



ASHLEY RAYNE

The central illustration depicts a romantic moment between two characters. On the left, a character with vibrant teal hair and pointed ears is shown in profile, looking towards the right. On the right, a character with dark, wavy hair is shown in profile, looking back at the first character. They are in a close embrace, with the dark-haired character's hands resting on the teal-haired character's neck. The dark-haired character has a large, bushy teal tail. They are both wearing orange-brown jackets. The background is a dark, atmospheric scene of a city at night, with a prominent skyscraper visible in the distance. The entire scene is framed by a large, ornate archway with a repeating gold and black pattern. The title "ANCHORED TO YOU" is written in a large, white, serif font across the bottom of the illustration, with "TO" in a smaller font size between "ANCHORED" and "YOU".

ANCHORED
TO
YOU

ANCHORED TO YOU

CREEPIN U: SEASON 2

ASHLEY RAYNE



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CONTENTS

[About The Book](#)

[Series Memo](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Also By Ashley Rayne](#)

[Stalk Me](#)

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Beck

This school year at Creepin U, I only have three priorities: get through my classes, play baseball and work enough to make money for school. I don't have time for distractions, drama, and especially not hookups. Then I find out my new roommate is the one person I never expected to see again, and I know I'm screwed. After ghosting Talon last year, I told myself it was nothing more than a hookup. And it wasn't. I had too much going on back then, and I have even more going on now. But living with him makes forgetting impossible. We're sharing a small space, and the more time I spend with him, the more I want a second chance to prove I'm not the guy he thinks I am.

Talon

Getting ghosted hurts. But getting ghosted by the person who's your new roommate is worse. But he doesn't need to know that, so I lie. I tell him that night meant nothing and that I've moved on. But when he comes back asking for another night together, I can't help but agree. No feelings, no expectations, only hooking up. But the more I try to prove to him and myself that it means nothing, the harder it is to ignore my feelings. Maybe the biggest mistake wasn't hooking up again? Maybe it was believing that we could do it again without catching feelings.

SERIES MEMO

Notes from the Organization of Monster Enhancement

About two decades ago, a spontaneous anomaly affected the world. Approximately thirty-three percent of the human population was permanently transformed into different beings of various classifications, soon labeled as “monsters.” Some individuals shift into and out of their secondary form. Others were permanently changed and have no shifting abilities. An additional subset of previously deceased beings was resurrected; while most of these undead individuals are harmless automatons, a rare few have sentience.

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CHAPTER
ONE
TALON

One Year Earlier

Spinning around on my stool, I look at how empty Zomb-Bar is tonight. Of course it's empty, tonight's the annual Creelin U bonfire. Which I should be at, but for some reason I'm not feeling it right now. Maybe it's because I just broke up with Jeff a couple of weeks ago and I'm not ready to see him, or maybe it's because each time I've gone to the bonfire, I've gotten drunk and made stupid decisions. Like meeting Jeff in the first place. Some connections are simply not meant to become actual relationships. He's one of those people who should have remained a hookup. But you live, you learn, right?

I thought coming to Zomb-Bar would take my mind off being nervous about starting my junior year at CU, but there is nothing and no one here to distract me. There's maybe a handful of people in the bar, but even those people seem to be wrapping up their drinks and getting ready to leave. I wave goodbye to Henry, a Vampire who was in one of my classes last year. He gives me a brief signal before transforming into a bat and flying out the door.

Turning back around, I chug my shot of Vampire Vodka, raising my hand in the air trying to get the bartender's attention. He quickly fills up my small glass before taking off down the counter to go talk with the cute girl that's sitting on one of the stools. The Vampire Vodka burns going down,

and I wince, shaking my head. I am not usually one to take shots of liquor, but the nerves are running rampant tonight, and it seems to be the only thing that's currently calming me down.

"Is this seat taken?" A gruff voice asks, causing goosebumps to rise on my arms at the shock of him being so close. The screech of the stool moving hits my ears, making me wince and hunch down. I turn to face the guy who couldn't even wait for me to answer his question, ready to ask him to find another chair.

"Actual-" my words get cut off when I see the stunning man standing in front of me. He definitely goes to CU, since he's wearing a Creelin U baseball shirt. He's way taller than me; he has to be at least six feet with dark brown hair and these gorgeous blue eyes I wouldn't mind getting lost in. "No," I shake my head, probably a little too eagerly, but whatever.

"Cool. It's pretty dead in here, huh?" He laughs, gesturing around the space.

I glance across the bar again, agreeing with him. " Yeah, it's quite empty."

"No, get it. It's dead in here. Dead at Zomb-Bar. "Oh god, if I have to explain it, then it isn't funny anymore," he grimaces, lowering his head.

"Ohhh," I drag out, finally realizing what he meant. "That was actually pretty funny." I chuckle at his joke, even if I didn't fully understand it at first.

"It's okay, you don't have to fake laugh for my benefit. I'm Beck, by the way," he says, reaching his hand out.

I shake his hand, my gaze stuck on where our hands connect. He has rather large hands. Huge and rough, just how I like them. "I'm Talon. Are you new to CU?"

He sits up straight in his seat, a beaming smile appearing on his face. "Yep. It's my first year here. I didn't think I was going to get into CU, so I was so damn excited when I got my acceptance letter."

"Are you a human?" I ask, knowing that Creelin U officially opened its doors to humans for the first time this year.

"I am. You?" The bartender comes to us, and Beck orders a Boowery Beer before directing his attention back to me. "Well?"

"Oh, no. I'm not a human, I'm actually a mermaid."

"Holy shit, I've never met a mermaid before." He looks down at my legs, confusion etched on his face.

"I'm a shifter," I laugh, realizing he was expecting to see my fins.

"Woah, how does that work?" He scoots his stool closer to me and I don't hate it. Hell, if I'm being honest he could scoot another inch closer if he wanted to.

"Basically, any time I touch water, I can shift into my true form. But I can also control it so I don't shift every time I come into contact with water. I can take a shower and not worry about my fins knocking down all my shampoo and soap bottles." I joke, chuckling when he laughs loudly. Most people seem to think anytime I touch liquid that my tail fins automatically come out, but that's not true. When I was younger, it was harder for me to regulate my shifting, but as I've gotten older, I've been able to figure it out.

"Damn, I'm so fascinated by that. I grew up not too far from Creelin, so while I knew about monsters and shifters, I wasn't really around them as much. The school I went to only had humans. When I found out that CU was opening its doors to humans, I knew I had to apply. I didn't think I would get in, but holy shit, I'm so glad I'm here. Earlier today, I noticed some monsters hanging around. I have a feeling this is going to be an exceptional year."

"CU is a great school. I've had the time of my life here. Honestly, with how excited you are, I'm surprised you're not at the campfire. If you haven't noticed," I tell him, gesturing in the vicinity of the empty bar, "most people are gathering over there right now."

"Ah, yeah, I heard of the infamous bonfire, but I don't really know anyone here, so I thought it might be weird if I showed up to a party by myself. But I guess showing up to the Zomb-Bar by myself was just as strange."

"I can go with you if you don't want to go alone. I was about to head that way myself," I clamp my mouth shut, chastising myself. What the fuck, Talon? You don't even want to go to the damn bonfire. And you sure as hell weren't planning to go at all.

"Yeah? You wanna come with me? I wouldn't say no to spending some more time with you."

Is he flirting with me? He turns his body so that his knee bumps into mine. Instead of moving it, he leaves it there, tingling racing up my spine. Yep, he's definitely flirting with me.

"I uh, wouldn't mind enjoying more time with you either." I bump my leg into his, letting him know I'm just interested in him as it seems he is in

me.

"Yeah?" he asks, a huge beaming smile appearing on his face. "Let's go."

We both pay our tabs, then take off into the night, walking down toward the forest. The bonfire is always the start of the new school year. There's partying, drinking, swimming in the river, and just hanging out with friends. Our entire walk through the woods, Beck and I talk about what classes we're taking, and in between each answer our arms will rub up against one another or he'll look at me in a way that says he wants to tear off my clothes. Which, hell yes, please? I want that.

The sound of yelling and music hits our ears before we enter the clearing where the roaring bonfire is. I'm about to walk toward the keg when Beck grabs hold of my hand.

"Wanna swim?" he asks, stopping in his tracks as he glances out at the river full of students swimming and hollering.

"Here?" I ask, looking at the enormous party in front of us. "You don't want to grab a drink or play a game?"

"I thought I did, but I'd rather just hang out with you. Plus, I would love to see your fins if you're willing to show me."

"Hell yeah, I am. Let's go."

I clutch his hand, leading him through the crowd of students partying all around, toward the edge of the riverbed. We strip down to our briefs, and I can't help but stare at Beck in his underwear. Fuck, the man is a god. He's so damn muscular, which, duh, he's on the baseball team, so he probably works out a lot.

"Thank God for the moon," I mumble, my eyes fixed on Beck.

"I concur," he adds on, stepping closer to me. "You're beautiful, Talon. I'm about to kiss you, and unless you tell me no, it's going to happen."

"I'm not saying no."

Beck moves one step closer, his hand coming out to cup my face. "Last chance," he murmurs, his gaze flicking from my eyes to my mouth.

"Kiss me," I tell him, moaning when his lips finally touch mine. Damn, this man can kiss. My toes are curling into the sand, my arms wrapping around his waist and trying to bring him right up to me. "Wow," I whisper when we eventually pull away.

"Wow, yourself. I really want to kiss you again, but I also want to swim."

Barking out a laugh, I nod my head eagerly. "Same. How about we swim and kiss at the same time?"

"As long as we keep our heads above water, I should be fine. Last one's a rotten egg!"

Beck takes off into the river, jumping in with an enormous splash. I follow behind him, slowly entering the water. I close my eyes as my body shifts, allowing my fins to transform freely. Dunking my head under the surface, I swim a few feet before coming to a stop next to Beck. I flip my fin against the surface, letting Beck see the teal fin that matches my teal hair.

"Hi." I tell him, splashing him again as I circle around him.

"Wow, I knew you were beautiful, but seeing you in this form, damn, you're gorgeous." His fingers reach out to caress the tip of my flipper, his hand grazing up to my hip.

My cheeks warm and I know without a doubt, I'm blushing intensely. "Thanks, you're not too bad yourself."

He laughs hard, squeezing my hips. "I guess I'll take it. Come on, let's swim."

We swim around one another for a few minutes, enjoying the water. There are other students swimming nearby in the river, but we're not paying them any attention. This is not how I expected my evening was going to end, but I'm not mad. Hell, I'm shocked as hell to be honest. I thought for sure I would spend the night at the bar by myself until this sexy ass man sat in the spot next to me.

"So, I know earlier you said you didn't want to attend the bonfire by yourself, but you were able to not only visit the bar but also strike up a conversation with me. How come you were so nervous to be here by yourself?" I ask, wanting to learn more about the guy who randomly dropped into my lap.

"Ugh, it's hard to explain," he swims up next to me, stopping once he's in front of me. "I worry about what people are going to think of me. Being the new outsider here. I've barely made any friends on the baseball team, which is one reason I was iffy about coming tonight. I didn't want to show up not knowing anyone, and then I see a teammate and they ignore me."

I wade in the water, staying in place as we talk. "Do you suppose it's just because you're one of the new guys? When did you first get here?"

"It's only been a couple of weeks. We came a bit early to have some practice in before the year starts.

"Don't be so hard on yourself," I tell him, placing my hand on his arm. "I guarantee you already have friends. Hell, you easily came up to me and were friendly. I have no doubt you'll connect with others."

"You have more faith in me than I do," he snickers. "And we've only known each other for an hour."

"I'd like to think I'm a great judge of character," I bat my eyelashes at him, feeling so at ease with him. For someone I only met tonight, it feels as though I've known him even longer. "And you've got a new friend tonight."

He wraps his arm around my waist, pulling my body flush with his. "A new friend I'd like to kiss again."

"That can be arranged."

Encircling my fin with his body, we kiss one another, our kiss turning to fire. Pulling away, we're both breathing heavily, our chests rising and falling together. "Wanna come over to my dorm room? My roommate isn't here yet," he asks, his hands not leaving my form.

"Yes," I breathe, retreating and wanting to head to the shore as soon as possible.

Beck grabs my hand, leading me out of the water. After shifting back to my human legs, we both jump into our clothes, laughing as we walk again through the crowds of people, only this time we're leaving the bonfire. The trek to his dorm isn't long, but sadly it's in a different dorm than mine. For a fleeting second, thoughts flashed through my mind about how easy it would be to see one another if we were living in the same building. But as quickly as they appear, I douse them. Who knows if I'll even meet Beck again after tonight.

He opens the door to his room, letting me enter it first. One side of the room features a twin-size mattress against the wall. The opposite part of the area is completely empty, not a single small bag of clothes.

"When are you expecting your roommate to show up?" I ask, taking a seat on his bed.

"I'm not sure. I thought they would have moved in by now, but each day I wait excitedly for someone to move in. Hell, maybe I'll get lucky and I'll end up having the entire room to myself."

"That would be amazing. Having a roommate sucks. Luckily, the person I shared a room with last year and I decided to room together again this

year, so at least I know who I'm going to be living with. He's messy as hell, but it's better than the unknown of who you're going to live with." His eyes widen and I chuckle rushing out, "not that I'm trying to freak you out or anything."

"Well damn. Let's hope I don't get an asshole for a roommate then. However," he walks across the room and sits next to me, "I have to say, I'm thankful that whoever it is, is taking their sweet time getting here. Otherwise, we wouldn't be able to have any privacy."

"Oh, I do like that." I purr, leaning into his space.

Beck grabs hold of my chin, turning my head to face him. "I'm going to kiss you again. Stop me if you don't want it."

Like hell I plan to stop him.

Our kiss starts off light and sweet, but quickly becomes fire and dirty. His huge hands grip my waist as he pulls me onto his lap. My fingers sift through the hairs at the nape of his neck as his grasp holds me in place on his growing erection. Grinding down, I moan loudly as Beck kisses up the side of my throat. God, he feels amazing.

"Fuck, the things I want to do to you," he groans, his fingers reaching under my shirt and rubbing against my back.

"Do it then," I gasp, as his other hand comes out and flicks open the button to my jeans.

"Stay the night," he heaves out, his gaze locked on mine. "Please."

Nodding my head, I eagerly say, "Okay."

There's no way I'm planning to leave him tonight.

CHAPTER
TWO
BECK

One Year Later

Creelin University.

God, it's good to be back. Usually, summer is my time to shine. Go out to the beach, swim in the water, chill out in the sand, do everything I can to relax before returning to school. But this summer was different. My dad lost his job, and while I have a scholarship to Creelin U for baseball, it doesn't cover all expenses. Which means I needed to spend my summer working.

Getting the job was easy, saving up money was hard as fuck. So my summer of partying ended up being my time of working. Thankfully, I was able to save up some funds to last me for the first term of school, but now I have to find employment at the university that will not only pay me enough for the next semester but also work with my schedule. I tried to sign up for all the morning classes, but that is likely to be the best decision I've ever made—or the worst. I guess we'll just have to wait and see.

I take my time walking down the cobblestone streets to my dorm. My body sags as disappointment hits again. It's my senior year of college, and I thought for sure that I was going to be living off campus in an apartment with my best friends. But destiny sent a giant fuck you and I can't afford that so I had to sign up for college housing once more. Which meant I have to room with whoever is left. So yeah, I'm easing over there because the

way my life is going, I'll likely end up in the worst dorm at Creelin U, with a roommate who probably hates me.

Shaking my head, I roll my eyes. No one hates me at CU. I might not be the biggest guy on campus, but I do have a lot of friends. My suitcase bumps against one of the stones on the ground, and I straighten it out before lifting my gaze and taking a look at the grounds in front of me.

Creelin University is gorgeous. It's huge with ivory-colored walls, but my favorite part of the structure is hands down the gargoyles that stand guard. There's a rumor that some are alive, but as a human, I can't tell which.

Oh yeah, did I forget to mention I'm human? Some think it's weird that humans are attending "Creepin U," but the second I saw they were opening their doors to humans, I immediately applied. Last year was my first year here. Initially, the monsters shocked me, but they soon became my friends, and I stopped noticing their monster features. I just saw them—who they were as a person.

Last year I spent so much of my attention focused on baseball that outside of my teammates, I barely interacted with anyone at all. Teal eyes flash in my mind, and I shake my head, ridding my thoughts of the gorgeous man with teal eyes and teal hair. I didn't have the chance last year to do a lot, and this year seems as though it will be far worse. Having to add work to my schedule will be hard as hell, but I know I can do it. I'm going to go to class, study, and work. And hopefully party a few days too. I was lucky that my coach took pity on me and what I was going through. I drove up for practice the past couple weeks, but I wasn't required to stay on campus like most of the team.

The sign for Mummy Mocha catches my attention, and I beeline straight for the coffee shop. My suitcase bumps on stones behind me as I race there, but until you've had a Werebear Claw yourself, you wouldn't understand. There's already a long ass queue, everyone is in front of me carrying their own suitcases as we all stand in line. Mummy Mocha is gorgeous, everything is blue and gold, and is Egyptian mummy themed. All of the decorations are fake crypts and sarcophagi, but it looks so real. Last year, there was a genuine mummy who actually worked here. I wonder if he's still here.

"One, Sarcopha-Cappucino," I order, once I finally reach the front of the line.

"Coming right up."

Once I've secured my coffee, I leave Mummy Mocha, skidding to a stop when a flash of bright teal hair catches my attention. He's around the corner before I can fully collect my thoughts. I haven't thought about him in forever, but now I'm thinking about him twice in one day? It's probably because the bonfire is tomorrow night and it's bringing up memories of the last bonfire I went to. My thoughts drift to that evening, how easy it was for us to talk and how much fun we had when we returned to my room later that evening. If there's a single thing I wish would have been different last year, it would have been to see him again.

After making it to Karloff Hall, I take the elevator up to my floor. Using the key I got at check-in, I let myself into my dorm. My hands are shaking as I turn the door and I don't know why I'm nervous. I'm a pretty easy guy to get along with, but I'm worried my roommate and I will not click and then my senior year will be even more fucked than usual.

Stepping into the empty space, I spin in a complete circle, realizing that I'm the first one here. Hell yes, that means I get the initial pick of the bed. Dropping my bags down on the floor, I run and throw myself onto the first bed, groaning when my body flops straight down with no bounce.

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"Ugh," I groan, rolling over to my back. "Not this one."

I gingerly climb off, then do the same thing to the second bed. The mattress bounces about an inch, which is better than nothing. Wanting to claim this as mine, I grab my bag and dump all of my contents onto it. There. Now hopefully, whoever my roommate is, they won't take my bed.

My housemate last year was the roommate from hell. We constantly fought about everything and he was the messiest person I have ever met. Some nights I would come home from my game to find the room completely destroyed. His clothes would be everywhere; he would leave food and drinks all over the place. It would drive me crazy. I tried a couple

of times to get reassigned to a new roommate, but I kept hitting roadblocks and couldn't figure out a way to move in with someone new. Which was why when some of my teammates talked about getting an apartment together, I jumped at the chance. But without my dad's help, there's no way I could afford it on my own. So, here I am, having to stay in the dorms once again. And because I requested a room at the very last second, I couldn't even get a suite-style room that most Seniors can get in their final year. So for the consecutive year, I'm stuck in the smaller dorms with only two beds.

There's a soft knock on the door, and I'm about to get up when it swings open, King staring at me from the doorway. King is one of my friends I met last year here at CU. It was both of our first year at Creelin and we had a few classes in common plus we were on the baseball team as well so it just made sense for us to start hanging out.

"Dude," I groan, walking over and fist-bumping him. "What if I was naked?"

"Then I would have seen something I've spotted a million times before in the locker room."

"True, but still. Knock, dude. Where's your other half?" I ask, noting that his boyfriend, Niko, isn't beside him. Usually, where one is, the other is right next to them.

"He's helping his dad at the moment. Told him I wanted to stop by and say hi before the craziness of the move-ins begins to happen."

King and Niko met last year, and let's just say they didn't quite start off as friends. To be honest, I don't think Niko has many friends. Even when I met him, he was pretty closed off. Niko is a Gorgon, and he was always worried about what people would think of him and his snakes. I know it took a while for him to open up to King, and even longer to open up to his friends. I hung out with both of them tons of times until Niko finally cracked a smile in my direction. Now I wouldn't exactly call him friendly, but it's been awesome to see him warm up with King.

"Today's pretty chill. I know once tomorrow hits and everyone is here unpacking their shit, it's going to get wild." Looking around my empty space, a thought strikes me. "Damn, I bet my roommate is a new student, and that's why they aren't here yet."

"Makes sense. Considering you're putting away your stuff at the very end of the day. By the way, are you planning on attending the bonfire

tomorrow night? He asks, strolling over to the far side of my room and looking out the window.

"Hell yeah, I am. It's the last one of my college career. Of course, I'll be there."

"Alright, sounds good."

He appears distracted, and once his next few words fall from his mouth, I realize why.

"Niko's walking over this way. I'll see you tomorrow. Save a drink for me."

Before I can respond, he's across the room and out the door with the hugest smile on his face. I remember what it's like to be so obsessed with someone that just knowing you're about to see them has your blood on fire and the biggest grin on your face. Eh, maybe I'll feel it again. Maybe I won't. All I know is that this year I'm focusing on myself, work, and school.

That's it.

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CHAPTER
THREE
TALON

"Fucking hell, Talon, why do you have so much shit?" Hannah asks, trying and failing to grab the boxes out of the back of my car.

"I needed all my stuff. You know how many different outfits I have. There was no way I was going to pick and choose a handful of them."

Hannah sighs loudly, trying to reach for a smaller box on her second try. "Yeah, but you do remember you're not getting a suite room right? You have the smaller dorms. Which means tinier closets, Tal. Tighter closets lead to less space.

"I know what smaller closets mean," I roll my eyes, hip bumping her out of the way. "But that's also why I packed my trunks so I can stash some clothes in there too. And hell, maybe if I'm lucky, my housemate won't use their closet and I could take over their space.

"Speaking of... do you know who your roommate is yet?"

"Nope," I tell her, lifting the box out of the car and dropping it down onto the ground. "But it has to be someone who needed a room last minute too."

Hannah and I have been friends since the very first day of classes at CU. We sat next to one another and hit it off right away. We've been inseparable from that time on, barely having the chance to spend any time apart. Summers are always the hardest for us because she lives on the other side of the country. Hannah and I originally had plans to rent an apartment together, but I finally decided it would be better for me to obtain a room on

campus so that I can try and save some money. I got lucky and was able to get a job at Zomb-bar, but it wouldn't have been enough to pay for rent. Hannah was upset at first, but she understands how much I need to save up. My goal for the future is to become a lawyer and to do that, I still have a lot of schooling to go through, and scholarships only help so much. So yeah, taking the smaller dorm room was something I needed to do, even if I didn't want to.

"Wait, just you and I are bringing all of this upstairs? There's no one else here to help," she whines, grabbing a duffle bag and tossing it over her shoulder. "Where's Chris and Wyatt? Why aren't they around to lend a hand?"

"I'm pretty sure they're either at practice or Zomb-bar. They were planning to come, but someone wanted to stop a million times on the way here, so now they can't help."

"Do not blame me, Talon. We would have been on the road a hell of a lot earlier if all your shit was already packed. But noooo, you had to have nothing in boxes or bags, so that took us an extra two hours. Two hours Tal. And now there are no hot guys to help me carry these stupid things up the stairs."

"Are you more upset that you have to carry my shit, or more annoyed that you can't watch Wyatt carry my shit up the stairs?"

Hannah and Wyatt have had an on again off again relationship since we first started at Creelin. Every time I think that something more is going to happen between them, one of them will pull away. The last I heard they were off, but since Hannah is asking about him, I'm guessing that means she's hoping it'll turn on again.

"Of course I wouldn't mind watching Wyatt walk up those stairs with his bulging muscles. Can you blame me?" She tries to fan herself, her hand flopping back and forth under the box, causing both of us to laugh uncontrollably.

Once we both get ourselves together, I stick out my tongue. "Well, it sucks to be you, but he won't be helping us today. So toughen up, sweetie, it's just us."

Hannah and I grab as much of my stuff as we can and head into my dorm room. Of course, my room is on the third floor, but luckily there's an elevator that we can take. Hannah is groaning the whole time, whining about having to help.

"Oh my god," I moan once we finally reach my room. "It's only the first trip, and you're annoying as hell."

"Oh, shut up," she says, sticking her tongue out at me. "You love me and my complaining."

"You, yes. Your complaining, no."

As I open the door to my room, I stop in my tracks when I see that half of the room is already taken. Damn it, I was hoping to get here first so that I could figure out which bed I wanted. I look around the tight space, realizing it's not as small as I thought it would be. It's a corner room, so it's actually pretty spacious. My roommate hasn't fully unpacked yet, but he's already made his bed, making it clear that it's his. The rest of his stuff is thrown onto the floor or on the desk that's beside his mattress.

"Seems like you and your roommate both have something in common. Both of you are procrastinators. He hasn't unpacked anything either." Hannah tells me, her nose wrinkled up as she glances at his side of the room.

"I wonder where he is," I say aloud, but knowing she doesn't know the answer either.

"Is it break time yet?" She asks, lying down on my mattress. "Oh my god, Tal, this bed sucks. I bet that's why he claimed it first."

Dropping the box onto the floor, I take up the spot next to her, seeing how the mattress feels. Fuck, she's right, this bed pad sucks. Getting up quickly, I rush to the other side of the room, lying down on the other bed. What the hell? This one feels like feathers whereas mine was bricks.

"Come on, help me switch them."

"What?" She sits up looking at me wide-eyed. "Switch them?"

"He's not here; he won't know. Now come on."

Quicker than either of us have ever been, we strip down his mattress and start maneuvering them around to switch them. Luckily, they're both only a twin size, so they're not that heavy, but we're both still panting and sweating after getting them switched.

"Now set the blankets on again," I demand hastily, throwing the pillow at her while I try to put the fitted sheet back in place.

"You know as soon as his ass lies on that cushion he's going to know what you did, right?"

"Yeah," I smile, fitting the last corner of the sheet onto the bed. "But I'll just act stupid and bat my eyelashes. Hell, maybe he'll even forget he had

the soft mattress. Now come on, there's more stuff in my car."

Hannah and I bring up all of my belongings, tossing them down on the floor with a thump once we finally have everything in my room. Hannah and I bring up all of my belongings, tossing them onto the floor with a thump once we finally have everything in my room. We lay on my new softer mattress, giggling when we both pat the cushion roughly.

"Hopefully, you don't get a rough start with your roommate," she laughs, turning her head to look at me. "Wanna stick around and see who it is? Or are we going to go out and hide?"

"Let's hide," I snicker, jumping up off the mattress. Besides, I need to head over to Zomb-bar anyway and see what my schedule is."

"Alright, let's go."



WAKING UP THE NEXT DAY, I gingerly pull the comforter off my head and look in the direction of my roommate's bed. When I finally got back into my room last night, all the lights were off and my roommate was sound asleep on his rocky mattress. I wasn't able to see his face, but I sure as hell heard his snoring all night. He's loud as hell. The sun is shining brightly, so I have to squint my eyes, but even then I can tell he's no longer in his bed. Hmm. Grabbing my phone from under my pillow, I glance at the time. What the hell? It's only eight.

Sitting up, I look around the room, making sure he isn't hiding somewhere in this small space. I guess I'm not going to meet him this morning either. I feel like we've both circled each other the past twenty-four hours. When he's here, I'm gone, and vice versa. It's strange, and it just makes me want to see him even more. As long as he didn't notice I switched the mattress. Thinking back to yesterday, I snicker about Hannah and I struggling to move the mattresses. I can't believe we actually moved the beds. I was joking at first, but then once I thought about it, I had to do it. I'm just crossing my fingers that I haven't already made trouble with a roommate I have yet to meet.

My phone buzzes in my hand, and I look down to see a text from Hannah.

HANNAH

Wanna go get some coffee? My arms are so sore from yesterday.

ME

Oh my god, you're pathetic. It was like 4 things, Han.

HANNAH

That's 3 over my limit. Coffee? Pleaseeee Tal.

ME

Fine. Give me 30 mins.

Thirty minutes later, I'm riding the elevator down to the bottom floor. The dorm is crazy busy right now, tons of students finishing moving in their stuff. There're activities set up in the common areas for students to get to know one another. I love seeing the monsters and humans interact with each other. While not every monster stays in their monster form, a few of them are and it's great to witness it. It makes me happy to see them be themselves. I know for some of us it took a while to feel comfortable enough to be in our true forms around humans, but so many of the humans have been accepting.

"Talon!"

Turning around in a circle, I look nearby to see who's calling my name, when Wyatt comes barreling through a group gathered near the Mahjong Table.

"Mahjong, huh?" I ask, jerking my head in the direction of the table he had just come from.

"Have you ever played it before? It's so damn fun. A few students started a new group this year, so of course I had to sign up. They only meet a few times a month, but you should join it with me. Come on." Wyatt drags me toward the table, tossing one of the pens at me.

"I bet Hannah would like this too."

Wyatt gets a dreamy look on his face at the mention of Hannah. Yeah, my two friends are completely gone for one another.

Wyatt shakes his head, returning to our conversation. "Speaking of which, how did the move-in go yesterday? Sorry I couldn't help. You all

came during practice, and you know Coach wasn't going to let me leave early to lend a hand."

"Well, it was just Hannah and me, so you can only imagine how it went."

"Complaining," we both reply in unison.

"But I'm about to meet Hannah right now for some coffee if you want to come?" I singsong the last word, knowing he loves being invited to things including Hannah.

"Ugh, can't." He groans, tossing his head back. "I have practice. But I'll see you both at the bonfire tonight?"

"Yep."

"See you then."

"Bye."

After signing up to join the Mahjong group—because let's be honest, that sounds like so much fun—I finally make my way outside, pulling out my phone to call Hannah.

"I'm already waiting outside the library; hurry up." She hangs up the phone and I chuckle, putting the device back into my pocket.

It doesn't take me long to reach Mummy Mocha, which is conveniently located in the library on campus. The number of times I've been here is ridiculous. At this point, I should have a drink named after me. After ordering our drinks, Hannah and I sit down at one of the tables.

"I just saw Wyatt on my way here. He was asking if we're going to the bonfire tonight." I tell her, taking a sip of my Sarcopha-cappucino.

"Duh, we're going. And no, you're not going to bail on me this year, like you did last year."

"I didn't bail," I lie. "I got caught up with something. And it just made me late."

"Late? You might have gone late, but you never even came to find me." She pouts, sticking out her lower lip.

"Wasn't that the night you and Wyatt were making out in front of the fire and only stayed there for less than twenty minutes? Hell, I'm pretty sure I was at the bonfire longer than you were."

"Still. You ditched me."

We both laugh loudly, knowing she's full of shit. Even if I went with her to the bonfire, she and Wyatt would have found each other eventually, and then I would have been a third wheel. It's not so bad when Wyatt's best

friend Chris is there, but sometimes he's preoccupied with trying to find someone to hook up with, so he checks out too.

"Do you think you'll see him tonight?" She asks, twirling her straw around in her cup.

"Hmm? Who?" I play dumb, even though I know exactly who she's talking about.

Last year, on the evening of the bonfire, I tried to hide out at Zomb-Bar, but once Beck walked into my space, I wanted to spend the remainder of the night with him. After our swim in the river, we went back to his room where we hooked up. It was the hottest night of my life. That man had me saying and doing things I had never done before. Hell, I still haven't had another night like that since then. But the highest of feelings crashed when I was ghosted by Beck. The morning after we exchanged numbers, and we each promised to text and hang out again. Well, after trying a couple of times to text him and receiving nothing in response, I gave up. I wasn't going to chase after a man who obviously didn't want to talk to me. I never saw him again, either. I figured for sure I would have seen him once or twice throughout the year, but nope, nothing. It's not that I'm bitter; I realize one night stands are common. I was more irritated at the fact that he couldn't send a three second text just letting me know nothing else was going to happen. And I haven't even thought of him since then. Not his gorgeous blue eyes, or the longer strands of hair I wrapped my fingers in. Or that perfect V-cut on his abdomen. Nope, I haven't thought about him at all.

"Beck. Or whatever his name was. I bet he'll be there tonight."

"Maybe. Who cares?" I lie, hating that my heart beats faster at the idea of him going to the bonfire tonight. I was only planning to make a quick appearance for Hannah's sake, but now I'm rethinking things. Maybe I'll hang out even longer at the bonfire this evening.

"Oh honey, you know you care. But that's okay; we can pretend we don't care. We just have to make sure you look good as fuck."

"Hell yes. We're both about to look spectacular. Now what should we wear?"

Hannah and I spend the rest of the morning discussing what we're going to wear to the bonfire tonight. By the time we leave the library, we've made plans about when we will meet at the bonfire. And for the first time in a long time, I'm actually looking forward to the CU yearly party.

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CHAPTER
FOUR
BECK

"Fuck, why is Coach riding our ass so hard?" I groan, letting the water from the shower rush over my back. I close my eyes tightly, my body aching from practice. That's another thing that sucks about living in shared dorm rooms. Shared showers. So, I always try to spend as much time in the locker room washrooms as possible. I don't have to worry about rushing because someone else is waiting on me to finish. And with how hard Coach is making us work, I need all the extra minutes in the bathroom I can get.

King laughs, turning on his own shower head. "This is nothing. Did you already forget how it was last year? Hell, we had no time to do anything. He knows our team this year is a fucking beast, and he's planning to make us work our asses off. This might be the year we make it all the way to the end. I don't think that's ever happened since Coach took over."

"This blows," Wyatt adds, joining us in the showers. "Everyone else is getting ready for the bonfire, and here we are working extremely hard. I don't even know if I'm going to stay awake long enough to get to the damn thing."

"Niko is making me go, otherwise I would crawl into my bed and hide. You would think I would be the one dragging him out tonight, but nope, that man has opened up in so many ways. I love seeing him become carefree and so much more full of life. But damn, right now all I want to do is sleep."

"Beck, you're going to the bonfire, right?"

"Ugh," I groan loudly, not answering. I don't know if I feel like going.

My body is sore as hell, and last night when I finally laid down to go to sleep, my mattress was hard as a rock. I can't even imagine what it would have been like to lie down on the other mattress since I had picked the softer of the two. Plus, Coach has been working us into the ground. We've been coming to practice early as hell in the mornings, and then he makes us do strengthening and conditioning for a few hours. My body is wrecked.

"Come on, man," Wyatt says, getting my attention. "You can hang out with me and my friends. It'll be fun."

"Fine," I relent, shaking my head underwater. "But I can't guarantee that I'll stay the whole time."

"Me neither, so it's all good."

Grabbing my towel off the rack, I quickly dry myself before stepping away. "Text me and let me know when and where we're meeting up."



I TOSS my white t-shirt over my head, double-checking my outfit in the mirror. Sifting my fingers through my hair, I mess it up a little so it doesn't look so put together. I pick up my Nikes out of my duffel bag and put them on my feet. My gaze drifts over to the other side of the room. My roommate moved in, but I haven't seen him yet. Besides his lump under the covers this morning. I tried to catch a glimpse of him, but he was so cocooned in his blanket that I couldn't see any part of him. He must have been here right before I got back because there's a pile of clothes in the center of his bed.

Eventually we'll have to meet one another at some point. Thought it would have happened by now, but maybe he's just as busy as I am. Wyatt texts me, letting me know he's on his way toward the bonfire, so I grab my phone and head out of the room. My thoughts drift back to last year, on the night of the bonfire, and how I was in a completely different headspace. I was so nervous to come to Creelin U, and I had felt so out of place. I was worried I wouldn't be able to make any friends, and I didn't want to go to the bonfire only to be hanging out there alone.

After making it through the bonfire and the initial weeks of school, I started to get my footing underneath me, but the school year still wasn't easy. School doesn't come easy to me. What usually takes one student a small number of times of reading to understand, will take me twice or three times as much. Plus, not only trying to keep up with all of my classes but also making sure that I'm keeping up with all things baseball. The practices are brutal, and it took me a while to figure it all out.

Blowing out a breath, I shake my head as the elevator door opens and I step off. Damn, if I thought last year was tough, this one is going to be worse. Not only will I still have my classes and baseball, but now I'm trying to add a job on top of that. Which fuck reminds me I need to go by the places around campus and see if any are hiring part-time employees. I guess that'll be my goal for tomorrow. I'd better enjoy tonight while I can before life takes over again.

Exiting the dorms, I head down the cobblestone path, following the crowds of students who are walking toward the forest. On my left, a huge centaur is strolling with this gorgeous vampire with violet hair. She's talking animatedly while he's laughing hard. On my right, there's a spiderling in his true form. There aren't many times when I've seen a spiderling, as they're usually in their human shape, so it's wild to see one moving toward the woods. He's massive; his long legs taking one step to my every ten.

I'm reaching the entrance to the forest when Wyatt comes running up to me. "Hey man, glad you could make it."

"I had a feeling that if I didn't show up, you guys wouldn't let me live it down. And I'd rather not deal with all that bullshit," I joke, fist-bumping him. "Where's Chris?" Chris and Wyatt are two peas in a pod. Wherever one is, the other isn't far behind.

"He's already at the bonfire. He wanted to set up the beer pong table early. Which yes, I'm going to make you play. Don't even try to make an excuse."

I raise my hands in surrender and laugh loudly. "I didn't even say anything."

"You might not have said something, but you were thinking it."

He's right. I was already trying to think of excuses to get out of it. Wyatt and I head farther into the forest until finally the bonfire comes into view. It's similar to last year; tons of students all around the bonfire. Other students surround the area, drinking and playing games. My gaze drifts over

to the river, a fin catching my attention. For a second I think it's Talon until I see the fin is bright pink and a woman appears. My heart, which was beating a million miles a minute, slows down, realizing it's not him.

I don't know why I still think of him a year later. It was only one night. But I know that if my life had been different, I would have tried to reach out to him. His smile was infectious, and if there was something in my life I regretted, it would be that I didn't keep in touch with him.

I put my hands into my pockets, surveying the surrounding scene. I'm in a funk now and want to leave as soon as possible. Which is stupid, right? I should want to have fun, but now all I can think about is having to find a job, classes start on Monday, baseball is making me so damn tired, and that I could have had a chance with this handsome mermaid and I let that slip through my fingers.

"Earth to Beck," Wyatt says, waving his hands in front of my face. I have no idea how long he's been trying to get my attention, but by the exasperated look on his face, I can guarantee it was more than once.

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"Hmm?"

"I was saying my friend doesn't have a partner for beer pong. Do you mind partnering up with him?"

"Uh, I don't know, man-" I say, trying to think of any excuse to get out of it.

"No. No excuses," he tells me, not letting me off that easily. Damn it.

"Fine," I relent, rolling my eyes playfully. "But if I lose, then that's it. No forcing me to play another round."

"What a party pooper. Anyway, this is my friend-"

"Talon," I cut him off when Talon steps into view.

Fuck, he's more gorgeous now than last year. His teal hair is still the same, down to his shoulders and wavy, as though he just got done swimming in the river. Teal eyes stare back at me as his eyes widen, before

giving me a quick once-over. My chest puffs up at the thought of him checking me out, but once our gazes meet again, his eyes are ice cold.

"We know one another," he tells Wyatt curtly, looking away from me.

"Oh, uh, um," Wyatt babbles, not sure what to say. He looks at me and I shrug my shoulders, not knowing what to say either.

It's clear from Talon's voice and posture that he doesn't even want to look in my direction. Fuck, that hurts. But to be honest, I don't blame him. I *did* disappear after telling him I would text him back.

"How have you been?" I ask, trying to get him to talk to me.

"Fine," he says, taking a step away from us.

I look over at Wyatt, who widens his eyes and glances between Talon and me. I'm giving him pleading help me eyes, but he either doesn't understand what I'm trying to say, or he doesn't care.

"Alright, you both are up first. You're going against me and Hannah. And don't worry, we won't go easy on you."

Talon doesn't look at me, just passes me and heads over to the table. He talks to this beautiful blonde girl with green eyes. She keeps her gaze on me while Talon whispers in her ear. Her eyes sharpen as she nods her head, her gaze quickly turning to Wyatt, a wordless conversation flowing between them. I watch as she sways over to Wyatt, placing her hand on his chest.

"I'm going to team up with Tal for this game. And then you can have me all to yourself later."

"But-" his words get cut off when she kisses him roughly, their tongues tangling with one another.

I should one hundred percent look away, but I can't. Damn, they're hot as fuck. I look over at Talon, who rolls his eyes and takes a sip out of his red cup. I'm about to say something else to Talon when Tom walks up to the table. Tom is another player on the baseball team; he's a Sasquatch and is tall as hell. He's an outstanding baseball player; his ability to easily lift his arm into the air allows him to catch fly balls.

"What's up?" He asks, walking over to me and tapping my fist. "I see you all have the table all set up. Can I join? There's Brewery Beer, right? That's the only beer I drink."

I look over at Talon, who's staring at the two of us. I'm not sure whether he's wanting me to tell Tom yes or no. Talon interrupts me just as I'm about to speak.

"Oh, you can take my spot. I wasn't really feeling it anyway," he says, smiling sweetly at Tom.

Talon walks away, moving closer to his friend, and I don't say a word. I don't blame him for being so cold toward me. Hell, I'd probably act the same way if I were in his shoes. Tom and I move over to the table, setting up the cups and beer. The entire time I'm setting up the game, I'm watching Talon from my periphery. I see the exact moment he leaves, and my body deflates. I wasn't trying to make him leave the party early. Damn, maybe I should have left as soon as I realized I was hanging out with his friends. I didn't mean to make him uncomfortable.

Tom and I start playing the game, but my mind is solely focused on Talon. Seeing him again has so many emotions flooding through my body. Anger at myself for basically ghosting him. Sadness at seeing how hurt he was once he saw me tonight. But I'm also determined. Determined to find him and explain myself. And maybe we'll be able to be friends. Especially since I have a feeling we'll be seeing more of each other since we have friends in common. With newfound determination, I spend the next few hours having fun and hanging out with friends.

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CHAPTER
FIVE
TALON

Getting back to my dorm, I'm annoyed as hell. This was the first time I saw Beck since our night together, and rather than pretending nothing happened between us, I showed he affected me. So dumb. I gave myself away too easily. It was a shock to see him, especially after going a whole year without seeing him. I had no idea he was friends with Wyatt and Chris. Dumb on my part, because they're all on the same baseball team, so of course they know one another. He's just never hung out with them before, so I wasn't expecting to run into him tonight.

I always told myself that if I ever crossed paths with him again, I would play it cool. I would act as if I barely remembered him or that night. Yes, I may have thought way too much about someone who only had one evening with the man. But damn, what a night it was.

Whatever.

I'm not going to let him get to me again. Grabbing my shower caddy, I make sure I have all my stuff and my pajamas and head out of my room toward the community bathroom down the hall. The dorm is completely empty; all the students are down at the bonfire. It's eerily quiet; the only sounds coming from my feet padding against the floor. I probably spend way too long getting cleaned up, but since I'm the only one here, I'm taking my sweet time.

Blue eyes flash in my mind, and my dick plumps up.

"No," I tell myself, irritated that I'm thinking about him again.

Not wanting to jerk off to him—once again—I quickly turn off the hot water and dry off. I may or may not have used our one night together to fulfill many of my jerk off sessions. Sue me. It was a hot as hell night. But now that I've seen him again, it feels weird to use him as a prop in my fantasies.

There's a loud bang in one of the shower stalls, followed by giggling and snickering. Trying to sneak out of the room, I stifle a laugh when I see two zombies making out next to one of the shower curtains. I guess it's a good thing I didn't try to get off. That would have been awkward as hell.

Once I'm finally back in the safety of my room, I grab hold of the TV on my desk and turn it to face my bed. I have nothing else to do, so I might as well watch some documentaries. Maybe if I stay up late enough, I'll actually be able to meet my roommate. Using the remote, I navigate to Ghouloo, trying to find something that catches my attention. I love watching murder documentaries. My idea of relaxing is curling up in a huge, thick blanket, a mud mask on my face, and a documentary on the TV.

I'm deep into the show; the episode finally getting interesting when the doorknob jiggles. My heart races, realizing that I'm going to meet my roommate. The door squeaks open slowly, and I stare at the space, waiting to see who enters. My stomach drops when Beck walks through the doorway, his eyes widening when he sees me.

"What are you doing here?" I ask, way too aggressively. But come on, why is he standing here in my room?

"Uh, what are you doing here?" He looks around the room, just as confused as I am. His gaze pings to his bed, then he takes a step back and looks at the door he just entered.

"This is my room."

"This is my room."

"Are you just going to keep copying everything I say?" I ask, irritated. How did he find out which dorm room I'm staying in? Ugh, if Hannah told him where I live, I am going to be pissed.

"Sorry," he walks back into the space, shutting the door behind him. "Um, this is awkward," he scratches the back of his head, looking over at me again. "This is my room."

"No, this is my room."

I get what he's saying; I just don't want to believe it. There's no way my luck could be this bad. He moves over to the bed—his bed—and takes a

seat, rubbing his hands together. He shakes his head before glancing up at me. "Well, shit. I'm not sure what to say."

"There's really nothing to say. Guess we're roommates now."

Ugh, could my life get any worse? I already have so much on my plate, and now I'm going to have to deal with the fact that I'll have to see Beck every day. Even to my own ears, I know I'm being petty. We're two men in college, hooking up and ghosting is a typically normal thing. But my ego has taken a hit. I know it has, and I know it's why seeing Beck affects me deeply. I thought we had a great night together, and it sucks knowing that he didn't feel the same way.

"It's good to see you. Honestly, seeing you earlier at the bonfire shocked me. And shit, now we're roommates. How crazy is that?"

"So crazy," I murmur, looking away.

Fuck, what is wrong with me? I'm not usually like this. And I'm acting ridiculous, even to myself. And for what? Because I got ghosted? Hell, people get ghosted all the damn time. We're in college. How many people actually end up with someone they hooked up with in college? Besides, do I really want to spend the entire year with a chip on my shoulder? I have too much going on to sit and be petty. Yeah, it hurts, but do I want to hate coming home every night when I see him? Not really.

"So, uh, after seeing you earlier, it reminded me of what happened between us last year."

He remembered only after he saw me? Unlike me, who uses that night as jerk off material at least once a week. Maybe that evening wasn't as special as I thought? I guess I need to be more like Beck and act as though it doesn't affect me as much as it does.

"Oh yeah, that was a fun night. One and done. Just like I like it."

What the fuck, Talon? You sound dumb even to your own ears. There's no way he believes I'm okay with it after how I acted earlier tonight.

He rubs the back of his neck, nodding his head. "Heh, yeah."

"I hate to cut this short, but I have to work tomorrow, so I should probably get to sleep. Damn, it's already three in the morning," I say, looking at the time on my phone. I didn't even realize how late it actually was. I must have been watching TV longer than I thought I was.

"Where do you work?"

"Uh, Waffles and Werewolves. It's connected to Zomb-Bar," I reply hesitantly. Zomb-Bar is where we first met. But it's also one of the most fun

places in town. It's always busy, filled not only with students but customers from all over Creelin. At night, Zomb-Bar is the place to be, but during the day, the space next to it is the top brunch spot in the downtown area. I already know the tips are going to be great, and the owner Seth is consistently willing to work with CU students and their schedules.

"Do you know if they're hiring?"

"I think so. Well, I think Zomb-Bar is. I don't know about Waffles and Werewolves," I say, hoping he's not going where I think he is. Fuck, I'm already having to wrap my head around living with the man. I don't know if I can handle having to work with him every day too.

He twists his hands in his lap, taking a deep breath. "Do you mind if I go over with you tomorrow? I need to get a job, and I would love one where I can work fewer hours but still make decent money."

"Uh, yeah," I force a smile as I look at him. "You can come with me tomorrow. I'm sure Seth will be down to meet with you."

"Awesome. Thanks, man. I'll let you catch some sleep now."

"Thanks," I whisper, laying my head down.

Beck turns off the light a few minutes later. His breathing evens out before a soft snore escapes him. This was not how I expected my senior year to start off. I was expecting to get a roommate I barely got along with, worked hard in my classes and earned some money on the side. Now I'm having to live with the man who fucked me so good I saw stars, then ghosted me and is now asking where I work because he wants to work with me. Sighing deeply, I roll onto my side, pulling the comforter over my head.

Yeah, I have a feeling I'm not going to get any sleep at all tonight.



"TALON?" a whispered voice pulls me from my slumber, and I turn over, squinting my eyes from the sunlight.

"Hmm?" I ask, squeezing my eyes shut once again. "What time is it?" I croak, trying to soothe my dry throat.

"Uh, ten? I wasn't sure what time you needed to be at Waffles and Werewolves. But I didn't want to risk you being late, or me not waking up

early enough and not being able to go with you." The bed squeaks as he takes a spot next to me on my mattress.

"What are you doing?" I ask, opening one eye to glare at him. "Why are you sitting on my bed?"

"Oh," he quickly gets up, looking at me sheepishly. "My bad. Well, now that you're awake. When are you heading over?"

I'm about to respond when the alarm on my phone goes off. After turning off the alert, I look at Beck, who looks way too chipper in the morning. "I guess now. Let me get ready, and then we can go."

"Awesome."

An hour later Beck and I are making our way down the street toward Zomb-Bar. He's been talking a million miles a minute, giving small commentary on every store we pass. I barely talk, giving a grunt or groan now and then to the conversation. Waking up this morning, I'm not even upset anymore with Beck. Realizing that what we had was one night, plus knowing that I'm stuck with him for the next year has me looking at things differently. There's no reason to be petty and annoying with him.

But that doesn't mean I'm a morning person either. We didn't have time to stop at Mummy Mocha on the way, which is why I'm quieter than usual. When I was falling asleep, I told myself that I would wake up this day with a fresh start but he's way too excited in the morning and I'm the type of person who needs twelve hours of sleep and a gallon of caffeine to get me in a good mood. We're passing by the bakery Bakeenstein's when I can't take it anymore.

"Need coffee," I mumble, heading off toward the entrance.

"Coffee? I could use some. And a pastry. Damn, now my stomach is rumbling."

We head into the bakery, the aroma of coffee beans and sweets taking over the entire space. If I can't have Mummy Mocha, this will definitely do. Walking over to the display case, my mouth starts to water as I take in all the goodies in front of me. There's Boo Butter Cookies, Cemetery Crumble Bars, Crypt Cakes, Boo-nuts, and oh my god, they have Eyeball Truffles. I am in heaven right now. All the treats look and smell amazing, but I know there's no way I can eat them all.

"Holy shit," Beck whispers next to me as he leans down. "We'll have to come back over and over because I want to try everything, but I'm certain my stomach will hate me."

"That's exactly what I was just thinking. I might have to stop in before every shift I have."

Beck and I take turns ordering, with me getting a Cauldron Chai Latte and two Eyeball Truffles. Beck orders an iced Vanilla Frankenbrew and a Boo Butter Cookie. They wrap up our sweets in this cute, light brown packaging that looks like mummy wraps. They place our drinks in large plastic cups, securing them with two bolts on the lid. This feels like it'll be my new spot to go to. I'll have Mummy Mocha on campus and this when I'm at work. After leaving the store, Beck and I continue down the street heading toward Zomb-Bar.

Walking into the bar, I head toward the back to see if Seth is busy or not.

"Hey," I say, knocking on the door to Seth's office.

"Hey, Talon. How are you doing?" Seth asks, lifting his head from his desk. He's working on something important since he's wearing glasses on his face. I've noticed he only wears them when he's concentrating on a task. He takes the eyewear off, turning away from his computer.

"I'm good, quick question though." Leaning back out of the doorway, I look at Beck, who's standing next to the bar. His hands are in his pockets, and he's looking around the area. I can tell he's nervous as hell, and I feel a little sorry for him. Trying to get a job is hard as hell, but finding one that will work with your school schedule has to be near impossible. But that doesn't mean I still want him to find work here. "My roommate is hanging out at the bar. He's looking for a job for the school year and wanted to talk to you about if there're any openings here."

"Damn, what great timing. I was about to post another flyer on Fangstagram trying to see if I could get some more people to come in and apply."

"Oh, that's good," I say, presenting a fake smile. I know Beck needs the job, but damn, I'm going from haven't seen him in a year to being around him every second of the day.

"Are you okay?" Seth asks, his eyebrows furrowed. I'm aware I'm not making any sense. I'm the one who walked in here asking him to help give my roommate a job, and now I'm upset that he actually has an opening to offer him.

"Yeah, yeah," I tell him, shaking my head and getting rid of the cobwebs. "I think he'll be great for Zomb-Bar."

"Sounds good. Let me go ask him some questions."

Seth walks over to Beck and right away they're smitten with one another. They're laughing and joking; Beck's nervousness is nowhere to be seen anymore. After Seth and Beck fist-bump, Beck looks over at me, giving me a thumbs up with a huge smile on his face.

Well damn, I guess I'll be getting what I wanted a year ago. Spending a lot of time with Beck.

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CHAPTER

SIX

BECK

Talon gives me a thumbs-up in return, and I can't help but smile. Damn, when I saw Talon at the bonfire, I knew I wanted to explain myself right away about how I never reached out to him after our night together. But he left so quickly, I didn't get the chance to do it.

Imagine my surprise when I finally get into my dorm, only to come face to face with a sleepy Talon on his bed. He looked adorable and cute as fuck, but was definitely standoffish. I didn't want to talk to him about it when it was so late, and then this morning we woke up early and I couldn't talk to him then either. At this point, I don't think we'll ever get to talk about what happened between us.

Which may be for the best.

With this year being even crazier than last year, I need to stay out of all the drama that I can. And if Talon is okay with moving forward, then I have to do the same. There's no point in bringing up something that I can't change, even if I still feel pretty bad about it.

And now I owe him. Trying to find a place to work at that would also work with my school schedule has been tough. On the way over to Zomb-Bar, Talon was telling me about Seth and how he owes both Zomb-Bar and Waffles and Werewolves. Seth is a Werewolf who became a chef and loves to cook breakfast items. One day, a woman moved into the space next to his restaurant and opened a bar. After feuding for a few months, both of them realized they were arguing every day because they wanted to be around

each other. They ended up falling in love and getting married. And now they both own two of the busiest places in the downtown area.

Seth talks way too fast, letting me know that he's hiring more bartenders and servers at Zomb-Bar. Which is perfect for me because I can easily come to work after school and after practice at night. I'm trying to keep up with what Seth is saying, but my gaze is stuck on Talon in the corner. I might have been secretly hoping we would have more time together, but not with us working two completely different shifts.

Seth sticks his hand out, causing me to come out of my stupor. "It'll be great to have you. Besides, any friend of Talon's is someone I want working for me."

"Thanks, sir."

Seth shakes his head, laughing. "Nope, my dad is a sir, not me."

"Got it," I laugh. "And thank you again for giving me a chance."

"Of course."

Seth walks away, Talon coming up and taking his spot. "How did it go?"

"I got the job!" I squeal excitedly. Without a second thought, I wrap my arms around Talon, lifting him into the air. "Thank you!" I yell a little too loudly. I hold on a bit tighter than normal, my heart racing at how close our bodies are. God, he feels so good in my arms, which is weird as hell. Fuck, I need to let him go. Why am I still holding him?

Talon stares at me when I finally put him down on the floor. "You're welcome," he clears his throat as he backs away. "I have to get next door, though. I guess I'll see you later?" He asks, as if we don't live together.

Why is he looking at me funny? Fuck, do I have something on my face? I not so subtly dab my face, then wipe my tongue across my teeth. Do I have something stuck in my teeth? I don't feel anything. He tilts his head quizzically, and I copy the motion.

"Yeah, I'll see you later. Have fun at work."

Talon takes off out of the bar like his ass is on fire, and I can't help but chuckle. He is one strange dude. Hot as fuck, but strange as hell. Glancing at my clock, I realize I'm almost late for conditioning, so I hightail it out of the bar, making my way back to CU.



"WHAT THE HELL was that last night?" Wyatt asks once we're able to take a break from lifting weights.

We're both sitting on the floor, drenched in sweat as we chug from our water bottles. Classes start tomorrow, and Coach is using it as an excuse to work our asses hard. My arms are jelly and my legs are no better, and I know Wyatt is feeling the same way as me, so I'm not sure why he's trying to have a conversation right now.

"What?" I huff, not able to get any other words out of my mouth.

My body gives way and I slowly fall to the right, letting gravity take over. God, yes. The floor is dirty as hell, and probably has layers of dry sweat, but right now it's more comfortable than a fluffy bed. I curl up on my side, closing my eyes as Wyatt keeps talking.

"Last night at the bonfire. I wasn't aware you knew Talon. But apparently, you two know each other pretty well. I've never seen him that closed off to someone before. Usually he's happy-go-lucky, always has a smile on his face, and is friendly to everyone he meets."

"Yeah, we met last year. Started off on the right foot, but then something happened." That's all I'm wanting to say about it. What happened between Talon and me should stay between the two of us. Besides, knowing that they're friends, I don't want to say anything and have it make its way back to him. I don't want him thinking I'm going around campus talking about him, when I'm clearly trying to not talk about him at all.

"What? You're being so damn cryptic. Tell me what happened," Wyatt begs, scooting closer on the floor toward me. "You know I'm not going to say anything."

"He fucked and ran," King says, coming up and taking a spot beside Wyatt on the ground. "My man ghosted him."

"Holy shit. You're that guy?" Wyatt asks wide-eyed. He sits up straight and stares at me dead on. "You're an asshole."

I huff, breathing a deep sigh. Thanks, King. "I know. But to be fair, I wasn't planning on ghosting him. But I got too overwhelmed with baseball

and school, and I didn't have time to talk to anyone. Much less to hook up with somebody."

"But didn't you have his number?" King says, smirking at me. "I didn't realize texting someone took so much time out of your day."

"First, fuck you," I say to King, "you know how much I was dealing with last year."

"What he said." Wyatt adds on, hiking his thumb in King's direction. "A three second text wouldn't have hurt. I remember Talon and Hannah talked shit about you a lot. Well, mostly Hannah, but Talon would add things here and there. Fuck, you fucked up."

Scrubbing my hands down my face, I sigh again, feeling like shit all over again. "I know," I groan, closing my eyes. "I fucked up. But I had more important things going on. Should I have reached out to him? Duh. But I didn't. Which was why he was cold as ice last night. Speaking of which, something else happened last night that shocked me."

"Tell us," Wyatt and King reply in unison.

"Fuck, that was creepy that you replied together," I laugh, "but when I got home last night, I met my roommate for the first time."

"Okay?" King says, lifting one eyebrow.

"Are we supposed to know who your roommate is?" Wyatt asks, taking another sip of his water bottle.

"It's Talon."

Wyatt spits out the drink, rushing to wipe his mouth while King's jaw drops.

"Damnnnn," King drags out, shaking his head. "Karma is a bitch."

Wyatt seems as flabbergasted as I felt last night. "So you and Talon are roommates? Damn, this just got interesting. Did he throw something at your head? Cuss you out? Yell and scream? Kick you out of the room?"

"No, he was a bit quiet at first. But he's still the same nice guy I met a year ago. Hell, he took me with him this morning and helped get me a job."

Wyatt smiles, nodding his head. "Yeah, Talon is one of the best guys I know. Even when he hates your guts, you'll never know it."

I swallow thickly, realizing that Talon probably does hate me. "You think he hates my guts?"

"Well, I don't think you're on his good side."

"I'll fix that," I tell them both, more determined than ever.

I'm definitely not looking for a boyfriend, but I can always use another friend.



A FEW HOURS LATER, I'm sitting on my bed, not so patiently waiting for Talon to come back. I have no idea when he's expected back, but I want to make sure I'm here when he finally shows up. Bouncing on the mattress, I look down when it creaks. I swear this mattress wasn't this uncomfortable the first time I moved in. There was at least a bit of a bounce to it.

My gaze pings over to Talon's mattress, and I narrow my eyes. He wouldn't have switched our mattresses, would he? I quickly get up from the bed and rush over to his side of the room. Staring at the mattress, I try to see if there's a way to tell if it's mine. Of course, there's no way to know, since it's covered with his blankets and pillows. I look over at the door, then take a quick seat on the bed. My jaw drops as I bounce twice on his mattress. Oh my god, he swapped our mattresses! I knew the bed I chose wasn't that uncomfortable. Wow, I smile hard, shaking my head. Someone is full of surprises.

Wanting to get him back, I jump up from the bedframe and lock the door. Using my phone, I take a quick picture of his bed so that I'm able to put everything into the correct position again. Once that's done, I get to work. I rip the blankets and pillows off my bed, tossing them onto the floor. Then I carefully do the same thing to his, only putting his stuff on top of his desk so it doesn't get dirty. After I strip both mattresses down, I work on swapping them. The mattresses aren't heavy, but the room isn't that big to begin with, so trying to maneuver them is harder than I thought. It takes me longer than I anticipated, but I finally get the cushions switched and back to their original spots. I keep my phone in one hand with the picture pulled up as I work quickly on putting all of Talon's belongings back onto his bed. My bed is easier; I only need to toss things onto the mattress.

The doorknob jiggles, and I panic, my heart beating fast as I fling the last pillow into its spot. I sit down on the bed, trying to act nonchalant as Talon enters the room.

"Are you okay?" he asks, looking concerned.

"I'm fine," I puff, trying to catch my breath. Fuck, who knew moving two mattresses around was such hard work? Plus, attempting to be sneaky? I am not cut out for being sly and stealthy. Putting my hands on my knees, I try to steady my breathing.

"Oh god, ew, were you jerking off? Oh god, oh god, oh god, I didn't mean to barge in. Fuck, maybe we need to have a system in place for this. I mean, there's no way you could have been normal and done it in the shower, right? Like, that's what I do. Nope, you did it here. Which I mean, okay, yes, it is your room, but oh god."

"What?" I say once he finally stops talking. "I wasn't jerking off," I rush out, standing up.

"Did you run a mile in the room or something?" He asks, cocking his hip.

"Uh, no," I reply, rubbing the back of my neck. Well damn, I can't quite tell him why I'm so out of breath. Then he'll know I switched the mattresses, and he'll want his own again. He stares at me, and I'm about to crack when I blurt out, "fine I was jerking off."

Talon looks surprised I admitted it, and I'm shocked I even said those words. He clears his throat, looking at the ground. "Oh, um, nice? Well, maybe we should come up with a system for when we're jerking off in the room. Or if we ever bring someone over for some fun. Maybe like a sock on the door or something?"

My brain sticks on bringing someone over for fun. I already know that's not going to be me, but I didn't think about the fact that Talon might want to take someone home. Ugh, I don't like that idea. Not at all.

"Yeah, a sock is cool," I mumble, sitting back down on my bed.

"Good, I'm about to head over to the food court and get something to eat if you want to come. I bet you're pretty hungry after working up an appetite," he winks at me as he takes off his Waffles and Werewolves shirt and tosses on a plain black tee.

"Mmm, yeah, I could use some food," I reply, my thoughts stuck on his body he just briefly showed me without realizing it. Also, moving those mattresses was a workout. "Let's go."

Talon heads out of the room, and I follow along happily. This roommate thing might be harder than I thought.

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CHAPTER
SEVEN
TALON

Professor Falcon has us highlight another section in our syllabus, and I do it quickly before stifling another yawn. Despite being a hardass, Professor Falcon is the best damn professor for child psychology. Based on his name, many people come into his class thinking he's some type of monster, only to be surprised when they find out he's actually human. He's on the shorter side, with black hair and grey streaks throughout it. He's constantly wearing a three-piece suit, and whenever he's walking around campus, he always has a briefcase in his hands. When I was talking to my advisor about law school, she suggested I take a psychology class that is geared toward the type of law I wanted to do. My plan for the future is to practice family law, so I thought taking child psychology would make the most sense. My advisor warned me that Professor Falcon is hard and fails easily, but I only want to learn from the finest.

Looking over my syllabus, I might be regretting that choice. He has everything laid out for the semester, which includes a ton of reading I'm not prepared for. Glancing around the room, I see a few familiar faces, so I hope that we'll be able to get a study group together. But damn, this is only my first class of the day and I'm already feeling overwhelmed.

A ton of heads turn to face me as I yawn again, stretching my back. I had the absolute worst sleep of my life. And no, it wasn't because I walked in on Beck jerking off. My bed was so damn hard, I couldn't get comfortable at all. Not only was I tossing and turning most of the night, I

then had to listen to Beck who snores like a freight train all night long. Each time I would finally fall asleep, he would snore this deep snore that I guarantee woke up the entire floor. And then I would be wide awake once again, staring into the darkness.

Not the way I wanted to start the school year, so this morning I got up extra early and headed straight to Mummy Mocha to grab the biggest latte they had on their menu. I have a feeling I'll be sneaking over to the library again to get another coffee at some point today.

My thoughts drift back to last night when Beck and I went to the food court. We didn't talk much, but when we did, our conversation was pretty easy. He told me he's majoring in education, hoping to become a high school baseball coach one day. I shared with him my goal to become a lawyer, and he told me he figured it was that or pursuing a career as a doctor. I had to laugh at that because I originally wanted to go to medical school with the goal of becoming a pediatrician before eventually changing my mind.

The door to the auditorium slams shut, everyone in the room looking up to see who's coming into the class late. My eyes widen when I see Beck barreling down the aisle, trying to find an empty seat. His hands are full with textbooks, a backpack slung over his shoulder as his eyes scan up and down each aisle, trying to find an unoccupied chair.

Please don't see me, I plead, making an effort to sneak down in my seat. I really don't want any attention drawn to me, and from Professor Falcon's face, Beck has not made a good first impression by being late.

I glance up quickly, regretting it when Beck sees me. A huge smile forms on his face as he cuts through students struggling to get to the empty seat next to me.

"Hey man," he says, once he joins us.

"Shh," I scold, attempting to tell him with my eyes to shut the hell up.

"Nice of you to join us," Professor Falcon says once Beck sits down.

"I'm so sorry," Beck tells him, and to give him credit, he actually does look apologetic. "I got lost trying to find the building, and then I got lost trying to find the classroom."

"Well, let's hope next class you leave earlier in case you get lost again," he replies, turning around quickly, dismissing him.

"Yes, sir," he mumbles, slinking down in his seat, his cheeks bright red.

Beck stays quiet the rest of the period, making an effort to catch up on all the notes we've been taking in our syllabus. Once Professor Falcon releases us for the day, Beck takes a huge breath, facing me.

"Fuck, that was bad, huh? Damn, I didn't mean to be late, but this building is so damn far from our dorm. And why is this classroom all the way in the corner, hidden from everything else?"

Gathering up my stuff, I stand, waiting for him to join me. "I wouldn't say that was the best introduction to have. But it could have been worse. You could have come at the very end. I mean, you only missed about the first fifteen minutes, so it wasn't that bad."

"Oh god," he groans, stuffing papers into his backpack. "It was so damn bad. And now I have to find my next class."

I glance at the map he has in his hand, smiling at the small highlighted classroom numbers. He might have been late, but at least he was attempting to be in the right spot. "Where's it at? Maybe I can help you find it."

"It's in Maxton. Is that by the library? I swear the guide said it's by the library." He turns the paper around in a circle, trying to figure out which way is the correct way to read it. It's adorable as hell, and with that thought, I need to leave. Quickly.

"Damn, you would think you didn't go here last year. How do you not know where all the buildings are? CU isn't the smallest, but not that big either." I say, grabbing my backpack and tossing it over my shoulder. I walk down the aisle, and Beck follows closely behind me.

"I don't know how I got so lucky, but all of my classes last year were in the same two buildings. And both structures were next door to my dorm and the athletic facility. So finding my way around wasn't hard at all. Now, this year, the odds are against me because each class is in a different building. I'm just lucky I only have three courses a day because can you imagine the amount of steps I would get every single day?"

Chuckling, I shake my head, leading him out of the lecture room. "Hell, even with only those three classes you'll still be getting a shit ton of steps in. I hate to be the one to tell you this, but Maxton is on the complete opposite side of the campus."

"Fuck, really?"

"Sorry," I say to him, actually meaning it.

While Creelin U isn't the biggest campus, it can be hard to navigate. A few months into each semester, I'll still see students walking around with

their maps in their hands trying to find their way about. Beck and I exit the building, and I glance up, seeing one gargoyle staring at us. I give him a quick smile before giving my attention back to Beck.

"Okay, where am I going?" He asks, taking out his map and laying it down on the bench next to us.

I grab his highlighter, then draw a line from where we currently are and where he needs to go. "Okay, just follow this line and it'll take you where you need to be. Just don't deviate from the path, and you should find it easily."

"Okay, cool." He blows out a breath, then flashes me his gorgeous smile. "Thank you. I probably would have ended up being late for that class, too. I'll see you later?"

"Yeah, I'll see you later."

Beck shoots me another grin, and I swear I melt right then and there. That's the same grin he used a year ago to kiss me and then get me to go home with him. Fuck, if I'm not careful I'm likely to end up in the same spot again. And nope, that's not happening. He can flash that smile all he wants, but I'm going to make sure nothing happens. Beck takes off down the cobblestone path, and I can't help but watch him walk away.

Once he's out of sight, I glance up, seeing the gargoyle still staring at me.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. I'm way too obvious. But can you blame me? Have you seen him?"



I'M SITTING on my bed, a few of my syllabi laid out in front of me. It's only the first day of school, and I'm already feeling overwhelmed. I only have the information for half of my classes, and I can clearly see locking myself in my room to make sure I'm studying. I'm highlighting another line on the paper when Beck comes barreling into the space.

"Hey man," he says, tossing his backpack onto the bed.

I watch with rapt attention as he walks over to his small closet, ripping his shirt off over his head. Fuck, the muscles on this man's back are

everything. Of course I knew he had a nice body, but this view has me swallowing my tongue.

"Hey," I rasp, finding the will to look away before he catches me staring at him.

"How was the rest of your day?" He tosses a tee over his head, then strips out of his jeans.

God, is he trying to kill me?

"It was good," I mumble, not taking my eyes off him this time.

"Thanks for your help earlier. I wasn't late and didn't have a professor on my ass, so I owe you." He turns around before I can stop staring. He raises an eyebrow but doesn't say a word. But from the smirk on his face, he knows exactly what I was staring at. "Are you already studying?"

"No. I'm just trying to get everything from today organized before I have a whole new set of syllabi thrown at me tomorrow. I just don't want to fall behind."

"Damn, you're way more organized than me. Maybe I should be more like you. Teach me your ways." He jokes, taking a spot on his mattress. He pulls out some books and papers and lays them out in front of him.

Laughing, I shake my head, "I don't think there's anything to teach. I can't fall behind, or else I'll be trailing the entire year."

"I know how that is," he mutters, rubbing his hand down his face. "Last year, I started the year off on such a high note, but shortly after classes started, I struggled. The content began getting harder, and then Coach put more pressure on us, and I cracked. I couldn't keep up. And then I had to get a part-time job and, to be honest, I'm shocked I made it through the school term intact."

"Damn." Fuck, I didn't realize how much Beck was going through last year.

"Yeah," he replies, his voice soft. "I mean, it's not a good excuse, but it's one of the reasons I didn't reach out to you last year."

"Don't worry about it," I lie, plastering a fake smile on my face. "It was just a fun night between two guys. I have nights like that all the time."

Lie, lie, fucking lie. I'm such a damn liar. I never have nights like that. That was the first time I felt comfortable going home with someone I had just met, and it helped me to realize that I'm not that way at all. But if I'm being honest, it makes me feel better knowing I'm not the reason he ghosted me. It had to do with himself and what he was enduring.

"Oh, you do?" He asks, directing my attention back to my lie.

Ugh, why would I say that? It just fell out of my mouth, and there's no way I can say 'just kidding' now. Fuck, I'm an idiot.

"Yep, all the time. So don't feel bad about what happened. We're adults. We hooked up. No need to make it awkward or anything."

"Yeah, of course," he replies quietly, looking at me.

Fuck, if he looks any deeper he'll realize I'm lying. He tilts his head, and I jump up from my bed, grabbing my shower caddy. "I'm gonna go to the shower. I'll see you soon."

"Okay."

I dash out of the room, beeline straight for the showers. What the hell, Talon? Now I have to pretend I'm some type of playboy who hooks up all the time. Closing my eyes, I sigh loudly as I enter the bathroom. How do I end up in these situations? I take my phone out of my caddy and pull up my text thread with Hannah.

ME

SOS. Need help. I might have created a problem for myself.

She'll know exactly what to do.

I hope.

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CHAPTER
EIGHT
BECK

The first two weeks of school have flown by. I'm loving all the classes I'm in, but I love working at Zomb-Bar even more. I've met a ton of new people and am having a great time. Yeah, it's tiring as hell, but the tips make it so worth it. I've already been able to save a lot, and I've even been able to make a little extra for a treat here and there.

Having Bakeenstein's so close to Zomb-Bar is a blessing and a curse. I've probably gained at least five pounds because I have to stop in everyday on my way to my shift. But I can't help it. The sweets are so damn good. It's the one thing I've allowed myself to spend some of my money on. The rest of it goes into a little piggy bank under my bed. Talon and I haven't had to come to work at the same time yet, but I know he's gone to the bakery too because I'll see the trash sitting out on his desk some days.

Speaking of Talon, I was worried things would be awkward between us, but things have actually been great. We don't see too much of each other, but when we do, we're able to talk. Hell, sometimes I can even make him laugh, which is shocking to me. When I could finally tell him about what happened, I thought we would have had a deeper conversation about it. Or at least have some type of discussion. But I ended up tongue-tied after hearing I was just another notch on his belt. Which I should be thankful for, because then that means Wyatt was wrong about Talon caring so much about our night together. At first, I didn't believe it. But for the past two weeks, there have been a couple of times when I've arrived at our room only

to see a stupid sock on the door. I haven't met any of the people he's brought home, but I know they've been there.

Which is fine. Totally fine. Completely fine.

Just like last year, I don't have time for hookups.

Once the bar is closed, I help the Zombies that work there clean down all the tabletops. One bartender, Peter, comes over to lend a hand, stacking all the chairs on top of the tables.

"Are you going to the karaoke party at Scareoke this weekend?" He asks as he places the last chair onto the surface.

"I'm not sure. To be honest, I have no idea what party you're talking about," I laugh, putting my final chair up.

I follow him toward the back room where we can clock out. "Man, you have to come. It's going to be fun as hell. Everyone from the bar and restaurant will be there."

"I'll think about it," I tell him. "If I can study before then, I'll be there."

"Sounds good, man."



TALON and I are sitting beside one another when Professor Falcon hands us back our first quiz of the semester.

"I was pleasantly surprised by how well everyone did. Well, most people. You all are exceeding my expectations. Make sure to keep it up."

Professor Falcon hands me my quiz, and by the look on his face, I know I'm not one of the students he's talking about. My eyes automatically fall shut when I see the bright red C on the top of my paper. Fuck. I actually studied for this, too. Glancing over at Talon's paper, I smile when I see a red A at the top of his quiz.

"Damn, congrats," I tell him, reaching over and tapping his paper with my finger.

"How did you do?" He asks, leaning into my space. Vanilla overtakes my senses, and I inhale, loving the scent of him. The aroma transports me to a year ago when I was sucking his cock and all I could smell was cum and vanilla.

I casually try to adjust myself in my seat before answering. "Not too well. I thought I knew all the information, too. Ugh," I groan, tossing my head back against the chair. "I can't fail this class."

Talon's quiet for a few seconds before he blows out a long breath. "What would you think about us studying together? It would be easy to meet up since we share a space and I know a lot of this information already, so I can help you with what you're missing."

"Really?" I ask too excitedly. "You wouldn't mind studying with me?"

"Nah, it's no problem at all. I spend most of my time hitting the books, anyway."

I want to ask him when he's studying because all I ever see is him in class, going to Bakeensteins or hooking up with people in our room, but I stay quiet. He's planning to help me, and hopefully, this can keep me on track. I need this class, and I can't afford to fail it when I'm so close to the finish line of getting my degree.

"Damn, I owe you. When can we get started? I don't want to fall behind."

Talon taps his pen against his chin, drawing my attention to his lips. God, those lips are plush and juicy. And they looked so pretty when they were wrapped around my dick.

"Tonight?"

"Huh?" I ask, dragging my gaze up to his eyes. "I missed that."

Talon chuckles, shaking his head. "I asked if you're free tonight. Or are you working at Zomb-Bar?"

"I have to work tonight," I tell him, hating that I have to work. If I didn't need the money badly, I would call in sick.

"Tomorrow?"

"Same," I sigh, slouching down in my seat. "I'm off Thursday, though."

"Thursday works. We can grab some food from the food court and then lock ourselves in the room and study for a few hours."

"Hell yeah, let's do it. It's a date." Talon stares at me quizzically, and I rush to clarify. "Not like a date, date or anything. It's a saying that some people say when they set something up."

"Yeah, I know," he laughs, rolling his eyes. "It's a date."



I WOULD BE LYING if I said I hadn't been looking forward to tonight all week. Talon and I have been like passing ships in the night, only seeing each other every so often. He's such a fun guy to be around, and I know we can end up being great friends. But he's also smart as hell, and I'm so damn thankful he's willing to help me study for the next test we have coming up. Leaving the locker room, I pull up his contact info, stopping in my tracks.

TALON

Hey :)

Fuck, he sent that text after our night together and it went unanswered. God, I really hope he deleted our text thread, or I'm going to feel like an even bigger ass.

ME

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Hey! What if instead of the food court, I pick us up some pizza from Zombie Pizza?

TALON

As long as it's a deep dish

And full of pepperoni

ME

Deal

I turn back around, heading away from the athletic facility and toward Zombie Pizza. When I get there, there's a bit of a line, but the wait isn't too bad. It doesn't take me long before I'm back in our dorm room, two hot pizzas in my hands. Walking up to the entrance, I breathe easily when I see there's no sock on the door. Good. I don't have to worry about sitting

outside the room waiting for him and some guy to finish. I kick the door with the tips of my toes, standing by for Talon to open it. He swings it wide with a huge smile on his face as he grabs the pizzas, snatching them from me.

"Oh my god, these smell amazing," he gushes, bringing the box under his nose and inhaling deeply. "I can't remember the last time I had a cheesy pizza. Thank you for getting it for us."

"Of course. I figured if we're going to lock ourselves in our room studying, we might as well have some good food to eat."

"I could get used to this." He places the boxes on his desk, opening the top of one box and taking a slice out. "I might have to request a pizza every time we study."

"So, this might be more than a one time thing?" I ask, moving next to him and grabbing a slice of my own. Damn, this looks amazing. I'm glad I bought two pizzas instead of just one.

"If you promise a pizza every time." He smiles wide before shoving the pizza into his mouth. He moans loudly, the sound going straight to my dick. God, he even makes eating look sexy as hell. "Alright, let's get started. Grab your textbook and open it to chapter four."

Talon and I spend the first hour reading the next few chapters in our book. I zone out more than once, my gaze getting stuck on Talon and the way he studies. He keeps the book on his lap, while he has a pen in one hand and a highlighter in the other. Every so often, he'll stick the pen into his mouth, biting on the tip before pulling it out and mouthing some words to himself.

I swear I'm trying to focus, but he makes it so damn hard. His tongue wraps around the pen, and I stop moving, just staring at him in front of me. His gaze ticks up to mine before he pulls the pen off his lips.

"What?" he asks, dropping the pen onto the book. "Is everything okay?"

"Gr-great," I croak, trying to clear my throat. "My head is getting fuzzy. What if we switch to quizzing one another?"

"Sure."

We switch to quizzing one another and this isn't helping my concentration at all. I never realized it before, but damn brainiacs turn me on. His confidence in each of his answers and then the smug look he gives once I tell him he's right is hot as hell.

"Okay, I bet you can't get this one." I'm about to ask him a different question when he cuts me off.

"What's the bet?"

"Huh?" I ask, looking up from the book in front of me.

"You said you bet I can't get this one? Well, what's the bet? I want to win something." He looks so damn excited at the thought of winning a bet against me.

"Okay, if I win, you have to come with me on Saturday to Scareoke, and if you win, um, what would you want if you win?"

"Scareoke on Saturday?"

"Yeah, apparently there's some party there on Saturday. Thought it might be fun to go, even funner if you can come with."

Talon wrinkles his nose, hating the idea. "Fine, if I win, then no Scareoke on Saturday."

"Deal. Shake on it."

Talon and I shake hands, a jolt of electricity flowing through my body. When will I not react to this man? Ugh. Moving away, I pick my textbook and ask him a question. His eyes widen, as he starts to mouth words. I can tell the second he doesn't know the answer because he groans loudly, hitting the mattress with his fist.

"You don't know it!" I yell, jumping up excitedly. Laughing hard, I point my finger toward him, wiggling it in his face. "Guess who's coming with me to Scareoke?"

"Fine, a bet is a bet. Now calm down," he snickers, grabbing my hand and pulling me down.

I fall down onto the mattress beside him, both of us falling onto our backs. Our heads turn one another, our laughter dying down as we stare at one another. Neither one of us say a word, our gazes locked on each other. Fuck, I want to kiss him. Should I?

No.

Damn, Beck. What in the world is wrong with me? I can't even spend an hour around the man without wanting to kiss him or touch him. God, this is not good. We haven't been living together for a full month yet, and I already know it's going to be hard as hell to stay away from him.

Talon jumps up, scooting away from me on the bed. "Anyway, we should probably pack it up. I have to be at the restaurant in the morning."

"Yeah," I say, swallowing roughly. "Thanks for helping me."

"No problem," he tells me, avoiding my eyes.
Way to make it awkward, Beck.

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CHAPTER
NINE
TALON

"Why are we here again?" Hannah asks as we step into Scareoke. There's already a ton of students in the space, with barely any room to move around. She grabs hold of my hand, dragging me toward the bar in the far corner. My head is on a swivel as I look around the room for Beck, but I don't see him.

"I told you. I lost a bet. So I had to come."

"A bet," she says, having to speak loudly since it's so loud in here. "You could have easily made an excuse not to show up tonight. But for some reason you wanted to come." She taps her finger against her chin, smiling at me. "I wonder why."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I lie, turning away from her. If she sees my face, she'll know I'm lying, even though she already does.

I have no idea what I was thinking. When he asked me that question, I one hundred percent knew the answer, but I couldn't get it to exit my damn mouth. I wanted to come tonight and spend time with him. God, I'm ridiculous, but that study session was one of the best nights I've had in a while. So yeah, when I had the chance to spend more time with him, I took it.

"How is your little deceit going?" She asks and I shake my head, hating that I followed her advice.

"I mean, he hasn't said anything about it, but I know he's come home a few times to the sock on the door."

A few weeks ago, I asked Hannah for ideas because I wanted Beck to think he was just another night to me and at first she suggested I should hook up with random guys but after we both laughed at that because we knew I would never do that. But then she got the bright idea of making it seem as though I mess around with random guys without actually doing it. Which was brilliant to me. Every time I put a sock on the door, I would lie on my bed and crack open a book and use it as an opportunity to study.

I do feel a little bad that there's been a couple times when Beck has stayed away because he thinks I have someone over, but I had to put my stupid foot in my stupid mouth and tell him that our night together wasn't a big deal. I could tell he didn't believe me, so maybe he believes me now.

"Hey you made it!" Beck appears on my side, wrapping his arm around my shoulders. Hannah looks at his arm, then back at me, a smirk on her face. "Good to see you again," he says to Hannah as she smiles at him.

"A bet is a bet. Told you I'd be here. But, uh, this is pretty wild. There's so many people here."

He groans, "I know," while tightening his hold on me. "I wasn't expecting there to be so many people. I don't know how long my social battery is going to last. But we've got a booth over here, come on."

His hand moves from my shoulder down to my hand, where he clutches it. He walks toward the crowd, and I quickly grab Hannah's hand, bringing her along with me. The booth is on the other side of the building, and when we arrive, I see Hannah head straight for Wyatt, who's sitting on the edge. He hugs her tightly, and I realize I've lost her for the night.

"What do you want to sing?" Beck asks, showing me his phone with a list of songs on it.

"Oh, no, no, it's okay. I'm not singing tonight. Or ever, actually," I laugh, pushing his device away.

"You have to sing at least one song. Come on, please," he pleads, giving me big doe eyes. "Don't make me go up there by myself."

"Fine, but I get to pick the song."

"Deal."

Beck and I scroll on his phone trying to find a song to sing. All the songs blur together, my body so attuned to his. Our arms are touching, goosebumps appearing all over my body. It's wild, the reaction I have to him. It's never been like this before with any other person I've met. My

body is so aware of him with every movement he makes. I point to a song by The Killers, and he chuckles, a tingle racing down my spine.

"Hell yeah, let's do that one."

Beck clicks on the song, which sends it up to the queue. There's only a few songs in front of us, so we take a seat in the booth, watching other people up on the stage singing their songs. There's a beautiful harpy, Serena, who's singing a Madonna tune at the top of her lungs. Once she's done, Tom from the bonfire and his best friend Matt, who's a Phoenix, take the stage next. They're belting out the lyrics to "Save a Horse, Ride a Cowboy," having all the students go wild. There are hoots and hollers as they dance sexually to the song, trying to seduce the audience. I can't help but look around the building, smiling at all the people having fun. This usually isn't the type of thing I like to do, but I can't deny that I'm enjoying myself.

"We're up," Beck tells me, grabbing my hand and dragging me up through the crowd.

"Hell yeah!" Hannah shouts when she sees me walking up to the stage. "Go get em' Tal!"

"Oh my god," I whisper, squeezing my eyes shut, trying to calm down. "I'm not a talented singer, Beck. I don't know if I can do this."

"Hey, hey," he soothes, leaning down so he can look me straight in the eyes. "We don't have to do this. I have no problem going back to the booth and just watching other people sing. But if you're willing, I will lead the whole thing and you can be my backup singer."

Blowing out a breath, I try to think of what to do. It would be so damn easy to give up and go sit back down. Looking out toward everyone in front of us, I see nothing but supportive faces. They're all just here to have fun. Hell, that's why I'm here. Beck squeezes my hand, getting my attention again. He's staring at me so openly, and he's so damn excited, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

Wanting to sing this song with him, I nod my head, whispering, "Okay."
"Attaboy."

The intro to the song plays, and Beck takes the lead, singing loudly. I let him sing first, then join in, closing my eyes and trying to get lost in the song. My eyes stay closed until the chorus, until I finally open them, turning to face everyone who's watching. People are standing on their feet,

singing along with Beck and me. It's intoxicating. And holy shit, I can't believe I'm actually doing this.

Beck is moving around the stage, his eyes glued to me. It isn't long before we're only staring at one another, neither of us looking out toward the crowd. Once the song ends, Beck wraps me in a tight hug. He finally lets go and I want to yell out, "Touch me again." Luckily I don't, but it doesn't mean it doesn't want to escape my lips.

"You fucking killed it," he tells me as we walk off the stage.

"Oh my god," I squeal, shaking out my tingling arms. "I can't believe I did that."

"Tal!" Hannah screeches, jumping off Wyatt's lap to run over to me. "You were amazing. Who knew you could sing?"

"Ha ha," I say, bumping my shoulder into her. "You're next."

"It's going to be quite a show. Just like the two of you put on. That was hot as hell. Neither of you had eyes for anyone else."

My palms sweat and I quickly wipe them on my jeans. "Was it obvious that I was staring at him?"

"No. It was obvious that he was staring at you, though."

Turning around, I look to see where Beck has gone. He's standing over to the side, talking to one of the bartenders from Zomb-Bar. Beck is laughing at what the other guy is telling him, a pit forming in my stomach. Not wanting to give any attention to what's going on, I glance back at Hannah.

"What song are you going to sing?"

"What a way to change the subject. Luckily for you, I like to talk about myself. Now help me decide what to sing."

The next hour passes quickly, with everyone taking turns getting on the stage. I don't get up there again, but Beck gets up a few times, singing his heart out. Hannah and Wyatt do a duet before Hannah takes off by herself, with Wyatt watching from the booth. My social battery is dying, my brain running through all the different excuses I can give to leave early.

"Wanna get out of here?" Beck asks, taking the spot next to me on the bench.

"Sure," I tell him, grateful for the excuse to leave.

After giving our goodbyes to everyone, Beck and I exit Scareoke, coming out into the cool night air. I shiver slightly when a gust of wind hits

me. Earlier tonight, I decided to dress for looks and not for comfort. Which I'm regretting now.

"Cold?" Beck asks, tilting his head. "You do know it's fall, right?"

"Yeah, yeah," I mumble, glancing away. "Thought it would be warmer."

"Mmm." Beck takes off his jacket, shaking it out, then putting it over my shoulder. "Here, you look better in it than I do, anyway."

"You don't have to give me your jacket, but I'm not going to say no."

We stroll toward the dorm, our steps getting slower as we get closer to campus. "I'm not quite ready to head back yet," Beck says once our building comes into view. "How about a quick walk through the forest?"

"A walk in the forest? At night? Do you watch any documentaries? That sounds like a bad idea."

Beck snickers, grabbing my hand. "Come on, I'll protect you. A short walk. I promise."

"Okay, but the second I hear something in the dark, I'm out." I tell him dramatically, knowing there's probably nothing hiding out there. Hopefully.

"You do realize there will be a ton of sounds in the forest. Especially with all the monsters who go out there at night," he snickers, gesturing to the group of monsters at the corner of the street where they're making heaps of noise.

"Well, duh, but I can tell the difference between a monster out there having fun and someone trying to murder me."

Beck stops in place, turning to face me. "Wow, you're pretty dramatic, huh?"

Looking at him, I smile widely. "I'd like to think I'm honest."

My smile quickly fades when I remember the lie I'm telling him. Pretending I'm hooking up with random people in our room when in reality I'm spending the entire time studying. It makes me feel like shit, but then I recall him completely ghosting me last year, and it reminds me that sometimes a little white lie doesn't hurt anyone. Especially if it makes me feel better about myself.

Beck releases my hand, and I feel the loss instantly. It really fucking sucks, because I know I can't deny our chemistry and if I had my way, I would have already climbed him like a tree again. But it's the principle of the matter. I won't ever let him know how attracted to him I am. He'll never get to see that side of me again.

He spins in a circle before stopping completely. "Are we close to the river?" He asks, taking another step in the direction of the rushing water.

"Yeah, it's just a few hundred feet to the left. Wanna head down?"

"Duh."

I follow behind him as he walks toward the water. A gust of wind picks up, the scent from his jacket causing me to close my eyes and inhale deeply. I wrap the large jacket tighter around my body, hating how much I love wearing his clothes. The one night we had together, I went to sleep in his shirt, and it was incredible. I might have gone home in that shirt too, but after a week of not hearing from him I tossed that shit in the trash. I laugh loudly, remembering when I dumped the shirt into the toilet before shoving it in the garbage.

Beck turns around, staring at me. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing," I snicker, not wanting to bring up the shirt. Once I bring that up, the entire night will come up, and I don't want to talk about all that.

"If you say so," he purses his lips as he walks backward. "How cold do you think the water is tonight?"

"For you? Probably too cold. For me? Perfect."

He digs his toes into the dirt, turning it in circles. "Would you like to swim?"

"Raincheck?" I ask, wanting to get into the water with him but remembering what happened the last time I did that. I'm already too in my thoughts tonight; I don't need to confuse myself even farther. "I'm pretty beat. As soon as my head hits the pillow, I'll crash."

He nods his head in agreement, but I know he's disappointed. Hell, I'm disappointed, and I'm the one who said no. I just know myself, and as soon as the clothes come off, I'm going to be tempted. And I can't allow myself to give in to temptation.

I can't.

CHAPTER
TEN
BECK

I'm sitting in my statistics class, unable to concentrate on anything. I tried to shoot my shot a few nights ago with Talon at the river and got completely shut down. Which duh, I figured he would shut me down, but I didn't realize how much it would hurt. I honestly don't know what I was thinking either, though. I can't be hooking up with anyone. Especially my roommate. That's a recipe for disaster.

But it still doesn't change the fact that I would love to feel him underneath me again. To hear him moaning and whimpering my name while he rides me. I squeeze my eyes shut, slightly adjusting myself in my seat. Fuck, this is not the right time to be fantasizing about Talon. My eyes dart around the room, noting that no one is paying me any attention. Good. Because my mind is already thinking about Talon again.

God, it was amazing to see him let loose at Scareoke. I was so sure that he would not show up, and then once I saw he did, I wondered if he would actually get up onto the stage and sing with me. He blew me away. At that moment, he reminded me so much of the man I met the first night at Zomb-Bar, and less like the man who I've been around for the past few weeks.

I thought we had turned a corner. From studying together, talking more, and then singing together. I got a little overconfident, which is what led me to asking Talon to go swimming with me. We both knew what I meant. Luckily, he didn't call me out on it, and my ego was a little grateful that he shot me down nicely. But now all I've been able to think about is him.

Which is dumb as hell, because all I should focus on is school, baseball, and work. In that order. Not the sexy as hell mermaid with the long teal hair I want to run my fingers through.

"Ugh," I groan, wincing when a few students around me shush me. "Sorry," I whisper, raising my hands apologetically.

One of them rolls their eyes, and I sink into my chair. Fuck, I need this class to hurry and end.

An hour later, I'm walking through the quad when King and Niko walk up beside me.

"Hey man," I tell him both, fist-bumping King and trying to fist bump Niko but failing. "Right, I forgot, you don't fist bump."

"Are you going to be at Zomb-Bar tonight?" Niko asks as he and King fall into step with me.

"Yeah, I'm working right after practice. Why? What's up?"

"A friend and I are going out for some drinks. Figured we would head over there." Niko shrugs, giving me a small smile. While we don't talk much, he's starting to warm up to me more and more with each interaction.

I nod my head, "Hell yeah! Come on over. You joining them, King?"

"Not tonight. Niko plans to hang out with his best friend, and I'm going to use that time to get an ice bath after practice.

Niko gives King a passionate kiss, probably way too dirty for me to witness, before he tells both of us goodbye. Once he's out of earshot, King stops walking.

"Keep an eye on him tonight. He's not a big drinker, but his best friend Matteo just got dumped by his boyfriend, and he's wanting to take him out to get his mind off everything. I just don't want either of them to drink too much."

"No worries, I'll watch him. Now let's go get our asses kicked in practice."



WALKING INTO ZOMB-BAR, I'm tired as hell. Coach had us running up and down the field a million times before we even got to start our practice. Then

he worked us into the ground. I think I lost about one hundred pounds of sweat. And vomit. It was horrible. And now my body is weak and Jello, and every time I walk my legs shake wildly and want to fall off. King had the right idea by heading over to the trainers and getting an ice bath. If I didn't need to work this shift so badly, I would have called in and done the same thing.

The night starts off pretty easily; it's not too busy and I'm able to take a few seconds of a break here and there. Zomb-Bar is a pretty cool place, because not only does it have a bar full of liquor, but they also have a bar restaurant in the back so people can stuff their faces with food such as Frankenburgers, Monster-ella sticks and French-freights. When it's a slower rush, I'm behind the bar, trying to learn how to make some mixed drinks. The bartender is teaching me different tips and tricks in case I ever need to sub in for one of them. While servers make some money in tips, bartenders make way more money. If I can figure out the process for crafting drinks, then I'll be able to work whichever shift Seth needs me to.

I'm only working for an hour when Niko and his friend Matteo walk into the bar. They take a spot at the bar counter, both of them laughing loudly. I've never seen Niko this carefree with anyone except for King. I guess he's not as standoffish as I thought.

"What can I get you guys?" I ask, rounding the corner and standing in front of them.

"Let's see." Matteo takes the menu from the surface, studying each of the options on the paper. "I'll have a Mummy Melt with French-freights. Oh, and a shot of Vampire Vodka."

"I'll have buffalo bat wings with ogre rings, and also a shot of vodka," Niko adds on.

"Got it. Do either of you want water? Or soda?" I ask, remembering what King had said earlier. The fact that both of them are starting off with a shot of Vampire Vodka means both of them are here to drink.

"Nope," Matteo answers for both of them.

"Okay," I drag out, giving Niko a second to add on if he wants one. He doesn't. Well, this might get interesting.

After putting their order in, I go around the bar, checking in on other customers. Thankfully, it's still not too busy, so I'm able to monitor Niko and Matteo out of the corner of my eye. I see when they're given their

second, then third shot, and I grimace knowing some people can't handle a lot of shots of alcohol.

Niko and Matteo are laughing loudly, but in their own little world. The bar slows down, and I wipe down the empty tables, putting the chairs up in place. Another loud laugh catches my attention, and I chuckle when I glance over. They intertwine their arms and take another shot before slamming the glass down onto the surface. Niko whispers something to Matteo, whose head whips in my direction.

Oh no, this can't be good.

Walking over to them, I breathe deeply, preparing myself for what they have to say.

"Are you guys okay?" I ask, taking their empty plates and stacking them. I grab the unfilled shot glasses and quickly place them down below, hoping they don't ask for another one.

"Will you fuck my best friend? He needs a good fuck, and you could probably do an okay job."

"An okay job?" I echo, placing my hands on the surface. "I can do significantly better than okay."

"So you'll do it?" Niko asks excitedly, squealing as he turns to face Matteo.

"No, it's okay," Matteo tells me, his face bright red. "Niko joked that the best way to get over someone is to get under someone, and then we saw you. That's why he asked you. It's not like I want to or anything. I mean, I don't *not* want to, but I don't want you to think I'm sitting here trying to get in your pants."

"Oh, um, okay, I have no idea what to say," I chuckle, shaking my head. I might have picked up a different guy in this bar before, but I'm not looking to do it again.

"Fuck, okay, that came out wrong. That was his idea. Not mine. I don't want to have sex with you. I'm sure you're great in bed. In fact, with a body like yours, I can only imagine how good you fuck. But um, I don't want to have sex with you?"

"Is that a question?" I laugh, tapping the top of the counter. Matteo is not my type, but he's still cute as hell. He's bubbly and has the cutest smile, but he doesn't have those teal eyes that suck me in, or that bratty attitude that I know is just a wall.

"No, it's not a question. It's a statement. Sorry. I might have had a wee bit too much to drink. And again, that was all this guy's fault," he says, pointing his finger at Niko.

"Don't blame me," Niko says, slapping Matteo on the shoulder. "I was only trying to help you. From what I've heard, Beck can have sex with someone and not have it mean anything, so I thought that was what you wanted."

"What?" I ask, trying to make sense of what he's saying. "What are you talking about?"

"It's nothing bad. King was telling me about your roommate. How you both hooked up last year and now you guys are roommates. I just assumed you liked to hook up. Which was bad on my part to assume, but I'm just trying to help out my friend." He hiccups loudly, covering his mouth as he looks around. "That was nasty. Sorry," he laughs.

"I don't really hook up," I tell them, not sure why I'm even having this conversation with them. "Yeah, I've done it a few times, but I don't really enjoy it. And if I'm being honest, I really hate what I did to my roommate. He didn't deserve that. He's someone I could have had more than a hookup with."

"Oh my god, tell us more," Matteo says, resting his arms on the counter. "Please."

"Do tell," Niko adds, batting his eyelashes.

Shaking my head, I debate whether I should say anything. Taking them both in, I notice their eyes are a little glazed and they're constantly giggling. I have a feeling neither of them will remember this conversation tomorrow.

"Fine. So, when I first met him, I was smitten. I actually met him in this spot right here. I was blown away. He was gorgeous, with eyes I wanted to get lost in for days. We talked for a while and it was just so damn easy. And because I didn't want the night to end, we ended up going down to the river for a swim."

"Mmm, hmm, a swimmm," Matteo taunts, smirking at me. "I know what 'swim' means when I hear it."

I chuckle loudly, rolling my eyes. "No, an actual swim in the river. We went swimming."

"So, you hooked up in the water?" Niko asks, wrinkling his nose. "That doesn't sound very fun."

"Oh my god," I reply, already getting exasperated with both of them. "Do you want to hear the story or not?"

"Yes," they echo.

"Anyway, while we were swimming, we kissed. And it was honestly the best kiss of my life, and I didn't want the night to end. So, it didn't. We had such a fucking good time together. But the next day we exchanged numbers and I swear I wanted to reach out to him but I got buried with school and baseball and I knew if I let myself I would get overwhelmed with him and then I would get kicked out of CU for my grades and I couldn't take that risk."

"You couldn't have sent one tiny text saying, 'hey I like you, but I need to focus on school so this can't happen.' That doesn't sound too complicated or like it would take a lot of time." Matteo says bluntly, not knowing how much I wish I had done that.

"I mean, yes, I should have done that. But I didn't. I fucked that all up. But to be honest, I never thought I was going to see him again, so I didn't think it was that big of a deal."

"Until you realized he's now your roommate," Niko says.

I grab two glasses, filling them up with ice and water and handing them over to the guys. "Yeah, I was not expecting that at all."

"And how is that going?" Matteo asks, taking a sip of his drink and closing his eyes. Yeah, I don't think either of them is going to be lasting much longer.

"At first, it was awkward as hell. But now it's okay. We talk sometimes. Hell, he even helps me study now. We hung out together a couple of nights ago, and I probably ruined any chance we might have had of becoming friends."

Niko gulps down his water, slamming the glass onto the surface. "Why?"

"I might have suggested we go back to the river where we first kissed. We both knew what I was suggesting when I brought it up."

"And he turned you down?" Matteo asks, sliding his glass over to me, silently asking for more water.

I refill both of their cups as I blow out a deep breath. "Yeah, he made some excuse. Which is for the best, honestly."

"You know what I think?" Niko replies, burping loudly as he shakes his head. "I swear, I didn't realize drinking made me burp so much. Anyway, I

think you should still try to take your shot. Obviously, you regret what happened last year. And from where I'm sitting, it seems like you want to kiss him again, so why not?"

"Because my situation hasn't changed. I still need to focus on school, baseball, and now work. I don't have time for a boyfriend."

"Who said anything about a boyfriend?" Matteo mumbles. "Boyfriends are stupid. Maybe you guys just hook up. Does he hook up?"

"I mean, he told me he only does hookups. So, maybe? But ugh, no, I'm not a hookup person."

Niko sighs, tapping the counter with his fingers. "I think you should just kiss him and see what happens. Maybe hooking up is what you both need."

"Yeah, maybe."

The door to the bar swings open, King walking into the space. Niko's eyes become heart-shaped as he stares at his man approaching him. God, they're so ridiculously in love. It's gross.

"How are you doing, baby?" King asks Niko as he walks over and places a kiss on the top of his head.

"Better now," Niko sighs, curling into King.

"Are you guys ready to head out?" King says to Niko, rubbing the back of his neck, "I figured you might need a ride when you stopped texting me back." Niko purrs, loving the feeling of King's touch on him.

I laugh loudly, pointing my finger between the both of them. "They've been having a great time. And I've fully enjoyed the hard time they gave me."

"Uh oh," King says, helping Niko off the stool before placing his hand out to help Matteo. "Didn't I say don't be too mean to my friend?"

"We weren't mean," Niko hiccups, wrapping his arm around King's waist. "All we did was encourage him to hook up with his roommate. I mean, at first I told him to hook up with Matteo, but Matteo said hell no, so now we're trying to get him to try his shot with his roommate."

King turns to face me, wide-eyed. "Oh yeah, and how did that go?"

"They were just joking around," I tell him. "There's no way I'm going to do that."

"Hell, maybe you should. You never know what could happen. Besides, you talk about the guy a lot."

"I do not," I mumble, looking away, not wanting to give any more attention to this. "Anyway, are you taking off? I'll see you tomorrow."

King, Niko, and Matteo head out, and I spend the remainder of my shift thinking about what Niko and Matteo said. Maybe I should try again. Maybe Talon didn't know what I meant when I tried to get him to go to the river the other night. Okay, maybe I should try again. What could it hurt, right?

My heart? Maybe.

My ego? Definitely.

Oh well. He can reject me, but at least I'll know. After clocking out once my shift ends, I head straight to our dorm room, eagerness flooding my veins. As soon as I open the door, I'll walk over to him and kiss him. Or perhaps I'll say something first. Maybe have a quick conversation about where I'm at and see if he's feeling the same? But then that'll give him more time to shoot me down. So, maybe just kissing him first and seeing what he does is the best approach? Well, shit, he could slap me. But then I would know, right?

Shit, why is this so damn hard?

I take the elevator up to our floor, walking way faster than I usually do. I'm about to swing the door open when a blue piece of fabric catches my eye.

A blue sock on the door.

Which means Talon is not alone.

Fuck. My heart sinks but maybe I had it right before. There's no time for hookups, or to get involved with anyone. I don't even know why I thought I might in the first place. I give the door one last glance before turning back and heading down to the main floor. It looks like I'll just hang out in the common room and watch the TV there. Again.

CHAPTER
ELEVEN

TALON

It's been almost a week since Scareoke, and yes, I'm avoiding Beck. I knew hanging around him was a bad idea, and what did I do? First, I volunteered to study with him and help him with his classes. That's where I first went wrong. But I couldn't say no to him when he was asking for help. And then I had to make the stupid decision to hang out with him at Scareoke. I knew I wasn't going just to hang out with him and his friends. I wanted to be around him. Spending more time with him and seeing his carefree smile was what I wanted.

Walking to the river was a horrible idea, too. Luckily, I had the good sense to tell him no when he asked to swim in the water. I don't know if his head went where mine did, but all I could think about was us swimming in the water and kissing like before. I know if I had stripped down and got in that water I would have attacked him with my lips.

Which is why I have spent more time than usual locked in our room with a sock on the door. I feel bad that I keep kicking him out for no reason, but I don't know what else to do. I worry that if I spend extra time with him, I'll lose control and want to put my lips on him. Of course, I've still been helping him study, but I stay on my bed while he sits at his desk or on his mattress. But even then I'll catch myself staring at him from across the room. I see his face light up when he finally realizes that he understands something he thought he didn't get before. The absolute worst is when I can't take my eyes off him when he walks back into the place after

showering. He never brings his clothes with him to the bathroom, so each morning and night he glides into our room, a towel wrapped around his waist, drops of water still running down his thick chest. I don't know if he knows what he does to me, but fuck, I'm dying here.

I'm still pissed at being ghosted last year, but honestly, I'm getting over that. The more time I spend with Beck, and the more I get to know him, the more I want to be friends with him. Well, no. Not friends. I'd like to climb the damn man like a tree, but I don't want to hook up and then we're stuck living together for eight more months.

Throwing myself onto my mattress, I sigh loudly, not knowing what to do.

"You okay, man?" Beck asks, hovering over me.

I open one eye and sigh again, nodding my head. "Yeah, just tired, sorry," I lie.

"We don't have to study."

"No, no," I sit up quickly, not wanting him to leave. "Let's study. We have that test on Monday, and this is the only time we're both off."

Beck and I spend the next hour and a half studying hard. I might be studying Beck more than my textbook, but I can't help myself. He's gorgeous as hell. And he makes me laugh so damn much. While we're both making sure that we're hitting the books, he'll randomly say things to make me laugh and break up the tension.

"Do you think you'll be ready for the test?" I ask once Beck slams his textbook shut and groans.

"Who knows? I don't think I could study any more than I have, though. I'm fucking wiped out. But I don't want to stay here. I want to go out. But not like out, out, more like an outing where there's no people."

Chuckling, I nod my head. "Same." I debate what I'm going to ask, not sure if I should put myself in this position. We've already spent the last two hours together; do I need to spend more with him? Probably not. But am I going to try, anyway? You betcha. "Wanna hang out at Ghoul Games? Maybe grab some food?"

"Yes," he replies instantly. "I've actually never been there. But I do have to head to Zomb-Bar after."

"No worries. We can hang out, eat, then you can work."

"Okay."

Beck and I get ready, then head out of our dorm rooms. Ghoul Games is in downtown Creelin, but isn't too far of a walk from campus. As we reach the building, a large sign, "Enter If You Dare!" welcomes us into the arcade. I've only been here a couple of times, but I've always had a blast. I lead Beck into the arcade, bright purple, green, and orange lights shining all around the whole place. There are fog machines in the corners of the room with glowing feet and handprints all over the floor and walls. There are a ton of different games throughout, but it's the basketball hoop in the corner that catches my eye. After using the kiosk to get some tokens, I take Beck's hand, dragging him over to the side.

"Alright, let's play."

"Oh, hell yes," Beck says, rubbing his hands together as he smiles mischievously.

"I'm going to kick your ass," I tell him, sticking out my tongue.

"Oh, a shit-talker, I see." He puts a token into the machine, then takes his spot. "Let's see who's the better player."

"Game on."

We play a few games with Beck completely kicking my ass. After the fourth game of losing, Beck puts his ball down and walks over to me. I'm about to put my ball down when Beck moves behind me, my back to his chest.

"Let me help you," he whispers, leaning forward. He places his hand on top of mine, helping me bring the ball up to my chest. We lift our arms in the air, and I shoot the ball, him laughing when it bounces off the rim.

"I thought you were trying to help me," I joke, grabbing another ball.

Beck does the same thing, this time stepping even closer to me. There's not even an inch of space between our bodies, his heat enveloping me. My body shivers from his touch, my heart beating fast at how close he is. I sigh deeply, trying to catch my breath, but it's no use. This man has some type of hold on me, and if I'm being honest, I like it. The ball drops from my hands, and I spin in a circle, Beck's arms wrapping around my waist. We stare at one another, goosebumps rising all over my body. Fuck, is he going to kiss me? Will I stop him? Do I want to kiss him back?

Hell yes, I do.

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Beck stares into my eyes, and just when I think he's going to lean down and plant his lips against mine, he clears his throat and backs up. "Wanna grab something to eat?"

My body deflates, but I nod my head, putting on a fake smile. "Yeah, I'm starving."

We move over to the counter, placing an order for some food. While we wait for our names to be called, we sit at one table against the wall, both of us quiet as hell. I have no idea what's running through his head, but I know for me, I'm realizing that Beck is my weakness. Even when I know I should stay away, I don't want to. I'm also turned on like crazy. Feeling his body against mine reminds me just how long it's been since I've had sex with someone. Contrary to what I've made Beck believe, I barely hook up at all. It's been months since the last time I've done that with someone.

"So, uh, I have a proposition for you. And feel free to completely shut me down. To be honest, I don't even know why I'm bringing this up, but I can't stop thinking about it. And you. I know if I don't try though, I'll be kicking myself in the ass for months."

"What?" I ask, trying to figure out what he's talking about. "I'm confused."

Beck chuckles, rubbing the top of his head. He seems nervous, but I don't know what he could be nervous about. "Yeah, that was as clear as mud, huh?"

"Yeah, just about."

"Okay, so I don't know about you, but I'm so damn attracted to you. Hell, you know that, from our night last year."

"Yeah, same," I say, wondering where he's going with this.

"I know you don't do relationships, and to be honest, I don't want a relationship with everything I'm already having to deal with. And I don't even know if you feel this way, but I can't stop thinking about you."

"Oh really? How so?" I ask, wanting to know if he thinks about me as much as I think of him.

"I think about that night we had together, and I want to repeat it. Multiple times, if I'm being honest. And it feels like its kismet that we're roommates. Neither of us wants a relationship, and we know we're hot as hell together. It just makes the most sense."

I can't deny that what he's saying is the truth, and honestly, I've spent most of my days thinking about him and wondering if we would have the same chemistry as before. Besides, I'm not looking for a relationship and it seems like he's not either, so why not try it? What could it hurt?

Besides being awkward as hell and having to still live with each other?

Ugh, yeah, that would suck. But what if we could spend at least the next few weeks just hooking up? I could do that.

"So you want to be fuck buddies?" I ask bluntly, because that's what it is.

"Hell yes. And if you say yes, I'm planning to drag you back to our room right now and fuck you."

"Wow," I whisper, my dick getting hard in my tan shorts. "You're serious."

"Hell yes, I am. But it can't be anything serious."

"I don't do serious," I lie, but knowing I'm too weak not to give in.

"Sooo?" he smiles wide, like he already knows he's got me hook, line, and sinker.

"What if I wanted to fuck you?"

"Oh, holy yes. That. We can do that. I'm vers so I'm good with both." Beck groans loudly, not caring who here can hear him. "Please say yes. I don't think I can be around you anymore without putting my hands on you."

I sit quietly, watching him anxiously move around on his chair. His hand reaches under the table, and I can only imagine what he's touching right now. I already know I'm going to tell him yes, but catching him squirm in his seat has me giggling like a child. He's so turned on at the thought of us hooking up again.

"Talon," he whines, pushing himself back from the table and standing up.

"Hmm?" I ask, leaning my head back as he walks over to me and gets into my space. "What's up?" I ask, my chest rising and falling rapidly as he leans down, placing his lips at my ear.

"Are you going to let me take you home and fuck you into the mattress?" He purrs, licking the side of my neck.

"We're in public," I hiss, even though I don't care who sees us right now.

"Then you should probably say yes before I turn this indecent."

"It's already indecent."

Beck pulls away, looking down at my shorts, where the outline of my erection is right there for everyone to see. "Fuck, that's sexy as hell. I can't wait to put that in my mouth. So? Yes?"

"Yes," I breathe, knowing I'm not strong enough to hold out any longer. "Take my home and fuck me."

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CHAPTER
TWELVE

BECK

We crash through the door, my foot slamming it shut behind me. It's been hard as hell trying to keep my hands off him the entire walk home. He kept trying to talk to me on the way home, but there was no way I could have a conversation with him when I was hard as stone. It was already bad enough trying to speed walk with a hard on, there was no way I could have a casual chat with him while we were making our way home. Right when we reached the entrance to campus, I tried to pick up the pace when Talon slowed down walking down the cobblestone steps toward the quad. It took me a few seconds to realize that he was trying to mess with me. He knew how badly I wanted to get him home, and so he was teasing me by having pointless conversations and trying to get me to the quad.

Now that I have him alone, he's going to pay for that.

"On your knees," I demand, remembering how much Talon likes when I take control. On the outside he's the one who has to be in total dominance, being in charge of everything, but from our one night together, I quickly learned how much he loves being told what to do. And good thing for him, I love ordering him around. "Good boy," I purr, when he instantly drops to his knees.

Whipping my shirt over my head, I toss it to the side, then kick off my shoes. Talon is kneeling on the floor, fully clothed, and I'm loving the difference between us. I know he'll be utterly debauched in a few seconds,

despite his perfect appearance right now. I loosen the belt on my waist, pulling it out of the slots then tossing it onto my bed. With hooded eyes, Talon watches me slowly undress before him. My fingers undo the button on my jeans when I decide to tease him a little. I pretend I'm going to undo my jeans, and when his chest rises rapidly, I move my hands down to my feet, pulling off a sock. Talon groans loudly, and I can't help but smile. He's so damn reactive to everything I'm doing. I love seeing how affected he is, though. He wanted to play with me on the walk over here, so now it's my turn to have fun with him a little. But not too much, because I can't wait to get my hands on him and his mouth on me.

"Be a good boy and be patient," I purr, leaning down and rubbing the side of his cheek. He leans into the touch, and I decide to give him a little tease. With one hand still caressing the side of his face, I use my other hand to pull down the zipper on my jeans and shove them down my legs. I grip his chin, raising his head to look at me. He's only touching me through the fabric, and I'm about to blow my load in my underwear. I quickly pull away, chuckling when Talon groans again. "Is this what you want?" I pull at the waistband, letting my briefs fall to the ground. Talon nods his head wildly, his gaze locked on my dick.

"Yes," he breathes, swaying closer to me. "Are you going to let me suck you, Beck?"

"Hell yes."

Talon stays in his spot like the good boy he is, and I step closer, placing my cock against his mouth. I rub the tip against the plump lips, moaning when his tongue peeks out to lick at the precum. He doesn't give me a second to get used to his tongue when he's shoving my entire cock to the back of his mouth. Fuckkk, I forgot he doesn't have a gag reflex. He sucks my cock expertly while one of his hands reaches under and plays with my balls. There's no use even trying to hold on; his mouth is magic, and in less than a minute, I'm shooting down his throat, my legs locked tight as he sucks out every drop.

Talon pulls off my shaft, wheezing. "Fuck," he groans, licking his lips.

"My turn. Get on the bed." Just as I knew he would, Talon scrambles up, getting on the bed. His hands fly to the waistband of his shorts when I stop him. "Let me."

Talon nods his head, so I take down his shorts and understand in one pull, my mouth watering when his cock springs free. God, his dick is almost

as gorgeous as the rest of him. Talon is lying on the edge of the mattress, his shorts wrapped around his ankles while he's still wearing his shirt. His teal hair is a mess, lying on the comforter. His tan skin is bright red, probably from how turned on he is. Though he's panting, he's still absolutely stunning. We stare at one another for a few seconds before Talon's hand moves down to grab hold of his cock.

"No, that's mine. Let go."

Talon drops his hand quickly, and I kneel in front of him, staring at his dick. Wanting to give him the same pleasure he gave me, I suck him to the back of my throat. Unlucky for him, I do have a gag reflex, but that doesn't mean I can't suck his cock so good it blows his damn mind. I choke on his dick, tears filling my eyes, as I suck him roughly. I pull out a little, using my hand to stroke while I twirl my tongue around the tip. His hands come down to my head, his fingers holding my head in place as he thrusts into my mouth. He fucks me roughly, orgasming a few moments later as he floods my throat with his cum. I swallow him down eagerly, resting my forehead against his thigh as I try to catch my breath.

"Fuck, that was amazing," I huff out, raising my face to look at him.

"Hell yeah, it was," he breathes, tossing his head back onto the mattress. "I thought you were going to fuck me though."

"Oh, don't worry, I'm still going to fuck you into the mattress. Get undressed."

The thought of sliding into his body has my dick rock hard again. Thank god for being young. Getting up off the floor, I walk over to the small table next to my bed and grab a condom and some lube. By the time I snatch up the items and turn around, Talon is completely naked on his bed. He's lying on his side, his hand propping his head up while his other hand is stroking his cock slowly.

"Damn, that's a pretty sight," I say, walking over to him and leaning against the bed. "Do you want to work yourself open or do you want me to do it?"

"I want you to," he says softly, getting onto all fours.

"Okay."

I get in place behind him, first rolling the condom down my cock, then drizzling some lube onto my fingers. I insert one digit, letting him get used to that before slowly moving up to three fingers. Once I'm three digits deep, I curl my fingers, hitting that special spot inside him. Talon is a panting

mess beneath me, his hands clawing at the sheets as he moans my name loudly.

"You ready?" I ask, not knowing how much longer I can wait while listening to him.

Talon nods his head, turning to look at me. "I'm ready."

"Okay," I blow out a breath, grabbing the lube and slathering more on my dick. I get in place behind him, placing the head of my cock at his entrance. Talon bears down as I enter his body gradually. Fuck, he's tight and warm and feels so damn good. I enter him softly, letting him get used to the intrusion. Once I'm fully seated inside him, I stay in place for a few seconds, gently kissing up the spine of his back. Once I think he's used to me, I slowly pull out, then push myself back in.

"You can go harder," he tells me, pushing himself back on my dick.

Given the all-clear, I go harder, pulling out and then slamming back home. Talon's hands grab hold of the sheets, trying to find something to keep him in place as I fuck into him roughly. He's panting loudly, pushing back on my dick as I keep thrusting into him. I reach one arm under his body, my hand rubbing all over his chest. Wanting to see his face, I pull out quickly, tapping him on the ass. "On your back." Talon follows my directions beautifully, tossing himself onto his back. He grabs hold of his legs, holding himself open for me. "Fuck, you're beautiful." A gorgeous red tint flushes his cheeks, a soft smile playing on his lips.

Sliding back into his body, we both groan in unison. God, I can't believe I'm getting to feel Talon like this again. His hands grab hold of my shoulder, pulling me toward him. Wanting to give him what he wants, I kiss him, my tongue sliding into his mouth. Fuck, I had forgotten what a good kisser Talon is. There's this thing he does with his tongue that sends shivers racing through my body. I let go of his lips, moving back as I fuck into him.

"Touch yourself," I demand, knowing I will not last long and needing him to come again before I do.

Talon reaches down, grabbing hold of his shaft as he strokes it. He tosses his head back in ecstasy, moans flying from his beautiful mouth. Fuck, he's perfect. The way he listens so perfectly, or how loud he is, letting me know how much he's loving what I'm doing to him.

"I'm about to come," he breathes, his eyes squeezed shut.

"Me too," I tell him.

I take hold of his hips, fucking hard as I come. A few seconds later, Talon comes all over his hand and stomach, both of us panting heavily. Pulling out slowly, I fall down next to him on the mattress.

"Damn, that was amazing," I tell him, taking off the condom and throwing it into the trash. I lay back down, grabbing his blanket and pulling it over our bodies as I settle in.

"Hell yeah, it was."

We sit in silence for a few minutes; the only sound is our breathing filling the room. Damn, I'm so glad I brought this up. I've been craving to feel his body for weeks, and now that I have, I already know I want more. Fuck, if I have my way, I'll try to get my hands on him every second that I can.

Turning onto my side, I tuck a lock of teal hair behind his ear. "I can't wait to do this again."

"Me too." He takes a deep breath, then says, "But, uh, do you think you can sleep in your own bed? This is pretty small."

My stomach drops, but I understand. We're just hooking up; it's only casual, and sleeping in one another's bed is not casual at all. "Yeah, yeah, of course." I get up from the mattress, making my way over to my own bed. As soon as I'm under the covers, my eyes start to drift closed. Coming back to back is tiring as hell, but I whisper, "Goodnight," before I'm out for the night.

"Night, Beck."

CHAPTER
THIRTEEN
TALON

I'm wiping down another table when thoughts of last night flash into my mind. Beck fucking me from behind, his hand splayed out on my stomach as he fucks me roughly. Or when I couldn't help but look into his eyes as he was thrusting into me. The way he can make my body feel things is out of this world. Which is the problem. If I don't watch myself, I might get addicted to him, and I can't have that. I wasn't lying when I told him my bed is too small for both of us to sleep in there, but having him sleep in his own bed will help put some separation between us. Because if I'm being honest, there's no way I'm not going to have sex with him. He's hot as hell and, fuck me, he fucks me so damn good. But he's not looking for a relationship, and I don't want one either, so keeping boundaries is the only way to make sure no one gets hurt.

The door to the restaurant swings open, the bell on top ringing loudly throughout the space. Hannah walks in, gliding over to one of the booths against the window. "When's your break?" She asks as I walk over to her, handing her a menu.

"In about twenty minutes. Wanna wait for me?"

"Duh," she smiles, twirling her hair around her finger. "That's why I'm here." Twenty minutes later, I'm sitting across from Hannah, with a plate full of pancakes and bacon, and me with a cup of coffee. "So, how have you been?" She asks, taking a piece of bacon and chewing on it.

"Good. Why, what have you heard?"

"I haven't heard anything," she laughs, rolling her eyes. "I wanted to check in and see how your little sock thing is going. And wondering if he's been in your bed."

"Oh my god," I squeal, glancing around the restaurant to make sure no one is listening to our conversation. "Could you be any louder?"

"I mean, I could, but I don't think you want everyone here to know about what you like to do in the bedroom. But tell me, how is it going with the sock? Is it working?"

I sigh, rubbing my forehead. "A little too well, if I'm being honest."

"Do tell."

"Beck thinks I'm some master hook-up artist or something. I did it at first because I didn't want him to think our night meant more to me than it did to him. But then I kinda liked the quiet of the room, so I might have put the sock on more than I should have."

Hannah snickers, cutting me off, "Oh my god, no you didn't."

"I did," I groan, throwing my head back against the booth. "Anyway, he hung out after studying, and since he assumes I hook up all the time, he proposed that we hook up since we both know we're attracted to one another."

"Please tell me you said no."

"That would have been the smart thing to do, but I never said I was smart."

Hannah's jaw drops, her mouth making an 'O' shape. "Damn, but you're not really the hookup type."

"I know, but I don't know, Hannah. I'm so damn attracted to him and the things he can do to my body."

"Damn," she puts her fork onto her plate, leaning back. "I don't want to be the one to say this has a bad idea written all over it, but damn, Tal, are you sure you know what you're doing?"

"No," I laugh, shaking my head. "I don't know what I'm doing at all. But I also know that I don't want to stop. For once in my life, I want to be the person who has a hookup buddy. I just need to make sure I won't catch feelings."

"Hmm, and how will you do that?"

"By reminding myself that the first time I hooked up with him, he ghosted me. So obviously he isn't mature enough for any type of relationship except being my fuck buddy."

Hannah wrinkles her nose, shaking her head. "That sounds weird coming out of your mouth."

"I know," I snicker, not believing I said that. "But it is what it is. I have to get back to work, though. Wanna hang out tomorrow night? I'm off."

"Sounds good."

I get up from the table, giving her a quick kiss on the cheek before getting back to work. I'm more determined than ever to prove Hannah wrong. Isn't that what everyone does in college, anyway? Hook up with random people? Beck isn't random anymore, but I know I can do this without catching feelings.

I hope.

***'

"How did you do?" Beck asks as Professor Falcon passes out our tests from the other day.

"Pretty good," I tell him, showing him the 'A' at the top of my paper. "What about you?"

"Check this out," he says excitedly, showing me the 'B' on his. "Holy shit, I can't believe it. Who would have thought that studying would actually work?"

"Most students, actually," I chuckle, shaking my head. He's so damn happy right now, it's infectious. I can't help but smile along with him.

My body heats remembering what we did this morning before coming to class. He walked into the room after showering, those damn water droplets falling down his chest, and I couldn't stop myself. I jumped off my bed, probably a little too eagerly, and shoved him up against the wall. Leaning down, I licked his pec, lapping up the excess water with my tongue. When I pulled away, Beck was staring at me with fire in his eyes before shoving me down on his bed and fucking me hard into the mattress. I move slightly in my seat, feeling the ache from Beck being there only a couple of hours before. A soft moan escapes my lips, and I clamp my mouth shut, closing my eyes.

Beck bites his bottom lip, pulling it into his mouth. "Fuck, I know what you're thinking," Beck whispers, leaning into my space. "Trust me, it's all I've thought about the entire time I was taking the test. I'm surprised I was able to concentrate at all."

"Yeah, well, it doesn't help that I can still feel you."

"Fuck," he moans softly, looking around the classroom. Professor Falcon finally announces class is over, and within two seconds, Beck is grabbing my hand and pulling me up out of my seat.

"Wait, hold on. Where are we going?" I ask, quickly snatching my test off my desk.

He pulls me down the aisle and out into the hallway. I have no idea what he's doing, but he's determined as hell. His head is on a swivel as he looks around the hallway. His fingers press hard into the button multiple times for the elevator as though that will make it arrive any faster.

"Hurry up, hurry up," he chants, his finger still pressing the button.

"You're going to break the elevator," I taunt, laughing when his finger stops.

"Well, why the hell is this thing going so damn slow?" he whines, leaning back and looking down the hallway. "This is taking forever."

"Patience," I whisper, not even knowing where he's trying to take me. There's not many areas in this building to hide. Besides the lecture halls, there's a few lab rooms and on the very bottom floor, they have some professor offices that are usually always locked.

The elevator doors slowly open, Beck jolting through them as soon as he's able to fit. His finger presses the 'Door Close' button multiple times, and I laugh, knowing that the door isn't going to close until it wants to. As soon as it's shut, Beck is on me. He backs me up against the cool metal, his hands circling my waist as he takes my mouth with his. The kiss is feral. He's trying to fuck me with his mouth, and I'm letting him. My hand rubs the outside of his jeans; his erection is not hard to miss.

"God, I love having your hands on me." He tells me when the door opens and he pulls away.

He doesn't wait for me to respond before he's grabbing my hand and pulling me out of the elevator and down the hallway. I see a large number '4' on the wall, meaning we're on the fourth floor of the building. Few people come up here, so hopefully we're alone.

"Where are we going?" I ask as Beck pulls me down the long hallway. He's peeking his head through the door before moving on to the next door.

"I'm trying to find somewhere to go."

"No, I get that, but like where? We're in a building on campus. Usually, that means someone will be around." Beck's taller frame gives him strides

way longer than mine; my legs struggling to keep up as he walks faster. "I don't think you're going to find an empty room."

"Here," he cuts me off, shoving me into a room that appears vacant. We both look everywhere, making sure no one is in here before attacking one another again. His hands find my ass, lifting me into the air as he walks over to the door. He pulls away from the kiss as he looks around at the door handle. "There's no lock, which means your body is going to be what keeps it from opening. Don't move unless you want someone coming in and seeing you."

"What?" I ask as Beck places me down on my feet in front of the door. "We can't do anything here, Beck. What if we get caught? Fuck, no, we can't get caught."

"We won't get caught," he chuckles, kissing me softly. "Just keep your back against the door and be a good boy. Don't be too loud, though. Don't want to get caught," he winks, laughing when I groan. "Just trust me, baby."

"Okay," I tell him, ignoring the baby part as much as I like it.

"I want to make you feel good." Beck drops to his knees, my breathing stopping when I witness him kneeling for me. Fuck, he looks beautiful below me. His hands work open my shorts, pulling them and my briefs down. My hips arch in the air when Beck glances up at me. "Stay against the door."

"Sorry," I whisper, making sure my body is back pressed to the wood. "Are you going to suck my dick or what?"

"Tsk, ts," he murmurs, dragging one of his fingers down the side of my shaft. "Only good boys get their dicks sucked."

"I'm a good boy," I whine, grabbing hold of his hair. "I swear I'm the goodest boy ever."

"I need you to be quiet. Can you do that for me?" He asks, sticking his tongue out and flicking my tip.

My head falls back against the door with a loud thump, Beck shushing me. "I can't help it. It feels so good."

"I guess I'll just have to stop then," Beck tells me, trying to get up from the ground.

"No," I rush out, pushing on his shoulders so that he goes back to the floor. "I'll be good and quiet, I promise. Just please put me in your mouth." I beg, having no issues about begging this man to suck my dick. I've never

had anyone who can suck me off and have me coming down their throat in thirty seconds.

"Good boy," he purrs, wrapping his fist around my dick. "Now stay quiet and let me make you feel good."

Beck sucks my dick to the back of his throat and, fucking hell, it's torture trying to stay quiet. His fingers roll around my balls, tingling shooting down my spine. There's so many damn sensations, it's exhilarating. Not only from him sucking me, but also the thrill of knowing that we're hiding in one of the lecture rooms and at any second someone could try to walk in is sexy as hell. I've never done anything like this before. Hell, I've done nothing sexual in public at all. I don't want to say I could get used to this, but fuck this is hot as hell. I drag my hands along his head, getting a good grip before I guide him how I want him. Beck doesn't complain or tell me to stop, so I keep doing it. Keeping my hips against the door, I pull his head off my dick then shove him back onto it, groaning quietly when he gags roughly. I know Beck says he loves that I don't have a gag reflex, but I love that he does. The noises he makes as he's trying to shove my entire cock in his mouth, the fact that he can't breathe, and I love that he doesn't stop. He doesn't try to pull off my dick or to only lick at the tip. No, he's all in. Beck gags again, and this time I lose it, filling him with my come. Beck releases my limp dick, it falling down as he tries to catch his breath.

"My turn," I tell him, trying to grab his shoulders and bring him up.

"No," he tells me, standing up and invading my space. He kisses me, shoving his tongue in my mouth. Usually the thought of tasting myself grosses me out, but when it's mixed with Beck, I'm all for it. "This was just about you. You don't need to do anything in return. You can make it up to me tonight, though," he winks, giving me another peck on the lips. "But I don't want to cause you to be any later for your next class than you already are."

"Shit, I forgot I had another course." We both laugh as I pull up my shorts, redoing the button. "Seems I don't think too much when the thought of your dick is on my mind."

"Hey, now you know how I felt during the test today."

"You kicked ass on that test," I say, truly proud of him. He may think he goofs off a lot while we're studying, but I can see how hard he's actually working. And apparently, it's paying off.

"Thanks," he preens, staring at me. "I've got a pretty good tutor." Beck moves my body out of the way before opening the door and peeking out into the hallway. "All right, it's clear. We're good to go."

We quickly leave the room, hurrying down the hall back toward the elevator. Unlike the ride up, the ride down is less fun. Neither of us putting our hands on one another, no excitement for what's going to happen next. We both keep glancing at one another before quickly turning away. The doors ring open and we step off, gazing at one another yet again.

"I'll uh, see you later?" Beck asks, gripping his backpack over his shoulder.

"Yeah, sounds good."

Beck takes off first, and I can't help but watch him leave. My phone buzzes in my pocket, and I take it out, realizing I'm late for class.

Shit.

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CHAPTER
FOURTEEN
BECK

"**E**arth to Beck!" Coach yells when I miss yet another throw my way.
Fuck!

"Sorry, Coach," I mumble, jogging in toward the pitcher's mound.

Coach grabs his ball cap off his head, wiping his sweat, then running his hands through his hair. "This scrimmage in the next few weeks is going to be huge. We need everyone to show up and show out. I know the game doesn't count for official standings since the season hasn't started yet, but it'll be a great way to get the whole campus hyped for the home games if we can begin the year with a bang."

Coach has been lecturing us about the scrimmage for the past week, which has made each practice brutal as hell. I don't complain too often when it comes to baseball, but damn, am I always sore. But the soreness will be worth it once I'm playing on the field again. Coach gives us another speech which lasts way too long before telling us practice is over and to hit the showers or trainers' room for an ice bath.

"I don't think I've taken as many ice baths in my entire life as I have in the past month," Drax says as we're walking toward the locker room. Drax is a centaur and a newer student at Creelin U. Coach recruited him for the baseball team because of his wicked arm. I've never seen anyone be able to throw a ball as fast as he can. Plus, his having four legs doesn't hurt either.

He can run around the outfield in no time at all, barely missing any balls that get hit out that way. He's a beast when it comes to playing the sport.

"Dude, I know," I groan, sitting on the bench next to my locker. "I feel like every inch of my body is going to fall off."

"Don't even get me started," King chimes in as he takes his spot on the bench next to me. "I don't think I've slept as much as I have in the past few weeks. There's been so many times when Niko and I will watch a movie or something and the next thing I know he's waking me up the next morning to get up for practice or class. Can you imagine what it's going to be like once the season actually starts? Shit, I thought last year was tough, but this might take the cake."

Hell yeah, last year was hard as hell. I didn't think I would make it through the season, but somehow I did. But my mind is not focused on that right now. All I can think about is what King said about him and Niko cuddling all night and watching movies together. I would love to do something like that with Talon. Maybe try to find some time after my shift at Zomb-Bar where we can hang out and just relax. But then I remember that whenever we hook up, he kicks me out of his bed and into my own. I get it, but that doesn't mean I like it. Just one time I really want to fuck, come, and then wrap myself around him for the rest of the night.

"Hmm," I say out loud, no longer following King and Drax's conversation.

"I don't think he's listening to us anymore," King laughs, standing up and rummaging through his locker.

"Nah, man, for the past week or two he tunes out every so often and gets this giddy, goofy look on his face. And then he'll hmm and haa or give this weak-ass chuckle, pretending that he's paying attention when I know for a fact he hasn't heard a word I say," Drax tells King, both of them laughing loudly.

"I do not," I tell them both, rolling my eyes. "Have you ever thought that maybe what you have to say isn't interesting, and that's why I'm tuning out?"

"No," Drax says, grabbing his towel and walking toward the shower. "I can guarantee there's something else going on."

As soon as he's out of earshot, King turns to face me with a shit-eating grin on his face. "So, who is it?" His hands tap out against the metal bench, excitement flowing from his body.

"Who's who?" I ask, collecting everything I'll need to take a quick shower.

"Oh, don't even start. I know you. You were so dead set on focusing on just baseball, school, and work. And I know you're kicking ass at all of them, but something else has you occupied. Spit it out."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I mumble, walking away.

"I'll find out sooner or later," King shouts after me, but I'm already gone.

The drowning of the showers tunes out anything else he tries to yell at me, and I shake my head once I reach an empty area. Yeah, there's no way I'm going to tell anyone what's going on between Talon and me. First, because we're only hooking up. No one shares who they're hooking up with. And secondly, if somebody finds out, Talon might stop. And I sure as hell don't want to stop. Talon and I have found a groove between us. The nights when I'm not at Zomb-Bar, we'll spend some time studying in the room before putting our hands all over one another. We might have also found places around CU to put our hands all over each other in between classes. I've never done anything in public before, but with Talon I'm insatiable. It's thrilling and adrenaline-rushing to sneak into a place we shouldn't be and do things we definitely should not be doing.

Once I'm fully cleaned, I walk back to my locker, breathing a sigh of relief when I see King already packed up and left. I'm not ready for another round of questioning. But you know what I am ready for more of?

Talon.

After quickly getting dressed, I pick up my duffle bag and backpack and head out of the training facility. Snatching my phone out of my back pocket, I pull up Talon's contact and press call.

"Hello?" he asks softly, probably wondering why I'm calling him when we always text one another.

"Hey, I'm on my way home and wanted to see if you were busy?"

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"Um, no. Not really. I just finished studying. Why, what's up?"

Rubbing the back of my neck, I debate whether I should ask this question. We're not really the hang out and watch movies type, but I want to try it with him. "I'm on my way to Zombie Pizza. You down to eat some pizza and maybe watch a movie?"

It's quiet on the line for a few seconds before a quick "Sure" escapes his lips.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure it's a deep dish," I tell him, recalling that's what he requested the last time I grabbed us some pizza.

"You remembered?"

My hand grips the phone tightly as I say, "Yeah, I remembered. I remember everything about you." Talon goes quiet, and I realize I've probably just made this awkward. Wanting to get us back on track, I say, "How about some ice cream too? Does that sound good?"

"Hell yeah, I love ice cream."

"Okay, cool. I'll be there soon."

Less than an hour later, I'm walking into our room, pizza in one hand and ice cream in the other. Talon is nowhere to be found; the room is completely empty.

"Talon?" I ask, as though he's hiding under the bed or something. Our room is tiny as hell, so if he were in here, I would know it.

I set the pizza down on my desk, then put the ice cream in the small freezer that's a part of my mini fridge. I sit on the edge of my bed, wondering where Talon is. He knew I was going to be home soon, so I figured he would be sitting and waiting for me. I debate whether I should start eating the pizza before it gets cold. Maybe he changed his mind at the last minute? Maybe someone else came along with a better offer, and he went hang out with them instead? My thoughts race with all the things that Talon could be doing and why he's not here anymore. I rub my hands against my thighs, hating that I care so much about where he is and what he's doing right now. I look over at the pizza, realizing I can't sit here and wait for Talon to potentially show up.

"Fuck it," I whisper to myself as I stand up. I'm opening the top of the pizza box when the door to the room swings open, Talon walking in.

"Hi," he says, a towel wrapped around his neck and his bathroom caddy in his hand. He shakes the caddy, looking at me sheepishly, "I haven't showered yet since this morning so I figured I would take a quick one while

waiting for you. So that I'm fresh for whatever happens," he snickers, putting his caddy down.

My body sags, and I breathe a little easier after finding out that he was just in the shower. Damn, that was a roller coaster of emotions I just went through, but I don't want him to know that I was thinking he was out with someone else so I try to play it off, not letting him see how affected I just was.

"Damn, someone came prepared," I purr, walking over to him and wrapping my arms around his waist.

His body melts into mine as he looks up at me. "Always." His stomach growls, and he laughs. "Food first, though."

"You got it."

Talon and I spend the next twenty minutes scarfing down our pizza, filling up our stomachs. We're talking about nothing in particular, but we're both laughing our asses off. Talon is perched on his bed, while I'm sitting beside him at the desk. Every so often, he taps his foot against mine, then slowly pulls away and smiles my way. After cleaning up the pizza, I take out the ice cream, handing Talon's over to him. I watch with sharp attention as he slowly slides the spoon into his mouth, letting his tongue swirl around the ice cream before he pulls the entire thing out. Fuck, if he doesn't stop that, I'll attack him before he has time to finish the ice cream.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he asks, swiping the tip of his tongue up the bottom of the spoon.

"Because you're teasing me and it's hot as hell."

"I don't know what you're talking about," he grins, dipping the spoon into the ice cream and putting it into his mouth again. "I'm just eating my dessert. It's not my fault you're having dirty thoughts about me. I can't help what pops into your mind."

I laugh loudly, tossing my head back at his teasing. There's something about Talon that turns me on so much. And I'm not even talking about turning me on sexually. It's the way he's so open with who he is. How easily he can joke around with me. How there was never a time when he was shy towards me. Since the first night I met him a year ago, I have been smitten. His outgoing personality, how he's so confident in who he is. And yeah, him being gorgeous as hell doesn't hurt.

But as I'm sitting here, staring at this man in front of me, I'm realizing I'm completely fucked. Because as much as I want to say this means

nothing and it's only hooking up. My heart knows it's so much more.

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CHAPTER
FIFTEEN
TALON

I spoonful another helping of ice cream, shoving it into my mouth as I glance over at Beck. He's been staring at me for the last five minutes, and I can't tell if he's infatuated with me, or if I'm turning him on by eating my ice cream. There's one part of me that's hoping it's because I eat dessert sexily, but there's a small, like the smallest amount inside me, that's hoping he might be as infatuated with me as I am with him.

Even though I'm not infatuated.

Not at all.

"You seem to be thinking very hard over there. Penny for your thoughts?"

"I thought they stopped producing the penny. Seems it should now be a nickel for your thoughts," I say, placing the lid on my ice cream and reaching over my bed to put it into the small freezer attached to our dorm room fridge.

"Fine, I'll play. Nickel for your thoughts?" he asks, leaning forward and putting his ice cream next to mine. Our fingers graze one another for a brief second, but the jolt of electricity that shocks my body is strong as hell.

"I was just thinking about how tasty my ice cream was," I lie, knowing I wasn't going to tell him my thoughts were completely on him.

"I call bullshit, but I'll let you have your lies," he smiles at me, causing my heart to skip a beat. "Fuck, I'm full. Do you mind if we hang out for a little while and relax? Maybe let our food settle?"

"Oh, what a way to talk dirty to me," I joke, turning slightly to swing my feet onto the floor. I pat my stomach, knowing there's no way my body was to be bounced around right now. "That actually sounds like a great plan. Have anything in mind?"

Beck glances around our small room, his gaze stopping on the TV. "Wanna watch a movie?"

"Sure."

Beck grabs the remote and looks through the Ghouloo trying to find something for us to watch, while I clean up the pizza, stacking everything neatly. Once I'm done cleaning up our mess, I'm not quite sure what to do. I know what I should do, which is to stay in bed. But Beck moved the TV at an angle, and it's facing his mattress, which means I could see the movie more clearly if I move over there. But when it comes to Beck, I've given myself one simple rule. Don't fall asleep with him.

But it's not falling asleep, right?

We'd be watching a movie, and yeah, we would be lying in the same bed, but that's not sleeping with one another. Besides, it's only for a bit until we rip each other's clothes off. I can handle being in the same bed with him for a few minutes. Beck finds a movie he wants to watch, pressing play before standing up on the side of his bed, ripping off his shirt. Damn, his body is like a god. All muscular and ripped, with abs for days on his stomach. I glance away, not wanting him to know I'm staring. I sneak a peek a few times while he strips down to his boxer briefs. Once he crawls into his mattress, I get up from my bed, doing the same and undressing until I'm only wearing my underwear. He's gazing at me, his eyes dragging up and down my body as I stand beside him, not knowing what to do.

How is he going to react once I try to get into bed with him? Will he tell me no and that I need to go back to my own bed? I don't think Beck is like that, but again, we've never done this before. Not trying to waste too much energy on what ifs, I hop into his bed, laying down next to him.

"Is this okay?" I ask, getting under his comforter and resting my head against one of his black satin pillows.

"Yeah," he croaks, clearing his throat. "This is fine."

We both get comfortable under the covers, our bodies side by side but not touching. The movie plays, my attention going from lying next to Beck to laughing and snickering at what's happening on the screen. A short while later, a loud snore draws my focus, my eyes darting to a sleeping Beck. I

have no idea when he fell asleep, but he looks so calm. He has one arm behind his head, while his other hand is resting softly against his thick chest. His eyes are twitching as though he's having a vivid dream, his mouth gaping open, a little drool falling down the side of his bottom lip. It's the most peaceful I've ever seen him. He seems so relaxed, and as much as I wanted to get my guts rearranged tonight, I don't want to wake him up. He is obviously tired as hell and needs rest. I look over at my bed, knowing I should get my ass up and move over there. But I don't want to. I'm too at ease where I'm at. Besides, I haven't even finished the movie yet. Yeah, that's what I'll do. I'll finish the movie and then I'll get up and head back to my bed. Pulling the blanket up around my neck, I snuggle in closer to Beck, laying on my side to watch the movie. My body relaxes, my eyelids feeling heavy.

Alright Talon, as soon as this movie is over, you're going to get your ass up and go to your own bed. No excuses.



"GOOD MORNING," Beck rumbles in my ear, his arm tightening around my waist.

My eyes slowly flutter open, coming face to face with a sleepy Beck. He looks cute as hell, with pillow marks on his face and his hair all over the place. My body freezes as I realize I've spent the entire night wrapped up in his arms. He must sense I'm about to panic and flee because his arm wrapped about my waist tightens, pulling me closer to him.

"I like this," he whispers, planting a soft kiss on my lips.

"Like what?" I ask, trying not to draw attention to the fact that I might like this a little too much, too.

"Being this close to you in the morning. The bed was snug all night, but having quick access to you first thing in the day has its benefits," he waggles his eyebrows, arching his hips toward me. His erection bumps against mine, both of us moaning into one another.

"Fuck," I groan, closing my eyes tightly. "I can see the benefits of sharing the same bed."

"When do you have to be at work? How much time do we have?" He reaches over me, the scent of Beck filling all around me. Damn, he smells so good in the morning. How does he do that? He grabs his phone, showing me the time.

"I have to be at work in an hour."

"Oh, that's more than enough time," he purrs, setting his phone and getting into my space. "More than enough time for what I have planned."

He tosses the blanket off us, climbing between my legs. Before I can utter a word, he pulls my underwear down, my cock springing free, wanting to get some attention. His rough hand wraps around my shaft, our eyes locking as he swipes his tongue along the underside. My hips arch upward, moans flying from my mouth as he wraps his tongue around the head. He bobs on my dick like an expert, his tongue working me spectacularly. I reach down, running my hands through his hair, grabbing hold of the side of his head. Guiding him the way I want, I close my eyes, losing myself to the sensation.

God, Beck is so damn good at sucking cock. There's something about the way he works his tongue that has my toes curling and a tingle racing down my spine. It isn't long before I'm shooting down his throat, my body relaxed as he pulls off. I push at his chest, trying to force him down onto the mattress so I can have my turn. He quickly takes off his briefs, tossing them over to the side as he lies down and puts his arms behind his head.

"Fuck, you look so beautiful between my legs," he tells me, my cheeks warming from the praise. Damn, I do love it when he praises me.

I hollow my cheeks, sucking him to the back of my throat. His grip on my hair tightens, the bite of pain turning me on. Rolling his balls with my fingers, I give them attention while I deep throat him, breathing through my nose. Beck locks one of his legs around my head, holding me in place as he fills my mouth with his cum. I swallow him down quickly, wanting to taste every drop of him. Once he's completely spent, he releases my head from his grip, letting me drop into his lap to catch my breath.

"I swear, I've never had anyone who's been able to make me orgasm as fast as you can," he tells me, reaching down to pet the back of my head.

"I know the feeling," I whisper, trying to calm my racing heart. Knowing I can't stay on his lap for too long, I slowly get up, first climbing off him, then getting off the bed altogether. I pick up my underwear from

the floor, hopping into it as Beck stares at me from his spot on the mattress. "I have to get ready for work."

"Okay, sounds good. Are you available to tutor tonight?"

"Yeah, I should be." I walk over to my dresser, grabbing some clothes and then snatch up my shower caddy. "I'll uh, see you later tonight."

"See ya."

I dash out of the dorm room, hurrying down the hallway toward the showers. Fuck, I can't believe I fell asleep in his arms last night. I wasn't planning to do that at all. But why did it feel so good? And why was I so damn happy when I opened my eyes this morning and the first thing I saw was a sleepy Beck? Aside from the amazing blow job he gave me, I think I would still be feeling on cloud nine even if nothing sexual had happened. Which is wild, right?

Ugh, never again. I can not let myself fall asleep with him again. Now let's just hope I don't spend the rest of the day thinking about how good it felt to be in his arms all night.

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CHAPTER
SIXTEEN
BECK

The whole damn day has gone by at a snail's pace. I'm not surprised I fell asleep so easily when I was lying next to him last night. When we first got into bed to watch a movie, I couldn't believe it was truly happening. I might have turned the TV on purpose, hoping that it would draw him into my bed, but I didn't actually think it would work. But once we were lying side by side, my body was so relaxed that I couldn't control myself. My eyes drifted closed on their own, and before I knew it, I was knocked out.

Since waking up with Talon in my arms, that's all I've been able to think about. How amazing it felt to have him wrapped tightly around me. The fact that he was the first thing I saw in the morning with his adorable sleep-filled face. I remember getting up in the middle of the night, surprised that he was still in my bed. I thought for sure he would have bailed as soon as I fell asleep. Realizing he had stayed the entire night by my side made my stomach flutter in a way it only has with Talon.

I noticed the moment he realized what his staying in my bed meant, which is why I made sure to go back to what we originally said we were and turn it into a hookup. There's no way he would have fallen asleep in my mattress again if it were just us hanging out and sleeping. And hell yes, I want him to sleep with me again. It's probably the best night's sleep I've gotten in months.

And now here I am, sitting on my bed, waiting for Talon to get home so we can study. And yes, I may have thought about ways I can try to convince him to skip the studying and get right down to the naked business, but with a test coming up, I probably need to actually buckle down and study.

My textbooks are spread all over in front of me, my highlights and pens all ready to go when Talon walks into the room, his hair a disheveled mess.

“Fuck, sorry I’m late. I stayed after at the restaurant to earn some more money and damn it was busy as hell. Also look at this,” he spins around, showing a huge dark brown stain on his ass.

Not able to help myself, I laugh loudly before shoving my hand over my mouth to stop. “Did you shit yourself?” I ask, wondering what that stain could be.

“No,” he whines, stripping out of the pants and tossing them into his hamper. “Some little Centaur was playing around with the syrup and when his mom wasn’t paying attention, he dumped the whole damn bottle onto the floor. Guess who didn’t see the mess and slipped in it, falling on their ass? Me. And because it was so close to when I was getting off, there was no reason to come home and change. So I’ve been wandering with my damn pants glued to my ass.”

Not being able to stop myself, I burst out laughing again, tears trickling down my cheeks. “I am so sorry,” I choke out between laughs, trying to calm myself down. “I bet your ass tastes delicious though,” I tell him, grinning like a fool when he pops a small smile.

“I’ve never done anything sexual with food before,” he says, short circuiting my brain. Oh great, now all I’ll be able to think about is what type of food will taste the best on Talon’s naked body.

“Well, damn, maybe that’s something we need to try.” But not right now; I need to focus on this test.

I thought for sure I would flounder by now, not able to keep up with school, work, and baseball, but somehow I’ve been thriving. Studying with Talon has helped me stay focused in class and actually manage to understand what I’m reading. And as much as working straight after practice sucks, there’s so much downtime that I’m able to find time to hide behind the bar and get some more work done. And the guys on the team have been so supportive as well. They’ll quiz me while we’re out on the field tossing the ball and forth. Sometimes we won’t leave the field until

I've answered every question they asked me correctly. Maybe I need to have more confidence in myself that I can do the things I put my mind to.

"Boo," Talon replies, pulling me from my thoughts. He smiles at me, tossing his black leather backpack onto the bed. "You're right, study first, then other things after," he waggles his eyebrows, the carefree Talon from last year shining through.

It's taken a long time for him to let his guard down around me again. Ghosting him last year was a shitty move on my part and I get why he's kept me at arms length since the beginning of whatever it is we're doing, but when he jokes with me and smiles so easily, it reminds me of the night we shared last year. If only I had figured my shit out last year, maybe things would have been different. But as he's standing here in front of me, a smirk on his face because he knows exactly what he does to me, I can't help but think that things worked out the way they were supposed to.

Talon and I spend the next two hours glued to our textbooks trying to cram as much information into our brains as we can. My head is swimming with different vocabulary words and so much information, but I'm confident that I'll be able to do well enough on my test.

Slamming my book closed, I arch my back, stretching widely as a huge sigh escapes my lips. "Finally," I breathe, glancing over to see Talon close his own book.

"You know what sounds pretty perfect right now?" he asks, getting up off his bed and walking closer to me.

"Oh, I can only imagine," I purr, reaching out and dragging my finger down his chest.

"Yes, that. But also swimming!" He says excitedly, bouncing in place.

"Do you want to go swimming?"

"Hell, yes. If you're up for it?" His hand stops my finger before I can travel any farther down.

Glancing up into his eyes, I can see how excited he is about this. And the fact that he's inviting me makes me want to do anything he asks of me. Anything and everything. "Let's go," I tell him, standing up then clasping his hand.

"Wait, wait, wait," he chants, locking his feet in place, trying to stop me from going.

"What's wrong?"

"I need to put on some clothes. And so do you." He releases my hand, walking over to his dresser and reaching for a pair of shorts.

"Damn it," I whine, dramatically stomping my feet. "I was hoping we would go swimming naked."

"Ooo, skinny dipping?" He fans himself with his hand before laughing loudly. "As much as I would love to go swimming naked with you in the middle of the forest, that's in the middle of our college campus, in the river that tons of students go to... I think I'll have to pass. Shorts are a must."

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"Shorts are a must," I mumble incoherently, acting like a child. "Fine," I tell him, grabbing a pair of shorts off the ground and dragging them up my legs. "Don't come asking to touch my dick under the water, 'cause who knows who might be in the river and see what you're doing."

"Oh my god," he barks out a laugh, shaking his head. "You're ridiculous. Let's go."

Talon and I walk out of the dorms, heading down the cobblestone street to the forest. The moon is out, shining brightly, reminding me that the full moon is coming soon.

"Do you like full moons?" I ask, staring up into the sky. Astrology, the sun, the moon, and the stars have always fascinated me; they are full of mysteries.

"The full moon and I have always had a love/hate relationship. When it is a full moon, most shifters' abilities intensify. This means that the slightest touch of water usually causes me to shift into my fins. Which isn't my idea of a fun time when I'm in the movie theater or hanging out with friends. I mean, it's beautiful, yeah, but I probably don't have the same experience as you."

"No, I guess we don't have the same experiences with it. I didn't mean to bring up something that has bad memories," I say, feeling like shit

because I never thought about how his journey with life might differ completely from what I've gone through.

"Don't worry. It's not like I hate the full moon or hate that I shift. I love it, to be honest. Being different from so many people, being unique. Being considered a monster is one of the proudest parts of who I am. My parents had a harder time with it, since they didn't grow up being mermaids. The first time they shifted, they thought it was a curse. After having my sister and me, they grew to learn the blessing that it was."

"You have a sister?" I ask, realizing there's so much to Talon I don't know.

"I do," he smiles fondly, looking off into the distance. "She's five years younger than I am. A spit-fire for sure. She's been a handful her entire life, and even though we're a few years apart, she's my best friend. We don't talk as often as I would like because we're both so busy, but whenever we do have a minute for one another, we can easily talk for hours."

"I love that. I'm an only child and I've always wondered what it would be like to grow up with a sibling. It's one reason I love being on the baseball team so much. I've made such great friendships with some guys on the team that it feels as though they're my brothers. They could be people my future children call Uncle when they see them every weekend."

Talon nods his head, "Yeah, Hannah is like that for me. She's the one person at CU that I know is going to be a part of my life going forward. Whenever we're together, we just click. She's like the female version of me. It's pretty wild, if I'm being honest."

"I love that."

Wanting to know more about Talon, I ask him more questions about his family. He tells me about his parents who live pretty close to campus, even though he doesn't stop by and see them as often as he would like. Talking on his family transitions to things we did in high school, and I shock the hell out of him when I tell him I used to be in theater. I was on the baseball team and was part of every school play that our high school put on. He shocks me when he tells me he was on his high school tennis team.

"Don't take this the wrong way, but I never saw you as a sports person."

"Is it the teal hair?" he jokes, flipping his hair off his shoulder and smirking. "Most people assume I'm an artsy person because of my hair color, but it's my natural hair. I have no control over it being teal. And I love the color of it, so I've never tried to dye it any differently."

I bow my head, grimacing, "Yeah, I assumed that because of your hair. Damn, I'm an asshole, huh?"

"No," Talons laughs, pushing at my arm. "Can I say I thought you were a jock because of your muscles?"

"Oh, you like my muscles, huh?" I waggle my eyebrows, flexing my arm.

"God," Talon rolls his eyes, faster away from me. "That is not what I was trying to say. I just meant it's normal to try to assume some things about people. What you assume might not be accurate, but it's normal for people to make guesses based on how someone looks."

"So, what I'm hearing is that you like how I look."

Talon stops in place, placing his hand on his hip. "Now, how did you get that from what I said?"

"I don't know," I sing, walking past him. "First you're talking about my muscles and then you're talking about my looks. If I didn't know any better, I would think someone likes what he sees."

"I never said I didn't like what I see," he tells me, short-circuiting my brain. "I've always liked what I see. Especially when you're naked."

Now it's my turn to stop dead in my tracks. Talon stares at my face, biting his bottom lip as he eyes me up and down. My cock is rock hard, thinking about getting him naked again. I glance around the empty forest, trying to find a spot where we can run and hide. I need to get my hands on him, and I don't know how much longer I can wait.

"You could have been riding my dick right now, but someone wanted to swim," I say, stepping close to him and wrapping my arm around his waist. Pulling him closer to me, I smile when his breath hitches.

"Swimming is so much fun, though," he whispers, subtly grinding his erection against my body.

"But imagine this: both of us in my bed, you riding my cock, your head tossing back in ecstasy as I pound into you from below," I bit the lobe of his ear, then place a gentle kiss below his ear. "But you're right, swimming is so much fun."

I let go of Talon, stepping around him and heading back toward the river. Behind me, I can hear him mumbling incoherently about teasing him and it not being fair, but I keep walking forward. The smile on my face is huge, and as much as I want to turn around and drag him back to our dorm, I'm having so much fun with him.

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CHAPTER
SEVENTEEN
TALON

Beck is skipping ahead, walking straight for the river, while I'm slowly following along, hard as a rock. I was trying to be a tease, but that backfired on me. And now here I want to say forget swimming and let's go back, but he won't let me. By the time I catch up with Beck, he's stripped down to his swim trunks, standing ankle deep in the water. There's no one else out in the river, and with the moon shining so brightly, I can see him perfectly. His body has gotten more defined since last year, which I'm sure is because of all the working out he has to do for baseball. He's grown out his hair in the past few weeks, letting it fall down below his ears. But something that hasn't changed about him is that damn smile. The same one that lured me in over a year ago. The one that's currently on his face right now, begging me to come into the water with him.

My feet walk straight to him, ripping off my shirt and tossing it into the sand. I kick off my shoes and take off my pants, then I plunge into the water. Beck moves deeper into the river, giving me space to shift into my fins. Once I'm fully shifted, I swim a few laps around Beck, splashing him with my fins.

Pulling up beside him, I give him one final splash. "Sorry, not sorry," I tell him, snickering as he wipes the water from his face.

"Don't be. I love seeing you this way." His hand reaches out, running alongside my fin, reaching its way up to my waist. "Your fins are beautiful,

Talon. The bit of shimmer that reflects off the moon is the same shimmer that reflects in your eyes when you smile. You're gorgeous."

"Thank you," I swallow a lump in my throat, trying not to get emotional. I wasn't lying earlier when I told him I loved the monster part of me. Being a mermaid is something I've always been proud of. But that doesn't mean that other people see me the same way. For some humans, they don't like monsters, so they stay away, or they try to ask invasive questions that make me uncomfortable. Then there are other monsters who don't consider me "monster" enough. Like even though I shift, I'm not a true monster like the rest of them. So hearing him tell me how much he enjoys this part of me is healing a part of me I didn't realize needed to be healed.

"Is it okay that I'm touching you?"

"Of course it is. I don't mind when people touch my fins. Even though there haven't been many opportunities for someone to do that," I admit, realizing how little I've actually shared this part of myself with others. Of course, friends have seen me in my shifted state, but not someone I was dating.

Fuck.

No.

Not dating.

Hooking up.

Beck and I are only hooking up. There's no dating or anything similar to dating between us. He reaches out, swimming closer to me so he can wrap his arm around my body, pulling me tight against him. My heart beats wildly, loving being this close to him. We stare at one another, a magnetic force pulling us close until our lips touch. I lose myself in his kiss, moaning into his mouth. One of his hands finds my hair, tugging lightly, while his other rubs his thumb against my hip and moves to rub my ass. I love having his hands on me. Especially in my shifted form. It feels so much more erotic to be kissing him this way.

Beck pulls away, panting heavily. "Have you had enough swimming yet?"

"Maybe," I purr, swimming away from him. "Are you trying to tell me you want to go back to our room? You sure you don't want to keep swimming?"

Beck swims toward me, trying to chase me, but I'm too fast for him. "No fair," he whines when he can't catch up. "I don't have fins, so I can't

swim as fast as you."

"Let me help you."

Grabbing his hand, I interlock our fingers, squeezing it tightly before locking our arms together. Keeping hold of him, I swim, flapping my fins quickly as we fly down the river. Beck whoops and hollers, his mouth filling with water as he screams excitedly. Once we reach the end of the river, I quickly do a u-turn taking us back down to where we first entered.

"Fuck, it felt like we were flying," Beck breathes, trying to catch his breath. "That was incredible. Is it always like that for you?"

"Sometimes," I tell him. "But it was more fun with you."

And it really was. This was the first time I've ever done something like that. Yeah, I've gone swimming with other people before, but I never actually took anyone swimming with me. At first, I thought it would be hard; me having to carry him while I'm swimming, but it wasn't hard at all. We flew through the water with our bodies fused, while my fins propelled us as fast as I could.

"I would love to do it again sometime. But I would also really like to get my hands on you right now."

"I think we can make that happen. You ready to go back to our room?"

"I've been ready," he says, swimming past me and walking me out of the river.



HANNAH, Wyatt and I are sitting at the table playing our second game of Mahjong. This game is confusing as hell, but I'm starting to get the hang of it. There are so many students sitting around the main room in the hall, with tons of different games going on. I've only been able to come to a couple of these meetups, but after this morning I really needed to get out.

Last night after Beck and I got back to our dorm, he fucked me so damn good; I passed out right away. Which meant I spent another night wrapped up in his arms. And I didn't hate it. Nope, if I'm being honest, I loved it a little too much. Which was why when I woke up with a huge ass smile on

my face as I looked at a sleepy Beck, I knew I had to get out of there. And so here I am, crashing Hannah and Wyatt's Mahjong semi-wannabe-date.

"So, tell us again how much you loved sleeping with Beck," Hannah hums, smiling at me sweetly.

"I didn't say that at all."

"But isn't it, what did you say?" Wyatt adds on, hyping Hannah up. "You said you woke up in his arms and bolted. Why else would you bolt except for the fact that you liked it? Probably even lovvvvved it," he taunts.

"I didn't say that either," I mumble, looking down at my Mahjong pieces.

"So, what are you going to do, Tal?" Hannah asks, once I finally glance back up. Both she and Wyatt are staring at me with sympathy in their eyes. They both know what I realized this morning: I'm having feelings for Beck. Strong feelings. Feelings that go deeper than just a hookup.

"I don't know," I tell them both honestly. "Probably stop hooking up with him. That's how I got myself into this mess in the first place."

Wyatt cuts in before Hannah can get a word in. "You don't want to tell him how you feel? What if he feels the same way?"

"Trust me, he doesn't. He made it clear he's only focused on baseball, school, and work. He doesn't have the time for a relationship. And I told him from the beginning, I didn't want a relationship either. I'm not going to go up to him saying I changed my mind, when I know he didn't change his."

"But you don't know if he hasn't changed his mind," Hannah replies, placing her hand over mine. "You were so dead set on only hooking up, and now look at you. What if he's the same? What if he's been fighting his feelings the same way you have?"

I laugh loudly, wincing when the people next to me tell me to shush. "Sorry," I whisper, glancing around the room. Looking back at Hannah and Wyatt, I sigh loudly, "The only reason he was okay with us hooking up is because I made it seem like it's something I do all the time."

Hannah cuts me off. "I told you that would come back to bite you in the ass."

"Yeah, I know." I roll my eyes, but not at her, at myself, because what an idiot I was. "I thought I would be able to handle it, but I can't."

"He is a pretty cool dude," Wyatt says, staring at me. "One of the best guys I've met on the team. I can guarantee you can talk to him about how

you're feeling. He won't cut you off or try to belittle you. He'll listen to what you have to say."

"No, I can't. I don't want a relationship." Hannah coughs and I snicker. "I'm serious, Han. And I'm done talking about this. So, who's going to the Halloween Ball?"

Wyatt gives a dreamy look at Hannah before answering, "We're going together. I asked her this morning, and she said yes."

"He's lucky I said yes, when he knows the damn ball is tomorrow night," she looks over at Wyatt, who starts fumbling his words.

"I said I was sorry," he finally gets out. "I was nervous to ask, but hey, at least I finally got the courage, right?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," she says to him, smiling widely before she turns to look at me. "Are you going to the Halloween Ball, Tal?"

"Probably not. There's nothing really there for me. It's going to be full of couples hanging out and dancing around. And you already know I'm not one who likes to go to things like that. You're lucky I tagged along with you to the bonfire earlier this year. I'd rather sit in my room, watching a movie and eating some sweets."

I'm not lying, but I'm also not telling the whole truth. While I'm not the type of person who likes to attend dances or things like that, I also know that Beck is going to be there. He's already brought up the Halloween Ball multiple times, letting me know he's going with King and Niko, and asking if I was planning to go. I told him no and that it's not my idea of a good time. Realizing I need to keep some space from him means making sure I keep that space, and if I end up going to the Halloween Ball, I'm going to want to be around him. And fuck, it would crush me if I saw him at the ball with someone else. Because now that I've let myself understand I have feelings for him, those feelings have exploded. And how dumb am I to have developed emotions for the guy I was hooking up with? The guy who ghosted me last year. But he's also so much more than that guy. He's the guy who keeps putting a smile on my face with his antics, the guy who has shown how seriously he takes both baseball and his schooling. A guy whose arms I've enjoyed waking up in.

And that's exactly why I need to stay away.

CHAPTER
EIGHTEEN

BECK

Tonight's the Halloween Ball, and I kept hoping that Talon would change his mind and say he's going to go. However, each time I've been able to talk to him, he's made it clear that he's not going at all. Which sucks because I was hoping to go with him. I might not have actually gathered the courage to ask him, but I was hoping all the hints I was dropping would get across. But they didn't. Or hell, maybe they did, and he was trying to let me down easily.

Well, damn, that sucks.

And I swear he's been avoiding me since yesterday morning. After waking up in one another's arms, I knew he was going to bolt, but this time I couldn't do anything to stop him. He was out of the room before I could even get fully awake. And he was gone for most of the day. By the time he made it back to the room, I had to head out to go to work at Zomb-bar. There were so many people that came out to the bar last night that we stayed extra busy. And when Seth asked if I could stay over and help clean up, I couldn't turn down the offer. But by the time I got back to the room, it was already three in the morning, and Talon was wrapped up so tightly in his blanket, and I didn't want to disturb him.

This morning I thought about waking him up and talking to him, but after getting only a couple hours of sleep, I woke up past my alarm and was almost late for practice so I had to high-tail it out of the room while he was still knocked out. Of course, Coach kicked our asses all day, that I was

shocked when he finally called it a day. I thought for sure we would have been on the field the entire day. Luckily, Coach had to get ready for the Halloween Ball, so he let us off early, making sure we knew we were to be back on the turf tomorrow morning.

As soon as I got out of the shower, I rushed to the dorm, only to be met with silence once again. And that's where I've been for the past two hours. Waiting on Talon. Glancing at my watch, I realize the ball is about to start and I should probably get moving. I stare at the door for a few more seconds before finally getting to my feet.

"Alright, here goes nothing," I whisper to the empty room.

The entire walk out of the dorm, my eyes are scanning for any trace of Talon, but he's nowhere to be found. I slow my walk, trying to kill some time before making it to the quad. Monsters and humans are passing me quickly, excitement etched on all their faces. Most monsters are in their shifted forms, letting everyone see them in their true forms. Nearly everybody is wearing some kind of costume. Some are dressed nicely, while others are wearing Halloween costumes, but everyone looks amazing. I look down at my black slacks and black tee, realizing I didn't really dress up too much.

Once I reach the quad, my excitement for the ball builds. God, this place is amazing. Students and faculty are filling the quad, with many taking pictures in the selfie booths while others are standing nearby and talking. There's flashing lights coming from inside the hall and I head in that direction, wanting to see where everyone is going. Stepping inside the banquet hall, I'm blown away. They decorated every part of the hall. There's floating candelabras all around the room with black and orange linens beautifully decorating the rest of the space. It is screaming Halloween, but isn't too overdone. There's a line of faculty members against one of the walls, talking with one another while they look out at all the students in the area. Some students are chatting with friends, some are sitting at the tables, while many are dancing on the dance floor. Last year, I was too busy to attend the Halloween Ball, and now I'm regretting it. Tonight is going to be so much fun.

I find an empty table in the back, taking a seat and looking out at everyone having fun. My eyes keep scanning the room looking for a hint of teal hair, but I know I won't find him here as much as I want to. My thoughts of Talon get disrupted when the chair next to me screeches, King

plopping down on the seat. His boyfriend, Niko, sits on his lap, both of them glancing at me.

"Hey guys," I tell them both after they each say hi. "Came to dance?"

"Hell yeah, we did. Besides, this place is special to us, so of course we came," King says, reminding me of the story he told me about when he and Niko finally got their heads out of their asses and got together. It was at the Halloween Ball last year that they ultimately gave in to one another and made it official.

"Oh, way to be cheesy," Niko tells him, with love in his eyes.

"Always, for you," King says, grabbing Niko around the neck and pulling his lips to his.

I love seeing them this way; it makes me want to have the same thing they do. But I don't want them to know that, so I gag out "gross," laughing when they both pull away to look at me.

"Someone is jealous," King taunts, not realizing how accurate he is.

"Who's jealous of what?" Wyatt cuts in, his hand interlocked with Hannah's.

"Beck here. Being jealous of how in love Niko and I are. He wishes he were dating someone and in love like we are," King makes a kissy face at me, and I roll my eyes knowing he's only joking around with me.

"Oh, really?" Wyatt says, staring at me. He glances over at Hannah, a wordless conversation flowing between them. He pouts his lips, closing his eyes. "I think we should say something."

"Wyatt," Hannah hisses, pushing at his chest. "It's not our place to say anything."

I look over at King, who shrugs his shoulders, not knowing what they're talking about either.

"What are you talking about?" I ask, as they glance at each other once again.

"Fuck," Wyatt groans, shoving his hands through his hair. He gives a helpless look to Hannah, who shakes her head roughly. "I heard you've been hooking up with Talon."

"Wyatt," Hannah groans, tossing her head back. "It's not our place to say anything."

"I know, I know, but if we can help our friends, then we should do it." Hannah rolls her eyes, but doesn't speak up, Wyatt turning to look at me again. "So?"

"Yes," I reply slowly, not knowing where he's going with this. "I have been. I thought no one knew, but apparently Talon told you." Which is shocking as hell. Talon doesn't seem like the type of guy to tell our secrets. Especially when it has to do with me. I thought for sure he would take this secret to the grave with him.

"What do you think of him?"

I stare at Wyatt blankly, not sure what he's asking me. "He's a great guy."

"He's the best, but that's not what I'm asking, and you know it," he replies, glaring at me.

I blow out a breath, getting irritated with this entire conversation. "Then what are you talking about? Just spit it out."

"I just know you two have been hooking up since the beginning of the school year. But I was more so wondering what you thought of him. Like, do you ever think of him as more than a hookup?"

I glance around, seeing Wyatt, Hannah, King, and Niko all staring at me intently. "Of course, I do," I whisper, a lump forming in my throat. "But he doesn't see me that way."

"What if he did?" Hannah asks, walking over and taking the seat next to me. She places her hand on my knee, squeezing lightly. "What if you found out that he felt the same way as you? What would you do?"

"Ask him on a date," I tell her honestly. I've thought about it so many times. Not only asking him on a date, but planning the whole thing. I've been thinking about taking him to the arcade, or to the movies, or even to a nice fancy restaurant where we both have to dress up. If I'm being honest, I thought about it way too much.

"Then why haven't you done it?" King cuts in before Hannah can respond. Hannah whips her head around to look at him, and King laughs, putting his hands up in surrender. "We were all thinking it."

She turns around to look at me, nodding her head. "Actually, he's right. We were all thinking it. Why haven't you asked him out on a date yet?"

"I, uh, I," I stammer out, sweat appearing on the back of my neck. "Because he'll say no," I tell them all, dropping my head. There's no way he would say yes to a date with me. Hell, half the time I think he can only barely tolerate me.

Wyatt puts his hands in his pockets, rocking on the heels of his feet. "I don't think he will. I think he'll say yes, and this is me being your friend and

his friend. Take a chance, Beck."

"Fuck," I drag my hands through my hair, yanking on the strands.

"I think you should tell him," Hannah says, pulling my hands off my face. "He's my best friend, and I know him better than anyone else. I might not have agreed with Wyatt spilling Tal's business everywhere, but he wasn't wrong. I hate seeing my friend upset and down."

"Upset?" I ask, cutting her off. "Why was he upset?"

"He was trying to lie and say he didn't have feelings for someone. Like someone else we know," she jokes, bumping her shoulder into my arm.

"I didn't lie and say I don't have feelings for him. I was just saying I don't think he has feelings for me. At all." A bloom of hope forms in my stomach as I think of Talon and Hannah having a conversation about whether he feels something for me.

Hannah blows out a breath, giving me a soft smile. "Why don't you go ask him yourself?"

"I'm scared," I admit, the hope in my stomach turning to butterflies. "What if I lay it all out there and he turns me down?"

Fuck, I can't imagine what would happen if he turned me down. I would still have to live with him for the rest of the school year. There's no way I would want to come back to our room every night after being rejected. Damn, would I have to find a new place to live? And shit, we work for the same owner. Does that mean I would have to look for a new place to work at too?

"Get out of your head," King says from next to me. "Go talk to Talon. And if it doesn't turn out the way you want, you have a group of people sitting right here who will be here for you."

"He's right," Niko says quietly. "Take the chance, Beck. You won't regret it if you do, but I can guarantee you will regret it if you don't take the leap."

"Okay, okay," I say, standing up, gaining my courage. I bounce in place, stretching my neck, trying to hype myself up. "Alright, I'll either see you in about fifteen minutes with my heart in my hands, or you won't hear from me until tomorrow. And if that's the case, don't come bothering us."

There are whoops and cheers from everyone as I turn around and walk away. The rest of the sounds in the hall fade out as I focus on making my way to Talon. I know he's still in our room, so I walk as fast as I can, diving around groups of people and monsters. Once I'm outside the hall, the

moonlight shines brightly across the campus, lighting my path to Talon. The nerves dissipate the closer I get to him, excitement bubbling throughout my body. Knowing that he told Hannah he has feelings for me has me on cloud nine. All I want to do is slam open our dorm door, pull Talon into my arms and kiss him wildly. Then, once I have my hands on him, I'm going to ask him out on a date. And hopefully, after a date, he'll be my boyfriend.

Shit, a boyfriend.

Something I told myself I absolutely didn't want to have this year, but after getting to know Talon, I want all of him. There's two vampires hanging out by the front door to the dorms, and I have to sidestep a few times before they realize I'm trying to get inside the building. After offering a quick apology, I rush to the other end of the facility to take the stairs to our floor. I'm too damn impatient to wait for the elevator to come down.

Swinging open the door to our floor, I run down the hallway, sliding to a stop outside our door. My heart drops to the floor when I notice the sock hanging on the doorknob. A sock that I haven't seen since Talon and I started hooking up. Which means that Talon has someone else in the room. Someone who isn't me.

"Fuck," I whisper, grabbing my chest as I stumble back against the wall. I take a deep breath, my gaze stuck on the sock that's taunting me.

I knew better. I fucking knew better than to get my hopes up. But having all the guys and Hannah telling me that Talon felt the same way as me had me thinking of how things could be different. I should have just kept with being with no guys at all. Allowing Talon in was a mistake I should never have made. I need to go back to what I told myself at the beginning of the year. School, baseball, and work. That's it.

No more Talon.

My heart hurts, the pain radiating throughout my body as I stumble away from the room and to the elevator. I need some time to myself. My mind is reeling and I need to be alone. Knowing the perfect place, I walk out of the dorm heading toward the forest. I just need quiet right now.

CHAPTER
NINETEEN
TALON

Slamming my textbook shut, I sink into the bed, breathing a sigh of frustration. Fuck, what am I doing? I'm literally hiding out in my room, trying to avoid Beck. I know he's at the Halloween Ball right now, and I'm craving to go there and be with him. After talking to Hannah and Wyatt, there's this little seed of hope that's bloomed in my stomach, telling me I should tell him how I feel.

Which is why I've locked myself in my bedroom, attempting to focus on studying for an upcoming test, instead of getting dressed and heading out. But it hasn't been working. If I'm lucky, I'll go five minutes where I can concentrate on what I'm reading, but then my mind will think of Beck and I'll lose track of what I was doing.

Swinging my legs off the side of the bed, I let my toes touch the carpet, debating what I should do. If I don't say anything to him, then I won't have to be rejected. But what if he doesn't reject me? Ugh. But this is the same man who ghosted me last year. And I mean, he had a pretty good excuse why he didn't reach out. And after getting to know him over the past few weeks, I've grown to realize there is so much more to Beck than I originally thought. He's such a caring, sweet, thoughtful man who is always thinking of me and doing whatever he can to make my life easier.

Fuck, what is wrong with me?

Why am I not at that damn dance telling him how I feel? I should be spinning around the dance floor, tangled up in his arms. Fuck, I'm an idiot. I

jump up from the bed, scanning all over the room, trying to find a pair of shorts. I grab a dirty pair, pulling them up my legs, then tossing a shirt over my head. After sliding on my crocs, I rush out of the room, the slamming of the door hitting my ears as I'm already down to the elevator.

The dorm isn't as busy as it was before; more students are out partying or at the dance. Once I reach the outside, I sprint toward the hall, going as fast as I can. My breathing becomes labored as I run hard. Yeah, this is why I'm not in sports. This shit sucks ass. Who the hell does this for fun? After being yelled at by multiple people for almost colliding with them, I finally make it to the quad. I pace around in a circle, trying to find Beck, but I don't see him anywhere. Giving up on finding him outside, I race up the stairs, my thighs on fire when I reach the entrance to the dance hall at long last. I don't even give myself time to look at the decorations. I'm too busy trying to find a gorgeous set of blue eyes in the sea of students dancing nearby.

"What are you doing here?" Hannah asks, walking up to me and squeezing me tightly. "I thought for sure you would have been locked up in your room with your lover boy."

Pulling away, I stare at her, confused. "What are you talking about? Lover boy?"

"Didn't Beck come to find you?" She asks, her eyebrows furrowed. "He left here almost an hour ago, determined to talk to you."

"Talk to me about what?"

Beck never came into the room. Hell, there wasn't even a knock on the door. I could barely concentrate on my textbook, but I know for sure that no one tried to come in. My mind replays the past few hours, trying to remember if maybe Beck came in, but I was unaware. But it's not possible. If he had come into the space, why wouldn't he say anything to me?

"He likes you. Like how you like him. He was on his way to talk to you about making it official. I told you that you should have just told him the truth about your feelings for him."

"Fuck," I whisper, my heart in my throat. He was on his way to tell me he has feelings for me, but never made it? Did he change his mind? Did he chicken out? Shit, I need to find him.

"Do you know where he is?" I ask Wyatt as he walks up and puts his arm around Hannah, pulling her close to him.

"Nah, man. I thought for sure he would have gone straight to you. The man was determined to talk to you. Do you think something is wrong?"

Wyatt's face becomes concerned, wondering if something nefarious could have happened to Beck.

"God, I hope not." My mind is reeling, wondering what could have happened to Beck and why he never made it back to the room. "I'm going to check the room again. Call me if he shows up back here."

They all give their agreement to call and I take off out of the hall, back toward our dorm room. Fuck, I can't remember the last time I've run this much. My legs are killing me, and if my body could scream at me, it would be cussing me out right now. Somehow I get to the dorm far quicker than I thought I would, bypassing the elevator to run up the stairs. As I get to the door of our room, the sight stops me cold. Fucking hell. The sock. I forgot I had put the sock on the door when drunk students were knocking and banging on the door every few minutes. I thought if I put the sock on the door, they would think we were busy and leave us alone. But if Beck saw the sock, then he probably thought the wrong thing. Fuck! He probably thinks I had someone else in the room, and that's why he never came in.

I pace in the hallway, running my hands through my hair, trying to figure out where Beck could have gone. I replay all the conversations we've had in the past when it finally clicks. The river. Beck always talks about how much he loves going down to the river. He says it's the one place on campus that doesn't feel overcrowded to him and where he can go to sit and think. If I were on my way to tell him how I felt and I saw the sock, I know that's where I would go.

Determined to find him, I rush back down the stairs, my lungs and legs on fire as I run as fast as I can toward the forest. I head in the same direction that we've gone a few times when we've swum together. The forest is dark, only the moon lighting my path, but I know exactly where I'm going. My feet guide me to the river, a large rock off to the side where I can see Beck crouched up, staring off at the water.

"Beck," I gasp once I finally reach him. I'm breathing hard after having run around the campus multiple times, so I'm trying to catch my breath.

Beck stands up quickly, his eyes wide as he stares at me. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you," I breathe out once I'm able to speak again. "Fuck, that shit was tiring. How do you run so much for baseball? I couldn't do it. There's no way. This shit was horrible."

Shut up, Talon, and tell him why you're here. He doesn't need to hear about how much you're dying from exercise you so clearly need.

Beck scratches the back of his head, staring at me. "I actually want to talk to you."

"No, I need to talk to you," I rush out, stepping closer to him.

"No, let me go first," he tells me, grabbing my hand. "Before I lose the courage to say this. I've been sitting here for a while, thinking about us."

"Us," I echo, loving the sound of that. Fuck, I hope there's still an us.

"Talon," he scolds, tossing his head back. "Let me get this out."

"Okay, okay," I tell him, squeezing his hand. "Tell me."

"Okay, so I get you're still seeing other people-"

"But," I cut him off, wanting to let him know that there's no one else but him.

"Talonnn," he drags out, getting irritated with me. "Are you serious?"

I mimic zipping my lips, smiling at him. "Sorry."

"As I was saying, I know I'm not the only person you've been hooking up with, but I want to be the only one. I want to be the one person you come to each night, and not as a roommate. I want to cuddle together while we're watching movies, go to this river together and swim together, go out on dates, and just be together. But I don't want anyone else to be there. Just us. I came to tell you this earlier today when I saw the sock on the doorknob. At first, I was upset, thinking that there was no way you would give it up, but as I've been sitting here thinking, I knew I still had to try. Even if you completely shut me down, I had to try. I needed to let you know how I feel. I want to be with you, Talon. Although I don't know what the future holds, I do know that I want to spend every extra second I have with you. When I started this school year, I told myself I wasn't going to fall for everyone, but then we spent time together and I realized I'm falling for you."

He stares at me intently, his words echoing around in my mind. I knew this is exactly what I wanted, but knowing that he feels the same as me has me on cloud nine. Fuck, he's falling for me? I'm falling for him, too. I want the same things that he does. And I want them all with him.

"Talon?" Beck asks, tilting his head, making me realize I've just been staring at him this whole time not saying a word.

"Oops, I meant to say something, but I was too busy swooning from your words," I chuckle, stepping closer and wrapping my arms around his waist. "I want all the same things. With you. Only you. I'm falling for you

too, and I don't want there to be anyone else. And there's something I need to be honest about, but I don't want you to be upset."

His eyebrows furrow, confusion etched on his face. "What is it?"

"There has never been anyone else," I tell him honestly, hoping he's able to understand why I lied. "From the very beginning, every time there was a sock on the door, I was in the room studying. Alone. I wanted to be close to you, but I didn't want you to know that. I wanted you to think there were others, so that you wouldn't know you were special to me. Which I know is really fucked up, but at the time it was the only thing I could think of to keep you at arm's length."

"And the sock on the door tonight?"

"It was because so many students kept drunkenly knocking on the door trying to bug me. I thought if I put it there, they would leave me alone. And they did, but I didn't think about what you would think if you saw it."

Beck bursts out laughing, releasing my hand as he bends over to snicker. "I knew you weren't the hookup type. I always thought it was strange that you were hooking up with so many people, but I never caught a glimpse of anyone. And now it makes complete sense."

"You're not mad?" I ask, hoping this isn't a deal breaker for him. Starting off with a lie is not a good way to enter a relationship, and I want to be honest with Beck about everything from here on out.

He wraps his arms around me, pulling me tightly against his body. "No, I'm not mad at all. And I get it. I lied when I said I was okay with not being the only one you were hooking up with. I hated it. But knowing that we were both lying, and basically for the same reason, because we wanted to be with each other, does make it a little easier."

"I'm sorry for lying. But I'm not sorry for why I did it. Especially if us getting together is the result of it."

He kisses my forehead, pulling back to look at me. "So, is that what we're saying? That we're together?"

"Yes," I breathe, swaying into him. "I want to date you, Beck. I want to be yours."

"Good, because that's all I want too."

Beck leans down, kissing me on the lips. I lose myself to kiss, opening my mouth and tangling my tongue with his. It might have been a wild ride to get to this point: hookups, ghosting, and more hookups. But I wouldn't

change our story for the world. I'm so excited to see where my future with Beck leads.

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EPILOGUE

BECK

Five Years Later

“**O**h my god, this is freaking heavy,” Talon grunts, trying to help me maneuver our new mattress onto our bed frame.

This is the last thing we have to finish until we’re completely settled into our new house. It’s a wild feeling, knowing that Talon and I officially have a place of our own. It may have taken a few years, but I’m so damn excited to be here. After graduating from Creepin U a few years ago, Talon and I moved in with a few friends into a shared apartment, while we all tried to get our footing underneath us. We figured it was easier to live with roommates and not have to worry about struggling or paying bills. It was honestly so worth it. It gave us time to save and work on what we wanted for the future. While we still haven’t been able to buy our own home, renting a house just the two of us feels like the perfect next step. Plus, it’ll be nice to have a lot of private time.

“Do you remember the day you found out about the switched mattresses?” I ask, remembering that day so clearly. It took him sleeping in my bed for a few months before he realized I had caught onto his little scheme and had swapped our beds so that I had the softer one again.

He drops the mattress down onto the frame, placing his hands on his hips. “Oh my god,” he wheezes, laughing loudly. “I can’t believe I forgot

about that. I was so pissed when I found out the reason my back was killing me was that you switched them again.”

“I tried to get you to sleep in my bed, but you kept insisting that we stay in yours. If only you weren’t so damn stubborn,” I shake my head, thinking back to when Talon would only let us sleep in his bed. And at that time the two of us were so damn inseparable that I never had time to switch the mattresses back. But after both of our backs killed us, I came clean and told him the reason the bed sucked for both of us.

“Well, luckily for both of us, we tested out this one and it was perfect. Neither of us will have to worry about bad backs.”

“Actually, that’s not true,” I say, walking over to him and wrapping my arms around his waist. “I plan to break your back tonight when I fuck you hard into the mattress.”

“Or,” he says, spinning us around and shoving me up against the hard wall. “Maybe I’ll do the same to you when I fuck you into the mattress,” he purrs, biting the lobe of my ear. “Or better yet, we can take turns fucking each other. In every room of the house.”

“Fuck,” I moan, adjusting myself in my shorts. “How is it that you can turn me on so damn easily?”

“It’s a gift,” he smiles, rubbing my dick before backing away. “But we can worry about that later tonight. I want to get the room finished.”

“Talon,” I groan, pushing on my aching cock. “I need you to touch me, baby.”

“I promise, I’ll take care of you tonight. Now come on, help me put on the sheets.”

“So bossy,” I mumble, taking a deep breath before heading over to the mattress. “I don’t know what’s so damn exciting about putting the sheets on the bed. I’d rather be taking them off, if you know what I mean.”

Talon laughs loudly, “That doesn’t even make sense, Beck. I think all the blood in your head has gone to your dick.”

“Then you should take care of it,” I waggle my eyebrows. “Come on, baby, please,” I beg, hoping Talon will take pity on me and put me out of my misery.

“After you make the bed.”

“Fine,” I huff, taking hold of the corner of the sheet and trying to shove it onto the mattress. “All I want is to get my hands on my boyfriend, but he

doesn't want to put his hands on me," I grumble, cracking a small smile when Talon giggles.

"Such a crybaby," he mumbles, clutching the sheet and placing it on the corner of the bed. "Hey, can you grab that pillowcase on the floor? I want to put it on the pillow for this side of the bed."

"Sure," I tell him, grabbing the cushion cover. The bottom of the material drags, a hard piece hitting me in the ankle. "What the fuck?" I whisper, whipping the case up, realizing that there's something contained in it. Reaching my hand inside, I grab hold of the small square box that's hiding inside. "What is this?"

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"Beckett," Talon whispers, saying my full name. "I thought of a million ways I wanted to do this, and I kept changing my mind, telling myself that it wasn't good enough. So, I was sitting with that hidden for the past month trying to figure out how exactly I wanted to do this."

I gaze at the small black box in my hand, knowing what it is, but my brain is not computing what it means for us. My grip is shaking, trying to flip open the top to see exactly what's inside. I'm not able to say a word, my mouth opening and closing as my eyes stare at the palm of my hand.

"So, then I thought maybe I would wait until our first night in our new place," he continues, ignoring my frozen state. "But as we've been working on getting everything set up, I really don't want to wait much longer." He grabs my other hand, squeezing it tightly. "Beck," he whispers, my eyes finally dragging up to look at him. "Since the moment I met you, I knew there was something special about you. Even at the beginning of us, I felt there was something different about you. And as much as I tried, I couldn't stay away. And I'm so damn thankful I didn't."

"Me too," I finally choke out, tears swimming in my eyes. "Fuck, I'm so damn glad we found our way to each other. Is this what I think it is? Or is it a bracelet? I wouldn't mind a bracelet, but I also don't want to get my

hopes up that it's something else. Ya know, just in case it's not what I think it is, and it's actually just a bracelet. Or a necklace, I guess."

"Beck," Talon sighs, shaking his head. "Let me talk, baby."

"Okay."

"As I was saying, I've been wanting to ask you this for a while. And I wouldn't say I was nervous to ask you, more so nervous about taking this step. And not because I'm not sure; I am so damn sure this is what I want. What I need to know is that this is something you want, too. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I want to wake up every day next to you and go to sleep wrapped in your arms."

"I want the same things you do," I tell him, watching as he grabs the box from my hand and takes out the ring. Fuck, it's a gorgeous black band with teal woven throughout. The color is the same as his hair and fins, a piece of him I'll always carry with me. "You haven't asked me a question, though."

"Oh god," Talon chuckles, placing the ring on the tip of my finger. "Beckett, will you do me the absolute honor of being my husband? Of spending the rest of your life with me? To be the only man who'll ever be inside me?"

"God," I choke out when he giggles at the last sentence to leave his mouth.

"Just wanted to make sure you were listening. Now, will you marry me, Beckett?" He asks, sliding the ring down my finger.

"Of course," I tell him, wrapping my arm around his waist and pulling his body close to mine. "I can't wait to marry you, Talon. I love you."

"Fuck, I'm so damn happy you said yes. I love you, too."

"Now can I fuck you into the mattress?" I purr, nuzzling the side of his neck.

"I was hoping you'd ask that."

"God, I love you."

"I love you, too."



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