


a Love Has No Boundaries story

**Pledge
Number
Seven**



C.M. Walker

PLEDGE NUMBER SEVEN

T.K. Rogers knows his Alpha Phi Kappa brothers would never accept a gay brother, so he's kept that secret for two years from even his closest friends. He doesn't blame them; if he had the choice, he'd be straight too. But once pledge number seven gets under his skin and into his bed, T.K. can no longer separate his frat life and his sex life.

Carlos Castillo has everything figured out. A fraternity will give him instant friends, and he'll gain real world experience in event planning and management. He just has to get through the hell of pledging. No problem. Staying in the closet was never part of the plan, but then again, neither was T.K. Rogers.

Hiding a relationship from the twenty guys you live with isn't easy, but T.K. loves APK and risking his place in the brotherhood for a pledge he's just met is not an option. How far will T.K. go to keep his secret?

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Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

PLEDGE NUMBER SEVEN

By C.M. Walker

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what they do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

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Photo Description

Two dark-haired young men sit on a hardwood floor, viewed through a doorway. The younger, clean-shaven man has his back against the wall, wearing a white undershirt, dark pants, and boots. The other man faces him, bracing himself with his hand between his boyfriend's feet. He wears a dark T-shirt and has the beginnings of a beard growing in. The men's faces are close, suggesting an intimate conversation or a kiss.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Something new that must be kept a secret. But secrets will out, and who discovers this "forbidden" relationship? (And is it really as "forbidden" as they think? Are they keeping their relationship a secret because of a game, because it's easier, because one person in particular cannot know the truth?)

HEA (or a strong HFN), and a "forbidden affair" at least at the beginning. Bonus points for some dub-con and/or (reluctant?) kissing in public. Can be any level of heat.

Sincerely,

May R.

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: college, coming out, barely legal, first time, in the closet, fraternity, homophobia

Content warnings: dub-con

Word count: 21,065

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PLEDGE NUMBER SEVEN

By C.M. Walker

CHAPTER ONE

The pledges stand in a line in front of us wearing nothing but their underwear, hands clasped behind their backs. Large, black numbers label their bare chests. I scan their faces one by one. Even as my brain repeats *don't look at him*, my gaze snaps back to lucky number seven. I wipe his real name from my mind. Until he's a brother, he's just Seven.

From this distance, his eyes look black. Though he's not what you'd call built, taut olive skin covers his deliciously defined pecs and the faint ridges of his abs. The top line of the seven is perfectly centered between his dark nipples. Boxer briefs contain the bulge between his legs and snugly wrap around to his backside. The dark hair covering his legs matches the mop on the top of his head.

Seven is one of fifteen lucky freshmen who received their Alpha Phi Kappa pins yesterday. Earlier tonight, three brothers waxed the freshmen's chests and wrote the numbers onto the smooth surface with a bold marker. Nothing starts the brother-bonding process like having your chest hairs ripped out with hot wax.

My gaze travels back up to his face. He stares at me. No way he missed my inspection of his entire body. Shit. I quickly look to Eight, who's shorter and a little rounder. Better. No inappropriate reactions there.

As Chuck, this year's Pledge Master, talks about the tradition of pledging and the ritual of becoming a brother, my attention wanders back to Seven. He continues to watch me, perhaps expecting another eye-fuck. Sorry to disappoint you, Seven. And yet, I can't seem to avert my gaze. Are his eyes really black or just very dark brown?

"Fifteen of our brothers have so graciously volunteered to personally guarantee that your pledging semester gets off to the right start." Chuck shakes

the bowl of paper in his hands. “They’ll each draw a number and then supervise your completion of a task of their choosing. Failure to complete the task will result in consequences. And trust me, you don’t want the consequences.”

Chuck offers the bowl to Paulie first. He pulls out a slip of paper, unfolds it, and reads, “Two.”

Two nods. You can almost see his mind working a mile a minute, wondering if Paulie is exactly the type of person people mean when they say, “It’s the quiet ones you gotta look out for.”

Mikey draws next. “Twelve, you’re my bitch.” He rubs his hands together. “This is gonna be fun.”

Chuck steps over to me. “Your turn, T.K.”

Please be Eight. Or Nine. Anyone but Seven.

I fish around in the bowl, as if the paper marked Seven will feel different from the rest. I tear my eyes off Seven just long enough to read the one I’ve chosen. My mouth grows so dry that my announcement comes out hoarse. I clear my throat and wet my lips. “Seven,” I repeat, this time loud enough to drown out the throbbing of my heartbeat in my ears.

Chuck moves on to Boomer.

Seven shows no reaction. He’s either a damn fine poker player or too cocky for his own good. No. Better not think anything about cocks right this minute. I take Seven’s stoic nature as a personal challenge. If he can stand there unaffected by what’s happening, then I sure as hell can. Well, I’ll have to fake it because just the thought of getting him alone in my room makes my dick stand at attention.

Seven still eyes me as Chuck gives the “Go to it” command. Some of the other pledges eagerly approach their assigned brothers. Idiots. Others glance around nervously, as if unsure what to do. Seven stands just as he has been the

entire time, back straight as a rod, no hint that he's embarrassed to be standing there in his underwear or nervous about what task he might have to complete.

I reach him in two strides and wrap my fingers around his upper arm. "Let's go," I say as I tug him forward.

He brings his hands out from behind his back, but doesn't yank his arm away or resist. He doesn't speak. Because he's not sure if he's allowed to or he just doesn't want to?

What had my brothers seen in him? The first time I saw him, last week during Rush, I got a hard-on. I avoided him the rest of the week and hoped he wouldn't get a bid. Turns out I was the only one who voted against him.

I lead him upstairs to my room. I shove him toward the middle of the room and shut the door.

He stands there, waiting calmly. I walk up to him, getting right into his face. He's maybe an inch shorter than me, but I've got at least twenty-five pounds on him. He meets my eyes, giving no indication that my closeness bothers him. Our noses could collide with the slightest of movements.

"You sure you can handle this, tough guy?" I ask.

"Sir, yes, sir!"

I bark out a laugh, unable to help it. "This isn't the fucking army, genius."

A muscle in his cheek twitches, the first sign that he's not some kind of robot, that there might actually be a person in there. A comedian. Who would have guessed?

I slowly circle him, not taking my eyes off him. "You don't want to fuck with me, Seven."

I pause to appreciate that ass, clenching my fists to keep from grabbing it.

He scoffs. "I can handle myself. Against you? Any day."

I complete my circle and step back into his space. He has full, dark pink lips. With a tilt of my head, we could be kissing.

“You’ve got a mouth on you, don’t you? Tsk, tsk.” I shake my head. Then I know exactly what that mouth—and those lips—can be used for. I lock the door. “Let’s put that mouth to good use. Your task is to suck my dick.”

His face finally changes, his eyebrows raising so high they become part of his hair. “What?” His voice jumps an octave, as if I couldn’t possibly have said what he thinks I said.

“Suck. My. Dick. Right here. Right now.” I palm my dick through my jeans to make my point.

His throat moves in a slow swallow as he continues to size me up with those dark, dark eyes. I can see now that his eyes aren’t actually black, just very close to it. Have I misjudged him? I’ve never really believed in the gaydar thing, but something about the way he looks at me, it’s like he knows about me. Which, of course, he doesn’t. The guys I’ve been living with the last two years don’t even know, so how could Seven?

My stomach drops. Have I gone too far? We have to be careful about what we force our pledges to do. Strictly speaking, hazing is against University policy, but you can’t get through pledging without it. Anyone with a set of balls can handle the shit we put our pledges through. And we always steer clear of anything that would land us in the news, especially sexually-themed tasks, so what the fuck am I doing?

As I open my mouth to tell him that his first official pledge task isn’t actually a blow job, he steps toward me. He lowers his eyes to unbuckle my belt, but looks up again as he reaches for my jeans. My breath stops in my throat when his knuckles graze my stomach. It’s only once he pops open the button and unzips the fly that I can breathe again, and even then I feel like I can’t draw in enough oxygen. My dick throbs, as if trying to push itself in his hands, but clothes still block the way.

The unemotional mask hasn’t changed. Seven looks neither scared nor turned on; he’s just following orders. This frustrates the hell out of me, knowing that I don’t affect him the way he affects me. As he slides my pants down my legs, he sinks to his knees. My dick springs free from the confines of my boxers, embarrassingly hard, just inches from his face.

Without hesitation, he grabs my dick with one hand and circles those soft lips around the head. I swallow my moan as his tongue swipes across the slit. He works his way down my length, sucking me into the hot heaven that is his mouth.

Sweet Mother Mary of Baby Jesus and all that is pure and holy in this whole goddamn world, as my mother says. Well, sort of. No fucking way this is his first blow job.

I bite my lip to keep quiet. My hands grab at his thick hair as my hips thrust against his mouth.

Shit, how can I keep any level of respect when I'm ready to shoot my load after a few seconds of my dick in his mouth? Preparing for Rush and pledging has kept me too busy to sneak out to the clubs the last few weeks.

"You don't... have to..." I gasp.

He tugs my sack in time with his bobbing head, and for three long seconds, my legs don't feel strong enough to hold me upright.

"Carlos." My voice is husky and low.

He moans around my dick and sucks me in deep as I come.

When he finally releases me, I stagger back and bang into the door. I close my eyes and catch my breath.

Hot air brushes my ear. "I thought this pledging shit was supposed to be hard."

My eyes crack open. I want to wipe that smirk right off his face. I grab his arm and yank him closer until he crashes against me. I kiss him hard, shoving my tongue in his mouth. He doesn't fight or push back. I whip us both around and shove him against the door. My fingers slide down his smooth chest until they reach the waistband of his boxer briefs. I lift them over his dick and kneel in front of him as I push the briefs down his legs. I'm practically salivating at the sight of his dick in front of my face. It's the thrill of breaking his control, I tell myself, not the fact that he looks particularly delicious.

It turns out Seven is really fucking loud when he gets sucked off. This amount of moaning is inappropriate for the task I'd planned to give him. I heave him off the door and we stumble towards my bed. Pushing him down, I kneel next to him and lick him from sack to head, breathing him in, as I press my hand against his mouth. "Quiet down, would ya?"

He responds by taking two of my fingers into his mouth. He licks and sucks them as I work his dick. He continues to moan, but at least it's muffled now. His hips buck, and his fingers dig into the sheets. I've finally found a way to break his carefully controlled facade.

He mumbles around my fingers. I can't understand what he's saying, but I'm guessing it's something along the lines of, "I'm gonna come."

I suck harder, pushing him to the edge. A strangled sound comes from his throat and his body stiffens as the salty come shoots into my mouth. I take it all, but I don't swallow.

I crawl up his body, laying my chest on his. Pressing my lips to his, I force my tongue into his mouth and along with it, his come. I can tell from the way his body jerks that he wasn't expecting me to snowball him, but he takes it like a man. All things considered, Seven has worse things to look forward to the rest of the semester.

The kisses progress from hard and bruising to sweet and exploring as our breathing slows. With a final kiss, I take the opportunity to suck in Seven's lower lip as he pulls back. He gives me a small smile when his lip releases. I prop myself up on my elbow. It's the first time I've seen Seven smile in the last two days.

"You know you can't tell anyone what we did, right?" The minute the words are out of my mouth I want to kick myself. Does Seven realize how much I'm trusting him with? "Secrecy of pledging. You signed up for this shit."

It's only a small lie. Pledges are supposed to keep their mouth shut to outsiders. Talking about it within the fraternity itself isn't forbidden. He'll figure that out as soon as one of his pledge brothers opens his mouth.

Seven looks me straight in the eye. “I won’t tell anyone. Not about anything.”

I nod. I should thank him, but brothers don’t thank pledges.

“So I can go get my clothes now?”

“Yup. You’re off the hook. For now, at least.”

He leaves the room quickly, as if afraid of what else I might do to him.

CHAPTER TWO

As a freshman, I played a lot of foosball. It helped keep my mind off my sexual frustration. Now, I'm APK's foosball champion, which actually kinda sucks because no one will play with me unless I'm drunk. Pledges are good for a game or two though. I take it easy on them for the first few points before I crank it to full T.K. power.

It's Monday afternoon, and I've just scored the fourth point against Two when Seven walks into the lounge. He leans against the wall, watching. Two loses control quickly and I score from my defensive 2-bar.

Seven's eyebrows raise.

I give him a sweet smile. "You want a shot?"

"Hell yeah, I want a shot." His dark eyes bore into mine. Does he mean a shot at foosball or a shot at my face?

I motion to the table. "Well, come on, tough guy."

"Why do you call me that?" he asks as I hand him the ball. I'm a good sport like that, giving my opponent the first serve.

"You don't like it? I could just call you Seven."

"I do have an actual name."

His serve rolls to my 5-bar allowing me to shoot for his goal so quickly he wasn't ready for it. "Damn," he mutters.

"Nope. You're a pledge now. Seven or tough guy, take your pick and be glad it's not something worse."

He does a better job serving the ball this time and keeps control of it. He plays aggressively, but I block his shot.

"Fine. Seven."

"You got it, tough guy."

A noise of exasperation from the other side of the table makes me glance up, but he's focused on the game. That split second of distraction allows him to sneak one by my goalie.

I serve, but not before the hint of a grin tugs at his lips. I don't hold back after that. Two goals in a row. I look up at him and throw him a toothy smile. "Having fun yet?"

"Wouldn't you like to know what I do for fun," is his response as he serves, returning his eyes and his attention back on the game.

My attention, however, diverts completely to my dick, and the things I'd like to do with him, to him, for fun. A bedtime blow job every night during his pledging, for starters.

My hand slips on the handle for my goalie, and he scores. Before serving the ball again, I take a moment to breathe, to tell my dick to behave. I shift my weight from side to side and wipe my sweaty hands on my pants.

Determined not to let up another goal, I serve and position to score immediately. *Bang.*

I won't look up at him again. Absolutely refuse to let him get under my skin.

At least, not more than he already is.

I focus on the game, but somehow my gaze wanders past the table straight to his crotch and his hand twisting the rod to block my shot with his defensive 2-bar. My dick throbs, as if that's what his wrist is twisting over. My breath comes out shaky. I need to adjust myself but that would give away my hard-on. Could I blame it on the adrenaline of a tough opponent? The thrill of the game? Probably not.

Seven manages to tie the score at 4-4. Fucking bastard.

The ball speeds back and forth several times. He blocks my shot, I block his. He plays with the ball, getting it in just the position he wants, just out of reach of my guys. I anticipate his shot going right.

He goes left.

What the fuck just happened here?

“Holy shit!” Boomer cries. “Seven just beat T.K. straight out.”

“Whooo boy, looks like we got another House Champ.”

Seven holds out his hand, a smug smile on his lips. “Nice game.”

“Sure.” I shake his hand and jerk my head toward him at the same time.

Instead of letting go, I squeeze his hand but not in a hard, pissing-contest kind of way. His eyes widen just the slightest amount; somehow it’s enough to put a little vulnerability in his face. He opens his mouth to speak, just as Boomer and Mikey grab him from behind. “What the—”

He flails, trying to get free, but Boomer and Mikey each outweigh him by fifty pounds. Either one could take care of him, but I want in on this action.

They hold him still long enough for me to wrap my arms around him, pinning his arms to his chest. “Get his legs.”

He kicks, but it’s pretty much over. Gotta give him credit, he never stops trying to twist away.

“Don’t you know it’s not nice to win against a brother, tough guy?” I tell him as we carry him down the hall.

“What are you going to do to me?” His voice jumps an octave by the end.

In his ear, I say softly, hoping the other guys can’t hear over his struggling, “I promise I won’t hurt you.”

We reach the bathroom and toss him down in a shower stall. I turn the water on and jump back as it shoots out.

“Hey! That’s cold!”

By the time he gets to his feet and shuts off the water, his T-shirt clings to his chest and water drips from his hair into his face. Boomer and Mikey laugh their asses off. I join in; it’s the easiest way to distract myself from the nipples that are now visible through his shirt.

“Dick!” He shoves me as he walks by.

“Hey, Seven,” Boomer yells. “I know you didn’t just threaten a brother.”

I put a hand on Boomer’s shoulder and shake my head. “I think he’s learned his lesson.”

Mikey snorts. “You’re getting soft, T.K.”

They leave the bathroom, still laughing, while I think that one over.

When Seven returns a few minutes later, I’m still standing there like an asshole. He’s snagged a towel from someone, and his shirt is tossed over his shoulder. He scowls. “Sore loser much?”

“Nothing personal, man. Part of being a pledge.”

“Bullshit it’s nothing personal.”

“You could be a little bit grateful, you know. If I hadn’t stopped them, Mikey and Boomer would have held you down and shaved your head or something.”

“Because I beat you at foosball?”

“No, dumbass, because you shoved me after I showered you. You don’t pick fights with brothers. You take your shit like a man and you move on.”

He towels off his hair and I take advantage of his distraction to admire the reflection of his bare chest in the mirror.

He tosses the towel on the counter and wrings his shirt out over the sink. “So why did you stop them?”

I can’t come up with a good answer, so I avoid his eyes.

He turns to face me and catches my gaze. His face is uncharacteristically soft, making him look young and hopeful. “It is personal, isn’t it?”

Warmth explodes in my stomach and snakes its way through my body. “You want some dry clothes? You can throw yours in the dryer.”

He considers.

“I’m not a total asshole,” I add when he still hasn’t answered.

A smile slowly spreads on his face. “Sure.”

“C’mon to my room.” I motion toward the door.

Boomer and Mikey are in the lounge when we walk by. They look at each other in confusion.

“You said it, Mikey. T.K.’s going soft,” Boomer says.

We ignore them and head up the stairs.

I open my door for Seven and nod for him to enter. I close the door behind us.

He starts undoing the fly on his pants.

“Apparently you’re not shy about stripping in front of other guys.” I pull out a pair of clean sweats and toss them to him.

“You already sucked my dick. Didn’t think I needed to be modest around you. But if you’d be more comfortable—”

“It’s fine,” I say, but I turn around anyway. Just listening to him peel off his wet jeans has me hard. No need to watch it too.

“All of a sudden you’re shy?”

“Jesus, just wanted to give you a little privacy.” I pull a random T-shirt from my closet.

He touches my shoulder. I turn to face him.

“Maybe I don’t want privacy with you.” He holds my gaze for a moment and then kisses me.

There are a thousand reasons why this is a bad idea. Why I should push him away, get him out of my room, and order him to leave me alone. Maybe even slug him. I can’t think of a single one because my body has taken over.

The shirt I was going to give him falls to the floor as I wrap one arm around him, pressing his still damp skin against me, making me wish my shirt was off too. My other hand squeezes a handful of his thick damp hair. Drops of cold water slide down my fingers.

All at once, I regret drenching him in the cold water. I flatten my palms against his skin, rubbing them up and down his back. I draw him closer to me, trying to transfer the heat of my body to his.

He responds by kissing me harder. His hands slide under my shirt. I shudder when his icicle fingers touch my back.

“Sorry,” he whispers between kisses.

“Need to warm you up.”

“Mmm. Bed?”

I take a step backward, pulling him with me.

A sharp knock and the turning of the door handle make us jump apart.

Chuck pops his head in. “Hey, T.K.?”

“Yeah.” My voice comes out strained. I give a short cough. “What’s up?”

“You’ve got”—he glances over at Seven, still shirtless and damp—“the stuff we need for tomorrow night?”

I pick up a bag sitting next to my desk, keeping it closed so Seven can’t see what’s inside.

Chuck looks between me and Seven another time before he ducks out of the room.

I sit down on my bed, blowing out a long, slow breath. “Fucking hell.”

“Maybe next time you should lock the door.” Seven picks up the dropped shirt and pulls it over his head. He grabs his wet pants and towel and walks out.

CHAPTER THREE

That evening, Seven isn't at dinner even though the pledges are on dinner duty.

"Where's Seven?" I bark out at the pledges in the kitchen.

Three responds, "He's got class Monday nights."

I head back out to the lounge. Seven wasn't the only pledge missing; maybe I should have asked about the others. Now I'm just being paranoid. No reason I can't ask about Seven. No reason anyone should suspect anything other than friendship. Were we even friends?

If Seven and I slept together on occasion, no one would have to know. Certainly it would be easier if we were roommates, but Seven wouldn't be moving into the house until next semester. If yesterday was any indication, Seven's blow jobs were better than any I could get in a dark club.

Eventually, I head back to my room to tackle some homework and get my mind off Seven. It only partially helps. Sometime after ten o'clock, there's a knock on my door.

"Yeah?" I call when the door doesn't open.

Seven walks in, holding a pile of folded clothes. "I came to return your clothes."

"Thanks. Just pop them over on the dresser."

He does, and after a moment, he says quietly, "Thanks. For the clothes, I mean. And saving my hair." He runs a hand through it as though he's self-conscious.

"It'd be a shame to lose that thick mess."

I expect a smart-ass comment in return, but all he says is, "You busy right now?"

I glance at my homework, only three lines completed since I started. "Nah, not really getting anywhere with this bullshit."

He pulls a folded notebook from his back pocket. “You mind? The dogbook, I mean. Can I ask you the questions?”

Every pledge must “interview” the active brothers in order to get to know them. The annoying ones just ask the questions down the page, writing down what you say, not really listening. The ones that get it are the ones that have an actual conversation with you. They forget to write anything down and hand in an empty book to the Pledge Master. However, the P.M. can drill them on just about any brother and the pledge can respond with decent accuracy. The dumb fucks that conducted interviews have to look up the answers.

“Shoot.”

“What’s your name? Full name.”

“T.K. Rogers.”

His eyes narrow. “Don’t be a dick.”

“Actually, I’m not. That’s my name. T period K period.”

“That’s what’s on your birth certificate?”

“No, but that’s what everyone calls me. I don’t tell anyone my actual name.”

“Why not?”

“Cause I hate it. ’Cause my parents were assholes.”

“Apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, I see.” He winks. “Seriously, am I going to get in trouble for just writing T.K.?”

“Nope. That’s what everyone’s going to have on their papers.”

He doesn’t write it down. He doesn’t have a pen, and he doesn’t ask to borrow one.

His head tilts to the left. “What do your parents call you?”

“T.K.”

“Really?”

“I’ve been T.K. since... well, my whole life. Started with my cousins, I think. It was a losing battle for my parents.”

“Huh. How come you don’t have a nickname like Boomer?”

I shrug. “No one ever came up with one for me? I’m just T.K. It’s who I am.”

“Do you think I’ll get a nickname?”

“You don’t like Seven?”

He makes a face. “Is that really how you think of me? Just a number?”

I don’t answer right away. Of course he stands out. Each pledge has something unique about him. The point of assigning and calling them numbers is to make them feel like they aren’t special. I should say yes, but I can’t seem to do it. “You’re not just a number.”

His face softens, just the slightest change. Even his eyes look less black. His lips part and his tongue darts out to moisten them. The skin on my back prickles where his cold fingers touched it earlier. I force myself to look away.

“Why don’t you have a seat? Make yourself comfortable.” I gesture around the room and then realize that I’m sitting in the only chair. His options are the floor or my bed. He chooses my bed.

We lose track of time as we chat. Every now and then he asks me an actual question from the paper, but most of the time he makes up his own, either things he’s curious about or things triggered from the previous question. It’s kind of a cross between an interview and a conversation. We take detours around the questions, extra side paths, but we still make progress. After a while, I join him on the bed, leaning against the wall.

There’s a lull in the questions for a moment. Then Seven asks quietly, avoiding my eyes, “Have you ever had sex?”

“Yes.”

“With a guy?” Still avoiding my eyes.

“Uh, no.”

His head shoots upwards and he stares at me. “Girlfriends?”

“Nah. Sorority chicks I was drunk enough to get it on with but not too drunk either, you know? After parties.”

He seems to think this over. “You’ve obviously given blow jobs before.”

“Well, yes,” I admit. “But I didn’t think that’s what you were asking.”

“It wasn’t.”

“What about you?”

He shrugs. “I’ve been with a couple guys.”

“No girls?”

He makes a face like the thought horrifies him.

I laugh. “You give good head. You must have had a lot of practice.”

He drops his gaze and gives an awkward sounding chuckle. Is that a hint of a blush on his cheeks?

He slowly looks up at me with those dark eyes from under that thick row of lashes. “Yours was really good, too,” he whispers.

God, I want to see him look at me like that while he’s sucking my dick. I have to look away before I do something I shouldn’t.

“Oh crap, it’s two thirty in the morning!” He scrambles off the bed.

“Shit, I ain’t driving you back to campus. Why don’t you stay here tonight?”

“Here?”

“I told you I’m not a total asshole. I’m not going to make you crash on a couch. It’s up to you.”

“I got an eight A.M. class tomorrow.”

I snort. “Freshman.”

He gives me the finger.

“You better not wake me up.”

He fiddles with his phone and then sets it on my desk.

I leave the room with my toothbrush and toothpaste, trying not to think about how narrow the bed is and the fact that Seven will be sharing it with me. It's better than driving his ass back to campus, right? Sure.

When I return to the room, he's already in bed, all the way against the wall. He looks like he's trying to take up as little space as possible. He's stripped down to his underwear. Maybe I should give him the sweats back just so his tight-ass briefs don't tempt me.

I strip as well and then pull on a pair of sweats before turning out the light. I lie down facing away from him, carefully arranging my body so that I don't touch any part of him.

"Good night."

"Night," he whispers back.

Although we aren't touching, I swear I can feel every breath he takes.

"T.K.?"

I grunt.

The bed dips and creaks as he maneuvers himself around in the small space. "What are we doing?"

"Trying to get a few hours of sleep before your early-ass class."

"That's not what I meant." He doesn't have to elaborate.

I perform my own acrobatics to roll over in bed without touching him or falling off. His eyes gleam in the darkness, and I can see the vague outline of his face, but that's all. "Do you want to stop?"

"No. I just didn't expect... so soon..."

"I'm not looking for a boyfriend."

"Well, I'm not anyone's girlfriend." There's an edge to his voice, like I've offended him.

"There's no shortage of girls available if I wanted a girlfriend."

The only sound is our breathing. Finally he asks, “What *do* you want?”

“I just want to keep it simple. And I don’t want anyone to know.”

“Simple,” he repeats. “Like just hooking up once in a while? I’m cool with that.”

“It’s nice to have someone that’s, you know, the same. My right hand thanks you.”

He chuckles. “Glad to help you with that. Just not tonight. Too tired.”

“Tomorrow then.”

My eyes have adjusted enough that I can see him smile. “Good night, T.K.”

He doesn’t turn back away and eventually his breathing slows and evens out. I watch him sleep for several minutes. My stomach tightens as I consider how much I’m trusting him with. But why shouldn’t I trust him? He has as much to lose as I do. This is a win-win situation.

I sit up and pick up his phone from the desk. I text my phone from it and save my number as a contact named “Your Favorite Asshole.”

CHAPTER FOUR

When I wake up the next morning, Seven is already gone. I pick up the clothes he left on my dresser and give them the sniff test to determine if they need to go in the laundry pile or back in my closet. Although he'd only worn them a few hours, his scent lingers in the fabric. Instantly I can taste the salty skin of his neck, feel his hard length digging into my thigh as he grinds against me. I toss the clothes on my bed.

Down in the kitchen, I scrounge up some toast and a glass of orange juice. Mikey and Paulie are already there, and Boomer joins us a few minutes later.

Only half listening to the conversation, I pull out my phone. I find the text I sent last night from Seven's phone, save the contact under "Tough Guy", and hit reply.

thx 4 not waking me.

ur welcome. your favorite asshole?

;-) coming 2nite?

in ur mouth i hope.

dirty boy.

u luv it.

"Yo, T.K., what's with the big-ass grin?" Mikey asks.

"Huh?"

He gestures to the phone in my hand. "You got a new girl?"

"We'll see."

Mikey fist-bumps me.

"Later. I got class."

After dinner, I challenge Seven to a foosball rematch.

"Oh, you want to get beat again. Okay."

“Bitch, please. You got lucky.”

He laughs and gives me the first serve. Knowing that later tonight I’ll be exploring other fun things to do with Seven helps keep my attention on the game. And I really do need to stay focused; it’s an evenly matched game. The ball travels from one side of the table to the other several times before I manage to score the first goal.

“Yeah, that’s right!” I taunt.

“You scored first last game. How did that work out for you?” He flashes me his cocky smile as he serves the ball. I still haven’t decided if I love or hate that smile.

I’m lining up a shot when Chuck jogs by banging a pot, breaking my concentration. “All pledges in the lounge,” he calls. “Hey, Boomer, help me out here.”

“Pledges, get your asses to the lounge!”

I don’t even know where Boomer is, but his voice rattles the windows in the lounge.

“What’s going on?” Seven asks.

I shrug casually and score a goal while he’s distracted.

He grumbles under his breath while I laugh.

We keep playing until Chuck and the rest of the pledges have gathered in the lounge. Several brothers claim spots on the couches to watch the show about to start.

Chuck stands behind the table where there is a box and a pitcher of water. He pulls out a stack of cups and a bottle of liquid soap from the box. Into a neat row, he lines up fifteen cups and then fills each halfway with water from the pitcher. A little squirt of soap into each cup. Finally, he dumps out the bag I gave him last night and fifteen brand new toothbrushes scatter across the table.

“Pledges, the lounge walls are filthy. It’s your job to clean them up, ceiling to floor. These are your tools.” Chuck gestures to the items on the table. “Any

complaining, back talking, or dicking around, and any one of your brothers will be glad to set you straight. Get to work.”

The pledges each grab a toothbrush. Seven takes charge and divides up the group. His pledge brothers actually respect and listen to him. Soon they are moving furniture to stand on to reach the top of the walls.

Over the next half hour, brothers come and go from the lounge. Chuck, as Pledge Master, stays to supervise. I stay and watch Seven because I'm some kind of masochist. He works his way down until he needs to squat. What a spectacular view of his ass. Maybe my room's walls need to be cleaned with a toothbrush, too. By Seven. Without clothes.

Mikey mock-tiptoes into the lounge. One of his hands is covered in brown, well, something. Chocolate pudding, I hope. With the other one, he gives us brothers an exaggerated *shhh* signal. He walks up behind Seven then presses his brown hand against the section Seven has just cleaned. He walks the length of the wall, leaving a large brown streak across the freshly cleaned white wall.

Several of the pledges stop. Their backs tense, fists clench, but no one says anything. Disappointing. Seven turns and glares at Mikey. It makes me chuckle. He catches my eye and his face softens just a little before he gets back to work.

“Hey, you guys hear that SigTau's got a fag pledge?”

I'm not sure which brother standing behind me said it because I'm too busy watching Seven's reaction. His toothbrush pauses, and his shoulders raise and lower slowly before he starts scrubbing again.

The room fills with laughter.

“No way!”

“Guess they're gonna start pledging girls now?”

“How hard up does your frat have to be to bid on a fag?” Chuck shakes his head.

The pledges don't say anything because of the gag order.

“Hey, Paulie, stop checking out Five’s ass!” someone taunts. More laughter erupts.

“Fuck you. I’m no faggot,” Paulie yells back, which is weird because Paulie hardly ever raises his voice. He must know they’re just messing around. Everyone knows he isn’t gay.

“We’ve heard you singing in the shower like a girl.”

“You’re just jealous ’cause the only pussy you can get is your mama’s,” he fires back.

A couple brothers “ooooh” and laugh. Seven works away, pretending not to hear anything going on.

“T.K., you were Paulie’s roommate couple years back, weren’t you? Did you hide your ass from him?”

I have to look away from Seven when I respond, “I told him from day one to keep his dick to his faggy self.”

More laughter. Seven scrubs harder.

“Fuck all y’alls.” Paulie stalks away.

“Awww, I think you hurt his feelings, T.K.”

Seven turns and looks at me. His gaze shoots daggers right through me. I refuse to avoid his eyes despite the chill that settles in my body. Who the fuck does he think he is, trying to intimidate me? He’s just some gay pledge who agreed to swap blow jobs.

Fuck it. I get up and walk away as well. I’m not sure what bothers me more, the way Seven looked at me or the fact that I actually was thinking about his ass. It could easily have been me they targeted.

“Gonna check on your boyfriend, T.K.? You guys were really more than roommates, huh?”

Without responding, I go straight upstairs to my room. Paulie’s room is right next to mine, so I catch up with him in the hallway. He still looks upset.

“Hey, man, everything okay?”

“My ‘faggy self’? Really, T.K.?”

“You know we’re just messing with you.”

“Yeah, but...” He shakes his head. “Forget it.”

He goes into his room and slams the door.

At least now Seven knows why he needs to keep his goddamn mouth shut.

A couple hours later, someone bangs on my door. Since the door doesn’t open right away, I know it’s Seven. He hasn’t quite grasped the idea of the open door policy around here.

I open the door.

He still looks pissed. “What the fuck, man?”

I drag him into the room and shut the door.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” he continues.

“What was I supposed to say?”

“I don’t know, how about, ‘Hey guys, not cool.’”

“And put a fucking target on my back? There’s a reason I’m in the closet. Don’t you get that?”

“I didn’t realize it meant not standing up to ignorance. And joining in on it.”

“You joined a frat, not Campus Pride. What did you expect?”

He glares at me for a moment before shaking his head. “I guess I expected too much.”

He reaches for the door handle.

I touch his shoulder. “I thought you were staying tonight.”

“Changed my mind. Let me know when you grow a set of balls.” He walks out, slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER FIVE

Wednesday night, Seven doesn't show up until just before dinner duty and then avoids me during dinner. I hang around in the hallway outside the kitchen afterward. When he walks by, I grab his arm and push him back against the wall. My arm rests across his chest and I lean into him so close our faces nearly touch. I'm hoping that from a distance it looks like a confrontation.

"Can we go to my room and talk?"

"What's wrong with right here?"

I glance around. The hallway is empty but who knows for how long?

He sighs, and as the breath blows across my face, he relaxes. "Fine."

I let him go and he follows me upstairs to my room. I'd spent the better part of last night thinking about Seven and what happened in the lounge.

"So none of what happened last night in the lounge bothered you?" Seven asks me when I close the door behind us.

"It's just guys talking shit. It doesn't mean anything."

"Doesn't mean anything? That was us they were talking about." He gestures between us. "You do realize that, right? And you even joined in."

"Look, maybe I was out of line with what I said about Paulie. But we all know he's not gay. He didn't have to take it so personally."

"Do you, T.K.? Do you know for *sure* that Paulie's straight? Isn't that what everyone would say about you or me? 'We all know he's not gay.'"

Paulie? Gay? I can't picture it. "Paulie's not gay."

"But you don't *know* that. Hell, any of the brothers could be gay and you wouldn't know it unless they wanted you to."

I shake my head.

"It's not unreasonable that there could be others. Lots of awesome people are gay. Like me."

I roll my eyes and chuckle despite myself. “It’s not a chance I’m willing to take. I told you upfront: no one can know.”

He sighs. “Yeah, I get it. I just wish you’d have stood up for us.”

“I can’t do that. But... next time, I won’t be part of it. I promise.”

He considers for a moment and then nods.

“Want to stay tonight?”

He grins sheepishly. “I brought a change of clothes in my bag, just in case. Eight A.M. class again tomorrow.”

I wake up for the second time Thursday morning when my alarm goes off. I smile, remembering the first time. I’m still not sure if Seven sliding against me as he got out of bed was an accident or on purpose, but I can’t really complain about the way it ended. We’ll have to do something about that boy’s schedule next semester. No more eight A.M. classes.

My phone beeps with a text message from Tough Guy as I’m headed out the door for class.

sorry I woke you.

no ur not.

;-)

maybe u need a punishment.

ill stay here

nope. pledge mtg 2nite

dammit

I find Seven in the lounge after his pledge meeting. He’s scribbling down what looks like a huge list on a piece of paper.

“Hey, man.” My words are surprisingly calm compared to my racing heartbeat. I can’t look at him without thinking about this morning. Or last night. I sit next to him on the couch.

He gives me the biggest smile I’ve ever seen on his face. “Guess what? I’m in charge of the pledge class fundraiser. We’re going to do a Casino Night, and maybe a silent auction, and—”

I laugh. He sounds like a kid about to go on summer vacation. I glance at his list. “You know this is a project for the entire pledge class, right?”

“I’m just writing down some ideas, things we’ll need to do. There’ll be plenty for everyone to do.”

He jots down some more stuff. I remember our conversation from Monday, when we chatted half the night away. “Oh, yeah, this is your thing, right? Hospitality Management or something like that?”

“Uh huh,” he says, not looking up. “Hospitality and Business Management. This is what I want to do.”

He works for several more minutes before he stretches his arms above his head and arches his back. His shirt rides up, exposing a tempting sliver of his skin.

“Done?” I ask hopefully.

Our eyes meet and lock. We stand at the same time, and then escape to my room as quickly as we can while still looking casual. I shove him against the wall and attack his mouth.

“Mmmm,” Seven murmurs when we break for a breath. “If this is punishment, I’ll take more, please.”

“Just you wait,” I growl.

“I’ve got news,” he gasps as I suck on his neck.

After a final lick up his Adam’s apple, which makes him shudder, I stop and look at him. “You’d rather talk?”

“My roommate’s gone all weekend.”

“That’s nice.”

“Nice?”

“So when should I come over?”

He wiggles his eyebrows. “Come whenever you want. But my roommate isn’t leaving ’til one or so.”

“Shit, that reminds me. I have to go to this stupid play tomorrow evening for my class. I’ve got an extra ticket. Want to come with me?”

He grins. “Are you asking me on a date? Gonna wine and dine me?”

“No, no, not a date,” I say quickly. Maybe asking Seven was a bad idea. “Just... moral support.”

“Mmmhmm,” he says against my lips.

I push him to the bed, and lie down on top of him, bringing my lips to his. The kisses are deep and frantic. I grind my whole body against his. Even through the layers of fabric, it feels so good. I press into him and he pushes up to meet my thrusts. After what feels like hours, I pull away from his bruised lips and tug his shirt off. Sitting up slightly, I run one hand down his perfect chest. I suck on his left nipple, returning my hips to their torturous grinding motion.

He tries to keep his moans muffled, but it’s also clear he really likes having his nipples sucked. I switch to the right nipple, flicking and licking it with my tongue, even biting gently before closing my mouth around it and sucking. I kiss down the center of his chest, down to his flat abs. This is what you don’t get with women. This hard, taut skin stretched over muscles that just beg to be touched and licked and kissed. As I move lower, I start undoing his pants. He lifts his hips to help me get them down. Fuck, I love him in boxer briefs. I mouth his hard dick through the fabric, leaving a wet spot.

“Suck me,” he pleads.

I pull myself up. Immediately his hand goes to his dick.

“Uh-uh. Those stay on,” I tell him as I push his hands away.

He groans.

I pull down my own pants, leaving my boxers on. Then I lay down on him again, sliding our bodies together. The underwear's so thin that it feels amazing. I kiss him again. His hands slide down my back, scratching slightly. He grabs my ass and squeezes. Holding me tight against him, he rocks his hips up against me. His head is thrown back, but his mouth is clamped tightly closed to keep his moaning down. I watch his face as he fucks himself against me. He's so fucking beautiful when he lets go of that tension.

I kiss the exposed skin of his neck. Kissing and licking and sucking. I have to move to his mouth when his moans get too loud. I take back control and start humping against him so hard he's probably making a dent in the mattress.

I can feel the moisture on his underwear and swallow all his moans as he comes. The wetness and the heat I feel through the fabric pushes me over the edge. I keep my mouth plastered to his just so I don't lose control and start screaming.

Afterward, I collapse onto him, completely worn out. He doesn't seem to mind my weight. Or maybe he's already asleep. It's hard to tell. He looks so peaceful. I nuzzle his neck. His fingers trail down my back gently. I roll off him.

“Still like your idea of punishment,” he says sleepily.

CHAPTER SIX

“So tell me again why we’re going to *A Million Faces*?” Seven asks as we pull into the parking lot of the small theater.

“For my Performing Arts elective. You’ll have to take it too, eventually. Or some other kind of arts class.”

“Can’t wait.”

After the lady at the will-call window hands me the tickets, Seven says, “Our fraternity, Alpha Phi Kappa, is holding a Casino Night fundraiser and we’re looking for donations from businesses in the community. Is there a manager I can speak to about Millhouse Theatre possibly sponsoring a table?”

“He’s not here right now.” She fishes around on her desk and then hands him a card. “But here’s a card with his number. You can call him direct.”

“Thanks.” He flashes her a smile.

As we walk toward the entrance, I say, “You’re really into this Casino Night thing, huh?”

“Hell yeah. I’m gonna kick ass. Just you watch. Our pledge class will raise the most money in APK history.”

“You’re a cocky son of a bitch, you know that?”

“I can back it up.” He punches me in the arm.

The usher hands us programs and directs us to our row.

“So are you supposed to take notes or something?” he asks when we’re settled into our seats.

“I don’t know. I’m not really sure how I’m supposed to write an essay about a play. Like a review maybe? Dissection of the plot? Evaluation of the actors?”

“Good luck with that,” he says in a glad-it’s-not-my-assignment tone.

There’s still several minutes before the play starts. I slide my fingers along the edge of the program. Seven pages through his copy. My leg bounces. As I

glance around the audience, I notice a few other pairs of guys. They all look like they're on dates. Is that what everyone will think about Seven and me? I rub the back of my neck, trying to slow down my heartbeat and my breathing.

I study the guys a few rows ahead of us. Why do I assume they are a couple? If I was here with Mikey or Chuck, I wouldn't even consider the idea that we look like we're on a date. Those two guys lean in close to each other. Their arms touch. When they look at each other, they smile even if they don't say anything.

"Hey, there's a lot of ads in this," Seven says, breaking me out of my thoughts.

"Huh?"

He puts his hand on my knee. "Restless much?"

I stare at his hand. I should shove him off, but heat soaking through my jeans somehow calms my nerves when it should be sending them into overdrive. I squeeze my eyes closed and try to remember what he said. "Ads?"

He removes his hand to point on the paper. "We can use this as a list of business to talk to. For the Casino Night."

"You never give it a rest, do you?"

He turns serious. "I need to prove I'm APK material."

"You've already proven that to me."

He leans over and whispers into my ear, "Was it the blow job that convinced you?"

I laugh so loud that the people in front of us turn to glare at me. I close my mouth tightly and try to look ashamed, but come on, the play hasn't even started yet.

"Ladies and gentlemen, in just a few minutes the lights in our theater will be dimming. Please be sure to take your seats at this time. Remember, food and beverages are not allowed in the theater. Flash photography and video recording are strictly prohibited. Please turn all cell phones off or on silent. Thank you for your cooperation."

Seven slouches into his seat. “Wake me when it’s over,” he mutters.

I poke him in the side and he yelps. More dirty looks from the people in front of us.

“If I gotta watch it, you gotta.”

“That an order?” he teases.

“Do I need to make it one?”

“Nope.”

The lights dim and the music starts. I’m actually following the story when I feel Seven’s arm nudge mine sometime during the first act. He leans in close. “They’re so totally gonna fuck by the end.” His breath tickles my ear.

I keep my mouth clamped shut. The spot on my arm where he nudged me tingles, and I’m suddenly very aware that we’re sitting together in the dark. Everyone is focused on the play. No one cares about the two guys seated in row twenty. We’re not alone, except we are. It’s a freedom we don’t get to experience at the house. There’s always the chance someone will come in my room. If I lock the door, I’d have to explain *why* Seven and I were in the locked room. No one locks their door at the house unless they’re hooking up.

I glance over at Seven. He’s got an amused expression on his face. He leans over and turns his head as if he was going to whisper something in my ear. He’s surprised to find me looking at him and our noses brush. He covers his noise of surprise by kissing my lips. It’s our first public kiss, even if it is dark and no one sees it.

“I need to pay attention,” I whisper.

“Sure,” he whispers back.

My heart pounds. Fear of being caught? As if we’re the first two people to ever kiss in a theater. It was unexpected and sweet, and so quick that it’s almost as if it never even happened.

Throughout the play, he whispers more smart-ass comments in my ear and I have to bite my lip to keep from laughing. Partway through the third act, his arm grazes mine again. I turn to look at him but he’s staring straight ahead at

the performance. I feel his fingers slide against mine and just like that, we're holding hands. He looks over at me, raises an eyebrow slightly. I smile. He smiles and turns back to the show.

I nearly miss the play's big finish because I'm too busy staring at our connected hands. Never in my life have I held hands with a guy, and though I must have with a girl or two in high school, I can't remember any times in particular. Somehow, sitting here in the dark watching a play and holding hands with Seven feels like the most natural thing in the world. Just another Friday night.

Except it's not Seven's hand I'm holding. I can't reconcile this relaxed, playful, *happy* person next to me with the stoic, stiff-backed pledge I'd met. I'd seen glimpses of this happier guy over the last couple of days, but for the first time, I feel like I'm with someone other than Seven. I'm with Carlos and we're holding hands in a theater and not only am I okay with that, it's making me smile.

When the show is nearly over, before the lights turn up again, he lifts my hand and touches it to his lips. Then he lets my hand go. Heat races through my veins, up my arm, down my body, and all the way to my feet.

As the actors take their bows on stage, I've already forgotten what the play was about. Whatever brilliant essay was writing itself in my head is gone. But I can still feel the cool rush of Carlos' breath on my ear, the warmth of his hand on mine, and the moisture of his lips on my hand.

We walk back to my car in silence. My arm has stopped tingling and I can finally think of something other than Carlos' kiss. Bits and pieces of the play come back to me, and I think maybe I'll be able to write an essay after all. Thank God. Going to another play was not something I had the time or desire to do, especially since paying attention would require going without Carlos.

When we reach my car, Carlos grabs my arm.

"Wha—" I gasp as he turns me and pins me to the car. He leans in and kisses me on the lips.

I push him away. “What are you doing?”

“Kissing my not-boyfriend on our not-date.” He has a wide, playful grin on his face.

My eyes dart around the parking lot.

“Relax. For one thing, it’s dark. For another, no one knows us. Now, are you going to let me kiss you properly?”

“I don’t—”

“No one is paying any attention to us. You aren’t the center of the universe.” He smiles and then leans in again.

This time I let his lips move against mine, let his tongue lick against my lips, let my lips fall open to his kiss. He shifts closer. Heat from his body radiates into mine from my lips down through my legs. I end the kiss earlier than I might have if we’d been alone, but that’s less about someone seeing us and more about appropriate public behavior. All I can think about now is spending the night with him and how little of it we’ll spend sleeping.

He’s smiling when I open my eyes. “You see? You didn’t burst into flames. No one said anything, no one probably even saw us. The world didn’t end.”

“Yeah, yeah, you win.”

We pick up some dinner on the way back to campus. Drive-through. It’s not a date; I don’t feel obligated to buy him a nice dinner, though maybe I should have after he sat through that play with me. Not that the actors weren’t talented. I’m just not a going-to-see-plays kind of guy. It’s just too, well, gay. Is it possible to be gay but not *that* gay? Only a little gay? Carlos isn’t the first guy I’ve been attracted to, but he’s the first I’ve risked exposing my secret for. What does that mean? Is he just exactly my type? Do I have a type? Apparently my type involves slim, dark, and smooth-chested smart-asses.

I realize that Carlos is staring at me, perhaps waiting for me to respond.

“I’m sorry, what?”

He laughs. “I said, ‘What did you think about the play? Will you be able to write a good essay about it?’”

“Sure. I can BS with the best of them.”

“I don’t doubt that.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

We have to park in the long-term visitor lot, which is only slightly closer than the freshman lot. I walk a half step away from Carlos; if he notices, he doesn't mention it. I follow him into the building and to the elevator. There're three other people in the elevator with us. Do they know Carlos? Do they know me? Doubtful. They look like freshman. Do they know Carlos and I are together?

Carlos lives on the fifth floor. We pass some people in the hall and he nods to them, but no "Hey, how are you?" or any other indication that they actually know each other. How lonely. No way do I miss living in the dorms. Sure, Carlos spends a lot of time at APK, but he lived here full-time before Rush. Hadn't he made friends?

He stops in front of room 527. "Home sweet home," he says as he unlocks the door and shoves it open with the help of his shoulder when it sticks. Nice.

Carlos' room is evenly divided. On one side is a desk piled with books and papers and a bed covered with, well, stuff. The other side is neat and orderly and has posters of Henry Cavill posing in his very muscular Superman suit, Johnny Depp wearing gyliner, and Matt Bomer looking handsome in a suit. None of the posters have nudity or anything inappropriate, but it does give off the "gay" vibe to have three posters of male actors. Hot actors, I'll give them that. But not a large-chested woman in sight.

"I was hoping my roommate would have cleaned up before he left, but well, I just had to throw his crap on his bed." Carlos looks embarrassed.

"So your roommate knows?"

"Huh? Knows what?"

"About you? Being gay?"

He shrugs. "I didn't tell him either way. Does it matter?"

"I-I just thought, you know, you were in the closet."

"I came out in high school. Had a boyfriend and everything."

“You did?”

He bumps my shoulder. “Hey, don’t sound so surprised. Apparently guys do find me attractive.”

“No, I just meant, you were out in high school but not now?”

“I don’t feel the need to broadcast a message, ‘Hey, I’m gay!’ I mean, straight people don’t go around saying, ‘Hey, guess what? I’m straight!’”

“Well, no. But being straight is...”

He raises his eyebrows. “Normal?”

“That’s not what I meant. Assumed.”

“Maybe it shouldn’t be.”

“Maybe not,” I concede, though I don’t have much faith it’ll ever change. “So what happened? With your boyfriend.”

He leans his back against the door and slides down until he’s sitting on the floor. “I was barely fifteen, and he was a few years older. I thought he was so sophisticated. So smart.”

I sit down opposite him, my toes pressing against the wall. I scoot close to him, leaning on one arm. My palm rests on the floor between his feet.

“I fell for him, totally and completely gone,” he continues. “We dated, slept together for months before I got up the nerve to tell him how I felt. When I did...” He takes a breath. His face grows hard, angry. “He laughed in my face. Said that I was nothing but an ass to fuck. That I’d taken everything too seriously and didn’t I know there were other guys? Other girls too?”

“I’m sorry.”

He looks at the floor, and his voice gets colder. “As if that wasn’t bad enough, he went on to tell anyone who would listen how I’d confessed my undying love for him. That I was pining over him, obsessed with him. The whole school knew within days. Whenever I passed him or his gang in the hall...” He shudders with the memory, and the words die in his throat.

I could picture it, naive Carlos expecting puppy dogs and rainbows and this asshole stomping all over his hopes. I'd like to stomp all over the asshole. "That was a shitty thing to do."

"Yeah, well. I was stupid."

"Nah, not stupid. Just young."

I squeeze his arm and he meets my eyes. I'd thought he was angry at me when we argued the other day, but it was nothing compared to this. His face is red, and the ice in his voice could frost a beer mug in seconds. This is more emotion, more passion than I've seen from him since we met.

His voice comes out very quiet now. "I'm really not all that tough. It's just an act."

"You're tougher than you think you are."

"T.K., I...", he whispers and leans in to kiss me before he finishes his sentence. It's tentative at first, but not for long. I stand and pull him up with me. His fingers skim just under my shirt. It tickles, and I squirm.

He pushes me toward the bed. Just before falling into it, we kick off our shoes. I pull him down on top of me and we resume kissing with barely a pause. My hands run down his back until I reach his ass. Oh God, that ass. When I squeeze those cheeks, he moans into my mouth and grinds his hips down against mine. His hard dick digs into my thigh.

He presses harder against me, and then he really starts moving. It starts in his hips, but soon his whole torso is moving in rhythm. His lips find my throat, and I tilt my head back to give him more room.

"I love how you taste," he whispers in my ear.

My hips jerk upwards to meet his thrusts. My throbbing dick and his heavy breathing and throaty moans make it impossible to think. All I know is that I want him in a way I've never wanted anyone ever before. I slide my hands up the sides of his body, peeling off his shirt in the process. He quickly pulls mine off too.

"I want you naked. Now," I say, panting.

He sits up on his knees and undoes his pants. I undo mine as well, but I can't take my eyes off him as he pushes down his jeans, and then finally pulls his dick out of his underwear. He squirms out of his pants as I wiggle mine down and kick them off.

I can't tear my eyes away from his hand jerking himself as he scoots backwards. His head lowers and he kisses the head of my dick.

"Oh, God," I gasp. My eyes fall shut, anticipating the sweet wetness of his mouth.

Instead, he licks the length, from base to the very top. He flicks his tongue into the hole and I nearly leap off the bed in surprise and pleasure. He licks the entire length a few more times, layering it with saliva. Finally, finally, he takes my dick into his mouth and for one awful, wonderful second I think I'm going to come right then and there. I tuck my left arm behind my head so I can watch him more easily. His head bobs up and down slowly, like he's savoring my taste. His cheeks hollow with suction, alternating with his tongue against my dick.

He looks up then, and his dark red lips stretched around my dick is possibly the hottest thing I have ever seen in my entire fucking life. He blinks slowly, his wide eyes looking like innocence while he works my cock like no one has ever sucked me before. It's unfair that he's so damn good at this.

With my right hand, I finger his hair. When he sucks extra hard, I grab a fistful of hair. I don't pull it, not hard anyway, but God, does that feel good. I thrust my hips against his face, gently at first to be sure I don't hurt him, then harder a few more times, and I watch him take it, sucking me in deep, moaning like it's the best thing ever.

He pops off my dick and immediately lies back down against me, lining up our cocks, and kissing me hard.

"Roll over," I tell him.

We rearrange ourselves, him on the bottom and me on the top. I start the way he did, kissing and humping our dicks together. Then I move down his jaw and neck, leaving a moist trail. I lick his right nipple, suck it in, scrape my

teeth against it. He arches his back, pushing his chest right up into my face. I tug on his left nipple.

“T.K.” The way he says my name, in absolute pleasure, almost in awe, makes my entire body feel like it’s on fire.

I switch sides, sucking and licking the left nipple while tracing circles on the right with my finger.

“Baby,” he gasps. “Gonna come if you keep—”

I kiss down the center of his chest. It’s so smooth and fucking perfect I have the sudden urge to cover it in streaks of my come. Another time, I tell my eager dick. I’m not even close to done with him tonight. I lick his cock a few times before I take it in. I go right for the deep throat, catching him off guard. He sounds almost like he’s crying. I flick my gaze up to his face, watching him buck and writhe and moan in pleasure. This is one advantage to being in the dorms. I don’t give a shit who hears him. I don’t have to muffle his beautiful noises, the fruits of my labor.

I stroke his dick with my hand. “You like that, don’t you?”

He nods vigorously. “So much. More. Suck me more.”

“Mmm. I like not having to keep you quiet.”

I go back to sucking, alternating deep and shallow strokes. Giving special attention to the head every few times. When his moans turn into pants I back off.

“Uh-uh. Not time for you to come yet.” I tightly circle the base of his dick with my fingers.

“I want... I want...”

Lick.

“Yeah, baby? What do you want?”

“Fuck me. I want you to fuck me.”

“I’ve never... Will it hurt you?” I feel like I’m the freshman, asking such a stupid question.

“A little discomfort, not gonna lie, but it turns into the best feeling ever.” He starts to sit up and I back up to give him space. He walks to his desk and rummages in the drawer. He holds up the bottle of lube and a condom.

“Okay.”

He must think I don't sound convinced, because he says, “Don't worry. I'll help you.”

I chuckle. “My gay-sex mentor?”

“Hell yeah. I'll mentor you anytime.”

He tosses me the condom and lies back down on the bed. “I'm hoping you don't need help with that,” he says with that cocky grin of his.

“I think I can handle this.”

As I roll on the condom, he dribbles some lube on his fingers. When he starts rubbing circles around his hole, I'm shocked at how much it turns me on. Who knew a guy playing with his own ass would be so hot?

He holds the lube toward me. “Here, give me your hand.”

I put my hand closer and he puts some lube on it.

“You have to prepare me, stretch me, with your fingers. Just go slow and it'll be fine.”

I slide my finger down from his balls until I reach his hole.

He nods. “Go ahead.”

I start with circles, the way he was doing, and then I try to push in. I look back and forth between my finger poking him and his face, trying to make sure I'm not hurting him.

He closes his eyes. “God, yes.”

Must be a good sign, so I push a little farther. Slowly, I fuck him with my finger.

“Add another finger,” he urges. “Go on. I can take it.”

I do. He gasps at first, and I start to draw back but he promises me he's okay. "It's just been a while."

Soon I'm fucking him with both fingers, watching as he moans and arches his back and pushes back against me.

"Yeah, that's it. Stretch me. Get me ready for your cock."

I experiment with widening my fingers. If the point is to stretch him large enough to fit me, he needs more room.

"You're a fucking natural." He smiles. "Lube yourself up. I'm ready."

"You sure?"

"Get your dick in me right fucking now."

I laugh. I'll never get tired of that dirty mouth of his. While I stroke with some lube, he rolls over on his stomach, pushing his ass up in the air. I press my lips to one of those perfect round cheeks. I can't help myself. I suck in a patch of skin, biting very gently. He practically pushes his ass back into my face. I release the skin and there's a red mark. I trace the outline with my finger. Yeah, I like that.

Sitting up on my knees, I move closer to him, placing one hand on his hip and one on my dick. I line up with his hole and push. Even with just the head in, I can tell this will not be like fucking a girl. Not a single fucking bit.

"I'm good. Push all the way in," he instructs, though his voice does sound strained.

I do, as slowly as I can, until I can't go any farther.

Holy fuck. Buried inside of him, it's so hot and tight and oh my God how have I not come already? I take a few steady breaths.

"Okay?" I ask.

"Hell yeah." He pushes back against me and I take the hint to start moving. Our simultaneous moans might be the hottest fucking thing I've ever heard in my whole entire life.

"More," he begs. "I won't break. Need you so fucking bad."

I grip his hips tightly, using them for leverage. I withdraw almost completely, and then shove all the way back in immediately. Again. And again. He rocks on his knees, meeting my thrusts. I stroke his back, my fingers sliding in sweat. My legs are already getting shaky. It's too tight and so good. I squeeze my eyes shut and focus on the feeling of being inside him.

"Carlos," I moan. "Gonna come soon."

"Yeah."

He shifts slightly, and I open my eyes. His arm moves rhythmically beneath him, and I can tell he's jerking himself off. That's all it takes for that tightness to start, knowing that I've gotten him so turned on he can't help but touch himself.

I give a few last, hard thrusts, moaning his name as I fill the condom with wave after wave of come.

His own moans become unintelligible as he comes too.

I lean forward and rest my head against his back, trying to catch my breath. When I feel like I can lift my head without getting dizzy, I sit up and pull gently out of him. I drop the condom into the wastebasket under his desk and crawl into bed with him.

He curls up against me immediately and our lips meet in soft kisses. Mostly we're on our way to sleep.

"Tobias," I say quietly into his hair. "Tobias Kennedy."

He doesn't say anything. Maybe he's fallen asleep. I'm okay with that.

I kiss his forehead and drift off.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The next morning when we wake up with our morning wood poking each other, I pull Carlos into my arms and kiss him and grind against him. A couple of blow jobs later and we're ready to face the world. Or at least take showers. I like being able to walk out of Carlos' room and not have to worry about who's seeing me. We behave in the shower, using separate stalls—I'm not up for public sex, in more ways than one—and get dressed. It's Saturday, so of course there's a party tonight. The pledges are in charge of prepping for it which sucks because I'd much rather hide out in Carlos' room and fuck all day.

We don't have to rush back, so we stop for breakfast at a diner. As we slide into the booth, Carlos' foot brushes mine. I jump a mile.

“Sheesh. Sorry.”

We're close to APK's house. Someone we know could walk in at any time. Considering I'd told Mikey I was spending the night with my hot *female* date, explaining breakfast with Carlos would be difficult.

After we order and the waitress brings our coffee, Carlos says quietly, “So, Tobias Kennedy, huh?”

“If you laugh, I swear to God I'll kick your ass, no matter how nice an ass it is.”

“I think it's nice. Toby. That'd be a good name for you, if you weren't such an asshole.” He throws a creamer at me.

“Toby? Really?”

“I like it.”

“It sounds so...” I stop myself just in time.

He looks at me for a long moment and then blinks slowly. “Gay?”

I fiddle with my coffee mug and sigh. “That's not what I meant.”

“Yes it is. That's exactly what you meant.” His voice is sharp.

“Look, Carlos, when you’ve been raised to believe one thing, it’s hard to believe another. You know?”

“You haven’t even told your parents?”

“Man shall not lie with a man as he does with a woman,” I recite, the words spilling out as if it were only yesterday. “That’s what I was told when I asked why Uncle Billy wasn’t coming to Christmas dinner any more. After that, my dad...” I shake my head. “Everything was about becoming a man. Being strong and tough. Sports and hunting and working hard. Anything less is weakness and not acceptable.”

“Oh, T.K.” The sadness in his voice makes my chest feel hollow. I pick up a package of sugar so I don’t have to look at him. “You *are* strong. You *are* tough. That has nothing to do with being gay.”

I want to believe him. I want everything to be as easy as he says it is. But it just isn’t. I stare at the white packet in my hands, turning it over and over.

“Hey,” he says, nudging my foot with his.

Reluctantly, I look up.

“You’re most definitely a man. Trust me. I’ve seen the proof up close and personal.” He winks.

I lean across the table and say in a low voice, “And did you like what you saw?”

“Oh, hell yeah.”

Too bad we can’t go back to his dorm room.

When we get back to the house, I hang around the car after he walks in so it doesn’t look like we arrived together. By the time I walk by the lounge, he’s surrounded by a group of his pledge brothers, already discussing plans for the party. He takes a piece of paper and a pencil from one of the members of the group and writes a list.

“Hey, hey, hey!” Mikey calls as he walks down the hall toward me. “Look who’s finally home from his date.”

I can feel the color drain from my face. “What date?”

“With that girl you’ve been texting with that goofy smile on your face?” He looks at me oddly.

I cover up my relief with a waggle of my eyebrows. “Had a great night.” I raise my voice slightly and add, “Smokin’ hot sex.” Carlos doesn’t look up, but his pencil breaks.

Mikey claps me on the shoulder and laughs. Paulie joins us in the lounge. I pretend to follow their conversation, but I’m really watching Carlos. How did I forget my cover story? If I’m not careful, I’ll fuck everything up.

Paulie nudges me. “Doncha think so, T.K.?”

“Huh? Yeah. Sure.”

Mikey and Paulie crack up.

“Your girl coming tonight?” Mikey asks.

“Nah. She’s, uh, out of town.”

“Didn’t you just spend the night with her?”

“Right. She left this morning.” I offer a weak smile. “Why do you think I’m here instead of at her place boning her?”

He laughs and responds, but I’m too busy wondering if Carlos heard me and if he knows by *her* I mean *him*.

While Carlos and his pledge brothers prep for the party, I jot down notes for my essay about *A Million Faces*. Had I ever spent so much time in my room since joining APK? After I hear the music blasting—yes, two stories above the basement—I head down to the party.

I circle the large room, looking for Carlos among the crowd. I find him standing behind the music table, staring at a laptop and clicking away with the mouse.

“Hey,” I yell over the music.

He looks up and smiles. “Hey, yourself.”

“You playing DJ or something?”

“Actually, I *am* the DJ tonight.”

I must look shocked because he adds with a wink, “And yes, I know what I’m doing.”

He puts on headphones and goes back to work at the computer, not seeming to mind that I’m watching him. After a few minutes, I place my hand on his hip—below the table where no one can see—and give a small squeeze. He squirms with a laugh.

“I’ll see you later.”

He nods and our eyes lock for a moment too long. I nearly lean in to kiss him before I remember where I am.

I go find the beer. Once I’ve had enough beers to loosen up, I join a group of sorority sisters without dancing with any single one in particular. They seem to appreciate the attention. Will they fight over me? Would Carlos join in the fight? If he did, would I let him win?

I study him as much as I can without being obvious. He’s totally focused on his task. No surprise there.

The next song is slower and one of the girls—if she told me her name I couldn’t hear it over the music—grabs my wrist. I guess she’s the winner. She grinds against me something fierce, and I half-heartedly grind back. This is usually the point where I’d kiss her, pretend to be into her, trick my body into being aroused. Instead, I orient our bodies so I can see the DJ table. The next time I glance over, Carlos is staring at us and our eyes meet. The multi-colored lights flashing around the room make it impossible to read his expression. I wish I knew how to tell him with my eyes that I’m sorry this is the way things have to be. For the first time all night, he leaves the table. He grabs another pledge on his way out, motioning toward the DJ table.

“I gotta pee,” I say into the girl’s ear.

“Right now?” she asks, annoyed.

I give her a goofy I-drank-too-much grin and untangle myself from her.

I push through the crowd to the steps, hoping Carlos hasn't gone far. I check the lounge and the two bathrooms on the main level. Before heading upstairs, I look out the front door.

Carlos is sitting on the porch with a red cup in his hand. He chugs the rest of it and then crushes the cup in his hand.

I open the door, startling him. When he sees it's me, he stands up without a word.

“Hey,” I say.

He glares at me. “I gotta get back.”

“Are you upset with me about that girl?” I step close to him and say in his ear, “You know I'd rather dance with you.”

I feel him take in a sharp breath. “So let's dance.”

I shift the weight between my legs. “You know why we can't.”

He huffs out a laugh.

I breathe in slowly. *Take a chance.* I kiss his cheek. Right here on the porch of the frat house. Right under the big Greek letters. Yeah, I've had too much to drink. When he finally looks back up in my eyes, his face is softer.

“You're the one I want to be with,” I promise. “That's what matters. C'mon. Let's go back to your place.”

He considers, and finally says, “I gotta get someone to cover me on music.”

“I thought you already did?”

“For the rest of the night, I mean.”

I nod. “I'll get my keys. Meet you at my car.”

He smiles. “Okay.”

He heads back downstairs and I run upstairs to my room. I reach my car first and lean against the hood to wait what feels like hours. I panic and consider going to look for him, but a few moments later he shows up. I toss my keys to him. “You’d better drive.”

On the way to his dorm, he says, “I didn’t like seeing that girl all over you.”

“If you don’t pretend to be into girls, the guys are gonna start asking questions.”

“Let them ask.”

I shake my head. “It’s not a good idea. Trust me.”

“Why should I trust you? You’ve never tried. You don’t know what will happen.”

“I’ve known these guys for two years. If I thought they’d be okay with it, I’d tell them.”

“No, you wouldn’t. You wouldn’t because you can’t accept the fact that you’re gay.”

I shrug. “I like guys. I like having sex with you. I don’t deny that.”

“But you still think there’s something wrong with it.”

I don’t have a response for that, and neither of us speak for the rest of the drive.

Once we’re in his room, I point to the computer on this desk. “You got any music on that thing?”

He brings up one of his playlists. I pull him tight against me and show him exactly how I would have danced with him if we could have. It only takes minutes before it turns more into vertical dry-humping than dancing. After a few songs, he takes a step back.

“T.K., how do you think your life would be different if you weren’t gay?”

He doesn't wait for me to answer and ticks off each argument on his fingers. "You'd still play all the same sports you do now. Your dad would still have taught you to 'be a man' and all that shit. You'd have gone to the same college, in the same major, had the same friends. You don't do those things because you're gay. You do those things and you also happen to be gay."

I smirk. "That's actually kinda profound for a freshman."

He sticks his tongue out at me.

"Hey, don't be sticking that thing out unless you're gonna use it."

He grins and then launches himself at me.

Oh yeah, he uses his tongue. So very well.

On Sunday morning, we don't sleep in. Carlos is on clean up duty with the rest of the pledges and if at all possible, we don't want it to look like we left the party together last night.

The house is silent when we arrive. We ease the door open as quietly as we can. The main level isn't too trashed. The basement will be a mess though. One of the best parts of pledging—for the brothers, at least—is not having to clean up after parties.

We tiptoe past the lounge, where Mikey is passed out on the couch, to the kitchen. We wash down our Pop-Tarts with some orange juice.

"I'm gonna head downstairs and see how bad the damage is. If no one's up yet, maybe I'll crash."

I nod. "A few more hours' sleep's not a bad idea."

And, because the house is quiet in that morning-after-a-party way, I kiss him.

He responds right away with wrapping his arms around me and opening his lips. What was supposed to be see-you-later turns into god-you-feel-good-where's-the-bed.

"Holy fucking shit."

We jump apart. Mikey stands in the door of the kitchen, looking like he's wondering just how drunk he got last night.

CHAPTER NINE

“Mikey, I...” I’m at a loss for words. I can barely breathe.

“You... he...” He rubs his forehead.

Carlos takes my hand. I’m in too much shock to pull away. “Why don’t we go to T.K.’s room and talk?” he suggests. Carlos leads the way upstairs. Once in the safety of my room, I feel like I can at least breathe.

“It’s not what you think.” I ignore the look Carlos shoots me.

“You guys were kissing.” He gestures between us. “Like, really kissing. Like... like...”

“Gays?” Carlos supplies.

“Yeah. Like you’re a pair of fags.”

Carlos blows out a breath, trying to stay calm I think. “I’m gay, Mikey.”

“For real?”

“Yeah.”

Mikey looks at me. “This pledge harassing you? Trying to take advantage of you? ’Cause I know you’re not gay, T.K.”

I want to laugh at the idea of Carlos taking advantage of me, but I realize this is it. Lying to Mikey now will mean the end of my relationship with Carlos. “Actually, Mikey, I, well...” I look over at Carlos. He’s watching me expectantly and gives a small nod. I look back at Mikey. I swallow hard. “I am gay.”

“Huh?”

I breathe. “I am gay,” I say, slower this time. Carlos’ smile is blinding.

Mikey forehead wrinkles in confusion. “The fuck? Since when?”

“Since always.” My voice is stronger now.

“But your girl—”

“I was with Carlos last night. And the night before that, too.”

He looks between us again.

Carlos nods. "It's true."

"My head is killing me." Mikey scrubs his face. "Like this is some kind of fucked-up hangover dream."

Carlos walks over to me, standing so close our sides touch. He wraps his arms around my waist. My arm automatically finds his shoulder. He leans over to kiss my cheek. "Nope. This is real."

"So you guys are like boyfriends or something?"

"Or something," I respond immediately.

"T.K. and Seven," Mikey muses, shaking his head. "All right."

"All right?" I ask.

"Just don't hit on me. I don't swing that way."

"You're not—You don't care?"

He shrugs. "Not really."

"Please don't tell anyone."

"Whatever. I need to get some coffee." He turns to head for the door.

"No, seriously. You can't tell our brothers."

Mikey turns back to us, puts his hand on my shoulder. "We're cool, bro."

He gives my shoulder a squeeze before walking out.

Carlos wraps his arms around my neck. "You did it!"

"Yeah. Don't know what the fuck I was thinking. I'm just glad it went okay."

"Okay?" How much better could it have gone?"

"It's Mikey. I'm not sure how good at keeping secrets he is, you know? This could blow up on us."

"So let's take control."

“What do you mean?”

“Let’s tell everyone.”

“Everyone?” My eyes widen and my voice squeaks.

“The brothers, I mean. We can start with them and move on to the whole world later.”

He’s teasing me. I’m about to have a breakdown, and he’s fucking teasing me. “Are you kidding me? We dodged a fucking bullet today. Let’s not put ourselves in a shooting gallery.”

“Why are you so okay with being in the closet?”

“Why are you so okay being out?”

“This is who I am. What difference does it make if I like boys or girls?”

“Boys are supposed to like girls. Not other boys.”

“I guess I was sick the day they taught that.” He shakes his head. “What about all that shit about brotherhood and sticking together and lifelong friendships? Doesn’t that apply to us?”

“Of course. If a brother needs help, I’m there for him. And likewise if I needed something.”

“So what’s the problem? You’re already you. It’s just a little part of you they don’t know about yet.”

“What about you?” I accuse. “You rushed the frat, became a pledge, and you haven’t told anyone but me you’re gay.”

“Because it’s not something you put on a fucking resume. I’m also Latino, but I haven’t told anyone that either.”

“The point is, if there’s no reason to be in the closet, then why are *you*?”

“Because of you!” he yells. “I was going to come out. But then you and your ‘suck my dick but you can’t tell anyone’ made me stop and think.”

“Maybe you should keep thinking.”

“I have! All week, I’ve thought about why you’ve stayed in the closet. Why you haven’t told anyone, not even the people you claim are your closest friends. I thought, there must be a reason. And yeah, sure, the guys can be asses. But everyone’s an ass sometimes. Let’s show them how wrong they are.”

“You’ve spent two weeks here. I’ve known these guys two years. Who do you think has a better idea of how these guys will react?”

“You’ve spent two years—hell, more like twenty—thinking there’s something wrong with you. You aren’t broken. I’m not broken either. If you can’t accept that, what are we doing together?”

“I just need more time.”

Carlos shakes his head. “I can’t... I can’t put any more into this relationship if it’ll never go anywhere.”

“Relationship?”

He stares at me for a moment. His face changes before my eyes. He turns back into Seven. “Yeah. It’s time to cut my losses.”

“Carlos, wait.”

“No, T.K., I’m done. You can’t talk your way out of this one. This was a mistake from the beginning. I thought a friends-with-benefits thing would work, but it’s just not going to.”

“No, Carlos—”

Carlos begins a circle around the room, gathering his books and stray clothes he’s left around. “Just friends, T.K. That’s all.”

He walks out the door.

CHAPTER TEN

I stare in shock at the door Carlos just slammed. What the fuck just happened? I thought we made up from our fight and now he's all pissed off again. We were very clear in the beginning. Just sex. No one can know. He agreed to those terms. Is it my fault he changed his mind?

But what was his problem exactly? The secrecy or the just-sex part? Or both?

The look on his face when I told Mikey, like he just got a puppy. When I told him no way I was coming out? Like someone drowned the puppy. No. No, that look came when I reminded him it was just sex.

What did that mean? Was he falling for me?

I think back to all the little gestures he made over the weekend. Holding my hand. Public kisses. Shouldn't they have been little warning blinking lights?

I sit down on my bed. For some reason, the idea that Carlos has feelings for me—romantic feelings—seems impossible. And yet, I'd liked those little gestures. I'd liked being in a place with him where we could be free to look and touch each other, even if it was just holding hands or a quick kiss. The sex is awesome, sure, but *those* moments. The moments of just us in our own world, that's what I'll miss. Even now my hand feels empty without his.

Is there any way to make it right? If I tell him I'm ready for a relationship, but not ready to come out, will that be enough?

Am I ready for that?

Would it be any different than what we were doing already?

I'm not sure. All I know is I'm already missing him, even though he'd been here five minutes ago. He's in the building. He'll be a brother of the fraternity. He's not leaving.

Is that any better? Now that I know I have feelings for him, that I want to be his boyfriend?

He laughed in my face. Said that I was nothing but an ass to fuck. That I'd taken everything too seriously.

Shit. I'm no better than his asshole boyfriend. No wonder he's upset. I need to find him. Tell him. Beg him to wait until I'm ready to come out.

By the time I'm back from class Monday afternoon, I've called Carlos five times. After the third time he didn't answer, I stopped leaving messages. My texts have gone unanswered. He's not at the house. I didn't really expect him to be, and I know he won't be around for dinner duty.

I could go to his dorm, but maybe a cooling-off period is all he needs. He'll be here for dinner tomorrow night, if not sooner. Maybe by then he'll be ready to talk.

I'm messing around with the foosball table, practicing some shots, trying not to remember laughing with Carlos during our rematch.

Mikey jogs into the lounge and says breathlessly, "Yo, T.K."

"You all right, man?"

"Gotta talk. Private." He gestures for me to follow him. His room is right down the hall. He closes the door behind us.

"What's going on, Mikey?"

Mikey is usually so laid back about everything that I'm starting to worry.

"Did you know Seven came out to Chuck last night?"

"What? That stupid son of a bitch."

"Shut up and listen. You heard about the double secret emergency meeting tonight, right?"

"Of course, but—"

"Chuck plans to blackball Seven."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“But Carlos has class tonight. He can’t be there to defend himself.”

“I don’t think Chuck cares about his defense.”

I pull out my cell phone and call Carlos. “Dammit, Carlos, answer the phone.” He doesn’t. I want to throw the phone against the wall but settle for punching the wall instead.

“Hey!”

“We had a fight last night. He won’t answer my calls.”

“Him being here won’t make a difference to Chuck,” Mikey points out.

“He deserves the right to know what’s going on. To defend himself.”

“You know that’s not how it works.”

“Well, I’ve got to try something.”

Do Carlos and I even have a chance if he’s kicked out of APK? Hell, he’d probably think I kicked him out myself.

I run upstairs, grab my keys, and then race back downstairs. The clock in my car tells me I have less than an hour before the meeting. I head toward campus, but just before I turn onto the long, winding entrance road, a new idea occurs to me. What if I could show Chuck that having a gay brother was no big deal? I drive past the campus and turn down the next street. Half a mile ahead on the right is Sigma Tau Gamma’s frat house. I double park beside one of their brother’s cars and jog up to the front door. I knock on the door, and only then do I stop to wonder if this is a good idea.

Erik, SigTau’s president himself, opens the door. “T.K.,” he says, obviously surprised to see me. “What can I do for you?”

“Can I chat with you and maybe some of your members?”

“Yeah, yeah, of course.” He steps aside so I can walk in. He leads the way to the lounge.

“Thanks. I don’t have a lot of time. I... okay, I’m just going to come out and say it. Did SigTau really accept a gay pledge this year?”

His body stiffens as if he’s preparing for a fight. “Yes, we did.”

“And how’s that, um, working out?”

“What are you getting at, T.K.?”

I huff out a lungful of air. “We’ve got a pledge that just came out. I was just wondering, you know...”

“No, I really don’t know. He rushed. He looked like a good fit. So far, he’s shown that he has what it takes to be a SigTau.”

“And your brothers don’t care?”

“That he’s gay?” He shrugs. “They treat him like they’d treat you. No difference.”

“Me?” I ask before I think about it.

He chuckles. “If you weren’t an Alpha Phi Kappa brother, of course. Any straight guy, I mean. Gay, straight, doesn’t matter.”

My mind races. Like me, a straight guy. Except I’m not straight. I didn’t need any special treatment or considerations. Sharing a room wasn’t an issue. Sharing a bathroom. I’d never even been attracted to any of the brothers until Carlos came along, and that’s all been mutual. So, what exactly was the problem again?

“T.K.?” he asks when I haven’t said anything. “You have any other questions?”

“You know the other fraternities are laughing at you? Calling you the gay frat?”

Again, he shrugs. “They’re just jealous ’cause we’re the first one on campus to accept an openly gay brother. We’re fucking pioneers. We’ll make history books.”

I consider this. Sounds like a bit of a stretch, but what if he’s right? “Can I talk to him?”

“Andy? If you harass him, I’ll kick your ass.”

I shake my head. “No harassment. I promise.”

“I’m not sure if he’s here right now. I can maybe find his phone number for you?”

“Thanks.”

We head to his room where he shuffles a bunch of papers, looking for the one he wants. “Ah, here it is.” He reads off the number and I type it into my phone.

“Thanks.”

“No problem. Nice to see APK following in SigTau’s footsteps.”

He laughs and claps my shoulder. I give a short laugh with him, but I’m really just thinking about what a pretentious ass he is. He walks me to the door. I get back into my car and head back to campus. As I do, I press the buttons to call Andy’s number.

“Hello?”

“Oh! Um, hi.” I’ve spent the last twenty-four hours being ignored by my sort-of boyfriend, yet this stranger answers on the second ring. “Is this Andy?”

“Yes. Who’s this?”

“My name is T.K. Rogers. I’m a brother with Alpha Phi Kappa. I wanted to talk to you about SigTau.”

He hesitates. “Yes.” His voice sounds cautious.

“How is... How are they treating you?”

“Uh, it’s pledging.”

I chuckle. “Yes, I realize that. But I mean, how are they treating you, specifically. Because you’re, you know...”

He sighs. “Gay?”

“Yeah. Gay.”

“They treat me all right. If you’re trying to get me to talk bad about my brothers, forget it.”

“No, no. One of our pledges has come out, and I just wanted to make sure... I just wanted to know if a gay brother could be accepted. Truly as a brother. You know?”

“Well,” he says slowly, his voice warming somewhat. “I can’t tell you how Alpha Phi Kappa will respond, but SigTau has been very welcoming. Some brothers more than others, sure. But I haven’t had any major problems.”

By the time I hang up with him, I’m turning onto campus and heading for Carlos’ dorm.

All of the short-term visitor spots are taken. No time for this bullshit, so I pull into a “no parking” zone. Glancing at the time on my phone, I realize Carlos may have already left for class. I text him.

Gonna be blackballed. Answer ur phone.

This time when I call him, it goes straight to voicemail. I run up the stairs, not waiting for the elevator. By the time I’m banging on the door of room 527, I have to catch my breath.

A guy I’ve never seen before answers the door. Must be Carlos’ roommate. “Yeah?” he says by way of greeting.

“Is Carlos here?”

“I think he went to class.”

“Do you know where his class is?”

“Really? What am I, his keeper?”

I push my way into the room.

“Hey!”

I ignore him and start searching Carlos’ desk. If he’s still got his schedule, it should be here.

“What are you doing? You can’t go through his stuff!”

I get in his face and use the height difference to my advantage. “You gonna stop me?”

“I could call campus security.”

I roll my eyes. “Relax. I’m just looking for his schedule to figure out where he is.”

“Why do you need to know?”

“I’m his...” *Just say it.* “...friend. One of the brothers in the frat he’s pledging.” *Chickenshit.*

I open the next drawer.

“Is this part of that hazing stuff?”

“Classified.”

“Isn’t that illegal? I don’t wanna be, like, an accomplice or something.”

I find what I’m looking for. Noting the building and room number, I give the good-citizen-roommate a mock salute and let myself out.

I hear the elevator ding from the hallway and race to meet it. I get my hand in as it’s closing and push my way into the already-crowded elevator. I apologize to the person whose foot I stepped on.

By the time I’m running out the door, there’s a campus security officer standing next to my car, filling out a ticket.

“No, no, I’m moving, I’m moving!” I call as I jiggle my keys in my hands.

He ignores me and completes the paperwork. He slaps it on the windshield just as I reach him, and then walks away as if I wasn’t even there.

“Seriously?” I yell after him. “I’m right here.”

I drive around to the academics side of campus. None of my classes are in these groups of building, so I’m not sure which of two buildings it is. There’s only a handful of evening classes, not like there’s a ton of traffic at this time of night, so I leave my car in the circle with the hazard lights blinking. I try the

building on the right. Nope. I jog across the courtyard to the left building. I find the room, a large lecture hall.

By this time, class has already started. I knock on the door, hoping the professor is the understanding type.

He opens the door. "If you can't be on time, enter the classroom without disruption or don't come at all."

"Sorry, sir. I'm not one of your students. I need Carlos Castillo."

"Lecture ends at nine. Come back then."

"No! It's a... family emergency. I'm, uh, his roommate and his mom just called. He needs to go right now."

He considers me for a minute, then addresses the class. "Carlos Cas—" He looks back at me. "What did you say his name was?"

"Castillo," I reply, and nod toward the other side of the room.

Carlos is already rising in his seat, staring at me with either humiliation or anger. Maybe both.

Seeing Carlos on his way, the professor heads back to his lectern. As Carlos passes him, he puts a hand on his shoulder, and tells him something.

Carlos shuts the door behind him. "What the hell, T.K.? Pulling me out of class?"

"Next time try answering your phone."

"I turned it off. I can't have it ringing in class with you calling all the time."

"Maybe there was a reason." I step up into his face, ready for the fight, then think better of it. "I'll explain in the car. C'mon."

"Like hell."

I sigh. "Look, Chuck plans to blackball you. The meeting is already happening. We have to get back to the house."

"What does that mean?"

“Do you still want to be a member of APK?”

“Of course!”

“Then move your ass.”

He finally does and we rush back to my car. I grab the ticket off my windshield. Goddamn campus security. Never around when you need them, but park in the wrong place for five fucking minutes...

“What the fuck were you thinking, coming out to Chuck last night?”

“I was thinking they’ve gotten to know me so it wouldn’t hurt anything.” He looks like he’s going to say something else but changes his mind.

I shake my head. “Chuck called a double secret emergency meeting. He wants to remove your bid, and he’s going to rally the rest of the brothers to support him.”

“He can do that?”

“Are you that naive? Technically speaking, you’re not supposed to be at the meeting. Hell, you’re not even supposed to know about it until the decision is made.”

He finally looks scared. “So what’s the plan?”

“I’m, well, I’m not sure yet. Somehow we have to convince the brothers not to go along with Chuck.”

“Will that work?”

“It’s just a vote. If the majority want to keep you as a brother, that’s that.”

“Why are you doing this, T.K.? Why do you care?”

I look at him. He’s studying my face with the same intensity as he did when he was standing in a line wearing only his underwear. The words are in my throat. *Just say them.* “It’s not right,” is all I can manage to get out.

He turns away and looks out the window.

I park in front of the house. I can’t think of anything to say, so we walk into the house in silence. The house is eerily silent as well. The other pledges

have been kicked out for the evening, and everyone else is in the basement for the meeting. We head straight there.

CHAPTER TWELVE

It looks like all twenty-four in-house members are present at the meeting. A few of them have snagged seats on the various tables and couches.

“T.K.,” Chuck greets me from his place in the middle of the room. “Where’ve you—” He notices Carlos behind me and sneers, “What’s he doing here?”

“He should have the chance to defend himself.”

“Defend himself?” Chuck asks incredulously. “Okay. Pledge Number Seven, did you or did you not tell me last night that you’re a faggot?”

Gotta give Carlos credit, he keeps his chin up. “I told you last night that I’m gay, and I promised that my sexual orientation won’t affect my ability to be a good brother for APK.”

“Thank you,” Chuck says coldly. “You may wait upstairs while we discuss the issue.”

“He should stay,” I argue even though I know it’s pointless.

“T.K.,” Mikey warns. “He can’t be here.”

I turn to Carlos, pleading with my eyes. “Wait upstairs, but please don’t leave until we’ve had a chance to talk. Please?”

He sighs, but agrees.

“Chuck, we can’t kick him out just for being gay.”

“No? You want APK to become the gay fraternity? What would that do to our image?”

“Make us look progressive? Besides, SigTau’s already beat us to that.”

“Well, good for them. Let them be the gay fraternity. APK has a strong campus presence. Why risk that for the sake of one person? Shouldn’t we do what’s best for the frat as a whole?”

There are murmurs of agreement.

“Think big picture,” I say, holding my hands out wide. “If we blackball a gay pledge, in thirty years APK is going to look just like the frats that only accepted white pledges.”

“You can’t be serious.” Chuck’s voice raises in exasperation. “You’re comparing apples to oranges. You can’t predict the future. We need to focus on what APK needs *now*. Not what might happen in thirty years.”

“Fine. We’ll focus on what APK needs now. Carlos is good for APK. He’s proven to be a dedicated pledge. He’s done everything asked of him without question or hesitation. He takes it seriously. Can you honestly say that for every single one of the other pledges?”

“What are you saying, we should kick out every pledge that has second thoughts about pledging?”

“No!” It comes out more of a yell than a rational response. “I’m saying, until last night you believed Carlos was a great fit for APK. Nothing has changed since then.”

“Everything has changed! He lied when he rushed, by not telling us up front.”

“If that’s a requirement for membership maybe it should be part of the interview.” I say it sarcastically, but Chuck nods thoughtfully.

“That’s true.”

My heart hammers against my chest. “You’re missing the point!”

“What is your point, T.K.? Other than taking up our Monday night? We were just about ready to vote when you showed up.”

“Carlos will be an excellent brother. You should see the thought he’s putting into this year’s fundraiser. It’s going to be amazing. You’re judging him on the wrong reasons.”

“He’s a liability. A risk. Jesus, what if he tries to fuck one of us?”

“He’s homosexual, not a goddamn rapist!” Blood pounds in my ears and I clench my fists.

“Are you sure there is a difference?”

Paulie shoots to his feet. “Are you for real? You said yourself that you admired his leadership skills.”

My heart is pounding. Until Paulie joined in, I had the feeling this was a tennis match, and everyone was just watching the ball volley back and forth between Chuck and me. Having him on my side gives me hope. He walks over to me and puts his arm on my shoulder. “I’m with T.K. This is bullshit, and y’all know it. Five minutes ago y’all liked the guy and now you’re blackballing him? Why y’all letting Chuck make up your minds?”

A low murmur creeps around the room. A brother standing against the back wall steps forward. “I don’t want a homo in APK. It’s just not natural. That’s not what God intended.”

“APK will never have a gay brother,” Chuck declares.

Mikey catches my eye. He gives a small nod.

“Chuck.” I pause, unclench my fists, and try to calm my nerves. “Brothers.” I look around the room at the faces of my brothers, wondering if this is the last time they will look at me without hatred. “APK already has a gay brother.”

“What?”

“No way!”

“What the fuck are you talking about, T.K.?” Now Chuck’s face is red.

After the initial shock, the room becomes still as they all wait for my accusation. Some of the brothers look between me and Paulie and his arm on my shoulder.

I suck in as much air as I can before my lungs feels like they’ll explode. “It’s me. I’m gay.”

If the room had been silent before, it’s a goddamn vacuum now. It’s as if every single person in the room forgot how to breathe.

Finally, Chuck laughs. “That’s a good one, T.K. This whole argument as set up? You almost had me.”

A few other brothers join in the laughter. Paulie doesn’t remove his arm from my shoulder. He just stares at me with wide eyes.

“I’m dead fucking serious.”

“I’ve known you two years. All those girls. There’s no way.”

“Yes, I’ve slept with girls. Yes, it was all a cover. No, I didn’t really enjoy it. Tits and pussy really aren’t my thing.”

Everyone stares at me like I’ve just said the most impossible thing. I shrug.

“If you want to vote Carlos out, you have to vote me out as well. None of you would accept your brothers treating your girlfriend in such a shitty way, and I refuse to tolerate it for my boyfriend.”

It takes a minute for them to put two and two together.

Chuck points at me. “You see, brothers? That is exactly why we can’t have gays in APK. In just two weeks, this pledge has convinced T.K. that he’s gay. Just wait ’til it’s one of you.”

Before I can respond, Mikey says, “Oh, for Christ’s sake, Chuck. Your homophobic ideas are just ridiculous. Is it a shock to hear that T.K. is gay? Of course. But it’s T.K. Can you even imagine APK without him?”

He steps up to stand on my other side and holds out his fist. I bump it with mine and smile thanks.

“Have your vote. I’m leaving the room. You’re voting on both Carlos and me.” I wait for a moment, just in case Paulie has an announcement of his own. He remains silent. I give him a quick one-armed man-hug and whisper, “Thanks.”

I head upstairs, hoping Carlos waited for me.

He’s standing just outside the door to the basement. His face is tense. “So?”

“They haven’t voted yet. I removed myself from the vote because they’re voting on both of us.”

“What?”

“I told them the truth. That I’m gay. That you’re, well, that you’re my boyfriend. At least, I’m hoping you’ll be my boyfriend.”

He opens his mouth but nothing comes out. “I can’t believe you did that for me,” he says finally.

“I can’t hide anymore. I’m not ashamed of who I am. And, yes, I want a real relationship with you. No hiding. You’re worth that to me.”

The smile that lights up his face makes my heart skip a beat. “Boyfriends. I like the way that sounds.”

I pull him into my arms and hold him tight against me. Our first real hug. And it feels awesome. The kiss that follows? Slow and sweet and for the first time, not a kiss that leads to or follows sex. No hurry, no frenzy, no burning need. It’s just, well, perfect.

“Get a room!” Boomer yells.

Carlos and I break apart, chuckling nervously. We hadn’t heard the door. He slips his hand into mine, weaving our fingers together.

Chuck stomps by, disgust covering his face when he sees us.

Mikey comes up and puts an arm around Carlos and my shoulders, making a three-person huddle.

“How’d it go?” I ask, anxious.

“Well, guys, I’m sorry to tell you this, but you’re stuck with APK.”

Carlos lets out a whoop.

“You should know,” Mikey continues, now serious, “it wasn’t a unanimous decision.”

That I expected. “Chuck?”

“Not just Chuck. I don’t know what repercussions there might be, hopefully none, but most of us brothers have you guys’ backs.”

“Thanks, Mikey,” Carlos says.

“Hey, man.” Mikey shrugs. “It’s what brotherhood is all about.”

Eight Weeks Later

Mikey, Boomer, and I walk into the crowded community center with our one hundred and fifty dollars of funny money. A huge banner spans the doorway with the words, “Alpha Phi Kappa Casino Night” printed in bold black letters. More than twenty tables are set up around the room, designed to look like real tables from a casino. Carlos had told me the pledge class sold over two hundred tickets, but the line of people at the door, plus the crowd already inside, still shocks me.

Even Mikey is impressed. “I’m going to find the craps table,” he says before wandering off.

“Looks like your boy really pulled it off,” Boomer says.

I couldn’t be prouder as I walk down the first row of tables looking for my boy. I find him behind one of the blackjack tables, dealing cards to three players. Like all the dealers, he’s wearing black pants, a white dress shirt, and a black bow tie.

He catches my eye and smiles. “Got an empty seat here, if you wanna play.”

“Nah, blackjack’s not really my game. Besides, I’m not sure I can trust the dealer.”

“Your loss.” He turns back to the game. The heavysset woman sitting on the end hits and he deals her a card.

I watch the rest of the hand, amused at the way he charms the ladies. He glances up. “I’m splitting shifts with Jonesy in about an hour. Find you then?”

I nod, and then head off to find the poker tables. Across the room is a poker table with an open spot. I take a seat and wait for the next round. Chuck is sitting at this table and though he sees me, he doesn't say anything. I don't bother to greet him either. Ever since Carlos and I came out, he's avoided us, only speaking to us when necessary.

After I've lost half my money on several hands of poker, two arms wrap around my shoulders.

"Doesn't look like poker is your game either." Carlos laughs.

Chuck folds his hand and walks away from the table.

Carlos sighs. "He's never gonna come around, is he?"

I pull his hand to my lips and kiss his palm. "No, I don't think so."

I lose another five dollars, and then stand up.

"Walk with me?" Carlos asks. "I gotta check in with everyone."

We go from table to table so he can get his updates. He seems satisfied with everything he's hearing.

"Hey guys!" Paulie's sitting at the next table we come to. "This is my brother, Joe." He gestures to the guy next to him. Then he nods toward the guy next to Joe. "And that's his boyfriend, Keith."

We shake hands with Joe and Keith and stay to chat for a few minutes before Carlos starts pulling on my arm to get to the next table.

"You've done a great job with this, you know," I tell him, but not before teasing him for being a workaholic.

"It was a group effort, believe me. Everyone worked hard. I just cracked the whip."

"Oh really? I didn't know you were into that kind of thing," I tease.

His eyes go wide and he actually blushes. "I—uh, no, I mean—"

I laugh. "Don't worry. I'm not into that stuff either. What I *am* into is you wearing that bow tie."

He fingers the tie. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. Wearing that bow tie and nothing else.”

A smile slowly grows on his face.

I kiss him. “Later tonight. Make it happen, tough guy.”

THE END

Author Bio

C.M. Walker lives in Maryland with her husband and two children. She read her first M/M romance story out of curiosity, decided that books were better with two men instead of one, and hasn't looked back since. When C.M. is not reading or writing, she's either next to a bright light cross-stitching with fancy thread, at the computer digi-scraping, or at the sewing machine making cute clothes for her daughter.

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