them up. Now.”

Christian glanced at the black briefs at his bare feet before looking up at Alexander. His eyes danced with merriment. “No,” he said, looking him in the eye. “What are you gonna do to me?”

Alexander felt his muscles tense up and his heart beat faster. He could almost feel the adrenaline pump into his blood stream, his senses kicking into overdrive.

He walked to Christian.

The guy didn’t move.

Alexander put a hand on Christian’s shoulder and pushed him down.

To his surprise, Christian didn’t offer much resistance and dropped to his knees. Looking up at Alexander through his long dark eyelashes, he picked the briefs up.

“Where should I put them, Master?” he said, in a mock-submissive tone, his eyes laughing. He threw his briefs on the chair. “You want me to kiss your feet while I’m down here? Or kiss something else?”

“You’re not half as funny as you think you are,” Alexander said.

A slow smile spread across Christian’s face. “I wasn’t joking.”

“Get up. I don’t want you to kiss anything.”

“Er, guys?”

Startled, Alexander looked at the bed. Mila was lying naked on the bed, frowning slightly.

Right. Threesome.

Alexander looked down at Christian.

Christian looked back at him.

He was also very naked.

Alexander swept his gaze over his body, lingering on the guy’s hard dick. A bit smaller than his, but definitely nothing to be ashamed of.

Glancing down at himself, Alexander realized that he had an erection too. He didn’t know when he’d managed to get hard.

Christian got to his feet and leaned toward his ear. “Don’t worry,” he murmured. “It’s a pretty normal reaction. Happens all the time when I tell the guy I’ll kiss his dick. Nice dick, by the way.”

He stepped back, grinning, and Alexander gave him a flat look. “It’s not you,” he said in a low voice. “My naked girlfriend is in the room, and I’m going to have sex with her. Of course I’m hard.”

Christian nodded. “Okay. Sure.”

“Guys, I’m getting bored here.”

Christian inclined his head towards the bed, still looking him in the eye. “Let’s go have sex.”

They walked to the bed, keeping a wary eye on each other, and lay on either side of Mila.

Mila smiled, giving them appreciative looks. “I’m the luckiest girl in the world.” Putting a hand on Alexander’s neck, she pulled him down into a kiss. Alexander obliged and kissed her for a few moments, gently and deeply, though his heart wasn’t really in it. He couldn’t concentrate while another guy was in their bed.

Mila ended the kiss and then pulled Christian to her lips.

Alexander watched them kiss for a moment before he leaned down and started kissing Mila's neck and the side of her face, his lips nibbling along her jawline to her ear, teasing her lobe before his tongue tickled the sensitive hollow beneath.

Christian broke the kiss, and Alexander stared at his wet, red, slightly swollen lips just inches away.

"You have such girly lips," he said before kissing Mila again, harder this time, sucking greedily on her lips.

Christian laughed by his ear and whispered, "Your girlfriend wasn't complaining. Can you taste me in her mouth?"

Alexander stopped kissing Mila and turned his head to glare at him. Christian just smiled innocently.

"Suck on my nipples," Mila said breathlessly. "Both of you."

Alexander leaned down and took her right nipple into his mouth. Usually he loved Mila's breasts, but at the moment he couldn't focus at all. It felt like a chore, something he must do just not to be outdone. Christian's presence made it impossible to relax.

He could acutely feel the movement of the air beside him as Christian moved to suck on the other nipple. Mila started moaning and muttering something unintelligible.

Rolling her nipple in his mouth, Alexander glanced at Christian.

He found him looking at him already.

Their faces were so close that Alexander could see Christian's every eyelash. Holding his gaze, Christian licked Mila's nipple slowly, the tip of his pink tongue circling around it.

Alexander bit the nipple in his mouth, hard.

Mila moaned, raking her hands through their hair and pushing them closer to her breasts—and to each other. "Harder."

Alexander's cheek was pressed against Christian's now. The guy's light stubble scratched against his own. Alexander's cock throbbed. He wanted to fuck.

He slid a hand down Mila's body and cupped her between legs. She was wet already when he started stroking her.

Mila moaned and spread her legs. "Fuck me. Someone fuck me now."

Alexander lifted his head and looked at Christian. The guy did the same.

Running his gaze down Christian's body, Alexander stared at his hard dick for a moment. "You aren't fucking her."

A ghost of a smile appeared on Christian's face. "Jealous? Scared she'll like me more?"

Alexander gave him a tight smile. "Just an agreement between me and my girlfriend that has nothing to do with you."

Mila spread her legs wider, looking between them.

"She can suck you off," Alexander said reluctantly.

"Yeah, come here, I'll blow you," Mila said, getting on her fours and presenting Alexander with her back. Alexander put on a condom and threw another to Christian.

Christian caught it, put it on, and moved to her head. The problem was, in this position he and Alexander were forced to look at each other.

"Ready?" Christian said, looking at Alexander.

There was something in those dark eyes. Challenge.

Alexander's cock twitched. "Yes." He gripped Mila's hips and pushed into her wet heat. He didn't want to look at Mila, didn't want to see her blowing this guy—the noises she was making around Christian's cock were irritating enough—so he looked at Christian instead.

Time seemed to slow down and the world around him became blurred and unfocused, his vision tunneling on the guy in front of him. Tightness,

heat, dark eyes. Christian's eyes were a bit glazed over, face flushed, plump lips parted as he panted. He didn't look away from Alexander even for a moment. Moaning, Christian touched his own neck, and Alexander slammed hard into the tight walls that clamped around him. Mila cried out, clenching hard around his cock as she orgasmed.

"Oh," Christian said as Alexander continued fucking her through her orgasm and Mila continued moaning. Christian looked down at Mila before returning his eyes to Alexander. "It must feel really good. Your cock."

It startled Alexander so badly his hips jerked and he came with a ragged groan, disoriented and weirded out.

He pulled out and fell back onto the mattress, breathing hard and trying to make sense of what had just happened.

He looked up at Christian and their gazes locked again. Christian's mouth opened in a silent moan, his body stiffened, and he went very still.

Realizing he'd just watched another guy come, Alexander looked away, more than a little unsettled.

Christian flopped onto his back next to him, sighing.

"This was fun, wasn't it?" Mila breathed out, stretching out on the other side of Christian.

Alexander made a non-committal sound.

"Sure," Christian said, the ever-present amusement in his voice. "Really fun, right, Alex?"

"My name is Alexander."

"He hates being called Alex," Mila mumbled, grinning.

"Then you'll get along smashingly with my grandma," Christian said, propping himself on his elbow. "She hates nicknames too. She gets so upset when people call me Chris. That's why I go by Christian, though I don't mind when people call me Chris. I like Chris better, actually. I think it fits me better—I'm a simple guy. You can call me Chris, Alex."

Alexander felt his lips press together.

Mila started laughing.

Christian just looked at him innocently. “What?”

“Don’t call me Alex.”

“Actually, you’re right—it’s so unimaginative, and you don’t really look like Alex. Hmm...” Christian eyed him. “You look like an Alec to me. I think I’ll call you Alec.”

“Please don’t,” Alexander said, very evenly.

Christian cocked his head, studying him. The amusement was gone from his face. “You know, when I was a kid, my parents—they’re geologists—used to drag me along when they traveled. I’ve seen a dormant volcano once. My parents said the thing wouldn’t awaken for thousands of years, that it was safe, but it made me uneasy. I could almost feel the ground under me trembling, very faintly. It creeped me out. My parents said the volcano was harmless and I was just imagining it, and I probably was, but still.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Alexander said.

“I’ve seen you around before, you know—when you come to pick Mila up. You look super calm at all times, but I feel...” Christian put a hand on Alexander’s biceps and watched the muscles tense. “I feel like it’s fake,” he said softly. “Just like I felt when I stood on the sleeping volcano. It looked like a harmless mountain, but it wasn’t.”

Mila laughed, sitting up. “You’re wrong, Chris, believe me. I know him far better than you. Alexander is the most dependable, considerate, and calmest person I’ve ever met. He’s practically a perfect boyfriend.”

“Perfect,” Christian murmured, looking at Alexander’s rigid muscles under his hand. He met Alexander’s eyes. “No one’s perfect, sweetheart. Appearances can be very deceiving.”

“My boyfriend is,” Mila said, annoyance creeping into her voice.

“Maybe. I’m sure you know him better.” Removing his hand, Christian hopped off the bed and started dressing.

“You already going?” Mila said.

“Yup. I really gotta go.” Christian zipped up his jeans. “Promised my grandma I’d buy eggs. She’ll be massively disappointed if I don’t, and I’ll become her least favorite grandson.”

Mila smiled and sat up. “That’s very sweet of you. How many grandsons does she have?”

“One,” Christian said, and they laughed together.

“There’s a store just around the corner,” Alexander said.

Christian finally looked at him. “Thanks. You’re very helpful. Just perfect all-around.”

Alexander gave him a flat look that only made Christian smile wider. “All right, thanks, guys, I had a great time. Don’t worry, I’ll let myself out.” He stepped to the bed and pecked Mila on the lips. “Thanks for inviting me. I had fun.” He looked over Mila’s shoulder at Alexander and blew him a kiss. “More fun than I expected.”

And Christian strode out of the room, whistling a cheerful tune.

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Chapter 3

“Your crush is here again,” Shawn Wyatt—Christian’s best friend—told him.

Chuckling, Christian said, “He’s not my crush.”

“Right. Then how do you even know who I’m talking about?”

Christian glanced in the direction of Alexander, who was leaning against the wall, ignoring all the students around him. As always, he looked impeccable, unapproachable, ridiculously gorgeous, and too damn good for the mere mortals around him. He was probably waiting for Mila again—that was the only reason he came to their college, after all.

“I don’t have a crush on him anymore,” Christian said. “It was a tiny crush anyway.”

Shawn rolled his eyes.

“No, I’m serious. Sure, I used to have a bit of a crush on him—who didn’t? But now that I actually talked to him and got to know him a bit, I’m over it. I’m serious.”

Shawn shot him a curious look before grinning. “Does he have a small dick or something?”

Christian chuckled and shoved him a little. “Oh, shut it, I’m not that shallow! And nope, his dick is just as ridiculously perfect as he is. And that’s the problem I have with him.”

“You don’t like that he has a perfect dick?”

Christian snorted. “Hardly.” He glanced at Alexander again, but couldn’t help but stare. The guy took the meaning of “tall, dark, and

handsome” to a whole new level, and his dark-blue eyes were nothing short of stunning. It was such a shame the guy was a weirdo—and a weirdo with a girlfriend. “There’s something off about him. He’s too perfect.”

“Too perfect?”

“Yeah. I don’t mean his looks. I mean his personality. Sure, he has a few quirks, but other than that, he’s so damn calm, reasonable, rational, and... and perfect. His face betrays nothing. It’s just not normal.”

“There are people like that. I told you he had a stick up his ass.”

“It’s not that,” Christian said, shaking his head. “It seems like a mask, you know? Every emotional reaction seems planned and carefully controlled. I don’t know... he’s weird. It gives me the creeps.”

Shawn gave Alexander a long, assessing look. “He doesn’t look like a creep.”

“That’s the point,” Christian said. “He *looks* like a fucking hero in some goddamn romance novel: handsome and hot, with a great car, a great apartment, and a great, beautiful girlfriend. He obviously has money, too. He’s a perfect, considerate boyfriend—I mean, he practically always comes to pick her up! And he ignores all the girls here that constantly try to get his attention. And I’m pretty sure he agreed to the threesome just to make his girlfriend happy. Because he’s such a perfect boyfriend.”

“Please stop saying the word ‘perfect.’ It’s giving me a headache.”

Christian laughed. “Sorry. But his perfectness annoys the hell out of me. It’s fake. I’m sure of it.”

“Why are you so sure?” Shawn said.

“Because his mask slipped a few times the other day,” Christian murmured, looking at Alexander. He shivered, remembering the glimpse of wildness that lurked beneath the calm surface. “He’s not at all what he appears to be, trust me. I’m good at reading people, you know that.”

“Whatever.” Shawn patted him on the shoulder. “I’m glad you’re over your little crush. Crushing on straight guys is never a good idea.”

Christian nodded, deciding not to tell Shawn he wasn't entirely sure about the straight part. He couldn't prove it, of course. Alexander could well be completely straight, and his own attraction to the guy might be clouding his judgment. And even if Alexander had really been a little attracted to him, it would be hardly something surprising. Christian was neither blind nor naive. He knew he had a certain effect on people; even totally straight men often stared at him when he smiled. It was kind of amusing, and Christian wasn't ashamed to use it. Hey, it wasn't his fault that most people liked him!

Though he was pretty sure Alexander Sheldon didn't like him at all.

Christian looked at Alexander again. He still stood alone, glancing at his watch from time to time. He was clearly waiting for Mila.

"I'll go say hi," Christian said. "It would be rude not to, right?"

"Chris," Shawn said, clear disapproval in his voice.

Christian grinned at his friend. "What? I'm bored! Go make out with Professor Rutledge while I'm gone."

"Hush!" Shawn hissed, glancing around. He looked adorably flustered.

Shaking his head with a smile, Christian walked away. He would never understand how his friend ended up having an affair with the most hated, nastiest professor in their college, but whatever. He wasn't one to judge.

"Hey, Chris!" some girl said.

"Hey," he muttered with a smile and walked faster, hoping he looked busy enough so she wouldn't try to talk to him. She looked like a nice girl, but he wasn't sure he remembered her name. His memory was pretty crappy, to be honest, and he knew a lot of people.

"Hey, Christian!"

"Hi, Chris!"

"Hey!" he said, smiling some more and walking even faster. His eyes were on Alexander, so he could see the moment the guy noticed him. His

face betrayed nothing, but something changed in Alexander's posture; Christian couldn't quite put his finger on it.

"Hey," Christian said, coming to a halt very close to him. He could feel that Alexander didn't appreciate his personal space being invaded, but his face remained calm. Of course it remained calm.

"Hello," Alexander said, giving him a cool look.

"Waiting for Mila?"

Alexander nodded and didn't say anything.

"It's a small world, isn't it?" Christian said, slinging his arm around the guy's shoulders, as though they were old buddies. He could feel Alexander's body stiffen.

His face blank, Alexander looked straight in front of him. "Don't think so. You go to this college." His voice was so cold that even the air between them seemed to become colder.

"I have a strange feeling you don't like me," Christian said in a mock hurt voice.

Alexander turned his head to him.

Christian licked his lips. Fuck. Those eyes were ridiculously blue. Almost violet.

"Don't you know the meaning of personal space?" Alexander said, irritation lacing his voice.

"What personal space?" Christian said with a teasing smile. He let his hand move a little, brushing the back of Alexander's neck, touching the warm skin there.

"Precisely," Alexander said, the tension in his body growing. "What are you playing at?"

Christian adopted a look of innocence, his blunt nails digging into Alexander's skin just below his nape. "I've no idea what you mean."

Alexander gave him a *glare*, his calm mask slipping.

Christian felt a thrill run through his body. He looked at Alexander from under his eyelashes and smiled.

“You’re so gay,” Alexander said after a moment.

“Thanks,” Christian said, holding his gaze.

Alexander laughed shortly, shaking his head. “Stop doing this. It doesn’t work on me.”

“Huh?”

“This. Flirting. Messing with my head. Whatever you’re doing.”

Christian laughed. “You think I’m flirting with you? Someone has a big head, methinks.”

Alexander put his hands into the pockets of his pants. “I wasn’t born yesterday. You’re bi, and you give me all these—all these looks. Sorry, I’m not interested.”

“Yup, definitely a big head.” Christian smiled. “Sorry to disappoint you, but I ‘flirt’ with everyone. It’s just how I roll. Not all of us are grumpy cold bores. You haven’t seen me really flirt.”

Alexander shot him a skeptical look.

Christian nodded, mock-serious. “I know: it’s hard to accept you’re not special.”

“And I guess you grope everyone too?”

“What can I say, I’m a touchy-feely guy.” Christian’s fingers stroked Alexander’s neck. “And this? This is not groping.”

“Then what is this?” Alexander practically gritted the words out.

Christian leaned in until their lips were inches away. “This is me messing with you,” he whispered. He almost brushed his lips against Alexander’s. Almost. He felt Alexander’s body tense like a string ready to snap.

Christian stepped back, a little breathless, and winked at him. “Tell Mila I said hi.”

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Chapter 4

Stretched out on the bed, Alexander watched Mila brush her hair. She was wearing only her panties, so he eyed her curves appreciatively.

“Honey,” she said suddenly. “I met Christian this afternoon and invited him again.”

Alexander’s eyes snapped to her face. “What?”

Mila fidgeted, shifting from one foot to the other, and gave him a wary look. “Well, I figured you wouldn’t mind. The experiment went well, right? And he’s a nice guy.”

Alexander had to make a conscious effort to unclench his jaw before he could speak.

“That wasn’t the deal,” he said. “I thought we agreed it would be a one-time thing.”

Mila flushed and looked at her feet. “Sorry.”

“Sorry? I was very clear. You shouldn’t have done that without asking me first.”

Mila’s eyes filled with tears, and Alexander gritted his teeth, annoyed with her. He hated tears and he hated scenes.

He sighed. “When is he going to come?”

The doorbell rang.

Mila gave him a sheepish smile. “Now?”

Great. Just fantastic.

Alexander leaned back against the pillow while Mila went to open the door. He glanced at himself—he was wearing only his boxers—and considered putting something on, but what was the point?

He folded his arms behind his head and stared at the doorway, his muscles tense and alert.

Finally, Mila backed into the room, her lips glued to Christian's as she undressed him.

Something unpleasant coiled in the pit of Alexander's stomach as he watched Mila push Christian's shorts off his narrow hips, squeezing his firm, round ass.

Still kissing Mila, Christian opened his eyes, and looked at Alexander.

Alexander stared back at him.

Christian maneuvered her to the bed. Mila fell gracelessly onto the mattress, a little out of breath, and Christian stretched out on her other side. He leaned down and licked her trembling bottom lip, still looking at Alexander, as if saying, *See how she's trembling?*

Alexander watched Christian's pink tongue swipe across Mila's lips and felt the ugly feeling in his stomach spread to his chest.

As Christian leaned down to kiss her again, Alexander moved swiftly and covered Mila's lips with his.

Christian's wet lips grazed his cheek. "You didn't say hi," he said, in a barely audible whisper, just for his ears. "You're so rude."

Alexander stopped kissing her and looked at Christian. The tip of Christian's tongue poked out as he wet his lips. His face was just a few inches away.

"My turn." Christian leaned down and kissed Mila again. Unwilling to be a third wheel, Alexander started kissing the side of her face. Closing his eyes, he sucked and nibbled, moving down her cheek, to her chin, to—

Alexander sucked on the plump lips and delved deep with his tongue. There was a moan and then—

Alexander opened his eyes and found himself kissing Christian.

He jerked away.

They stared at each other, breathing hard.

“Oh, I know it was an accident, but this was so hot!” Mila said. It felt as though her voice was coming from very far away. “Come on, guys, do it again! For me?”

“I don’t mind, sweetheart, but I think your boyfriend does,” Christian said with a sly grin. His eyes gleamed as he held Alexander’s gaze. “I think he’s scared.”

Christian’s lips were full and shiny. Alexander averted his gaze. “I’m not scared. I just don’t want it.” He wiped his lips with the back of his hand, pulled Mila close and kissed her.

He felt Christian lean close to his ear and whisper,

“Liar.”

The word jolted him and kept nagging at the back of his mind as he touched Mila to get her off. It was still on Alexander’s mind as he fucked her, carefully *not* watching Christian as she gave the guy a blowjob.

By the time Christian left and Mila was asleep, Alexander was still thinking about it. Liar.

Liar.

He got out of the bed, threw a blanket over his shoulders and went out onto the balcony. A cold November wind hit his bare skin, stinging his bare face and hands and sending chills up his spine.

Liar.

A memory, old but not forgotten.

Liar. His mother’s broken, hysterical voice. Then his father’s excuses and promises that it was the last time, that it would never happen again. His father had lied, of course. Every single time.

Alexander had been five the first time it happened. He woke up to the sounds of yelling and sobbing coming from their parents' bedroom. Confused and scared, he crept out of bed, padded down the dark hallway and inched open the door as silently as possible.

"I'm sorry—I'm sorry," Edward Sheldon kept saying. "It just happened! I don't know why—I was drunk and didn't know what I was doing—"

"You were sober enough to get it up and stick it in his ass!" his mother yelled, her lovely face red and voice hoarse from crying. "Faggot!" She threw a vase at his father and missed. It shattered against the wall, making Alexander flinch and stare at the broken pieces on the floor. "Faggot! Cocksucker!"

At the time, he hadn't understood what the words meant, but as it happened again and again, and their fights got louder and uglier, and more things got broken, he had learned the meaning of those words.

He had started staying at Jared's house until Jared's parents eventually took him in when he was fourteen. Alexander's parents didn't care: his father was too busy fucking someone on the side and telling Tanya how much he loved her, and his mother was a broken woman—broken by lies and her own inability to let go of the man who didn't deserve her love.

Except Alexander didn't think it was love. Love was the quiet affection and attachment he felt for Mila. He wasn't obsessed with Mila. She didn't drive him crazy. If Mila cheated on him, he would be... reasonably upset, but he would tell her to leave and never return. He would get over it. He would never share his partner, but he would never be the clingy, hysterical wreck his mother had become. Tanya was obsessed with the man, unable to let go and see anyone but him.

Sometimes he wasn't sure which of them he despised more.

Liar. Christian's voice echoed in his mind again.

Alexander closed his eyes and breathed the cold air in.

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Chapter 5

Alexander wasn't in a good mood when he arrived to pick up Mila, and her tardiness didn't improve his mood, either.

"I'm so sorry," Mila said when he called her. "But I really need to hand in this assignment today. Professor Rutledge will fail me if I don't. It'll take half an hour at most. Wait for me?"

"Fine."

He hung up, put his cell phone into his pocket and leaned against the wall, prepared for a long wait.

He eyed the students milling around. With finals coming up soon, pretty much everyone looked stressed.

But not everyone.

Alexander's gaze fixed on the student who looked as carefree as ever, smiling and laughing as he talked to others.

Christian.

Alexander felt his body tense, for no reason at all. He inhaled deeply and relaxed, his eyes still on Christian.

After a few minutes of watching, Alexander came to the conclusion that the guy was a shameless flirt. The way he smiled at people was... indecent. To be fair, Christian wasn't doing anything particularly outrageous—he just smiled and looked people in the eye—yet it was enough for other students to stare, and drool, and try to touch him. The guy couldn't possibly be unaware of the effect he had on people, so it meant he was doing it on purpose.

Alexander's lips twisted. He couldn't stand flirts; he had zero tolerance for them. Most of them didn't know the meaning of the word loyalty. They loved being admired and wanted; one person was never enough for them. They were everything he despised.

His eyes followed Christian as the guy moved from one group of students to another. He watched as Christian laid a hand on some guy's shoulder and laughed. The guy's eyes practically glazed over with lust as he stared at Christian's lips.

Alexander watched as Christian stepped away from the guy and wrapped an arm around some pretty girl's waist. The girl put a hand on Christian's chest and stroked it.

Disgusting.

Christian stepped back, winked at the girl, kissed her on the cheek, and turned—

His smile froze on his lips when he saw Alexander.

After a moment, Christian muttered something without even looking at the students around him and made his way to Alexander.

“Got bored of breaking hearts?” Alexander said. The words came out sharper than he had intended.

“Huh?” Christian said, coming to a halt very close to him—again. The guy either had no concept of personal space, or preferred to pretend he didn't.

“You know what I mean,” Alexander said, glancing at the guy and the girl who were still staring dreamily at Christian.

Christian glanced back and chuckled. “Breaking hearts? Are you serious? I was just talking to them.”

“Of course you were,” Alexander said.

Christian leaned against the wall next to him, his head cocked as he studied Alexander. “Were you watching me?” he murmured, with a hint of a smile, his fingers playing with the sleeve of Alexander's jacket.

“I was waiting for Mila.”

“That’s not what I asked.” Christian’s fingers traveled down Alexander’s arm to his wrist. “Were you watching me?” he murmured again, fingers sliding under the sleeve and stroking Alexander’s skin.

“I was bored,” Alexander said, without looking at him, his body rigid with tension. What was it about this guy that got him so worked up?

“And there was no one else to watch, right?” Christian’s thumb stroked his wrist gently.

Alexander fixed his gaze on the girl who was in his direct line of vision. “You were the only familiar face.”

Christian laughed softly. “You’re such a creep.” His fingers continued to stroke Alexander’s skin.

“You’re the one trying to creep me out,” Alexander said, still looking at the girl. “Is this some kind of gay chicken? I’m not scared so easily.”

“You were pretty scared yesterday after you kissed me.”

“I wasn’t scared. I didn’t kiss you. I didn’t know it was you. It was a silly mistake.”

“Hmm... okay.” Christian took his hand in his. “Are you scared now?”

Alexander went still. The hand in his was a little smaller than his own but much bigger than Mila’s and unmistakably male.

“What are you playing at?” Alexander bit out. He didn’t remove his hand. He would be damned if he let this guy think he could be so easily flustered.

“To be honest? No idea.” Christian laughed a little. “I just like ruffling your feathers.” Christian entwined their fingers. “Still not scared?”

Alexander looked in front of him. It was completely surreal. His fingers were entwined with another guy’s. He was holding another guy’s hand. “No.”

“So you watch me creepily when I don’t know about it, but you wouldn’t look at me when I’m actually talking to you. Okay. But if you keep looking at that girl, she’ll start thinking you have a thing for her. She’s already giving you hopeful looks. You’ll break the poor girl’s heart, you know.”

“Pot, kettle, black.”

Christian gave him an innocent look. “I don’t break people’s hearts. Being nice and friendly doesn’t hurt anyone.”

Alexander snorted. “Just admit you’re a flirt and a player.”

Christian narrowed his eyes. “Even if I am—and I’m not saying I am—so what? Why do you care?”

“I don’t care.”

Christian raised his brows, a glimmer of amusement in his eyes. “For a guy who doesn’t care, you sure seem to have a lot to say about it, Alec.”

Alexander leveled him with a look.

Christian grinned, squeezing their fingers tighter. “What? Something bothering you, baby?”

“Don’t call me that,” Alexander grated out.

“What? Alec or baby?”

“Both.”

“Okay,” Christian said, nodding with a serious expression on his face.

Alexander was instantly suspicious. “Okay?”

“Sure.” Christian smiled at him softly.

The smile was...disconcerting.

Alexander looked from Christian’s lips to his eyes. “There has to be a catch.”

“No catch,” Christian whispered.

“Hi, Chris!” some girl called out, waving.

Alexander flinched, realizing how close his face had been to Christian’s.

“Hey, Donna,” Christian said with a rather strained smile.

The girl looked at Alexander curiously. “New boyfriend?”

Christian leaned into him and planted a kiss on Alexander’s scruffy cheek. “Yep. Gorgeous, isn’t he?”

The girl nodded, showed him a thumbs-up and walked away.

Alexander unclenched his jaw. “Do you get off on annoying me?”

“Get off? Not exactly,” Christian said a laugh. “So I annoy you, huh? I feel pretty damn proud. I bet not many people can say they get any kind of unscripted reaction out of you.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

Cocking his head, Christian studied him with unusually serious eyes. “I don’t know... It’s like you have some kind of filter inside of you. It only allows you to show appropriate reactions and emotions, suppressing the hell out of everything else.” He chuckled a little. “Am I making sense?”

“No, you aren’t,” Alexander said.

“See, you’re doing it again.”

“Doing what?”

“Retreating behind the mask. Refusing to look at me. It’s like you’re scared to look at me.”

Alexander turned his head back to him. “Why would I be scared to look at you?”

“I don’t know. You tell me.”

“Actually, yes. I’m scared,” Alexander said. “I’m scared of looking at you because I might accidentally strangle you.”

Christian's Adam's apple bobbed up and down. "Okay." He took Alexander's hands and put them on his neck. "Come on, then."

Alexander looked into the dark brown eyes. There was challenge in them now. Challenge and something else. Christian ran his tongue over his lip. Christian's pulse beat rapidly against his palm.

And Alexander realized he really wanted it. He wanted to squeeze. He wanted to squeeze his hands around this neck and watch Christian gasp, pant, and beg him to stop.

His hands tightened. Christian's lips parted. Alexander leaned in—
"Hey, guys!"

Alexander dropped his hands and stepped back, more than a little disoriented. What the fuck was that?

He was only vaguely aware of Mila's pecking him on the lips and saying something to Christian. His heartbeat was still thundering in his ears.

He registered what Mila was saying too late.

"...come tomorrow evening, then?" Mila said.

Christian threw a strange look at Alexander and hesitated. It was the first time Alexander had seen him look unsure about anything.

"I don't know," Christian said, raking a hand through his hair. He was slightly flushed. "I'm pretty busy this week, actually. Gotta get ready for finals—"

Mila laughed. "It's okay if you don't want to, Chris. Just say it. There's no need for any excuses, really."

Christian gave her a sheepish smile. "Sorry. But I'm really busy, actually."

Mila kissed him on the cheek. "It really was fun, but all good things must come to an end, I guess." She took Alexander's hand, entwining their fingers. "See you around."

“Yeah,” Christian said, glancing at their hands before shoving his own into his pockets and turning away.

Alexander watched him go.

“Alexander?”

He looked at Mila. She was frowning slightly. “Were you fighting with Chris? You had your hands around his throat.”

Alexander’s mouth went dry.

“He annoyed me,” he heard himself say. It wasn’t a lie. Why did it feel like one?

Mila shook her head. “He gets under your skin so easily. He’s hot, and the threesome was fun, but I’m almost glad we won’t be doing it anymore. He puts you in a bad mood. You’ve been kinda moody since the whole thing started.”

“Let’s go home,” Alexander said. “Did you finish the assignment?”

Mila didn’t call him on his blatant change of subject. She never did.

Christian would have.

Alexander pushed the odd thought out of his head.

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Chapter 6

When Christian was four, the caregiver at his daycare had sent him home with a note that said:

“Christian is a very smart, active boy, but he has a problem: he gets too attached to other children’s toys and ends up crying when the owner takes the toy back.”

Sixteen years later, as Christian walked home from classes, he thought ruefully that apparently very little had changed since then.

Except he wasn’t attached to Alexander Sheldon. He just wanted to get naked and sweaty with him—without his girlfriend present.

Chuckling, Christian shook his head. He liked Mila: she was hot, nice enough, and fun to be around. Normally, when such cute girls invited him for a threesome, Christian didn’t think twice. Sex was fun, and while he might prefer guys, he had nothing against sex with girls once in a while. The problem was, he had agreed to the threesome for all the wrong reasons. Yeah, he was reasonably attracted to Mila—she was beautiful—but it was her boyfriend who pushed all the right buttons in him. When it had turned out that he and Alexander were simply meant to share Mila, Christian was disappointed but told himself that at least he could enjoy the view.

The problem was, enjoying the view wasn’t enough anymore. Sure, the guy was a bit of a creep, but every time Christian saw him, he wanted to rip those impeccable clothes off and...

“You’re an idiot, Chris,” he muttered. Crushing on straight guys never ended well. Been there, done that. And it didn’t matter that he was reasonably sure Alexander was attracted to him, too. Most people were bi-curious at some point in their lives; it didn’t change a thing. Alexander was

in a serious relationship, and he would never want a “flirt” like him. He’d made it clear how much he despised Christian.

Yeah, he’d done the right thing by declining Mila’s invitation to join them again; last night had been bad enough.

Christian licked his lips, remembering Alexander’s firm lips against his own, Alexander’s tongue in his mouth. It had been an accident, of course, but afterward, he could barely focus on pleasuring Mila, staring hungrily at Alexander’s lips and wanting them again. And as he watched Alexander fuck Mila, he badly wanted to take her place. He wanted to shove her away. He wanted to be under Mila’s boyfriend. He wanted Alexander to fuck *him*.

“Idiot,” Christian muttered again. He needed to get laid, pronto. A good, hard fuck was exactly what he needed to get the guy out of his mind.

Alexander Sheldon wasn’t for him.

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Chapter 7

The club was full of shadows and flashing lights. The air smelled of chemicals, drinks and sweat. People crowded the dance floor, indistinguishable, unidentifiable. Occasionally one or two were picked out by a random spotlight, given their moment of fame, and then absorbed once again by the heaving mass.

This wasn't Alexander's scene. With every passing minute he regretted letting Mila talk him into it. But she had been tired and stressed out from all the studying and wanted to take her mind off the upcoming exams, and he had given in.

The bar at least had his favorite beer, which was a relief, and Alexander picked at the label until the upper half of it was gone. It was so loud, and the lights were both low and pulsating, which gave him a headache.

"Come on, don't be a mood killer," Mila yelled into his ear. "Let's dance!"

"You know I hate dancing."

"But everyone's dancing! Come on! I wanna dance!"

"Then go dance," Alexander said and took a sip from his beer.

"Seriously?" Mila put her hands on her hips. "You'll let some other guys dance with me? You don't care?"

"I trust you," Alexander said flatly.

"Seriously, what's wrong with you? You've been so moody the last couple of days. I'm the one stressed out by the finals, not you!"

Alexander took a sip from the bottle. “I haven’t been moody.” He kind of was, maybe, though he couldn’t point out the reason. He could feel this strange sort of frustration building in him, but he didn’t know what he was getting upset about. Everything was fine. The business ran like a well-oiled machine. His relationship with Mila couldn’t be better. There was nothing to be frustrated about.

“Go dance,” Alexander said. “Go have fun—” He cut himself off when a spotlight caught two guys dancing together.

Mila followed his gaze. “Oh, look who’s here! Chris didn’t waste much time after ditching us. He has a good taste. Very handsome.”

Alexander stared at the big hands on Christian’s hips as Christian moved, grinding back against the other guy, his head on the guy’s shoulder, his eyes closed and lips parted. The guy was watching him hungrily, his hands moving to slide under Christian’s T-shirt.

Alexander set his beer down. “Let’s go say hi.”

“You can’t be serious!” Mila said. “Christian wouldn’t be happy. I’m sure they don’t want to be interrupted!”

“Come on,” Alexander said, catching Mila’s wrist and practically dragging her towards the couple.

“Alexander!”

He ignored her protests, pushing through the crowd.

When they reached their destination, Alexander grabbed Christian’s arm—just to get his attention, of course.

Christian’s eyes flew open and he blinked dazedly a few times before his gaze focused on Alexander. Then a slow, radiant smile lit his face. His lips formed a word, but the music was too loud for Alexander to hear it. Christian pulled away from his dancing partner and practically fell against Alexander. “Hey!” he yelled happily.

That was when Alexander realized Christian was drunk. He had to wrap his arm around the guy’s waist to steady him. “You’re drunk.”

Looping an arm around his neck, Christian shook his head. “Just tipsy.”

Alexander snorted and looked at the other guy—who was glaring daggers at him.

“Get lost,” Alexander said. “He’s too drunk to put out.”

Huffing in annoyance, the guy disappeared in the crowd.

“I’m never too drunk to put out,” Christian announced into his ear.

Alexander grimaced. “You’re definitely too drunk to drive. How did you get here?”

There was a pause. “I dunno. I think I walked.”

“You think?” Alexander said. “How are you going to get home?”

Christian pressed his nose against his ear. “Don’t wanna go home. Wanna fuck.”

“Really,” Alexander said flatly. “I thought you declined Mila’s invitation because you didn’t want sex.”

“Don’t want a girl,” Christian’s murmured into his ear. “Want a man. Wanna be held down and fucked.”

Alexander swallowed. Meeting Mila’s concerned gaze, he flinched, though there was no way she could have heard it. And even if she could, he had no reason to feel guilty. He wasn’t responsible for what Christian was babbling about.

Alexander cleared his throat. “We’ll take you home. You need to sleep it off.” Gesturing Mila to follow, Alexander half-carried, half-dragged Christian off the dance floor.

“Where are we going?” Christian said once they got their jackets and went outside into the December night.

It was cold and damp but not windy.

“Where do you live?”

After a moment, Christian told him his address.

“That’s where we’re going, then,” Alexander said, pushing him towards his car.

“Hey, easy there!” Christian said, stumbling. “My legs are kinda funny.”

“You were fine enough when you were humping that guy on the dance floor.”

“You sound angry, Alec,” Christian said, turning and winking at him. Apparently he wasn’t too drunk for his silly flirting.

“I’m not angry,” Alexander said, grabbing Christian when he stumbled again. “I’m annoyed. Babysitting you wasn’t on my to-do list tonight.”

“Don’t be so hard on him, honey.”

Startled, Alexander turned his head. He had completely forgotten about Mila.

She lengthened her strides to catch up. “If anything, you should be the one apologizing to Christian for cock-blocking him.”

“I did no such thing,” Alexander said, opening his car and shoving Christian into the passenger seat.

“You did,” Christian muttered.

“You did,” Mila said, climbing into the back seat.

“He’s wasted.” Alexander got into his seat, buckled Christian up, fastened his own belt, and started the engine. “Who knows what the guy would have done to him.”

Christian started laughing—or rather, giggling drunkenly. “Aw, you’re so sweet.”

Alexander leveled him with a look.

Christian blew him a kiss.

Gritting his teeth, Alexander looked back at the street.

He felt Christian's gaze on him.

"This is so odd," Christian said, sounding confused. "You're sweet, but you look very sour. Odd."

"Anyone ever tell you you're a terrible drunk?" Alexander said, ignoring Mila's laughter from the backseat.

"No," Christian said after a moment.

"You're a terrible drunk."

"Am not. I'm an awesome drunk! I sober up pretty fast."

"That's not exactly what I meant."

"You're mean. You look so nice, but you're so mean."

"You just said I was sweet."

"I never said that!"

Alexander laughed. "You're kind of ridiculous."

"And you're a jerk."

"And you're annoying."

"Nice," Mila said, chuckling. "Kindergarten insults. What's next, guys?"

"He started it!" Christian said with a pout in his voice. "I really, really don't like your boyfriend. I don't know how you put up with him. Or why."

"He has his moments," Mila said. "Besides, he has a great dick."

That silenced Christian. For a moment.

"I guess," he mumbled reluctantly. "Though big dicks can be pretty uncomfortable when the guy doesn't know how to use it. But I guess he—"

"*He* is right here," Alexander said, looking in front of him. "And he really would like the two of you to stop discussing his dick."

“Spoilsport,” Mila said.

“Bore,” Christian said.

Mila laughed a little. “I hope you aren’t too pissed at Alexander. That guy was very handsome.”

“Yeah. He had nice eyes. So blue. Pity.”

Alexander glanced at Christian. He looked sleepy now.

“Can I ask you something?” Mila said.

When Christian made a sleepy noise, she asked, “Why don’t you have a girlfriend or a boyfriend? I mean, you’re probably the most popular guy in school, everyone loves you, but you never go out with anyone. You just sleep around. People say you’re afraid of commitment.”

“Nope,” Christian muttered, yawning. “It’s actually the opposite. My parents love each other—their love is epic and shit—and I basically grew up knowing nothing else. Settling for anything else seems kinda shallow. So I just fuck. You have to kiss a lot of frogs before you find your prince and all that. I haven’t met anyone I wanted badly enough to quit sleeping around.”

There was a wistful look on Christian’s face. He didn’t look all that drunk anymore.

“I really want to meet that person,” Mila said.

Christian caught Alexander’s eyes and averted his gaze. “You and me both, sweetheart.”

“All right, let’s have a little quiz!” Mila said.

“A quiz?”

“Uh huh. A woman or a man?”

“Easy,” Christian murmured. “A man.”

“Why are you so sure?” Mila asked, a trace of annoyance in her voice. “You might fall for a woman.”

Alexander glanced at Christian again. He had his eyes closed.

“Don’t get me wrong, I like women,” Christian said. “You’re nice to touch, nice to talk to, but I can’t really— can’t really see myself falling for a girl. There are things women can’t give me.”

“Like what?” Mila said.

Don’t want a girl. Want a man. Wanna be held down and fucked.

Alexander shifted in his seat slightly, fixing his eyes straight ahead.

“Being with a man is different from being with a woman,” Christian murmured. “The dynamic is different. I’m all for gender equality and everything, but there are still some things you just can’t—” He cut himself off with a frustrated noise. “It’s hard to explain. I feel different with men and want different things, you know?”

Mila giggled. “Just say you like cock better.”

Christian snickered. “That too, but it’s not that simple, actually.”

“Fine, whatever. So the person will be most likely a man. Tall and built or short and slim?”

“Dumb question. Do you like short and slim guys?”

“Not the same thing! I’ve heard some gay guys like twink.”

“Not me. Like them tall and built. Someone stronger than me.”

“I get it,” Mila said, a smile in her voice. “Let me guess: you like, um, to be on the bottom?”

Christian laughed. “I’ve done both.”

“But you prefer bottoming,” Mila pressed.

Alexander shot a sideways glance at Christian.

“Yeah,” he said, meeting Alexander’s eyes. There was a blush on his cheekbones.

Alexander looked back at the street. They were almost at the address Christian had given him.

“But I don’t actually do it that often,” Christian said. “I usually only do one-night stands, and you don’t really go that far with some strangers. And it’s a bit too intense and makes you feel too vulnerable and shit when the guy—”

“Too much information,” Alexander said.

The silence that fell in the car was almost deafening, and Alexander realized he had practically snarled the words out.

“Why?” Christian murmured at last. “Does it make you uncomfortable, Alec?”

Alexander kept his eyes on the road. “There’s such thing as over-sharing.” Alexander stopped the car in front of the building. “Is this the right building?”

“I—Yeah.”

“Then get out.”

“Thanks for the ride, I guess. Bye, Mila.”

“Bye, Chris.”

Alexander didn’t watch as Christian opened the door, but he had to look when the guy stumbled and fell down.

“For fuck’s sake,” Alexander said and got out of the car.

“The world is spinning,” Christian said. “Weird. I don’t feel all that drunk anymore.”

Alexander hauled him up. “Come on.”

Christian slung an arm around his neck and leaned heavily against him.

“You need help?” Mila called out from the car.

“No,” Alexander said and started walking. “Where’s your apartment?”

“There. Fifth floor. The elevator isn’t working.”

It figured.

When they finally reached the apartment, they leaned against the door, catching their breaths.

“I think I’m going to be sick,” Christian said.

“Don’t,” Alexander said.

“Very helpful, dude.”

“You can manage the rest on your own, right?”

“If I say no, will you carry me inside?” Christian was smiling slightly, but his eyes were oddly serious.

Alexander straightened up. “If you’re back to flirting, you’re fine enough to get your ass inside.” He turned to leave, but a hand grabbed his jacket.

“Alec.”

He inhaled and looked at Christian. “What?”

Christian let go of his jacket. He bit his bottom lip, a strange expression on his face. “It’s, like, the last time we see each other, right?”

Alexander shoved his hands into the pockets of his jacket and shrugged. “We’ll probably run into each other at your school.”

“You know what I mean.”

Christian’s eyes were like melted chocolate.

Averting his gaze, Alexander tugged at his collar. “Maybe. So?”

“I hate leaving loose ends,” Christian said.

“What loose ends?”

“You know what I’m talking about. Look at me.”

Alexander knew he shouldn’t. He knew it.

But he did anyway.

They stared at each other in silence; the only sound in the stairwell was their ragged breathing.

Christian licked his lips.

“Just once,” he whispered.

And Alexander lunged forward, crushing his lips with his own. Moaning, Christian grabbed his hair and kissed back, eager and needy, and Alexander kissed him deeper, shoving his tongue inside. The kiss was messy and carnal—tongues, teeth, breathless grunts and whimpers—and he couldn’t kiss him deep enough and hard enough. Nothing made sense—nothing but this: the most basic, physical want, his blood pounding with need in his veins and making his dick thicken and harden. He wanted—

His cell phone went off. It was his ringtone for Mila.

Alexander jerked away as though burnt.

Breathing hard, they stared at each other. Christian’s pupils were so dilated that his eyes seemed black, his face flushed, hair disheveled, lips swollen and red. Alexander hated that even as guilt twisted his gut into knots, a part of him wanted to go back to sucking and kissing those lips, his body burning with want.

“No,” he said hoarsely and backed away, almost falling down the stairs in his haste.

Once outside, the cold night air did nothing to cool his skin.

Alexander took a few deep breaths, trying to will his erection away. He thought of Mila waiting for him in the car, and he felt sick to his stomach.

He didn’t want to go there, but he couldn’t stay here forever.

Steeling himself, Alexander strode to the car and got into the driver’s seat.

“What’s taken you so long?”

Alexander stared out into the dark night through the windshield.

He could lie. He could omit the truth.

His stomach churned. No.

“I kissed him,” he said flatly.

A beat passed. “Excuse me?”

“I kissed Christian.” He didn’t look at her.

The silence lasted longer this time.

At last, she laughed, a bit uncertainly. “Wow. I’m not sure how I’m supposed to react to this. I thought—I thought you were one hundred percent straight.”

“I am,” Alexander said, gripping the steering wheel.

“Honey, I hate to break it to you, but you are not one hundred percent straight if you kiss another guy.” A pause. “Though I don’t really blame you. He’s ridiculously attractive and would make any guy bi-curious.”

Breathing out, Alexander turned his head to her. “I thought you’d be angrier.”

Mila twirled a lock of her hair on her finger. “Why? I kissed him too—and did more than kissing. I’m just surprised.” She peered at him curiously. “Did you like it?”

Alexander nearly laughed. How was he supposed to answer that?

Like didn’t even begin to cover it. Hunger was still clawing at him, his cock still half-hard.

But for all her open-mindedness, Mila wouldn’t take it well if she knew the extent of his attraction to Christian. She wouldn’t take it well if she knew his fingers were still trembling from the rush of adrenaline, his body stiff with arousal.

“It was good enough,” Alexander said shortly, turning away.

Mila put a hand on his shoulder. “So what are we gonna do about it?”

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m attracted to him, you’re attracted to him, and I presume he’s attracted to both of us. It’s perfect. We can have a real threesome, not just have two guys share a girl.”

Alexander drew a slow breath in. She couldn't be seriously suggesting this. "I'm not sure it's a good idea, Mila."

"Why? It was really hot when I saw you two accidentally kiss." She chuckled. "Gotta say there's something very exciting about watching two hot guys make out. I actually don't even feel jealous. It's like... it feels like it doesn't count, you know?"

Alexander could understand where she was coming from: he wouldn't be bothered either if he watched Mila make out with another hot girl. But the problem was...

He sighed, running a hand over his eyes. How could he tell her that he had a very bad feeling about this?

"Is this about him being a guy?" Mila asked when he didn't say anything. "If it is, it's silly. So you're bisexual, big deal! It's just sex, not a relationship. Come on, let's try it! If you don't like it, we won't do it again. Simple."

Alexander stared into the dark. He shouldn't be making any decisions when his body still ached with want and desire.

But he said, "All right."

"Great! I'll tell him tomorrow, then."

The uneasy feeling in his gut didn't abate.

Something told him it wouldn't be as simple as Mila made it out to be.

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Chapter 8

Christian wiped his sweaty hands on his jeans and swallowed, staring at the door to Alexander's apartment.

He should have refused.

He should have refused when Mila suggested it. At first he had been flustered and embarrassed when Mila had told him she knew about the kiss. Apparently Alexander always told her everything, like the perfect boyfriend he was.

Christian wasn't sure why it bothered him that much—at least he chose not to examine it too closely. Until his conversation with Mila, he had been trying not to think about the kiss, and Mila's suggestion had come as a shock to him.

Apparently, she—and Alexander—wanted a threesome. A real threesome. A threesome where he could touch Alexander and Alexander would touch him. Christian had been so startled he gave his assent without thinking. Not his brightest moment.

Dammit, this had “bad idea” written all over it. He should have refused. Because he really liked Mila.

And he didn't trust himself, not after that kiss.

“Quit being a coward,” Christian muttered and knocked.

As he waited, he became increasingly conscious of the tube of lube in his pocket. Presumptuous? Maybe. Maybe not.

The door opened. Mila stood there, wearing a thin white nightgown. “Hey,” Mila said with a smile.

Christian returned it and kissed her on the cheek.

She locked the door, took his hand, and led him to the bedroom.

Christian's heart pounded somewhere in the region of his throat. He couldn't remember ever being so nervous about sex.

Alexander was sitting on the bed, wearing only a pair of black boxers. Dark blue eyes met his, unreadable. Alexander's scruffy face was completely impassive. Only the bulge in his boxers gave him away—he wasn't as disinterested as he appeared.

Christian felt Mila's hands undress him, her lips kissing his neck as she did it. Alexander's gaze followed Mila's hands, watching her unbutton his shirt.

His fingers a bit unsteady, Christian unzipped his jeans and pushed them down with his underwear.

He felt himself blush as Alexander's gaze traveled over his naked body. It was ridiculous: he had a great body, and it wasn't like Alexander hadn't seen him naked before. Yet Christian couldn't help but feel self-conscious. Alexander was mostly straight, after all. Did he like what he was seeing?

"Come on," Mila said, pushing him to the bed.

Christian sat on bed. Uncomfortable, he watched as Mila climbed into Alexander's lap and kissed him. He watched as Alexander's big hands removed her nightgown. Christian fidgeted, hating his uncharacteristic shyness and awkwardness. It wasn't like him at all.

Annoyed with himself, Christian moved closer and slid a hand down Mila's smooth back, until his hand bumped into Alexander's. He stroked Alexander's knuckles with his fingers, felt them flex, and looked up. Alexander was watching him as he kissed Mila.

Christian wet his lips and Alexander's eyes fixed on them. Christian felt a thrill shoot through him. He stroked Alexander's fingers, looking at him through his eyelashes.

Alexander stopped kissing Mila back, his eyes glued to Christian. They were glazed over and a bit unfocused. Christian's own eyes likely looked no better at that moment.

Probably realizing Alexander was no longer kissing her back, Mila turned her head to Christian and pulled him close for a kiss. He let her, feeling Alexander grip his fingers almost painfully.

When Mila finally broke the kiss, Christian found Alexander's face only inches away.

They stared at each other.

The next thing he knew, they were kissing furiously, all tongue and teeth, hands in each other's hair, and god, it felt so good, and scary, but addictive. Christian moaned into Alexander's mouth and sucked on his tongue, pulling him closer, tighter, until he was on his back and Alexander was on top of him, his heavy body pinning him down. So good. Gasping, Christian hooked his leg around Alexander's hip and ground their erections together. Alexander groaned against his mouth and kissed him harder.

Christian whimpered when they had to stop kissing to draw some much-needed air into their lungs.

"Oh, wow."

He flinched at Mila's voice. Right. She was there too.

Christian opened his eyes and looked into Alexander's, inches away from his own. Alexander's pupils were completely blown, and he was breathing as harshly as him. Their bodies were entwined so tightly there wasn't a hair's breadth between them. But Christian still wanted closer. More. Tighter.

"Fuck me," he whispered, looking Alexander in the eye.

Alexander's nostrils flared. "I've never fucked a guy."

Good, Christian nearly said. "Do you want to?" It seemed like a stupid question, considering that Alexander's erection was pressed against his thigh, but he knew it might be a big deal for Alexander: he was mostly straight, after all.

Alexander's eyes roamed over his face before he suddenly kissed Christian again.

"Yes," he said, abandoning Christian's swollen lips only to continue with his neck instead, trailing hot, urgent kisses down his throat and sucking hickies into his skin.

Christian panted, barely able to think. "There's lube in my jacket."

Alexander didn't move, still trailing his lips all over his neck, thumbs rubbing Christian's nipples, his belly.

"Alec," he tried again. "Lube."

"Yes." Alexander lifted his head and gave him a short, hard kiss.

Except the short kiss turned into a very long one and Christian ended up with his legs wrapped around Alexander's waist, their stomachs and erections pressed tightly against each other. They kissed like that; wet, open-mouthed kisses, tongues sliding in and out, for endless minutes. Christian pulled back with a groan, panting for air. "We'll never manage to fuck if we keep kissing. Come on. Lube. And a condom."

"Here," came a quiet voice.

Christian turned his head and looked at Mila. She was lying on her side, watching them. Her pretty face was flushed. She pushed the lube and a condom to him.

Christian told Alexander reluctantly, "Get off me. I need to prep. I can't do it with you on top."

Alexander took the lube from him. "I'll do it."

"You sure you know how? It's been a while for me, and it's gonna hurt like a bitch if you don't do it properly."

Alexander gave him a look. "Women have anal sex too, you know."
Right.

Alexander rolled off him.

His eyes swept over Christian's naked body, almost like a physical touch. "Spread your legs," he said, voice low and hoarse.

Christian did, and then Alexander was nudging his thighs apart and touching his hole with his long, slick fingers, massaging it. Christian bit his bottom lip, unsure if he should thrust up or down, and settled for writhing a bit frantically. He had to keep his teeth locked together to keep from begging for more. He was very sensitive down there. Too sensitive.

Slowly, one finger slid into him. It burned, just a little, and Christian clenched down around it, trying to intensify the burn. It felt good, and he wanted more. "Come on, I'm not made of china. I can take it."

Alexander's face was tense, his jaw clenched tightly. "No. When we start, I won't be gentle."

Christian shivered, closing his eyes. Within a couple of minutes, Alexander was fingering him hard and deep. He worked a second finger in beside the first, and this time there was some pain as the muscle stretched, but it only added to the sensation, made everything feel sharper and better. Christian bucked his hips back into Alexander's hand and his cock got harder at the press and pull on his insides, blunt fingers catching on the edge of his hole with each thrust of Alexander's hand. He could feel the pressure building in his balls as the fingers fucked into him, but it wasn't enough. He still felt hollow, empty.

"Another one?" Alexander said, voice incredibly low.

"Yeah," Christian gasped out, on the verge of begging.

Alexander added a third finger, and Christian couldn't form words anymore. It was just sensory input – cool sheets under him, Alexander's body heat against him, the scent of sweat and pre-come. The ridiculous way his ass felt, stuffed full of three thick fingers, hole already stretched and sore, and god, Alexander's fingers had nothing on the width of his cock. Christian's muscles clenched around the fingers, and Alexander's breath caught.

"All right, that's it," Alexander ground out.

The fingers slid out slowly, leaving Christian feeling empty and cold.

The sound of a condom wrapper opening turned him on in ways he couldn't describe.

Drawing a deep breath, Christian forced his eyes open. Alexander was there, flushed and tousled, eyes dark and wild—his composure gone—and then Christian felt the press of Alexander's erection against his slick, aching hole. Alexander slid his hands under Christian, lifting his hips.

The slow slide of Alexander's cock into him had Christian give up thinking and he could only moan, the sound coming from somewhere deep in his chest. He threw his head back, his hands fisted in the sheets so hard his fingers felt numb. He heard Alexander draw a shaky breath.

"Jesus," Alexander said, his voice cracking.

Another thrust, striking at his prostate, and Christian's eyes rolled back in his head. God. "Yeah, there."

Untangling his hands from the sheets, Christian wrapped his arms around Alexander's back, pulling him closer, tighter, and their lips met in another deep, hungry kiss. The sensation of his own erection trapped between their bodies, slick with sweat and pre-come, made him whimper.

Alexander quickened the pace, and Christian dug his nails into Alexander's back as his eyes closed, his mouth opening in the shape of an O. God, he felt perfect inside him, long and thick, stretching him to that fine line between pain and pleasure, every thrust driving Christian insane. He was moaning and begging for more and couldn't stop, and Alexander was no better, grunting and groaning on top of him as they moved together.

Before long, Alexander's self-control slipped completely, and he began to thrust with all of his strength.

"Oh god," Christian gasped as Alexander threw his head back, the pace nothing less than frantic. The bed was creaking under them, and the smell of sex filled the air. Christian knew his grip on Alexander was hard enough to bruise, but he couldn't let go, couldn't get close enough. He scrabbled at Alexander's shoulders and grunted, twisting his legs around Alexander's midsection. His hole was oversensitive and aching, and he just wanted more, more of him, at this perfect angle, quick and brutal, slamming into him, filling him up so good and so much—

Alexander pulled back to look down at him. Their dazed eyes met. A final thrust, hard and perfect, and a muscle along the side of Alexander's face twitched, his eyes going wide and unseeing. His stomach pushed against Christian's cock, hard, and Christian arched back as he came with a cry, his hands holding onto Alexander's shoulders so hard it was probably painful. He was saying something, but he had no idea of what he was saying. Alexander wasn't any better, panting out what sounded like "fuck" and possibly "god." The tremors coursed through Christian's body, and Alexander, slumped on top of him, was shaking as well.

"That was—I..." Christian managed, his voice unsteady.

Alexander grunted into his throat, breathing hard, his body heavy, and hot, and perfect. So fucking perfect.

Christian wasn't sure what made him turn his head, but something did. His dazed gaze fell on Mila.

She was staring at them with a very odd expression on her face.

But then she smiled, and Christian thought he had probably just imagined it.

"He's very good, isn't he?" she said with a sly grin.

Christian laughed breathlessly. "Yeah. Pretty good."

Alexander pulled out and rolled off Christian to lie beside him. He removed the condom, tied it, and tossed it into the trash can next to the bed. "Pretty good? Should I be offended?"

Christian turned his head and smiled at him, still giddy from pleasure. He had to literally bite his tongue to keep himself from saying something ridiculous like "It was the best sex of my life" or "Please fuck me again and never get out of me."

"Pretty good is pretty good, isn't it?" he said instead and blew him a kiss.

Alexander stared at him for a moment before suddenly gripping his throat, leaning in and fitting their mouths together.

Christian turned to him fully and closed his eyes, enjoying the delicious little shivers of pleasure coursing through him as they kissed slowly. He couldn't remember the last time he'd enjoyed the simple act of kissing this much.

A soft female body pressed against his back, and Christian tensed and opened his eyes.

"You had your fun, guys," Mila said lightly. "Now it's my turn."

Alexander stopped kissing him, and Christian squashed the surge of annoyance. It was ridiculous. Mila was right: they were supposed to be having a threesome, and so far they had neglected her.

"That's totally his fault," Christian said, turning to her and putting on a smile.

She smiled back and kissed him.

Christian closed his eyes and tried to get lost in the kiss, yet he felt nothing but a sense of obligation. Alexander's firm body pressed against his back, and a big hand stroked his stomach, heavy and perfect, and *that* made him gasp in pleasure. Alexander nibbled on his earlobe.

Yeah, Christian decided, feeling his cock start hardening again.

This would work.

Chapter 9

Christian yawned and rubbed his eyes.

It was pretty late; he should be going. He had Rutledge's exam next morning, so he couldn't really afford to waste time. Even Mila had left the bed an hour ago to go back to studying for the exam. Christian was pretty sure every other student in Rutledge's class was studying like crazy at the moment, not lounging in bed after hours of sex. Even Shawn seemed stressed as hell when Christian had called him earlier—it looked like Rutledge wasn't cutting him any slack because they were in a relationship.

"If I fail Rutledge's exam tomorrow, it will be your fault," Christian said.

Alexander opened his eyes.

They were sharing the pillow because Alexander was still lying half on top of him, their legs tangled. They both were sweaty and sticky after sex, but Christian didn't want to move. He felt too good to move.

"Mine?" Alexander said. "You weren't even supposed to come tonight. We didn't expect you."

Inwardly, Christian cringed a bit. He knew he really hadn't been supposed to come over, but in the past week, he'd become so accustomed to... certain things that he'd felt restless and couldn't focus on studying anyway. The moment Alexander had pushed inside of him, the restlessness had disappeared immediately.

It worried him that he was a total slut for the guy. Hell, he was practically gagging for him. It wouldn't do. It was downright stupid. He was just a temporary addition to Alexander and Mila's sex life, basically

nothing more than a sex toy. They could decide to end this little arrangement any day.

“You weren’t exactly unhappy,” Christian murmured, pushing the thoughts away. Alexander definitely hadn’t been unhappy to see him: he was all over him the moment Christian had entered the apartment. Mila did seem a bit unhappy, but it was understandable, considering that they had a brutal exam tomorrow. She was in a much better mood after Christian went down on her, and she left the bed with a smile on her face. Though, truth be told, it was a bit of a mystery to Christian how he had managed to make her come at all, considering he could barely focus on anything while Alexander fucked him.

“I wasn’t,” Alexander admitted.

Christian looked at him curiously. “Does it freak you out?”

“What?” Alexander moved down a little to lick Christian’s nipple.

“This,” Christian said. “Sex with a guy.”

He felt Alexander’s muscles stiffen ever so slightly before relaxing again. “We’ve been doing this for a week. Do I look like I’m freaking out?”

Christian shrugged. “You’re weird sometimes. Sometimes you look at me like you’re thinking: ‘What the hell I’m doing?’”

Alexander swiped his tongue over the nipple. It tickled. His nipples weren’t particularly sensitive, but Alexander seemed to have a weird fixation on them. Not that it was unpleasant or anything, but he would have preferred Alexander to suck and lick something else.

But he never did. They might have had sex numerous times, but Alexander never touched his cock. It wasn’t that Christian minded that Alexander didn’t want to blow him—he knew gay guys who didn’t like sucking dick, and Christian liked being fucked better anyway—but it did bother him a bit, for a different reason.

Christian said, “Do you imagine I’m a woman when you fuck me?”

Alexander’s eyes snapped up to him. “What?”

Christian raised his eyebrows with a smile. "Do you imagine I'm a woman?"

"It's a bit hard not to notice you don't have breasts and a pussy."

Christian laughed. "That's not what I meant. You never touch my dick. It's like you're scared of it. Or it grosses you out."

Alexander shifted his gaze to the dick in question. Christian grimaced, feeling his cock start to harden under Alexander's scrutiny. Seriously, what was it about this guy that turned him into a total nympho? Alexander didn't even have to try, for fuck's sake.

"I'm not scared of your dick," Alexander said, still looking at it. Christian's cock was fully hard now. Of course it was.

Alexander looked back at Christian's face. His eyes narrowed, but the corner of his mouth twitched up. "Why do I feel like we're still playing gay chicken?"

Christian grinned, took Alexander's hand and wrapped it around his erection. "Because we kind of are. You fuck me every day, but I'm pretty sure you don't consider yourself gay or even bi." When Alexander didn't say anything, Christian chuckled. "I'm right, huh? You think you're still straight; you just happen to like putting your dick in me. It doesn't make you gay, right?"

As usual, Alexander's face betrayed nothing, and Christian half-laughed and half-groaned in frustration. "You're doing that again."

"Doing what?"

"Putting on your poker face. I hate your poker face. You look at me and I have no idea what you're thinking. Like, you could be thinking that I'm annoying or that I'm adorable." Christian smiled. "What are you thinking about right now?"

Alexander looked at his smiling lips. His tone was completely casual as he said, "That I want to feed you my cock."

Christian's mouth went dry. He laughed. "You do realize you sound like a total creep, right? It's creepy when you say stuff like that with a blank

face.” His cock was totally on board with that plan, though, and Alexander knew it, since his hand was still wrapped around it.

Alexander didn’t say anything; he just scrambled up over Christian’s body and then fed him his cock, as promised. Christian moaned around the thick flesh in his mouth and glanced at the door. He wasn’t sure whether they should be doing this without Mila—whether it was okay to have sex again without inviting her—but with Alexander’s cock in his mouth he couldn’t think properly. Fuck that. When Mila had left the room to study, Alexander was still fucking him; she probably wouldn’t care if they had another round of sex without her.

Relaxing his jaw, Christian looked up and watched him as Alexander fucked his mouth. He loved watching this, loved watching Alexander’s calm mask slip and fall away. It went straight to his dick, that he was the one who made this man lose his self-control.

Tightening his lips around the cock, Christian moved his hand to his own cock and started jerking off, letting Alexander fuck his mouth and do whatever he wanted.

He could feel that the other man was close already, but Alexander suddenly stopped and pulled out.

“What?” Christian croaked out, licking his lips. They felt swollen.

Alexander stared down at him with a strange sort of hunger. “Let me come on you.”

Blinking, Christian felt his cheeks heat up. He normally always said no when guys asked that—being covered in someone’s jizz wasn’t his idea of fun—but fuck, the way Alexander was looking at him...

“Okay,” he whispered, squeezing his own cock.

Alexander’s nostrils flared. Kneeling over Christian’s face, he started pulling on his cock, watching Christian intently. And god, did it make him hot. Christian was panting, his hand flying over his own cock as he watched fixedly Alexander’s erection, waiting and wanting. His lips parted, his tongue swiping over his freshly chapped lips, desperate for a taste. He wanted it. Wanted Alexander’s come, wanted to stink of him—

He gasped as Alexander's cock erupted over him, hot stripes covering him from hair to chin, dripping down onto his neck, covering his open, panting mouth and waiting tongue.

Alexander rolled on top of him and kissed him greedily, and his hands were fucking *rubbing* his jizz into Christian's skin, and that was fucked up enough to push Christian over the edge, and he came, moaning into Alexander's mouth. Moaning his name.

The world was still, just their heavy breathing disrupting the silence.

And then Christian started laughing.

Alexander lifted himself on an elbow. "Something funny?"

Still chuckling, Christian grinned. "Nope. Nothing. Well, besides the fact that I just had a neat freak come all over me. I'm fucking gross, man—and you fucking enjoyed making me gross. *You*. Neat freak. Ha!"

"You're so childish," Alexander said, his lips curling into a reluctant smile. "Such a baby."

To prove his maturity, Christian grinned and stuck his tongue out at him.

Alexander shook his head before kissing him again.

Christian sighed and kissed back, wrapping his arms and legs around him.

Someone cleared their throat.

Christian stiffened, and Alexander rolled off him.

Mila stood in the doorway, her lips slightly pursed and arms crossed over her chest. "I thought you already left, Chris. Don't you need to study?"

Suddenly feeling uncomfortable and uncertain, Christian sat up and reached for his clothes. "Yeah, you're right. I'd better get going."

He stood up, turned away, and dressed as quickly as he could. He could feel Alexander's eyes on him, and he could feel Mila's, too.

“All right, good luck tomorrow,” he said, rather awkwardly, unsure why it was so damn awkward. They had been doing nothing wrong.

Mila smiled, but her smile didn’t seem particularly friendly. Or was it his imagination?

“You should wash your face before you go,” she said.

Christian froze and then flushed, meeting her eyes. He glanced at Alexander’s inscrutable face.

“Right,” he said, even more awkwardly, and went to the bathroom.

He closed the door and breathed, still weirded out.

What the hell was that?

Shaking his head, Christian walked to the sink and washed his face quickly.

Finished, he strode back to the door but stopped at the sound of voices.

“...I didn’t think you’d care,” Alexander said, his voice emotionless. “Why does it matter if you’re in the room or not?”

“I—I don’t know! But it does! You should have told me to come back if you were going to have sex again.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You were studying.”

“He’s supposed to be studying, too, instead of—”

Christian opened the door. “We really didn’t think it would upset you,” he said, walking to Mila. He wrapped an arm around her tense shoulders and smiled at her. “We’re sorry. It won’t happen again.” He wasn’t lying, but he tried to ignore the part of him that liked the word *we* a bit too much.

She relaxed. “I’m sorry, too. I probably overreacted.”

Christian squeezed her shoulder. “I get it. We’re all stressed because of the exams.”

Mila grimaced. "Yeah. I'm worried that Rutledge will fail me tomorrow."

"Aren't we all? Look on the bright side: he won't be teaching us anymore after tomorrow."

"If we don't have to retake the class," Mila muttered grimly.

"Fuck, now I'm panicking too." Christian looked at Alexander, who had finished dressing. "I'll go." He wasn't sure why he was telling this to Alexander.

Alexander nodded, a strange expression flashing across his features.

"Right," Christian said. He pecked Mila on the lips. "Good luck tomorrow."

She smiled, looking distracted already. "Thanks. You, too."

Christian turned to Alexander and hesitated. He had given Mila a goodbye kiss. He could do the same to Alexander, right? Just a peck.

Mila was frowning, deep in thought, and wasn't looking at them anymore, so Christian stepped to Alexander and brushed his lips against Alexander's. Just a peck.

Except their lips clung to each other, not wanting to let go.

Their lips clung to each other even as they slowly pulled apart.

"Bye," Christian murmured, feeling a bit too warm.

"Good luck on the exam," Alexander said, giving him a faint smile.

Christian grinned, nodded, and stepped back.

He was still smiling as he left the apartment.

Chapter 10

Mila Bursell wasn't stupid. Neither was she oblivious. People often thought she was just a dumb pretty girl and rarely took her seriously, but she didn't mind: it was even amusing.

So she hadn't missed the way Alexander looked at Christian—like he was the most delicious thing in the world and he would like to kiss him from head to toe—but Mila couldn't really blame her boyfriend. It was a pretty ordinary reaction to Christian Ashford, and she was no different in that regard. It would be terribly hypocritical of her to be angry about Alexander's attraction to Christian.

No, Alexander's attraction to the guy didn't bother her all that much; she had told Alexander the truth that she found watching them very hot. But the *strength* of that attraction did bother her. She didn't like the way they looked at each other during sex, and the way they acted during sex. Every time Mila tried to participate when Alexander fucked Christian, she was pushed away. Neither of them was rude and she wasn't even sure it was intentional—they simply seemed to forget she was even there, too focused on each other.

It wasn't an issue when they pleased her, though Mila was somewhat disturbed by the increasing number of times she had to insert herself between them to keep Alexander's attention on her. It was... worrying. Very worrying.

When she had suggested a threesome after finding out about Alexander's attraction to Christian, she didn't expect how strong his attraction was. She had expected that she would still be the focal point of the threesome. She, not Christian. In hindsight, she should have evaluated the situation better before making any rash suggestions, but she had been

too excited by the prospect of having sex with Christian again to really think things through.

She should have known. Alexander hated cheating more than anything, so the fact that he had kissed Christian without her prior knowledge should have set off the alarm bells in her head. But hindsight was twenty-twenty, and what was done was done.

Mila sighed. It had been two weeks since Christian had become a regular feature in their sex life, and Alexander's attraction to him didn't seem to be abating in the least.

After her request, they hadn't had sex again without her present, but sometimes Mila wondered if her presence even mattered.

I could as well not be here, she thought, not without bitterness, as she watched them have sex, and once again, she couldn't help but feel like the third wheel.

But still, she had to admit, it was incredibly hot.

Christian was a wreck, his mouth swollen and red and wet, eyes wide and pupils blown, cheekbones flushed. His hair, dark with sweat, was a mess. She could understand why Alexander was staring at him the way he did; and she could understand why he was fucking him the way he did, his thrusts uncontrolled and powerful enough to rock them both forward under the sheer drive of his lust. Sometimes Mila had the ridiculous thought that if she had a dick, she would want to fuck Christian, too. Not that she didn't want to fuck him now—of course she did—but there was a certain... appeal about Christian that she was sure men appreciated. He was fuckable.

At least Alexander certainly seemed to think so, his expression nearly feral as he watched Christian under him. It made her aching wet—and worried, and jealous. He never looked at her that way when he fucked *her*. He was always in control of himself and his facial expressions. Always.

But not with Christian.

Fear surged inside her, and Mila moved closer to the men. She put her hand on Alexander's wide, strong back and stroked it, but he didn't even seem to notice, his eyes focused only on Christian.

She removed her hand and clenched it.

It's just sex, she told herself. Just sex. Alexander loved her; she was sure of that. He might be physically attracted to Christian, but he loved her, Mila. Christian was the one who left every evening; she was the one who stayed and shared Alexander's bed.

Alexander would never cheat on her or leave her—especially for a man. It was something she was absolutely sure of. Mila didn't know the whole story, but she knew that Alexander's father was a lying, cheating asshole who had broken his mother's heart by constantly cheating on her with men. Alexander despised his father and everything he stood for. Alexander was loyal to a fault.

She had nothing to worry about. Nothing. In a few weeks at most, Christian Ashford would be gone from their lives, and Alexander would be only hers again.

Sometimes Mila wondered if she should end this arrangement herself, but she had a feeling that would be a mistake. It was better for Alexander to get bored of Christian, or vice versa. Christian was bound to get bored soon anyway. After all, everyone knew Christian was a player.

She had nothing to worry about.

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Chapter 11

Christian dressed slowly, his hair still wet after the shower, his muscles aching pleasantly after sex.

Alexander and Mila were no longer in the bedroom.

He glanced at his phone to check the time. It wasn't late; no wonder they weren't going to bed yet. Now that finals were over, Mila could stay up as late as she pleased, and Alexander's work hours were irregular anyway.

Christian slid the phone back into his pocket, put on his shoes, and left the bedroom. He could hear voices coming from the living room.

Christian went still in the doorway.

Alexander and Mila were decorating the Christmas tree, or rather, Mila was decorating it while Alexander watched, looking vaguely amused. They were talking quietly; Mila was grinning and rolling her eyes. Alexander looked relaxed and comfy in his soft-looking gray sweater and sweatpants.

"I'm sure I've seen it somewhere," Mila said, digging through the boxes. "Found it!" She took a star out of its packaging, holding it up for inspection. Under the light, it glittered prettily and threw little shards of golden light on the floor and her hands. It was perfect.

They were perfect. Such a perfect couple.

"I'm putting it on the tree!" Mila declared, hopping to her feet. "Lift me up?"

"You can use the stool," Alexander said dryly.

Mila pouted. "Alexander!"

Sighing, Alexander walked over and held her up so that she could put the star on the top of the tree.

Mila placed the star before sliding down Alexander's body and kissing him, her arms around his neck.

Christian watched them kiss. There was a cold feeling in the pit of his stomach, one that churned and wrenched through him. He felt nauseous.

He cleared his throat and entered the room, putting on a bright smile. "All right, I've gotta go." Not that they looked like they remembered he was still there.

The couple stopped kissing and turned to him.

Mila smiled, leaning her cheek against Alexander's chest and wrapping her arms around his waist. Her body language reeked of possessiveness. "Are you spending Christmas here? I mean in the city," she added quickly, as though afraid Christian would mistake it for an invitation.

Christian smiled tightly. He was neither stupid nor blind. He had noticed that Mila had started disliking him. He wondered why she hadn't told him anything yet.

"Yeah, I don't really have anywhere else to go. My parents are in Iceland, studying volcanoes, so it's just Grandma and me."

Mila nodded. "We won't see you again for a while, so Merry Christmas!"

Christian nearly laughed. It was as subtle as a punch in the mouth. "Yeah," he said, shrugging into his jacket. "Merry Christmas to you, too."

He almost reached the door when Alexander said, "Don't go."

Christian stopped. "What?"

"You can't go outside."

"Why not?"

Alexander untangled himself from Mila and walked to him.

“Your hair is wet,” he said, running his hand through Christian’s hair. His fingers brushed Christian’s ear. “It’s freezing outside.”

Christian swallowed, meeting his dark blue eyes. Over Alexander’s shoulder, he could see that Mila was frowning.

“I never get sick,” Christian said. He smiled, very brightly. “I really gotta go. Have a date with Skyrim tonight. Want to kick that dragon’s ass.”

Alexander snorted. “Skyrim is lame,” he said before walking a bit away to a cupboard and pulling out a towel. “The story is weak, and there are no meaningful choices in the game. Try Planescape: Torment if you want to play a real RPG.”

He returned to Christian and started drying his hair with the towel, looking cool and efficient. Like there was nothing strange about it. Like it was a perfectly normal thing to do.

Christian stared at him.

Okay. He knew Alexander could be a very considerate guy when he wanted to be—Christian had seen him in “Perfect Boyfriend” mode too many times to count, and it always annoyed him—but this... Christian had to admit it felt... nice when he was on the receiving end of his attention. More than nice.

“Shut it, you hater,” Christian said with a forced chuckle, trying to act like this wasn’t making him feel weird at all. “I don’t play Skyrim for the story. I play it because it’s pretty and fun, and I can go anywhere I want! Besides, it has some really cool mods.” He wiggled his eyebrows. “Like Animated Prostitution. You can have sex with anyone!”

Alexander snorted. “Why am I not surprised,” he murmured, his strong fingers massaging his scalp as he continued drying Christian’s hair.

Christian tried not to lean into the touch; really, he tried. “I didn’t know you played videogames. You don’t seem the type.”

“Why?”

Christian shrugged. “I don’t know. You always seem so... mature and serious.”

“You don’t have to be immature and over-emotional to enjoy a good videogame.” Alexander’s voice was even, but his eyes glimmered with amusement.

Christian laughed a little. “Yeah, make fun of me.” He went still when Alexander’s fingers brushed his temple.

“It’s dry enough now,” Alexander said, his voice low.

“Yeah,” Christian said, rocking slightly on his feet. His lips parted. He wet them as their gazes locked.

Alexander’s fingers were still in his hair.

“Honey, can you help me with this ornament?”

Alexander didn’t move, still looking at him.

“Alexander?”

Something flickered in Alexander’s eyes. “Yes,” he said.

But he didn’t step away from Christian.

Christian looked over his shoulder at Mila. She had her lips pursed tightly.

When their eyes met, she glared at him.

“Right,” Christian said, turning to the door. “See you.”

Alexander’s hand grabbed his arm.

Christian inhaled shakily, his heart thudding in his throat. “What?” he said, without turning around.

Alexander’s warm breath brushed against his ear. “Merry Christmas.”

Christian exhaled and whispered, “Merry Christmas.”

The hand on his arm lingered for a moment before it was gone. Christian open the door and left. As he always did.

It was dark outside.

It was snowing; soft dreamy flakes of snow whirled and spiraled down to the ground. Bright red and green lights twinkled along the windows and doors of stores while the streets were covered in a carpet of white. It was beautiful. Like something from a fairy tale.

Christian shoved his hands into his pockets and walked. The snow crunched under his feet and soaked into his shoes.

He felt cold to his bones.

“Merry Christmas,” he whispered and laughed, the sound sharp and brittle.

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Chapter 12

Christian had seen some unlikely couples before, but nothing had ever come close to the affair between his best friend and Professor Rutledge. Except it wasn't even an affair anymore: Shawn had actually moved in with Rutledge, which was mind-boggling on so many levels Christian still had trouble believing it.

"Ashford," Rutledge greeted him, opening the door.

"Professor," Christian said awkwardly and entered the house. The man might be his best friend's lover, but there was no way in hell he could call Rutledge by his first name.

"Shawn is there," Rutledge gestured to the door to his left before giving Christian a hard look. "I'm working, so do not disturb me. Keep your voice down."

"Yes, sir," Christian said. What was it about this man that made him feel like he was three inches tall?

The door opened and Shawn's head emerged. "Are you bullying Christian again?" he said with an eye-roll.

Rutledge raised an eyebrow. "Me? Bullying?"

Giving him a long-suffering look, Shawn walked to Rutledge and kissed him. "Go work on your book while you still can. Don't forget that you promised Bee and Emily you'd take them shopping. They're super excited—they've wanted a puppy for ages."

"Yes, black and fluffy," Rutledge said with a pinched expression on his face.

Shawn grinned. “And with a white star on its forehead! That’s very important for Emily.”

Rutledge gave him a glare. “What if there’s no such puppy?”

“I’m sure you can bully people into finding you one,” Shawn said. “Go work before they wake up.”

Shaking his head and looking moderately irritated, Rutledge kissed Shawn on the lips and headed upstairs, presumably to his office.

“This is seriously creeping me out, man,” Christian said, blinking.

Shawn snorted and led him into the room. “Sometimes it still weirds me out, too.” He flopped down onto the couch and smiled widely. “But I’ve never been so happy.”

Christian looked around the elegant room. “I bet it doesn’t hurt that he’s loaded, huh?”

Shawn just laughed, shaking his head. “So,” he said, turning the TV off. “What’s up with you lately?” He looked at Christian intently, his blue eyes serious. Those were some beautiful eyes, but they were light blue, not at all like—

Christian cringed. This was getting ridiculous.

“I mean, I’ve been a shitty friend lately,” Shawn said with a sheepish look. “Things have been crazy, and Derek practically took over my life. I know it’s a bad excuse, but—”

“Don’t sweat it,” Christian said, sinking into a comfy-looking armchair.

“So, what’s up?” Shawn asked. “You’ve been kind of weird for a while.”

Christian rubbed the corner of his left eye. “Remember the threesome I had with Mila and her boyfriend?”

Shawn nodded, but he was frowning. “Wasn’t it a month ago?”

“Yeah,” Christian said. “The thing is, it wasn’t the only time it happened. Basically, it’s been going on for a month—well, until Christmas.”

Shawn’s eyes widened slightly. “For so long? But you usually don’t...”

“No, I usually don’t,” Christian said quietly.

There was a long silence, during which Christian found three screws on the ceiling and one small stain on the wall that might have been a bug at one time, though he couldn’t imagine Rutledge smashing a bug.

“Are you in a relationship with them?” Shawn said, his voice slow and confused.

The laugh that left Christian’s throat was a bit strained. “No. They’re a couple, and I’m their fuck-toy. That’s it.”

“You aren’t telling me something. I know you, Chris.”

Christian looked at his hands.

“I don’t want a threesome,” he whispered.

“You mean...” Shawn sounded shocked.

“Yeah. I’m fucking jealous. And I hate it. It’s driving me nuts.”

“Jealous of whom? Him... or her?”

“Her,” Christian said, his voice flat. “I hate watching her touch him, and kiss him—and fuck him.” Christian chuckled. “I know; it’s ridiculous. She has every right to touch him—she’s been his girlfriend for two years. I’m nothing to him. But...”

“Are you in love with him?”

Christian licked his lips. “I—I don’t know.” He smiled humorlessly. “If this is love, it fucking sucks. I always thought love was supposed to make people happy. I’ve never felt so shitty. It’s not even just sex. I hate it when I see them together, when I watch them be all couple-y and cute. She

can touch him whenever she wants. She holds his hand. She spends nights with him—she lives with him.”

He met Shawn’s eyes. “I’m starting to hate her, you know. She doesn’t deserve it. She’s a fun, nice girl. I used to like her. And now I kinda want to claw her eyes out, stomp my foot like a kid and shout ‘Mine!’ every time she touches him. And I’m sure she already knows I want more of him. She wants me gone. I know that.” Chris snorted. “And I can’t say I blame her.” He sighed heavily, running a hand over his face. “It’s driving me nuts. And it’s... it’s fucking stupid. I barely know him. I don’t understand him. But it’s like... I can’t separate sex from emotion, you know? I always could before, but with him, I just can’t. I want to *please* him. Want him to like me. It’s fucking ridiculous.”

Shawn was silent for a while before asking quietly, “What about him? Do you think it’s one-sided?”

Slumping back in the armchair, Christian sighed again. “I don’t know. He’s very hard to read. Sometimes I think there’s something there, but... but I don’t think he treats his girlfriend any differently. He’s always so... attentive to her. Still the perfect boyfriend.”

Shawn’s mouth set in a grim line. “Don’t shoot the messenger, but... if he felt the same way you do, wouldn’t he be jealous of her, too? Their relationship would have deteriorated. If they’re still fine, it... it doesn’t really look good for you.”

Christian’s stomach churned. He knew Shawn was right. The same thought had occurred to him, too. “I know.”

They both fell silent.

“What are you going to do?” Shawn said at last.

Christian bit the inside of his cheek.

“The smart thing,” he said, meeting Shawn’s eyes. “Quit while I still can.”

Chapter 13

Alexander felt restless.

He couldn't remember the last time he had felt so restless. Mila was snuggled up into his side, watching TV, but he was half-tempted to push her away and—and do something else.

Outside, the wind was howling fitfully down the street, drowning the distant roar of traffic.

Alexander stretched his arm over the back of the couch and drummed his fingers on the upholstery.

"What's wrong with you?" Mila said, turning her head to him.

"I'm bored," he said. It was as good an explanation as any. Perhaps he was bored. He'd never been a fan of the holiday season.

"Maybe I can entertain you?" she murmured with a smile, her fingers sliding to his crotch.

Alexander considered it. Sex was a good idea. Maybe it was exactly what he needed to get rid of this strange restlessness.

"All right," he said. "Suck me off."

He leaned back as Mila slid onto the floor in front of him.

Alexander closed his eyes.

She was good at giving head, but today it took him a while to get hard. He had trouble shutting his brain off, and even when he finally came, it was barely satisfying.

His restlessness was still there.

“Thanks,” he told Mila, zipping his jeans up.

She gave him an odd look but said nothing, snuggling into his side again.

Alexander fixed his gaze on the screen and drummed his fingers on the back of the couch.

Mila sighed.

After what felt like a century, the doorbell rang.

Relieved to have an excuse to leave the couch, Alexander went to open the door.

Chocolate brown eyes and full lips were the first things he saw.

“Hey,” Christian said.

“Hello,” Alexander heard himself say. He grabbed Christian’s jacket and dragged him inside.

Christian’s lips were very cold, but his mouth was hot and wet—and sweet. Christian made a small noise, wrapping his arms around him, and Alexander groaned and pushed him against the wall, his hands working on Christian’s jacket—too many clothes—

“Christian?”

Mila.

Sighing, Alexander forced himself to stop kissing Christian and step back.

“Hey,” Christian said, looking between them. Alexander didn’t see Mila’s expression, because he was looking at Christian, but Christian looked uncomfortable all of a sudden.

“You’re back already?” Mila said mildly.

Christian’s body stiffened even more. “Sorry—I didn’t mean to intrude. Just wanted to tell you guys that... I think... It’s been a while, and it’s been fun, but...” He smiled crookedly. “It was getting boring. You know I’m not really the type to stick around.”

Alexander went still.

Beaming, Mila walked closer. “Oh, I get it, no worries! I was wondering when you’d get bored of us.” She wrapped her arm around Alexander’s waist and kissed him on the shoulder. “We must be proud, love. We managed to keep Chris around for a whole month.”

Christian smiled faintly and pushed his hands into his pockets. “I guess I’ll see you around.”

And then he was gone.

Alexander stood very still, the room eerily quiet. Darker.

The wind howled outside, rattling the window panes, and he flinched. He found Mila watching him.

“What?” he said.

“Nothing,” she replied before smiling. “What do you want for dinner?”

“I’m not hungry,” he said, turning away.

Chapter 14

“Stop staring at them, man. You’re being too obvious.”

Christian turned away quickly and looked at Shawn. “I wasn’t staring.”

He wasn’t sure what was worse: the obvious, badly hidden pity in Shawn’s eyes or the way his pulse sped up the moment he had seen Alexander.

It had been two weeks.

Pasting a smile on his face, Christian leaned back against the bench they were sitting on, looking anywhere but at Mila and Alexander. “They seem pretty happy, yeah?”

Shawn shrugged, casting a look in their direction. “I don’t know. She’s smiling, but his face is mostly blank.”

Christian chuckled. “Means nothing. He’s got the best poker face I’ve ever seen. If he doesn’t want you to know what he feels or thinks, it’s incredibly hard to guess. Though sometimes he slips up.”

Shawn’s pitying look worsened, and it set Christian’s teeth on edge. He was *fine*, damn it. So he had gotten a bit attached, so what? He wasn’t heartbroken or anything.

“Are they gone already?” he asked a moment later.

Shawn glanced at them again. “Nope.” An amused smile lit his face. “Derek just walked over to them. Mila failed his class, you know. She has to retake it, and Derek hates it when he has to waste his time on students who already failed once. The poor girl looks terrified.”

Christian turned his head.

Sure enough, Professor Rutledge was looming over Mila, a scowl on his face as he berated her for something. Mila was nodding so quickly one might think that her head would fall off if she didn't stop. Christian would have smiled if his gaze wasn't helplessly drawn to Alexander again.

Alexander was watching the exchange between Mila and Rutledge with an indifferent expression on his face, his hands in the pockets of his gray coat. His coat was unbuttoned, and the blue shirt tucked in at his flat stomach was an almost perfect match for his eyes.

"You're staring again," Shawn said, elbowing him, and Christian averted his gaze. Shawn chuckled. "Not that I blame you. He's ridiculously handsome. Though, personally, Derek is much hotter."

Christian gave him an incredulous look.

"He is," Shawn said, smiling. "He's got that 'tall, dark, and scary' thing going on."

Christian snorted. "Scary? Definitely. Serious question: does he criticize you during sex too?" Christian did his best to imitate Rutledge's voice, "Your performance is subpar, Wyatt. Make an effort to squeeze your muscles around my—"

Laughing, Shawn pulled him into a playful headlock.

Someone cleared their throat pointedly.

His neck still wrapped in Shawn's arm, Christian looked up. His grin disappeared as Alexander's eyes met his.

They were cold as ice.

Shawn released him, and they both straightened up.

"Hey," Christian said, trying to sound casual and indifferent. He wasn't sure how successful he was.

"Hello," Alexander said, his face blank. His eyes flickered to Shawn. "You won't introduce me to... your friend?"

“Sure. This is Shawn Wyatt. Shawn, this is Alexander Sheldon.”

“Nice to meet you,” Shawn said, reaching out to shake Alexander’s hand.

Christian looked around. “Where’s Mila?”

“She went with Professor Rutledge to get her assignment.”

“Ah,” Christian said, lacing his fingers together in an attempt to keep his hands still.

Alexander had a very odd expression on his face: tight, almost pained.

The silence stretched, becoming awkward.

But Alexander didn’t move, his hands in his pockets, his shoulders straight and his gaze on Christian.

Shawn coughed. “So where do you work, Alexander?”

Alexander glanced at Shawn. “I own a small company that provides translation and linguistic validation services.”

“Sounds interesting,” Shawn muttered.

Alexander’s gaze returned to Christian.

Several minutes passed in silence, Alexander’s eyes filled with something Christian couldn’t put his finger on.

It was the most awkward silence of awkward silences, and Christian scrambled to think of something to say. He tried, but couldn’t.

His lips parted slightly and he took a greedy gulp of air.

Alexander’s lips pressed together. “See you,” he said stiffly and strode away.

“Well, that was weird,” Christian said, slumping back in his seat.

Shawn had a strange look on his face. “Okay, my experience with men is very limited, so I might be totally wrong, but he looked at you like he...”

“Like what?”

Shawn appeared a bit uncomfortable. “Like he wanted to lick you from head to toe.”

Christian groaned. “Don’t say stuff like that to me. I’m just getting over him.”

The look Shawn gave him was skeptical—annoyingly so.

“I am!” Christian said. He pursed his lips. “Besides, even if you’re right, it doesn’t change a thing.”

He looked towards the parking lot where Mila was climbing into Alexander’s car. “He has a girlfriend,” he said flatly, watching the car pull away. “He won’t leave her.”

Shawn slung an arm around him and squeezed his shoulder. “Fuck him, then. He’s just a guy—okay, a very hot guy, but just a guy. Look around. Half of the school wants you. You can have any of them.”

Christian forced a smile. “Yeah. You’re right.” Rutledge was walking towards them. “I know I’m irresistible and all, but you’d better stop feeling me up before your hubby kills me.”

Shawn laughed. “Derek’s not my husband.”

“Come on. He pretty much is.”

Rutledge came to a halt in front of them and regarded them with a raised eyebrow.

Grinning, Shawn leaned even closer to Christian and winked at Rutledge.

“He’s like a brother to me,” Christian said, just in case.

Rutledge looked at Shawn flatly. “If you’re done trying to make me jealous, let’s go. The new babysitter is supposed to arrive in an hour. We don’t have much time to get home.”

“Not your husband, huh?” Christian murmured as Shawn stood up.

Shawn gave him a sheepish look and followed Rutledge to his car.

Christian watched them go. They didn't touch—they were in public, after all, and relationships between professors and students were frowned upon—but their body language betrayed them. The way they leaned towards each other, the way Shawn smiled at Rutledge, the expression in Rutledge's eyes... Only a blind person wouldn't see that they were totally crazy about each other.

Looking away, Christian wrapped his jacket tighter around himself and stroked his arms, trying in vain to shake off the cold feeling.

It was freezing today.

* * *

"You look tense," Mila said as they pulled away from the parking lot.

Alexander said nothing, focused on driving.

Mila chewed on her lip, studying him from the corner of her eye. She was worried. She had thought that once Christian stopped coming, everything would go back to normal. And it *seemed* like it had, but something was off; she could feel it.

Alexander had been behaving more or less normal. The problem was, she wasn't sure how much of it, if any, was acting. Alexander could hide what he was thinking almost effortlessly.

Yet he couldn't hide the tension in his muscles and the way his fingers were clenching the steering wheel.

Mila hesitated before asking casually, "I saw Christian out there. Did you say hello?"

“Yes.”

She didn’t like the answer, but she supposed it would have been stranger if Alexander had ignored Christian.

“Did he introduce you to Shawn?”

“Yes.”

“Shawn’s very handsome, isn’t he? There’s a rumor they’re fucking.” Mila bit her tongue. She wasn’t in the habit of lying, but she wanted emotion, wanted a reaction from him. She wanted to know.

She got nothing. Not a single muscle moved on Alexander’s face. In fact, his face was unnaturally still.

“Why should I care?” he said in a very pleasant, reasonable voice.

A wave of unease washed over her.

She forced out a laugh. “Just saying, is all. Not that I would be surprised if it’s true—he’s a bit of a manwhore. He’s easy.”

“I thought you considered him a friend.” Alexander’s tone remained pleasant and calm as he turned the car swiftly. “That’s not a very nice thing to say about a friend.”

“Being friendly and being friends is not the same.”

He said nothing.

A chill went through her.

She stretched her hand out and took his, entwining their fingers.

Alexander didn’t squeeze back, but he didn’t pull his hand away, either.

Mila breathed out and relaxed.

They were fine. Nothing had changed. Alexander was as lovely to her as ever. She had nothing to worry about.

Yet, no matter what she told herself, a ball of worry was buried in her stomach, weighing her down and making her feel sick.

She wished she could turn back time and stop herself from approaching Christian Ashford.

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Chapter 15

Christian had just gotten out of the shower and put on a pair of shorts when his grandmother knocked on his door.

“Are you decent, dear? You have a visitor.”

Wondering who it could be, he opened the door.

Alexander stood beside his grandma.

Christian blinked, feeling lost. What was Alexander doing here?

“Hey,” he said, meeting Alexander’s eyes.

Alexander tugged at his collar and cleared his throat. “I was in the neighborhood,” he said, rather stiffly.

Christian blinked, glanced away and nodded. “Come on in.” He stepped aside, letting Alexander enter the room.

His grandma gave him a questioning look, but Christian shook his head: no, Alexander wasn’t his boyfriend.

“Your coat, young man,” his grandma said.

Alexander removed his coat and gave it to her.

Christian closed the door. “Sorry about the mess. I know you hate it.” In his defense, it was the room of an average college student.

Alexander looked around. “I expected worse.”

“Should I be offended?”

Alexander returned his gaze to him, and suddenly, Christian became acutely aware that he was wearing only a pair of shorts. And he was wet.

Christian grabbed a clean shirt and put it on quickly.

“I didn’t know you lived with your grandmother.”

“I’m a bit tight on money at the moment, so living here makes sense. Grandma doesn’t mind. I think she’s lonely.”

Silence fell in the room as they looked at each other.

Christian shifted from one foot to the other, rubbing the back of his neck. “You can sit down?”

Alexander’s lips twitched. “Is that a question?”

Christian grinned sheepishly. “Maybe.”

Alexander stared at him for a few moments before clearing his throat. “I have two hours to kill until I have to pick up Mila. Entertain me.”

Christian laughed. “Do you ever work?” he said, flopping down on the couch and grabbing the TV remote.

“Sometimes,” Alexander said, mock-serious. “If I’m in the mood.”

Christian found himself smiling as he switched on the TV. It still surprised him a bit that Alexander wasn’t a compulsive workaholic and perfectionist. He seemed the type, but he actually wasn’t. It looked like he strove for perfection only in his personal life. “I think I have some lame action flicks. They’re so bad they’re hilarious. Come on, sit down.”

He realized too late the only place to sit besides the bed was the spot on the couch next to him.

Alexander hesitated before sitting as far from him as possible, which wasn’t very far: the couch was pretty small.

Licking his lips, Christian looked at the TV as the movie started.

“Hope I don’t bore you too much,” Alexander murmured.

Frowning, Christian studied him. Alexander’s face was expressionless, his eyes on the TV screen. “Why would you bore me?”

“You said you got bored. That’s why you ditched m—us.”

Christian bit his lip. "It's different. It was sex. This... isn't sex." It definitely wasn't.

Alexander chuckled. "Just what every man wants to hear: that he bores someone only in bed."

Christian caught his arm. "You know I didn't mean it that way."

He felt the muscles under his hand flex.

Alexander looked down at Christian's fingers around his bicep before slowly looking up.

Christian flushed and let go, clenching his hand and putting it in his lap. "You know I was far from bored." He tensed, half-expecting Alexander to ask why he had quit if he hadn't been really bored, but Alexander didn't ask.

Christian breathed out.

They watched the movie in silence for a while, though Christian wouldn't have been able to tell what the movie was about even if his life depended on it. There was a lot of shouting and shooting, but he barely registered it.

Christian had never been so acutely aware of his own body. He could feel every breath: Alexander's even breathing and his own, irregular and a bit too loud. He could feel every inch that separated their bodies, his skin prickling and aching for Alexander's touch.

On the screen, people were having sex, and Christian fidgeted a bit. He didn't look at Alexander, but he was sure he wasn't just imagining the sudden awkwardness in the air. The tension, thick and taut.

He has a girlfriend, Christian repeated to himself like a mantra. Girlfriend. Girlfriend. Girlfriend.

He nearly flinched when he felt a touch on his bare arm. Alexander's fingers stroked the side of his hand, brushing Christian's wrist.

Christian turned his head and found Alexander watching the movie, as though he wasn't even aware what his hand was doing. Maybe he wasn't.

The sex scene ended, but Alexander's fingers were still touching his arm. Stroking. Kneading gently.

Christian panted, his gaze becoming unfocused, his nerves lighting up, and his skin burning where Alexander touched it.

"Alec," he bit out at last.

"What?"

"Your hand."

The fingers stopped.

Alexander looked down, pressed his lips into a thin line and removed his hand. "Sorry," he said, his voice clipped. "I didn't do it on purpose."

"It's not a big deal," Christian lied. "Shawn and I touch each other all the time."

"Shawn," Alexander repeated. "Is he just a friend?"

"What?"

Alexander's face was expressionless, but his eyes were fixed on him intently. "Do you sleep with him?"

Christian gave a short laugh. "No! He's like a brother to me. Besides, he's in a relationship, and even if he wasn't, he's not my type." Where the hell had Alexander gotten the idea about him and Shawn?

Alexander's lashes lowered, hiding his expression. When he looked up again, his eyes were unreadable. "How many people have you slept with in the last few weeks?"

Christian's breath caught in his throat.

He cocked his head. "Why do you care?"

Silence.

Alexander said at last, "I don't like that people think you're easy."

Oh.

Christian looked back at the TV. “It’s none of your business how many people I’ve fucked after you.” He knew he sounded pissed off and disappointed, but he couldn’t do anything about it; he’d never been that good at hiding his emotions. “I’m not going to apologize for being ‘easy.’”

He felt Alexander look at his profile. “I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“Then what the fuck did you mean?” Christian glared at him. “What are you even doing here, Alec? And don’t feed me that bullshit about being in the neighborhood. Why are you here?”

Alexander’s throat moved. He looked away, his jaw clenched.

“I don’t know,” he said tersely.

The raw honesty in his voice almost made Christian’s heart leap out of his chest.

“You don’t know?” If Alexander didn’t know what he was doing here—if this was a spur-of-the moment visit—it was huge. Alexander Sheldon always planned and rationalized his actions. Always. That much Christian knew.

Alexander stood up. “It was a mistake. I shouldn’t have come here.” A muscle pulsed in his cheek. “Goodbye, Christian.” There was finality in his voice, and Christian panicked and grabbed his hand.

Alexander flinched.

“Don’t go,” Christian said, squeezing his fingers. “We can be—we can be friends.” Inwardly, he was cringing, because this was a fucking terrible idea. Being friends with Alexander would be hell. But there was a part of him that was ready to be whatever Alec wanted them to be—the stupid, smitten part.

“Friends,” Alexander repeated, as though the word was unfamiliar to him.

Christian nodded, holding his gaze. “Yeah. Just hang out, you know?”

Alexander stared at him.

Christian could literally feel the conflict in Alexander: his grip on Christian's hand kept loosening and tightening.

Remembering that people seemed to like his smile, Christian smiled and said softly, "Friends?"

"Friends," Alexander said.

"Okay," Christian said, not sure whether he was elated or disappointed. "Friends, then."

Nodding, Alexander took his seat again, but closer to Christian this time. He freed his hand from Christian's fingers and stretched his arm over the back of the couch, behind Christian. He was warm, and big, and comfy—and so close that Christian could smell his aftershave. Feel his heat.

Christian took a shaky breath. God, he wanted him. He wanted to put his head on Alexander's shoulder. He wanted to wrap his arm around his waist. He wanted to straddle his body and ride him. And all of it was going at a thousand miles an hour through his head, making him dizzy with need.

Friends? At this rate, he would go mad by the end of the week.

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Chapter 16

By the end of the week, Christian had developed a case of blue balls.

By the end of the week after that, he was also annoyed as hell and stupidly, ridiculously smitten.

Alexander was a very attentive “friend.” He came to Christian’s place every day, usually right after Christian returned from school. He somehow knew Christian’s schedule, but that didn’t exactly surprise him: Alexander’s memory was freakishly good and he noticed everything.

Well, everything except for the fact that their “friendship” was weird as hell. He touched Christian all the freaking time. A touch on the neck or on the shoulder, an arm around his waist, a nose nuzzling the side of his face. Not to mention the *staring*. It drove Christian crazy.

The worst part was, Christian was pretty sure Alexander didn’t even notice how weird he was behaving.

But other people did.

Shawn was staring at them oddly, and no wonder.

Christian took a deep breath, trying to ignore Alec’s hand on his neck.

“Sure,” Alexander told Shawn. “If you want to ascertain that your sisters’ babysitter really speaks fluent Italian and Chinese, send her to my office.”

Shawn was still looking at Alexander’s hand around Christian’s neck. “It’s not that I care,” he said slowly, tearing his eyes away and shooting a what-the-fuck look to Christian, who gave him a helpless look in response. “But my partner finds her recommendations a little suspicious.” He shrugged, smiling crookedly. “Personally, I think he’s just paranoid, but we

haven't had much luck with babysitters for the twins, so he's a bit overprotective."

"Send her over," Alexander said, the tips of his fingers stroking the side of Christian's neck.

Christian hoped his shivers weren't obvious. "Yeah, do it," he told Shawn with a slightly forced laugh. "Maybe that would make this guy stay in his office for a few hours."

Alexander looked at him, a hint of amusement in his eyes. "My business can run smoothly without my full-time supervision. If the manager needs to be present at all times, it means he didn't hire the right people in the first place and didn't create efficient systems for them to follow. I did."

"Smugness isn't attractive," Christian said, smiling at him. Though who was he kidding? Alexander's self-assurance was kind of hot.

Alexander's cell phone rang. He answered the phone with his free hand, the other still wrapped around Christian's neck.

Christian gritted his teeth. This was getting ridiculous.

"I can't hear you." Alexander let go of Christian's neck and made his way to the empty classroom nearby where it wasn't as noisy.

"What the hell?" Shawn said as soon as Alexander was out of earshot.

"Tell me about it." Christian sighed. "He's driving me crazy with this. He says we're friends and then gropes me all the time."

"Did you discuss it with him?"

Averting his gaze, Christian raked a hand through his hair. "I..."

"You're scared," Shawn said, a note of surprise in his voice.

"I'm not," Christian grumbled. Yes, he was scared, and he hated it. He was scared to freak Alexander out if he confronted him. He was scared Alexander would stop coming, that he would stop touching him. No matter how frustrating all the touching was, deep down, he was a little addicted to it already. Or more than a little.

Damn it.

He caught Shawn looking at him oddly. “What?”

“Nothing. Just...” Shawn was eyeing him, thoughtful. “You’ve changed—I don’t mean it in a bad way, though. You just used to be all cocky and overconfident. You’ve got it bad, huh? You’re almost shy around him now.”

“I’m not!” Christian protested. He wasn’t shy. He was never shy.

“Just...” Shawn’s face was grim. “Just be careful, okay? He has a girlfriend. He might be a bit confused now, but he has a girlfriend. Don’t let him dick you around.”

Christian swallowed. “I know. I won’t.”

Alexander walked back to them, sliding his cell phone into his pocket. “Mila told me not to wait for her.” He looked at Christian. “You need a ride?”

Christian thought about Shawn’s warning.

Then he thought about spending the evening with Alexander.

He said, “Yeah.”

He ignored the disapproving, worried look on Shawn’s face. Fuck it, maybe it was pathetic and stupid, maybe it wouldn’t end well, but he couldn’t deny himself this.

Slipping into his jacket, Christian followed Alexander outside.

It was very cold, but he didn’t feel it.

Alexander looked back at him.

“What?” Christian said with a smile, feeling snowflakes melt on his flushed skin.

“Nothing,” Alexander said, dragging his eyes away and opening his car’s doors with a remote control. “Get in.”

Christian climbed into the passenger seat and chuckled, remembering the last time he'd been in this seat. "Remember the first time you gave me a ride? You were very annoyed."

Alexander snorted, starting the car. "You were very annoying. And talked too much. And..." He trailed off, and Christian fidgeted, suddenly remembering it was also the night Alexander had kissed him for the first time. The night that had started it all.

Silence stretched, getting more awkward by the minute.

When the silence became unbearable, Alexander's phone rang again. Thank fuck.

"Could you put the phone on speaker?" Alexander said, his eyes on the road as he maneuvered the car through the dense traffic.

"Sure." Christian pulled the phone out of Alexander's coat and put it on speaker. He hoped it wasn't Mila. The last thing he wanted to hear was Alexander and her being all lovey-dovey.

"Sheldon speaking," Alexander said.

"Sheldon speaking," a deep male voice repeated, clearly teasing him.

Alexander smiled. "How is good old London?"

"Probably still there," the caller replied. "But I'm not there, actually."

"You arrived already?"

"Uh huh. At my old place. Come over and bring some beer."

Alexander glanced at Christian. "Now? Don't you have jet lag?"

"I do, and that's precisely why I won't be able to sleep until I'm knackered."

"Knackered," Alexander repeated, snorting. "Don't forget to boil a pot of tea for me, mate."

The caller laughed. "I won't. So you're coming?"

Christian pursed his lips, trying to suppress his disappointment.

Alexander glanced at him. "I'm out with a friend, actually."

There was a short silence on the line. For some reason, Christian had the impression the caller was surprised.

"Well, bring him along, then."

Alexander looked at him with a question in his eyes.

Christian shrugged.

"We'll be there in half an hour," Alexander said.

"Who was that?" Christian asked when the call ended.

"My cousin, Jared. You'll like him."

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Chapter 17

Alexander's cousin looked a lot like Alexander.

That was the first thought Christian had as he watched the men hug and clap each other on the back.

They were freakishly alike: the same height, the same dark hair and dark blue eyes. Jared Sheldon was a bit stockier than Alexander and their facial features were slightly different—Alexander's were a bit more angular—but they could be easily mistaken for one another if one didn't look closely enough.

Jared noticed him staring and smiled. "No, we aren't twins. He's three years younger." He shook Christian's hand. "Jared Sheldon."

Alexander put a hand on Christian's shoulder. "This is Christian."

"I can introduce myself, you know," Christian said, nudging him. He turned to Jared and smiled crookedly. "Christian Ashford."

"You have an unusually beautiful smile," Jared said.

Christian hid his surprise as he took his jacket off. The guy definitely wasn't flirting with him or anything, but it wasn't exactly something a straight guy would say. Wait, was Jared the gay cousin Alexander had mentioned a while ago?

"Thanks," Christian said with a small laugh. "Yours is pretty nice, too."

An hour later, as they finished the six-pack they'd brought, Christian concluded that Alexander had been right: he liked Jared. A lot. He was a

great guy— calm and pretty laid-back. He had a quiet strength about him that instinctively made Christian trust him.

Apparently, Jared was a doctor.

“It suits you,” Christian said, leaning back against the couch. “I hate hospitals and doctors—no offense—but I wouldn’t mind to have you as my doctor. You look like a good doctor.” He gave him an exaggerated once-over. “And well, you’re hot. I bet you look super hot in a doctor’s outfit. Anyone call you Dr. McDreamy?”

Jared laughed, and Alexander dropped his arm around Christian’s shoulders.

Christian shot him a sideways glance.

Alexander had been very quiet, mostly listening and watching them chat. As always, he appeared calm and composed, but... there was a difference between his calmness and Jared’s. It wasn’t obvious, but it was there, and Christian couldn’t help but notice the difference. Jared’s calmness seemed effortless; in comparison, Alexander’s calmness felt unnatural. Deceptive.

It wasn’t the first time Christian had noticed that, but it had never been more obvious than now. The two men looked so alike but felt like complete opposites: one was a rock and the other was like a sleeping volcano. Christian shivered, wondering what if it was awakened. He’d never seen Alexander truly angry or emotional. Sure, he’d seen him somewhat irritated and annoyed, he’d seen him laugh and smile, but all of those emotions were mild enough and controlled. He could feel that Alexander constantly held back, keeping a tight rein on his emotions.

Christian wanted to know why. He wanted to know what made this man tick.

Alexander’s cell phone went off again.

“Sheldon speaking.”

The caller started yelling, and Christian saw Alexander frown.

“Please calm down, Mr. Kabenov.”

The caller only yelled louder.

“*Успокойтесь, пожалуйста, господин Кабенов,*” Alexander said, in what sounded like Russian. “*Давайте поговорим спокойно, как взрослые люди.*”

Brushing Christian’s neck with his fingers, Alexander stood up and left the room. “Mr. Kabenov, I assure you Robert is a highly qualified professional...”

Left alone with Alexander’s cousin, Christian hesitated, but he knew a golden opportunity when he saw one.

“Can I ask you something?” he said.

Jared inclined his head, looking at him curiously.

“What’s made Alexander so...” Christian paused, unsure how to put it. “Emotionally repressed?”

Jared sighed, his brows drawing together. He looked hesitant for a moment before saying quietly, “His parents messed him up. Long story short, his father is a chronic cheater. He cheats on his wife with men, and then lies that it’s the last time, my aunt becomes hysterical, they fight for days, but eventually she forgives him—until the next time. And it’s been going on for decades.”

Christian frowned. “They’re still together?”

“Yes.” Jared grimaced. “She should have kicked him out years ago, but she can’t. My aunt is a total wreck, to be honest. Last time I visited her, she was completely drunk, the house looked like pigs lived in it, and my uncle was nowhere to be seen. But they’re still together.”

“And Alexander...?”

“I convinced my parents to take him in when he was fourteen, but the damage was already done. He was just a kid. Kids are impressionable.”

Christian’s eyebrows furrowed. That explained why Alexander hated disorder and chaos, but it didn’t explain why he repressed his emotions so much—repressed them to the point he didn’t even seem to be aware of them.

When he said that aloud, Jared frowned. “I’m not sure. He doesn’t really talk about it, but my guess is it’s because of his mother. He despises her, maybe even more than his father.”

“Because she neglected him?”

Jared pressed his lips together. “Because she loves her husband too much. Her emotions basically turned her from a young, confident woman to a clingy, drunken doormat obsessed with an asshole.” Jared shook his head. “I once saw her sobbing on my mother’s shoulder and telling her that she loved her husband more than anything, that she would forgive him anything, that she couldn’t live without him—because she loved him so much. I barely recognized her, she looked so pitiful.” Jared averted his gaze. “Alexander must have heard stuff like that a thousand times when he was a kid. I don’t blame him for disliking strong emotions.”

Christian nodded slowly and chewed on his lip, pondering what he had learned.

“So what’s going on between you and my cousin?”

Christian froze and looked back at Jared. The guy was studying him calmly, his blue eyes sharp and assessing.

“I don’t know what you mean,” Christian tried.

Jared just gave him a flat stare, looking so like Alexander at the moment it weirded Christian out.

“Nothing is going on. He has a girlfriend, remember?” Nope, Christian didn’t sound bitter at all.

“I know he has a girlfriend,” Jared said. “And until today, I thought Alexander was straight. But since you entered my house, my cousin’s been all over you. He’s been acting like you’re his girlfriend.”

Christian laughed awkwardly, his face warm. “I don’t know, okay? I don’t think he even notices what he’s doing.”

“Alexander is far from unobservant,” Jared said.

“I know,” Christian said, stroking his forehead and running his hand through his hair. “But I think he’s good at ignoring things that he doesn’t

want to notice.”

For an instant, a shadow of sadness crossed Jared’s features.

“You’re right,” Jared murmured. “People can be astonishingly good at ignoring things they don’t want to see or know about.” He glanced at the door before looking at Christian. A smile curved his lips, and Christian was reminded how handsome this man was. “Let’s do something that he will definitely see.”

“What?”

Glancing at the door again, Jared stood up and took the seat Alexander vacated. He put his fingers on Christian’s chin and tipped it up.

Christian laughed a little. “Uh, you’re not into me, right?”

Something flickered in Jared’s eyes. Before he could reply, there was the sound of footsteps approaching, and Jared leaned in to kiss Christian.

His lips were soft, and the kiss was pleasant enough. Christian liked it—Jared knew how to kiss, he was an extremely attractive man, and Christian liked him—but something was missing. There was no spark, no fierce need, no hunger. Christian didn’t get all warm and tingly, and didn’t want to devour him—

Christian yelped as he was yanked off the couch by a very angry-looking Alexander. He actually *looked* pissed: his jaw was working, his eyes were blazing with anger, and rage was coming off him in waves.

“What the fuck?” Alexander growled, looking between them, his grip on Christian’s arm painful.

Christian was stunned. Even Jared seemed taken aback by the force of his cousin’s reaction.

Jared was the first to recover from his surprise. “What’s the problem?” he said calmly. “I’m gay. Christian’s bi. We’re both adults and we’re both single.”

That gave Alexander pause. But not for long.

“He’s twenty,” he bit out. “He’s ten years younger than you. He’s too young for you.”

Jared’s brows crept up, and Christian gave Alexander an incredulous look, too. Alexander was seven years older than him and Mila, but apparently a ten-year age difference was unthinkable.

“Look, calm down—”

“I’m calm,” Alexander said, sounding anything but calm. “We’re leaving.”

Christian was still so stunned that he didn’t even protest, letting Alexander practically drag him out of the house. He’d barely managed to grab his jacket and wave goodbye to Jared, who was watching them leave with a bewildered expression on his face.

The drive to Christian’s place was silent and tense. Alexander ignored Christian, his eyes fixed ahead.

Christian wasn’t sure what to think. It was the first time he’d seen Alexander lose his self-control. He’d always had a gut feeling Alexander’s unflappable, unemotional behavior was just a facade, but actually seeing it was a different matter entirely.

A part of him felt ridiculously giddy because Alexander had lost his self-control because of *him*. It had to mean something, right? Right? But on the other hand, he knew Alexander wouldn’t be happy at all about his lack of self-control.

He was proven right as Alexander looked tenser and tenser with every passing minute.

Alexander broke the silence only when they reached Christian’s place.

“Do you want him?” he asked, killing the engine. His face was inscrutable again, but his voice was sharp and hard.

Christian hesitated, unsure how to handle this.

Jared was Alexander’s close friend and cousin. He didn’t want to do anything that would harm their friendship, but... he wasn’t unselfish, dammit. He wanted. He wanted to make Alexander jealous—badly. He

wanted Alexander to feel what he felt every time he saw Alexander with Mila. He wanted to make him mad with jealousy.

“He’s very hot,” Christian said. “He’s exactly my type.” *Sorry, Jared*, he apologized inwardly and looked Alexander in the eye. “So yeah, I want him—”

Alexander lunged forward and slammed their lips together, hand fisting in Christian’s hair. Christian gasped and tried to kiss him back, but Alexander didn’t let him. The kiss was hard and cruel, a brutal branding. It was a kiss meant to punish, but all it did was elicit desperate need and hunger. Moaning, Christian parted his lips wider, wanting him deeper, more—god, it’d been so long—

Alexander tore his lips away, breathing hard. “I can’t do this,” he said, as though to himself, looking at him hungrily, hand still in Christian’s hair. He started leaning in again, but stopped, swore under his breath and sat back into his seat, his eyes fixed in front of him and every muscle in his body so tense it looked like he might snap.

Inhaling shakily, Christian reached out. “Alec—”

“Don’t,” Alexander bit out. “Don’t touch me. Please.” He rubbed his face. “Please get out.”

Christian stared at him and then got out of the car, still trembling faintly.

He watched as the car sped out of the driveway and onto the street, the tires screeching.

And everything went quiet.

He was alone.

Chapter 18

When Alexander got home, Mila greeted him with a smile and a kiss on his cheek.

He flinched, but she didn't notice.

"You're late," she said. "I thought you'd be home before me."

Alexander pulled off his coat and threw it on the coat stand. It slithered off and onto the floor. He stopped by the couch but didn't sit down and walked to the window instead.

It was dark outside. It was snowing again, soft gentle flakes fluttering to the ground in a beautiful cascade of glimmering white.

"Alexander?" Mila said hesitantly.

He heard her pick up his coat.

"Something wrong?" she asked.

He closed his eyes for a moment, his back to her. Yes, something was wrong. Him.

"Where were you?"

"At Jared's place." His hand gripped the windowsill, and he had to take a few deep breaths to control the surge of rage. This was ridiculous. Jared was like a brother to him. They'd grown up together. He shouldn't feel like killing him because of one kiss.

"He arrived already?"

"Yes," he said.

"Okay, what's wrong?"

The snow was getting heavier and the wind was picking up right behind it.

“Alexander?”

“I didn’t tell you something,” he said tonelessly. “I’ve been hanging out with Christian lately.”

Her breath hitched in her throat.

There was a long silence. The only sound he could hear was the faint howling of the wind outside.

“Okay,” Mila said, her voice shaking a bit. “Did you—did you sleep with him?”

Alexander’s grip on the windowsill got tighter. “No.”

Another long silence.

“Did you want to?”

A bare branch knocked against the window.

The silence lengthened.

Her harsh, bitter laugh cut through the room. “You can’t even deny it. Look at me, dammit!”

Alexander turned around.

She stood in the middle of the room, her face flushed and her eyes wide and shiny. An ugly, shaky smile twisted her lips. “Is that it? Are you going to dump me for him?”

Alexander’s brows furrowed. “Why are you even asking me that? You shouldn’t give me a choice. You can’t be okay with this.”

Mila laughed again, the sound jarring and abrasive. “Oh, I’m definitely not okay with this. But—but you’re mine, not his. It was never supposed to be that way! I can’t just give you to him! I won’t!” She walked over, grabbed his hand and squeezed. “You didn’t cheat on me. I don’t care if you want him. You didn’t cheat. We can—we can get over it—I’ll give you another chance—and we—”

“Enough, Mila,” Alexander said, bile rising to his throat. She looked nearly hysterical. She looked like...He put his hands on her shoulders and shook her slightly. “Don’t you have any self-respect? You deserve better. I’m the asshole here. You shouldn’t give me a second chance. It will change nothing.”

She shook her head slowly. “But you didn’t cheat,” she whispered.

Alexander looked her in the eye. “I kissed him.”

She opened her mouth and closed it before opening again. “I don’t care. You didn’t have sex with him. You didn’t cheat.”

Alexander hesitated. He didn’t want to hurt her, but she was clutching at straws. “Maybe not physically,” he said, forcing the words out. “But I did it every time I looked at him. Every time I couldn’t look away.”

Mila swallowed.

He touched her cheek with the back of his hand. “You deserve better. You deserve a man who will enter the room you’re in and see no one but you. I can’t be that man, but he’s out there. You’ll find him. I know you will.”

She looked at him for a long moment before averting her eyes and scowling. “Oh, shut up. Why are you so perfect all the time? Even when you’re dumping me? If you’re dumping me, at least have the decency to let me hate you! My next boyfriend will probably have at least five horrible flaws compared to you.”

Alexander kissed her on the forehead. “Maybe it’s a good thing. And I’m not perfect. Very far from perfect, actually.”

Mila snorted. “You? Please. You’re the definition of perfect.”

A crooked smile curled his lips. “If you think that, you loved a man who didn’t exist.”

She eyed him solemnly before nodding. “Maybe. Maybe I never knew you.” She chuckled humorlessly. “Maybe if I knew you better, I could have stopped you from falling for him.”

Alexander sucked a breath in. “I didn’t say I love him,” he said tersely, turning away.

“What?”

“I don’t love him,” he bit out. “It’s not love.”

“Then what is it?”

Alexander stared out the window, watching the snowfall. He thought of snowflakes melting on Christian’s flushed skin a few hours ago. He thought of how he looked and how he couldn’t look away.

“Obsession,” he whispered, barely audible.

A few hours later, as he helped Mila get her stuff outside, he looked at Mila’s face and tried to feel the quiet love he’d used to feel for her. But there was nothing—everything wiped out by this thing eating him from the inside out.

A cab pulled over and stopped in front of them. Mila glanced at it. “Send the rest of my things to my parents’ house.” Her eyes were shiny as she looked at him, but she gave him a confident smile. “I still expect to receive the red dress for my birthday, got it?”

“Got it,” he said and watched her walk to the cab.

As the cab pulled away, Alexander put his hands into the pockets of his coat and stood still, letting cold flakes of snow land on his face and melt. There was a faint feeling of regret in the pit of his stomach, but Alexander knew he had done the right thing. Mila did deserve better. And staying together wasn’t an option.

Because it was obvious now he couldn’t be trusted.

Alexander clenched his jaw, remembering how close he had been to having Christian right there, in the car. It was a fucking miracle he’d managed to tear himself away.

Looking back, it had been stupid of him to think he could be friends with Christian. A man wouldn’t get frustrated and restless if he didn’t see

his friend for a few weeks, but at the time, Alexander couldn't put a name to the odd restlessness under his skin—or didn't want to.

Then he saw Christian at Mila's school.

Then he *had* to see him again.

The last few weeks had been a disaster. He had told himself he would stay away from Christian, but he ended up seeking him out using some truly ridiculous justifications. He'd told himself he wouldn't touch Christian now that they were just friends, but he caught himself groping him on multiple occasions—touching, stroking his skin, putting a proprietary arm around him, pulling him close. It was like he couldn't control his body at all.

And he couldn't control his mind, either. When they watched movies together, he spent half of the time imagining pushing Christian flat on his back, climbing on top of him and rutting into him until his cock was sore and Christian was flushed and covered in his come.

Alexander sighed, feeling his cock stir just from thinking about it. He'd never felt so damn out of control before. Never. It wasn't normal that one smile from the guy could make his mouth go dry, his heartbeat pick up and his cock harden, as though he was a teenager once again. He hated his total lack of self-control around Christian.

This... obsession was getting out of hand. Nothing good could come out of it. This was already turning him into someone he wasn't: a possessive, unreasonably jealous man.

He had no right to feel jealous. It was *none* of his business if Christian wanted Jared and kissed him. And yet his blood was boiling with jealousy, rage, and fear all at once, cooking him from the inside out. Of course Christian was attracted to Jared. His cousin was basically an improved version of him. Jared was everything Alexander strove to be: calm, composed, and dependable. Jared had his life figured out. Jared never lost his composure. Jared didn't let his primitive instincts take over.

His cell phone rang.

Alexander pulled it out of his pocket. His face hardened when he saw the caller ID. But he answered. "What do you want?"

“And here I was hoping you’d calm down,” Jared said.

“I’m perfectly calm.”

Jared let out an incredulous chuckle. “Come over, then. I think we need to clear a few things up.”

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Chapter 19

When Jared opened the door, there were no hugs and smiles this time around.

Alexander looked at his cousin's face and couldn't summon even a flicker of affection for him. All he could see was the man who'd had his tongue in Christian's mouth.

Yeah, I want him. Remembering Christian's words, he felt his hands clench into fists by his sides, his breathing uneven and loud even to his own ears. Rage bubbled in his gut, mixed with a dose of fear and resentment. He loved his cousin. He shouldn't be feeling this. He shouldn't feel the nearly irresistible urge to slam Jared against the wall and punch him hard, again and again, until his face was a bloody mess.

As though reading his thoughts, Jared stepped back, eyeing him warily. "Come on in."

The house was dark and quiet, the fireplace the only source of light in the living room.

Alexander took off his coat and threw it on one of the chairs before sinking into the armchair beside the fireplace.

Jared stared at him, walked to the mini-bar, and grabbed a few beers.

"So," Jared said, throwing him a can. He sat down on the couch and opened his beer. "About the pretty boy you brought here."

Alexander stiffened but didn't say anything. He didn't trust himself not to say something he would regret later.

"Relax," Jared said, watching him. "I don't want your Christian." He chuckled softly. "Well, if he lands in my lap, naked, I won't say no—he's

ridiculously attractive, and I'm not dead. But I don't want him."

Some of the tension drained out of Alexander's body. "Then why did you touch him?"

Jared sipped his beer. "I was curious how you would react. You were feeling him up the whole time, so I thought it might bother you if I touched him. But your reaction exceeded all my expectations."

"If you want to study me like a lab rat, keep Christian out of it—and keep your tongue out of his mouth, dammit."

Jared eyed him. "I thought you had a girlfriend."

Alexander looked down at his beer, watching the reflection of the firelight on the can. "I did. Not anymore."

Silence.

"It's a bit strange," Jared said, his tone careful. "Your relationship seemed fine just a few months ago. I thought you weren't interested in guys at all."

Alexander opened his beer and took a big gulp. "I wasn't. Until Mila invited Christian for a threesome." Alexander looked at the fireplace, watching the yellow flames dance across a burning log. Now it felt like it all had happened in another lifetime, not two months ago. "He annoyed me." He chuckled humorlessly. "Not sure how I went from being annoyed to wanting my dick inside him."

He looked at Jared, gauging his reaction.

His cousin's expression was calm and unsurprised. That was the thing about Jared: he was always composed and cool-headed. Sometimes Alexander envied him, because he often felt like a ticking bomb set to go off.

"From the way you looked at him today, it's not just about sex, is it?" Jared murmured, sipping his beer.

"I don't love him," Alexander said tersely.

“I didn’t say you did,” Jared said, raising his eyebrows. “But out of curiosity—why do you think you don’t love him?”

Sighing, Alexander pinched the bridge of his nose. “Because I *don’t*. This—it’s not love. Love isn’t supposed to be like this.”

“Like what?”

Alexander met his eyes and said quietly, “When I saw you kissing him, I wanted to tear you limb from limb. I’m not exaggerating.” Seeing Jared’s expression, he let out a harsh laugh. “Yeah. It didn’t matter you’re my closest friend and cousin. This thing... it stripped me of all control. I felt like—like a man possessed. Like he’s mine. And no one but me can touch him. See, it’s obsession, not love.”

Jared studied him, his expression contemplative. “You just never wanted someone enough to be truly jealous. You never cared enough. You never needed enough. That’s why you think it’s not normal to feel that way.” He laughed, something pained flashing across his features before he concealed it behind a neutral expression. “It’s pretty normal, trust me. And it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s not love. If you think it’s not love, maybe you never loved before.”

“I loved Mila,” Alexander ground out.

“Did you?” Jared said in a low voice. “I’m not sure you did.”

Alexander tensed. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Jared looked down at his beer before looking back at him. “I’ve said nothing before, but I always thought all of your relationships were a little shallow—No, hear me out! Yes, all of them were pretty long and serious, and all of them were... nice and steady. They didn’t seem to make you feel much of anything. You were never jealous. You were never angry. You never cared enough.” He held Alexander’s gaze. “But that’s what you wanted, isn’t it?”

His jaw tightening, Alexander leveled him with a look. “I don’t like what you’re implying, Jared. And you’re wrong.”

“Maybe,” Jared conceded. “Maybe you did love your girlfriends. But your reaction to your jealousy over Christian speaks volumes. You think it’s

not normal. You don't want to feel it. You think anything that strong and ugly can't be love." Jared eyed his beer, a strange twisted smile on his lips. "You're wrong. And suppressing emotions isn't healthy, Alexander."

Alexander pressed his lips together. "How do you do it, Jared? Nothing baffles you. You have an answer for everything."

Some emotion flashed across Jared's face. "There's no need for that tone. I don't have an answer for everything. Far from it. I'm just saying sometimes love isn't pretty. It's not neat, and it's not textbook perfect. There's no template for love. Sometimes it's ugly. Sometimes it's a bit creepy. And sometimes it hurts."

Before Alexander could say anything, there was a sound of footsteps.

A half-naked young guy padded down the stairs, yawning and stretching. He had slightly exotic features and dark blond hair. Emerald green eyes flickered to Alexander without much interest before the guy walked to the couch and flopped onto his belly, putting his head on Jared's lap. "My neck hurts," he said with a faint French accent.

Alexander raised his eyebrows slightly, unsure what to make of it. He had no idea Jared was seeing someone. Jared had told him he wasn't seeing anyone.

He looked up at Jared and did a double take.

The indulgent, long-suffering smile that was on Jared's lips completely transformed his entire face. His eyes were warm, his expression full of naked adoration. It made Alexander distinctly uncomfortable. It felt like he was watching something very intimate. Something he wasn't supposed to see.

"I told you to stick to the training program," Jared said sternly, his voice at odds with the expression on his face. But then again, the guy couldn't see his face. "And you're being rude, Gabriel. You're ignoring my guest."

"I want a massage," Gabriel said. "And he's not your guest. I bet he's from your family. He looks like a pale version of you—"

“I resent that,” Alexander said dryly. “I’m the most handsome Sheldon you’ve ever met.”

Gabriel turned his head and gave him a critical stare. “Hmm,” he said thoughtfully. “No. Your hands are nowhere near as good. I can tell. Jared, come on. Remember, I’m injured.”

Jared rolled his eyes but started massaging the guy’s neck. “You sprained your ankle, not you neck. Alexander, allow me to introduce you to Gabriel DuVal, the most spoiled sportsman in the world.”

Alexander concealed his surprise. He had heard of the injured French kid Jared looked after years ago, but he’d had no idea they were seeing each other. “Soccer player, right?”

“Football player,” Gabriel corrected him before smiling blissfully. “Mmm, right there, yeah.”

“Your neck is stiff,” Jared said, in a gently scolding tone. “What were you doing to get it so—”

“Ah, he’s here,” said a female voice.

A pretty young woman stood on the top of the stairs, her hands on her pajama-clad hips. She gave Gabriel an unimpressed look. “Honestly, Gabe. Don’t be a baby.”

“She’s being rude to your guest, too,” Gabriel said, without opening his eyes. “Why am I the only one who gets scolded for that?”

The girl blushed and gave Alexander an apologetic smile. “I’m Claire, Gabriel’s girlfriend.”

Alexander stared. Then he looked at Jared, whose expression was bland.

“Nice to meet you,” Alexander said, belatedly, turning back to the girl. “Alexander Sheldon, Jared’s cousin.”

She gave him a distracted smile and said firmly, “Gabriel DuVal, stop bothering Jared and get up. We’re already imposing on his vacation—”

“You’re not,” Jared said, giving Claire a smile that didn’t quite touch his eyes. “But we’re done already—”

“No,” Gabriel said.

“—so you can take him,” Jared continued, as if having not heard him.

Sighing, Gabriel sat up. “I hate you,” he told Jared before pecking him on the cheek. “Night.”

“Good night,” Jared said, averting his gaze.

Neither Jared nor Alexander watched the couple leave.

Looking at his cousin’s stoic face, Alexander didn’t know what to say.

“He doesn’t know, does he?” he said at last.

Clenching his jaw, Jared shook his head.

“Why don’t you tell him?” Alexander chuckled harshly. “You tell me not to suppress emotions, but you —”

“It’s different,” Jared snapped.

It was the first time Alexander had ever seen his cousin angry. “How is that different?”

Jared stood up and walked to the mini-bar to pour himself a glass of whiskey. He downed it in a few big gulps. “Because there’s no point. He’s straight. Not like you. He’s truly straight. I know him inside out. He’s really straight. Can’t-get-it-up-for-a-man straight. He’s in love with his girlfriend. They’re very serious. If I tell him, it would just make everything awkward, nothing more.”

Alexander eyed his stiff back. “He doesn’t seem indifferent. He’s very affectionate—”

“He’s French,” Jared said flatly. “And no, he isn’t indifferent. He loves me. Maybe even too much. But not that way.”

“How do you—”

“Drop it. Please. I’ve been dealing with this for years.”

Sure you have, Alexander thought, remembering the expression on Jared's face as he looked at that kid. "Why don't you just leave? Quit your job and come back home."

Jared laughed, a short, ragged sound. "I can't."

"Why not?"

"For the same reason your mother can't leave your father. He's my everything." Jared turned to look at Alexander, a wry smile on his lips. "I know you despise your mother for that. Do you think I'm weak and pathetic, too?"

Alexander looked at his older cousin—the cousin he'd used to look up to when they were children—and didn't know what to say. "You can't just stay and watch him with someone else. It'll break you."

Jared grabbed the bottle of whiskey and brought it to his lips. "I know," he said and took a big gulp. His eyes were dull and tired. "Today his girlfriend asked me to examine her. Apparently, they're trying for a baby."

Alexander inhaled sharply. "Is she...?"

"No. Not yet." Jared took another gulp. "But it will happen someday. And someday, I'll be the best man at his wedding and maybe a godfather to his kids, and—" Jared cut himself off as his voice thickened. He turned away. "Maybe I'm weak. Maybe I'm an idiot to stick around only because he needs me. Maybe it's unhealthy to live for crumbs of affection and let one person become the center of my life. Maybe."

There was a long silence, during which Jared stared into the crackling fire and Alexander stared at him.

"If you want my advice," Jared said, still not looking at him. His voice was rough and clipped. "My advice to you: fuck whatever issues you have. Don't overthink it. Obsession, love—it doesn't matter what you call it. They're just words. If you look at him and think '*this is mine*,' that's it. Grab it if you can. I wish I could."

Alexander walked to him and clasped Jared's shoulder. "I'm sorry."

Jared's muscles flexed under his hand.

“Yeah,” he said, his voice toneless. “Me, too.”

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Chapter 20

Jared's words still rang in his ears as Alexander left his cousin's house and got into his car.

He slumped back in the driver's seat, running a hand over his face.

Sometimes love isn't pretty. It's not neat, and it's not textbook perfect. There's no template for love. Sometimes it's ugly. Sometimes it's a bit creepy. And sometimes it hurts.

He thought of Jared's dejected posture and strained smile. He thought of the way Jared looked at that French kid. Then he thought of Mila, and his other ex-girlfriends. They all were beautiful and nice, but if Alexander was honest with himself, he hadn't felt with them even a fraction of what he did with Christian—and he didn't mean just sex. He hadn't felt the irresistible urge to touch, to kiss, to pull closer, to *be* with them. He'd never had trouble looking away when they smiled. He'd never been impatient to see them. Everything—his reactions and his emotions—had been controlled. Predictable. Shallow. And he had liked it that way. He had liked it.

Alexander was jerked away from his thoughts when the passenger door suddenly opened and someone got in.

The French kid. Gabriel. He wasn't even wearing a jacket and was covered in snow. He glared at Alexander. "What the fuck did you do to him? Jared's drinking, and he never drinks. Whatever you did, go back and fix it!"

Eyeing him, Alexander realized the guy wasn't really as young as he had thought. He might be the same age as Christian. There was just something about the curve of his mouth that made him look vulnerable and innocent. But now that Alexander looked at the hard expression on the

guy's face, it was obvious how wrong his first impression was. Something told him this guy was very far from being innocent and vulnerable.

"Me?" Alexander said. "If anything, I should be the one asking that question." Damn it. He shouldn't have said that. Jared didn't want Gabriel to know.

But there was no trace of confusion in Gabriel's face. Gabriel averted his gaze.

Alexander's eyes narrowed. He studied the guy.

"You know," he said as realization dawned on him. "You know, don't you?"

Gabriel nodded, still not looking at him.

"If you know, then let him go."

"It's not that simple," Gabriel said tersely.

"It's very simple. He loves you, you know it and still make him watch you with your girlfriend. Don't you give a shit about him at all?"

"You don't get it."

"No, I don't," Alexander said, his voice hard. "I'll tell Jared you know."

Gabriel grabbed his arm. "Don't you dare," he growled, green eyes flashing. His expression transformed completely, something ruthless and ugly lurking in his gaze. "If you do that, I'll make sure he'll never talk to you again, got it? I can do that. If he has to choose, he'll always pick me, not his cousin. He's *mine*."

Alexander stared. Appearances could certainly be deceiving. Cute, innocent kid? Right. "Does he know what a selfish piece of shit you are?"

Gabriel laughed, as if he'd said something funny. "Jared knows me better than anyone. He's seen me at my worst." Something like wonder or perhaps embarrassment appeared on his face. "I'm not a very good person, but he loves me anyway. I'm not giving him up. Ever."

Alexander shook his head slowly. “Don’t you see how cruel it is? Don’t you care? It’s breaking him.”

His jaw tightening, Gabriel dropped his gaze. “I know,” he whispered hoarsely. “I hate hurting him, but I just—I can’t let go, okay? He’s...I owe him my career. I owe him everything I am now.” He turned away to look out the window. “I went from being a poor nobody to a star footballer who makes two hundred thousand pounds a week. I have everything I’ve ever dreamed of. I shouldn’t need him anymore.” He paused. When he spoke again, his voice was full of resentment. “But I do. And I hate this—this emotional dependency and constant craving his attention and approval. I never depended on anyone emotionally until him—I never had anyone to depend on. I hate all these emotions, hate being scared he’ll get sick of me and leave, you know?” Gabriel smiled crookedly, shaking his head. “Of course you don’t get it. No one gets it.”

“I get it,” Alexander said. “Better than you think.”

Gabriel shot him a skeptical look. “Really? You feel that way, too?”

“Well, not that way exactly. I’m nowhere near as messed up as you are.”

“Thanks,” Gabriel said. “So what’s the problem? I guess there’s a woman?”

“A man,” Alexander said. For some reason, it was easy to talk about it to Gabriel. Probably because this kid was far more fucked up than he was.

“Huh,” Gabriel said and muttered something that sounded like “must run in the family.” “So what about the guy? He doesn’t want you back?” Gabriel frowned. “Though it’s unlikely if he’s gay.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

Gabriel snorted a laugh. “Don’t you own a mirror? You look a lot like Jared, and Jared is very handsome. Pretty much everyone at our football club is in love with him.”

But not you.

“Anyway, what about that guy?” Gabriel said.

“I want him.”

“Eh, and that’s a problem...why?”

Alexander looked out of the windshield, staring through the heavy snowfall.

“Wait, when you say ‘I want him,’ do you mean you want to hold his hand and smooch him to death or do you mean—”

“I mean everything.” Alexander thought of Christian’s face, his plump lips, and that goddamn smile, the curve of his neck, his little dark nipples, his thighs, his strong legs wrapped around him, his tightness, his heat, his dark eyes—

Alexander smiled self-deprecatingly, feeling his dick twitch. “And I mean everything. From gazing at him sappily to wanting to rub my come into his skin and make him stink of me inside and out.”

“Um,” Gabriel said. “Too much information, mate.”

Alexander looked at him. “You do realize Jared probably has less than pure thoughts when he looks at you, right?”

Gabriel flushed and fidgeted, biting his lip. “I try not to think about it.”

“You should,” Alexander said, his voice harder. “He’s not your parent. He’s not your older brother. He’s not a monk. He’s a healthy man. If you love him as much as you claim to, you’ll stop being a selfish little shit and let him leave.”

Gabriel’s bright eyes dulled immediately. “I can’t.”

Alexander heaved a sigh. “Are you sure you aren’t even a little into guys? I used to think I was completely straight.”

Gabriel shook his head. “Men do nothing for me.” He looked at his fingers and said hoarsely, “You know, I’m glad I’m not gay. If I’m this needy and dependent when I don’t want him physically, I don’t even want to think what a clingy wreck I would be if I wanted him that way. I probably wouldn’t let him out of my sight.”

He looked at Alexander again, his green eyes wide and pleading. He looked like an innocent, vulnerable kid again. “Don’t tell him I know. Please.”

Alexander pressed his lips together but nodded shortly.

“Thanks.” Gabriel placed a hand on the door’s handle but paused. “You know, when I was sixteen, I damaged my spine. Everyone thought it was a career-ending injury. I was scared as hell. What if all the doctors were right and I couldn’t walk again? So I kept putting it off—if I didn’t try walking, I couldn’t fall, after all.” A wistful, soft smile appeared on his face. “But Jared—he was my physio at the time—he told me if I didn’t try, I wouldn’t *not* fall, either. So I tried. And now I’m the best winger in the world.”

“And the humblest too,” Alexander said with a snort, turning on the windshield wipers to clear the snow. “Thanks, I got the moral of the story, but it’s unnecessary. I don’t kid myself anymore.” Alexander smiled ruefully. “I can’t stay away from him.”

Gabriel nodded without a smile. “Yeah,” he said hoarsely, opening the door. “I get it. Good luck.”

“You, too,” Alexander said and started the engine. “Don’t break my cousin’s heart.”

Gabriel’s answer was lost in the howling wind and swirling snow. Maybe it was for the best.

Chapter 21

Alexander came to a halt outside the familiar door and lifted his hand to knock but paused.

Christ, it was crazy. What was he doing there at this hour? The rational thing to do would be to wait until tomorrow instead of showing up at one in the morning like an addicted man in need of a fix—which wasn't far from the truth. Christian and his grandmother were asleep for sure, and Christian was probably pissed at him for practically kicking him out of the car after kissing him first. Not to mention that Christian had given no indication that he wanted to be more than just friends. Christian didn't do relationships. And Christian had said he wanted Jared.

Alexander gritted his teeth. No. He hadn't imagined the hunger and need in Christian's kisses, hadn't imagined Christian lean into his touch. This thing—this helpless attraction—couldn't be one-sided. He didn't know what he would do if it was one-sided. Nothing good. Alexander had a sneaking suspicion that he wouldn't take it well if Christian said he wasn't interested. The mere thought made him restless and anxious. He didn't want to be in Jared's situation. Unlike his cousin, Alexander didn't think he was capable of watching Christian with someone else.

Realizing his fists were clenched hard at his sides, Alexander forced them to relax. Fuck. Maybe suppressing and avoiding emotions for years really had been a bad idea: he didn't know how to deal with this at all. Christian sometimes jokingly called him a creep. Alexander had a bad feeling that it might not be far from the truth. He felt like a faucet with a broken handle: once open, it couldn't be closed again. He had the potential to turn into a creepy stalker if Christian rejected him. Jesus. Christian had better not reject him.

Leaning against the wall, Alexander pulled out his cell phone and called Christian.

He had to wait a long time before Christian answered.

“Huh?” he mumbled, his voice sleepy and not entirely awake. His eyes were probably still closed. “Who are you and why the fuck are you calling in the middle of the night?”

“Do you really want Jared?”

Silence.

“Alec?” There was the sound of mattress springs.

Alexander licked his lips, imagining Christian in bed, his skin warm, his hair tousled from sleep, eyes sleepy and lips a bit swollen—

“Alexander?”

“Do you really want him?” he said, his voice harsher than he had intended. He couldn’t help it.

Another silence.

“Are you jealous?” Christian said, a bit hesitantly.

Alexander drew a deep breath in. “Maybe.”

Christian let out a choked laugh. “Shit, this is really fucking with my head.”

Alexander thought it was only fair, considering Christian had completely ruined his orderly, rational life. “Do you want Jared?”

Christian sighed. “Anyone told you you’re like a dog with a bone? No, I don’t want Jared. Happy now? And why are you calling me at this hour?”

“Come out.”

“What?”

“Come out. I’m here, outside.”

There was a moment's silence. "Are you seriously saying you're outside my place at one in the morning?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I was in the neighborhood," Alexander said.

"And decided to come for a friendly visit, huh?"

"Something like that."

"Creep," Christian murmured softly and hung up.

A minute later, he heard the sound of the lock click from the inside, and Alexander's body tensed.

The door opened. Christian stepped outside and closed the door again. He was wearing only a pair of black boxers. Christian flushed. "The floorboards are very creaky," he said, rather defensively, rubbing at his eyes. "I was afraid Grandma will wake up if I move around too much. She's a light sleeper."

"I didn't say anything," Alexander said, unsure where to look, his fingers itching to touch everywhere. He swallowed when he noticed that Christian's nipples were hard before he realized the most likely reason for it.

"You're cold." Alexander pulled off his coat and wrapped it around Christian's shoulders.

Christian gave him a strange look. "So what are you doing here?" he asked, adjusting the coat slightly.

Alexander tried hard not to stare. Seeing Christian in *his* clothes did strange things to his insides. And to his dick.

"Alexander?"

Alexander averted his gaze from the dark fabric of his coat against Christian's skin, but now his eyes were drawn back to the flushed sleepy face, rumpled hair, and soft lips. Christ. His heart was racing like he was

sixteen again, heat pooling in his stomach and sneaking across his skin. He couldn't think.

"I wanted to talk to you," he said, stepping closer.

"About what?"

Alexander put his hands on the door behind Christian, effectively trapping him between his arms. He breathed in deeply, looking into the chocolate brown eyes.

Christian's lips parted. "Alec? What are you—"

"I wish I'd refused when Mila suggested a threesome," Alexander said hoarsely. "I wish I never knew this feeling. It's not beautiful. It's ugly. And terrifying."

Christian swallowed. "Are you drunk or something?"

Alexander smiled crookedly, watching Christian's Adam's apple bob up and down. "I wish."

He dipped his head and brushed his lips against the pale skin of Christian's neck. Christian gasped, his body trembling with tension, like an arrow about to be fired from a bow. Alexander was pretty sure he was trembling as well, but he managed not to yank Christian to him. In fact, their bodies weren't touching at all—except for his lips barely grazing Christian's neck.

Christian whimpered, the sound small and barely audible, and Alexander finally sunk his teeth into the flesh and sucked hard, wanting to leave a mark for everyone to see.

He trailed open-mouthed kisses upwards until he found that spot right underneath Christian's jaw that made him shudder. He sucked hard, nearly delirious with want. "What the fuck did you do to me?" he whispered, licking there.

Gasping, Christian grabbed his hair and pulled him back. He looked no better than Alexander felt: his eyes were glazed over, his cheeks were flushed, and his breathing was labored. But he said, "Wait, we can't—fuck, I *want* to—but we shouldn't. You have a girlfriend—"

“Not anymore. We just broke up.” Seeing Christian’s wide-eyed look, Alexander said with a rueful smile, “I know the decent thing to do would be to wait, but... I can’t wait.” He leaned in again and kissed the corner of Christian’s mouth before pressing their cheeks together. He breathed his scent in, greedy. “Seriously, what did you do to me?” There was a great deal of resentment in his voice; he couldn’t hide it. “I feel—I’m a mess.”

Burying his fingers in Alexander’s hair, Christian pushed him back a little so that they could look at each other. “There’s nothing wrong with you, silly,” Christian said, his eyes smiling.

Alexander shook his head. “You have no idea what’s going on in my head. I have some—some really creepy thoughts that creep out even me. You’ll freak out if I tell you.”

Christian grinned, running his fingers through Alexander’s hair. “Try me. Don’t worry, I always knew you were a weirdo.”

Alexander laughed. “Do you take anything seriously?”

Christian dimpled at him. “Nope, but you totally love it.”

Alexander stared at that smile, trying to control the wave of *want* that had nothing to do with his dick. “Maybe I do.”

Christian’s smile faded, his dark eyes becoming serious. “Alec?”

Alexander leaned in again and brushed his lips against Christian’s cheek. “I want you,” he said. “Say yes.”

Christian’s body went rigid. He whispered, “To what? What do you want with me? Sex?”

Alexander drew a shaky breath in, pressing his forehead against Christian’s. “Of course I want sex,” he said in a hoarse whisper. He gripped Christian’s hips hard, digging his fingers into his round buttocks. “I want to fuck you. Want to kiss and touch you everywhere. Want to feel you come on my cock.” Christian’s lips were trembling an inch away from his. Alexander could barely stop himself from kissing them. “I’ve never wanted anyone so much, and it creeps me out, but just sex would never be enough for me. I know you don’t do relationships, but I don’t do casual relationships.” He felt his lips twist. “And this... there’s nothing casual

about this. So if you say yes, you'll get the full package deal, whether you want it or not."

He pulled back a little to see Christian better.

Christian's eyes were wide and oddly vulnerable before a dazzling smile split his face. "Is cuddling included in the full package?" he asked, putting a hand on Alexander's chest. "I'm very partial to cuddling."

Alexander felt his heart beat faster. At that moment, looking at Christian's smile, he thought he would agree to anything. "Special offer, only for you."

"Full package, please."

Alexander's breathing hitched. He gripped Christian's hips harder. "Are you sure? You'll never get rid of me."

Christian's hands moved to his neck and pulled him closer, until their foreheads touched again and their breaths mixed. "Maybe I don't want to."

And Alexander snapped. He kissed him, pinning him to the door with his body, sucking and biting the plump lips with hunger that shook his entire body. God, finally.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, he remembered the kiss that started it all two months ago. Full circle. The same place, the same person, but the want he felt had changed into something more personal, something more intense.

Something scarier.

Fuck it.

Alexander cradled Christian's face with his hands and kissed him harder, not caring.

If you look at him and think 'this is mine,' that's it. Grab it if you can.

So he did.

The End

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About the Series

Currently the Straight Guys series includes the following books:

#0.5 - [**Straight Boy: A Short Story**](#) (Sage and Xavier)

Young, blond and handsome, Sage attracts unwanted attention in prison. When his cellmate offers him protection, Sage accepts the offer, even though he doesn't trust the guy. Little does he know how much it will change his life.

When he's released from prison, Sage finds himself needing and wanting things he shouldn't want. Sage is straight. He is. He has a girlfriend. What happened in prison stayed in prison—or so Sage tells himself.

Until he meets his former cellmate again. Xavier. The guy he hates and craves.

[**#1 - Just a Bit Twisted**](#) (Shawn and Derek)

Professor Derek Rutledge is hated and feared by all of his students. Strict, reserved, and ruthless, he doesn't tolerate mistakes and has little patience for his students.

Shawn Wyatt is a twenty-year-old struggling to provide for his younger sisters after the death of their parents. On the verge of losing his scholarship, Shawn becomes desperate enough to go to Professor Rutledge.

Everyone says Rutledge doesn't have a heart. Everyone says he's a ruthless bastard. Shawn finds out that everyone is right.

He strikes a deal with Rutledge, but unexpectedly, the deal turns into something so much more.

Something all-consuming and addictive.

Something neither of them wants.

#2 - [Just a Bit Obsessed](#) (Alexander and Christian)

Alexander Sheldon likes order and control in his life. He isn't happy when his girlfriend invites another guy for a threesome. Alexander believes in monogamy, and he's never been good at sharing his things. It doesn't help that Christian rubs him the wrong way from the beginning.

But what starts as animosity turns into something else. Something unexpected and very wrong.

He was never supposed to touch Christian. He was never supposed to feel possessive of the guy. And he most definitely wasn't supposed to want Christian more than he wants his girlfriend.

It's a recipe for disaster.

#3 - [Just a Bit Unhealthy](#) (Gabriel and Jared)

When the line between "need" and "want" gets blurred...

Gabriel DuVal, rising soccer star.

Jared Sheldon, team physician.

To the outside world, they're just good friends. But the truth is, Gabriel isn't entirely sure what they are to each other.

Some call their relationship unhealthy. Some call it codependency. Gabriel calls it confusing. He knows Jared wants him – as more than a friend. He doesn't want Jared. He's straight, he has a girlfriend, and he loves her. But Jared is... Jared is more. Jared is his. He needs him – his touch and his strength.

But is it enough for Jared?

#4 - **Just a Bit Wrong** (Tristan and Zach)

Zach Hardaway is one of the best physiotherapists in Europe.

Tristan DuVal is a young soccer star with a groin injury.

They despise each other from the moment they meet.

As far as Zach is concerned, Tristan is a rich, spoiled brat who is too used to getting his own way.

As far as Tristan is concerned, Zach is a bossy, presumptuous asshole. Tristan hates Zach. He does. The problem is, he also wants to shove Zach against the nearest wall and climb him like a tree.

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